

The Complete Crockett

The Galloway Raiders

digital edition

New British fiction



HAL O' THE
IRONSIDES

S.R.CROCKETT

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

First Published by Hodder & Stoughton in 1915.

This Galloway Raiders digital edition published in 2021 is part of a decade long project (2012-2022) to bring the works of Samuel Rutherford Crockett (1859-1914) together in one place. The Complete Crockett comprises 66 published works, re-edited and re-formatted by volunteer labour to the highest standard.

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INTRODUCTION

This posthumous novel is both different and familiar from much of Crockett's living output. Published by Hodder & Stoughton in 1915 it is unclear exactly when it was written. The main difference is that it covers a specific period in English history – the English Civil War – and more narrowly the years 1643 -1645 mostly between the Battles of Marston Moor and Naseby. While Crockett had written many Scottish historical novels, and several European ones, this is the only one covering exclusively English history.

That aside, the plot and characters bear his characteristic trademark. There is an ordinary hero – in this case Hal Ludlow. He foregrounds the 'real' historical figures, in this case Oliver Cromwell. Though it has to be said Cromwell has more of a central role in this novel than most of the historic figures in Crockett's other novels. There is love interest, with more than one woman vying for the attentions of the hero. There is a kidnap and gypsies. There is also a 'turn' which is structurally similar to a much earlier novel 'The Black Douglas'. Part way through the story things take a hugely sensational turn, with the intrusion of the supernatural. Perhaps it is intended to offer a 'twist' to the otherwise broadly historical plot. The battles are described in detail, bloody and uncompromising. Above all, the familiar trope of the dangers of religious radicalism are evidenced through the inclusion of the sinister – both the traitorous Doe Royds and the mysterious Lady Lulu.

There is even a humorous mention of John Milton towards the end of the story.

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All in all, the novel takes known history and fictionalises freely with the characters and situation. There is classic Crockett natural description of flora and fauna, this time of the Fens, and also of ‘marsh fever’ (a form of malaria?)

Crockett is clearly on the side of Cromwell, although the Anabaptists are put under scrutiny almost as close as the Royalists with their penchant for ‘popery’ and the flamboyance of Prince Rupert and his followers set up against the stark and firmness of Cromwell’s emerging New Model Army.

There is more research to be undertaken to try and place this novel within Crockett’s living work – as yet I have not found it serialised, though it bears some similarities with Peter the Renegade (set in the Crimean War) which he worked on during his last winter. Whether it was already slated for publication at the time of his death or whether it was published out of his personal ‘slush pile’ by Hodder & Stoughton is a matter (for me) of conjecture at present. Answers may emerge out of the Crockett archive, but for the present it remains a curiosity among his work. Waiting for answers would only delay my completion of the digitisation of Crockett’s writing. I therefore offer this incomplete Introduction, with the intention of updating it as and when further information comes to light.

Cally Phillips

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CHAPTER ONE

THE PRIMROSE WAY

'Claude Batson, Israel Meeks, Issachar Watson - all present?'

'Right!' answered Cornet Sam Squire, as young Harry Cromwell of Ely Town called the roll of the Slepe Troop - the Tawnies or original Ironsides. Little more than sixteen years he had, when he made a soldier of himself - and Winceby Fight not yet fought. The Cromwell cock-birds began to use their spurs early - all but Lazy Dick.

'Hal Ludlow?'

'Hal Ludlow, I say?'

The boy's voice rose shrill and quickly angered. He felt himself insulted by Hal Ludlow's failure - his chosen friend to absent himself from call-over!

'Another petticoat!' growled Cornet Squire in his ear, so low, however, that his troop did not hear.

'I'll petticoat him!' cried the lad, flushing. 'Let him be horsed when he comes in, with a couple of muskets at his feet!'

'Don't break his will - this first time,' whispered wise Cornet Squire, the Colonel's adjutant; 'let me speak to him - we need not tell the Colonel!'

'But the discipline? My father made me swear to maintain that.' The boy's eyes flashed and he pushed his helmet back upon his tangle of dark curls.

For Hal Ludlow was his mate and comrade. A year ago they had fought and tussled, rolling each

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other over in the dust of the playground at Ely Grammar School. Since then Harry had followed his father and had learned many things - to fear God (well, no - that came natural to a Cromwell) - to fear his father, which was equally easy - to worship him, which was easier still - and above all to live and die for the Houses and the new cavalry of which the Slepe Troop was the model.

But of the two Henries, one had remained helter-skelter Hal, and he by no means the grave and soldierly boy of whom the small yeomen and farmers of the troop agreed with chuckles of satisfaction that he was 'the very spit of his father.'

Yet Hal Ludlow was two years older, of a richer family, always with money among his hands - money such as a young Cromwell never saw except in the sacred shape of 'trooper's pay.' The Colonel himself often went with a paltry five pieces in his own pocket, and so must his sons - without the five pieces. Of course Hal Ludlow would lend, and so would Sam Squire, but it was unhandy to be owing money to a man whom you might have to set astride that awkward animal the wooden horse, for a fixed number of hours, in the interests of the New Discipline. What if he asked you for those three gold pieces you owed him right before the sentry, and that sentry old Jack Flinders, a leader of the Praying Gang and a confidant of the Colonel's?

Harry Cromwell shuddered as he thought of it. He would rather have fought a dozen Camdeners at a wood corner than face his father after that, so he agreed that Cornet Sam should speak in the gate with Hal Ludlow, and that the horsing should stand over for the present.

'Never again!' his boy's heart was crying, 'never

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again will I borrow a sixpence, even for a present for mother and the girls in the old house at Ely.' Bess and Bridget must do without silk hose rather than that he with his captaincy new upon him should stand shamed before his father.

Then in the very bitter midst of his repentance the comforting thought came to him that Sam Squire was a rich man. He was an officer too and easy-going. No harm then, if the worst came to the worst, in borrowing, a shilling or two from Cornet Sam. Why, his father himself did so often, though of course that was to buy hay for the horses.

Hal Cromwell adjusted his helmet of which he was very proud. It was of Flemish make and had a white plume of a most noble aspect. Hal Cromwell wished that he might encounter the other Hal somewhere out in the woods. He would there and then strip to him, and though Hal Ludlow was two years older and though the girls admired him because of his moustache and the dashing way he had with him, he, Henry Cromwell, could thrash him again, as he had before when the shadows of Ely steeple lay across the dust of the playground in which they writhed and punched one another blind and dumb, each gasping 'Cry enough,' and almost ready to do it himself.

Oh, 'petticoating'! The shame of it! What was the use of girls to men of war, gazetted captains of seventeen mature years, under the New Discipline and his father's articles of war - in which women did not figure except as feeble folk destined to be sent cellar-ward in cases of siege and battery by heavy artillery.

Yet he had thought so highly of Hal Ludlow and been so proud of him once, that he had proposed

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him as captain in his place.

'Do as I bid you, sir,' the Colonel had said, 'a Cromwell must captain the Slepe Troop. Dick ought to, but Dick is too easy, so you must stand to it - with your father at the elbow and Sam Sobersides to keep you straight. Master Hal Ludlow will make an excellent cornet when he is broken in a little!'

There was no more to be said. There never was when Colonel Cromwell finished speaking. They knew that, the gentlemen of the Westminster Commons when they listened to the tall man in the ill-cut country-made suit. The House even heard him gladly, with a curious deference, astonishing to the dandies who swaggered and lounged there of an idle afternoon.

The Slepe Troop had been sent out from Ely to watch the Soham road for 'Candishers' and 'Camdeners' - that is, half-organised raiders owning vague allegiance to my Lord Camden or to Charles Cavendish - more exactly, plundering at large in their names and the King's.

And all this while where was the delinquent Hal, that *Puritan à panache*, the Roundhead with the Plume, as Le Franc the Huguenot weaver described him. Why, his horse was stabled in the great Tithe Farm of Ely Town, quite inconspicuously be it said, and he himself was in the garden of the Tithe House making careless love to Bess and Biddy Cromwell. These young women were gay and lighthearted. They scoffed at military discipline - at least, when their father was a score of miles out off on the road to Boston and they were free to chatter their loudest. They encouraged their handsome wooer to neglect his duties.

'Why, your captain! 'Tis only Harry - he is no

more than a boy. We make him stand about when he comes in our way, we can tell you - if he does wear a Flanders helmet!

'Doubtless, young ladies,' said Hal, 'only the mischief is I am by no means his sister, but a private in his troop, whom if I disobey and it comes to your father's ears, he will send me skipping.

"Out you go, my lad - obey or go home," he will say. "I can use the whip with any man, but just now I am raising a thousand men who may need the rein, but never the whip, never the spur. If you are not good enough - out you go!" That, girls, is what your father will say. I would swear it, but under the new rules that costs twelve pence!

The girls, gamesome maids of nineteen and sixteen, sobered a little at the mention of their father, but recovered at the thought of the enlistment muster on the Boston Road, twenty good miles away. Indeed, they were depending upon that, for had it been otherwise they would have been indoors "helping mother" or making down clothes for Mall and Fanny, their scampering sisters whose clamorous entrance at half-past four from the school in the close would put a stop to their pleasant chat with the "plumed Puritan" under the Tithing House elms.

Let us look at Bridget Cromwell, nineteen and well grown, modest of public demeanour as becometh her father's daughter, mirthful and even kittenish in private, she gave little idea of the bold soldier's wife she was to become. She had her own difficulties with a mother who would have chained her to a more severe domesticity, and still more with that tricksome imp her sister Bess, now sixteen, the only Cromwell who, till Mall and the Featherhead

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grew up, ever dared openly flout the formidable "Lord of the Fens." These three, being children, somehow discerned the tender heart under the shining breastplate of the First Ironside, and having found the secret, they played with it to the mingled admiration and fear of the entire household.

It was undeniably pleasant under the elm trees in the Tithe garden. The sun-dial a couple of yards away marked the flight of time, but neither truant Hal of the Slepe Troop nor his hostesses wasted a glance upon it. Bridget had taken the young man's helmet upon her knee and was arranging the plume so that it would fall well to the back, while Bess was making him a white true love-knot to wear on his wrist. Truly a fortunate young fellow!

But just then, when things were going most pleasantly, there swung into the garden a tall man, helmeted and corsleted, spurs clanking and sword jangling - a kind of sudden archangel's trump of doom to the trio by the sun-dial under the Tithe elms. Yet he did not look in any way terrible, this man. He carried a little girl on each shoulder, their feet beating a joyous rataplan on the mail, and their bodies swaying as the big man strode along, steadying them with a hand apiece under the armpit to right and left of the formidable steel-clad head.

They had encountered Colonel Cromwell as he entered his own door, taken him by escalade, and now triumphed and shouted high over the grim face for once relaxed into a smile. It was the single defeat of the Ironside chieftain. He was never beaten again.

Then he caught sight of the group under the trees, who sat, all but Bess, frozen and afraid. His brow darkened. He set the little girls down and out of his pouch he took some coppers.

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There, Mall, be off with you to Mistress Doudenay's and buy some sweet cakes. Let not your mother see you. She loves not feeding between meals! She is right, my dame, but I come not home every day to be abused so - worse than by a score of King's men! Off, ye scraplets!

The two took hands and fled, shouting because of the "sweet cakes" and the pennies to be spent at Gossip Doudenay's.

When he turned, Bess was there ready for him. In a moment her arms were about his neck.

'Do not be very angry,' she whispered, 'it was our fault. We made him stay. It is only Hal Ludlow after all.'

'This is New Model with a vengeance,' said Oliver, fixing the young man over his daughter's head with a glance that cut like a knife. 'You show a pretty example - you, the Commissioner's son! Where is your troop, sir? Is Henry malingering also? No, he would not dare. Where is your troop, I say? Have you got a tongue that can speak?'

The lion was roaring, and speech immediately after that reverberation was not easy to any son of man, Parliamentary Commissioner or plain citizen. But Hal Ludlow had risen to his feet at the first glance from the stern man's eyes. As if moved by a spring he stood at attention.

'My troop should be on the road to Soham, sir,' stammered poor Hal, 'I meant to join them - only I forgot - I never forgot before!'

'Please listen,' Bess Cromwell's whisper came again, 'it was all our fault. We were so bored with doing nothing, we wanted Hal to play with!'

Perhaps there was the least flicker of something not unkindly about the corner of Colonel Cromwell's

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mouth, but it passed like the skarrow of summer lightning across a crack in a window shutter.

He took down his daughter's hands quite gently.

'Go to your mother, girls - both of you!'

Bridget and Bess passed out of sight, moving swift and noiselessly over the grass.

'And now, young man,' said Colonel Cromwell, un-helming himself, 'I have a minute in which to say a few words to your father's son, such as I would that in like circumstances he would say to mine.'

He looked him up and down with one raking double glance, and bold Hal Ludlow's blood chilled in his veins.

'Your helmet, sir!' Hal set it upon the table, and Cromwell with one gathering snatch tore away the white plume and left the black metal bald.

'Now, sir, your wrist!'

And he wrenched away the white love-knot. These were the distinctive marks of the Slepe Troop, and with a gulp Hal Ludlow felt that he was being degraded.

The Colonel set himself down on the bench, and played absently with the deserted workbox on the little square table before him. But his mind was far indeed from scissor blades and tags of silk ribbon.

* * * * *

The silence of fate weighed on the small sun-flecked garden of the Tithing House under the shadow of St. Mary's steeple in Ely City. Colonel Cromwell seemed in no haste to speak. He looked straight before him - as it were beyond and through Hal of the Slepe Troop. But he meant to speak and to some purpose. The atmosphere grew heavy and

electric in that quiet flowery close. Hal Ludlow was a bold fellow enough in the shock of combat, but this was quite a different business. To stand and wait for Colonel Cromwell to open fire was nervous work even for the best fortified cities - how much worse for a young man slipped from the path of duty.

His gaze returned suddenly upon the culprit, almost with the sound of clean-running steel, as a sword half drawn snicks back into its sheath.

'Hal Ludlow,' he said, 'because you are young, and because you are your father's son, I shall deal with you man to man. Perhaps you think that this is a light thing which you have done, to leave your regiment on service that you may gossip an afternoon with my girls.'

Trooper Ludlow hung his head. He had in fact thought it no great matter - that is, before the incoming of Colonel Cromwell. But things seemed to have a way of changing their similitude under the brooding thunder-cloud of that brow and the occasional lurid lightning of Oliver's sombre eyes.

'A little thing, and in itself innocent - yes, and for most young men good, even laudable - to speak an hour or two with honest maidens. But not for any soldier of mine, Hal, and as such I have broken you until such time as you prove yourself worthy.'

'It is hard to hear you say so, sir,' stammered poor young Hal, 'I would die to serve you.'

'It is possible,' said Cromwell, unmoved. 'Any fool can die, but what I want is a thousand men who will obey me. I cannot have a laggard, a garden-loiterer in the battle-field of the Lord. *My* princes must be altogether kings! You might do for my Lord of Essex or Manchester, but till you have proven your armour you are not good enough for me. Why have we of the

faith never had a cavalry which could stand against the horsemen of the Rhine princes? Because our men have been cellarmen, tavern drawers, or plough-horse yokels, commanded by the first man who had favour with a parliament member or an army commissioner. Rupert's men are gentlemen of birth and courage. They had been on horseback ever since they could walk, and what wonder that they go through us like fire through gorse. But I will raise and range a thousand men who shall break the stout heart of the Prince and abase the glory of his high looks. To do that I must try every man of them. I must weed and prune.'

'You will find me do my duty on the day of battle. Colonel Cromwell,' said the young man, lifting his head with the young fire dancing in his eyes. The chief of the New Model quelled him with a look.

'The day of battle, say you? Learn then from me that he who would be ready on the day of battle must be ready every day. How know you that Lucy or Cavendish are not now cutting in upon your late comrades while you have stayed philandering here?'

Hal Ludlow grew pale and his brow sweated cold even in the afternoon heat of that confined space – "philandering" ... broken for philandering ... how could he face his father? The leader spoke on.

'Go, if you will, to your cousin, Wiltshire Edmond of Hazlerigg's Horse. He is, I hear, with General Waller. I will recommend you for a cornetcy and I make no doubt that you will serve him well. But what is good enough for the other armies will not do for the Eastern Association. They build of brick and are thrown down. I build of hewn stone which shall stand the shock.'

'If I do something worthy you will take me back,

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Colonel Cromwell? I would rather be a trooper with you than command a regiment elsewhere.'

'I thank you,' said Cromwell, 'I will deal with you as with my own. So much freedom I use with you. My son Oliver is with my Lord Essex. I love him well, but there he bides till I am sure of him - aye, though I never see him again. My son Richard I keep only because he is not to be trusted, except under my own eye. Henry is the only one who can walk alone, and him I keep close with the oldest and the safest of our people at his right hand and at his left. Mark you well, Henry Ludlow, to be of us, is to be of the chosen, is to be a citizen of no mean city. Once I have welded my iron on the anvil, we shall tumble Rupert in the dust when next we meet him. Every battle, sayeth the Scripture, is with confused noise and garments rolled in blood, but ours shall be with burning and fuel of fire!'

The Colonel rose and handed the deplumed helmet to the young man.

'This will serve you well with Hazlerigg's men, and the Wiltshire captains will permit what I dare not. Go - I will send letters of introduction to your lodgings!'

'But if I do something - if I do something - ' Hal Ludlow gasped. He went red and white with shame and anguish - such a little thing and so heavy a punishment.

'When you do anything, let me see it - by their works ye shall know them!'

He nodded curtly, looking the discarded Ironside fair in the face, not wholly without a certain grim approval of his attitude.

Hal Ludlow stood fixed at the salute till the tall figure had jingled itself inside. Then he sighed,

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glanced once at the parlour windows hoping for a farewell salutation which did not come, and then strode manfully through the great sweet-smelling spaces of the Tithe Barns, out of the big wain doors into the yellow slant of afternoon sunlight which filled the streets of Ely.

CHAPTER TWO

EXIT THE PHILANDERER

Hal Ludlow did not go home, he was in no mood to take another dressing down from his father. Colonel Cromwell's might indeed be considered sufficient for any average young man, not an absolutely impervious blockhead. Hal had had his dose for that day. But there was a look on his face that was not natural to him. There was no *panache* in his Puritanism any more - the deplumed helmet compelled humility.

From the windows of the "White Hart" young voices hailed him, bidding him come up and join the garrison mess. He waved an acknowledging hand, but kept on his way. For the moment he would leave his horse in the corner of the Tithe barn. He had asked the caretaker, Tom All-Alone, to make him comfortable and give him a feed of corn, Hereward would be all right. He and Tom knew each other of old. It was by no means his first visit to the Tithe barn, not the first time that Hereward had been shamefully deserted by his master.

There is a little neglected street in Ely, lying towards the easterly wall, which bears the name of Hog Lane. In Tom All-Alone's early days he had been one of the town swineherds, and daily had led his grunting awkward squad along this narrow thoroughfare out upon the "marsh commons." But now Hog Lane had been built up and a colony of "peculiar people" had established themselves there. These were the Anabaptists, or as some folk called them, Levellers - dwelling apart and indeed shunned

not only by respectable Church and Presbyterian, but even by Independents and unclassed "Sectaries." The fact was, the shadow of Munster Kirk and the orgies of the famous John had for a hundred years left a deep and wholly undeserved stain upon the English Anabaptists.

But it so happened that Hal Ludlow knew them well. He was of the Cambridgeshire Ludlows, and his immediate kin were zealous for the Presbyterian discipline. But his mother's kinfolk were out of the west, while his uncle and cousins of the Wiltshire Ludlows leaned to Anabaptistry and any other creed or lack of creed which made for raw red republicanism. Personally Hal cared little about the matter, but he loved all that was odd and adventurous, and he knew that there were daring spirits and desperate adventurers among that little colony in Hog Lane.

It touches off Hal Ludlow's character at this period that he caught himself humming: —

'Fill the bowl with rosy wine,'

and checked only long enough to console his mind with the closing stanza: —

'Let's banish business, banish sorrow.

To the gods belong to-morrow.'

Again Hal Ludlow halted himself. He loved a catch and could troll one with the best, but the stern Puritan atmosphere in which he had grown up kept his conscience alert and fine. He knew that catches must be left to idle cavaliers untouched by the Word, but he had a born faculty for adaptation and made very good ones out of the Truro version of the Psalms. Colonel Cromwell's psalm was the Hundred-

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and-tenth, and arranged by Hal Ludlow it had gone very well to the trampling horses of the Slepe Troop

*'The Lord did say unto my Lord,
Sit thou at my right hand
Until I make thy foes a stool
Whereon thy feet may stand.'*

Then came in the rear ranks stormily, reduplicating the line —

'Whereon thy feet may stand.'

Hal absolutely rejoiced as he struck into the second verse —

*'The Lord shall out of Sion send
The rod of Thy great power:
In midst of all Thine enemies
Be Thou the governor!'*

And from behind and from far before pealed the refrain of that famous battle catch of the Ironsides

*'In midst of all Thine enemies
Be Thou the governor!'*

Nor was there any doubt as to who among the enemies of God was to govern. Colonel Cromwell would occasionally check them, turning in his saddle with frowning brow and uplifted hand. But on such occasions the Ironsides answered him with a mighty shout which carried their faith and their

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conviction. They swept away his protests with that unanimous command which was afterwards to shake down the walls of towns and commonwealths

'Be Thou the governor!'

Then Colonel Cromwell with a shrug of his shoulders, and perhaps a secret heart-swelling as if already Destiny called, would turn in his saddle and ride on.

The heart of Hal Ludlow was filled with sudden anguish. Never more was he to lead that music, never more blow on the trumpet the order of charge, swing it behind him, change his sword hand and see the Slepe Troop drive the foe like chaff down the wind. Another army? There was but one leader for him, that tall rugged man who had spoken so harshly in the garden that afternoon. There were other charges of horses, but only one Slepe Troop. He had laughed at their ways, at Israel Meek's whine and Tab Tomline's texts, but in his heart of hearts he rejoiced in them, and knew that they were going to make the world over again. The Slepe Troop was the Model for the New Model, and the Colonel was quite right to be jealous of its reputation. What a fool he had been! Ah, what a fool!

At the corner of Market Square he came upon Levi Allister, orderly and master of music to the Slepe Troop. Allister was a hard-baked Independent, a small householder much trusted by Colonel Cromwell, who had had many years' traffic with him in the matter of buying and selling hay and corn, a business akin to horse-dealing in that it takes a watchful Providence to keep even a professing

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Christian fairly honest. But under the eyes of his Maker and those of Colonel Cromwell, Levi Allister had well approven himself for twenty years.

'Hey, lad, where away? They be in a pretty taking down Soham way along o' thee. Where hast thou been and what a-doin'? If't be the wenches, say nawt, but ride the wooden horse thou must. For Sam Squire and Captain Harry are rarely mounted against thee. I was sent to fetch thee, lad, so haste and ride. I must see the Colonel before I go, but get thy beast and wait for me at the bridge.'

'No use, Allister,' said the young man sadly, 'Colonel Cromwell has broken me. He has cast me out of the Slepe Troop as a man unworthy.'

There came the deep note of a man's suffering out of that young breast, always a touching thing when a lad's pride struggles with his manhood.

'Sake-a-sake, whatever has't been doing of, Hal?'

'Laughing with Bess and Bridget in the Tithe House garden. The Colonel fairly caught me.'

'Um-m-m!' Levi hummed through his nose meditatively, 'that is a most ungentle providence. Why did you let yourself be caught?'

'Biddy Cromwell was flouting me!'

'Well, her hath flouted thee to some purpose, and then I be supposing Oliver did dress thee down rarely?'

'Till the sweat stood chill as a white Christmas on me, Allister, and he shore off my badge and plume which I wore, being of the first mount, as you know.'

'And did he mention no loophole - order no punishment?'

'None,' said the youth sadly; 'these I should have been glad of and suffered like a man, but he told me I was in nowadays good enough for his regiments and

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that I might go, with his blessing, to enlist with Hazlerigg and Essex as being all I was fit for.'

'Ah - there speaks Oliver - I can hear him!'

'Would to God you had then - and not I,' said the young man rather testily. 'He told me that when I proved my worthiness by deeds, he would think again upon the matter.'

'Tis a pity,' said the chief trumpeter, 'for the Candishers are swarming down across Lincolnshire like a hive of bees at Lammastide. Dick Lucy commands them, or at least they buzz thickest about him when he goes after plunder.'

Instantly Hal Ludlow was attentive. 'Where are these Candishers?' he inquired carelessly, but he listened well for the answer.

'I heard say that they are to rendezvous at Whittlesea where the Wisbee men will meet us. Our sixth troop has gone to Downham, but will be returned in time to ride with us. We are to fall on when we cross Nen Water. The day after to-morrow it is to be done. They have some time to lose their edge before it comes to that. There is good ale in the cellars of Market Deeping. I should not be surprised if they abode there till we smoked them out. 'Tis that young daredevil of a Dick Lucy who leads them out harrying. Cavendish would have a better care of his men, but the truth is they have no idea of what Oliver's lads can do. Being of the King's side, the veriest hedge-varlet and road-scraper among them fancies himself a Rupert as soon as he can keep in a saddle for five minutes.'

'Thank you, Levi lad,' called out Hal as the trumpeter lifted his reins and the charger danced about on the paving stones impatient to be gone, 'to our next meeting -'

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'In the Lord's name I say aye to that,' cried Allister over his shoulder, 'and may it be soon, lad. We shall weary for your merry pipe when the march is long and the psalm strikes up.'

Hal turned down Hog Lane and marked the small clean houses, some of brick and some merely of clay and wattle like a fenman's shelter. For these long lank men came from the Drovers - French Drove and Gedney Hill mostly - to be quit of the incursions of the enemy's raiders.

They were an argumentative set when they got together, but relapsed immediately into long moody silences which came from the custom of week-long solitary meditation out on the fens and broads. Famous men too with the brad-awl, cobblers like to none and able to turn you out in an afternoon a better pair of shoes to march in than any that were sent up by the Parliament Commissioners sitting at Westminster. This was now their business in Ely, and Colonel Cromwell kept them busy, for besides the foot regiments for my Lord Manchester, he had set them to making jack-boots for his horse. They had never done such a thing before (they said), but let him give them a pattern and Hog Lane would do its best.

Nor was Hog Lane's best any mean thing. First of all the boots had to satisfy the Colonel, who knew how to be served with a penny's worth for his penny as well as any man. But chiefly the task was easy because they were hiding among them one Hubert Van Kamp, a Hollander of extreme opinions who, save in the secret councils of the Anabaptists, gave no certain account of himself - but who in his time had made riding-boots for Maurice, Prince of Orange.

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Hog Lane, except in the way of trade, kept much to itself. It discouraged visitors, and even Hal, whom they received first because of his Wiltshire relations and afterwards for his own healthy youth and the genuine liking he manifested for their society, was made to understand the greatness of the privilege.

Nor did he abuse it. He had several times stood the friend of Hog Lane, especially in contested settling operations with the Colonel's clerk and treasurer, Sam Squire. Hog Lane did not cheat, but living as it did in a kind of republic, where they had all things in common, even money, the chiefs of the community needed to be careful as to their accounts.

Hal nodded to this good wife and that other, busy about her affairs, but he did not pause in his stride till he came to the ancient market hall, called the "Hall of Trials" because the produce of the country wives' baskets who entered the city had commonly been "tried" or assessed there for town dues. But since this custom took end, which was when stalls and private booths arose in the main market-place itself, the Trials' Hall in Hog Lane had been used as a store-room for leather, and part of it served on Sundays for the meeting-place of that sect of gloomy sectarian cobblers. Here too the elder men often worked with some sense of community, but mostly in silence. If any were moved to speech his comrades listened to him without interrupting for a moment the play of their elbows. But there was no loud hum of discussion such as continually arose between Presbyterians and Independents. They were the Lord's own peculiar people, and sure of the fact. So they sewed, hammered, and waxed in silence, revolving and appraising each other's produce much

as the city marshal had been wont to do with the market baskets.

To Hal Ludlow's knock at the inner port (for the outer gaped wide open) a deep voice responded, 'Brother, come thy way, in the Lord's name!'

'Peace be with the brethren!' said the young man ritually.

'Peace also upon thee, brother, and on thy house!' came the response.

Hal stepped into the clear light of the many windows which opened upon the court. The men were gathered under the archways in groups of two and three, their tools about them, jealously using the last hours of sunlight and labour. It scarcely seemed that any lifted a head, but Zachary Elsegood, their preacher and leader-in-ordinary, welcomed the incomer.

'What brings you among men of peace, young Hal Ludlow, clanking scabbard and tinkling spurs like the Assyrian captains spoken of by the prophet Ezekiel?'

'I have news for you,' he answered gravely. The lank and lathy men continued to moisten their bristles and tighten their threads with swift convulsive jerkings of the elbows, grimly spread-eagled over their work, pulling and patting and hammering against time, with a jealous God watching overhead and Oliver waiting for his next six hundred pairs of riding-boots, wanted in haste for the new Cambridgeshire men whose need was daily more pressing.

'Tell thy news, brother,' commanded Zachary Elsegood. 'Exalt them that fear the Lord and bring to naught the men of wrath.'

'The men of wrath do exalt themselves,' said the

young man, seating himself on a table where skins lay piled, and the sharp cuts in which showed for what purpose leather had been shaped there.

'The Candishers are out and are sweeping down upon us, burning and slaying as they come. The brethren at Market Deeping are at their wit's end. If we do not do something, French Drove and Gedney Hill will be places of wailing and lamentation.'

All the men were now looking up, their eyes gleaming murkily out of the growing dusk.

'Say that again, young Master Ludlow - French Drove and Gedney Hill I think you said?'

I did say so: I have the news from Levi Allister of the Slepe Troop.'

'And why are you not with that troop, young man? You were vaunting it enough when you last came here - aye, and showing us our duty to join - us that are a peculiar people!'

Ah, why not indeed? It was an hard matter to tell why, but Hal Ludlow took firm hold upon himself, for he saw a remote chance. 'They have cast me out!' he said doggedly.

'Praise the Lord!' cried Zachary Elsegood, thrusting his beard forward truculently. And all the other fen cobblers cried out in chorus, 'Praise the Lord!'

For to be cast out could only mean one thing when it happened to a scion of the house of Ludlow. The Ludlows were of the fine flour of the godly, and particularly this young man, who took not after his father the Parliament Commissioner, but was like Wiltshire Harry and his son Sir Edmond, an Anabaptist like themselves - or at least would be when the heats of youth were over.

Hal decided to say nothing about philandering

with pretty Bidy and Bess in the Tithe House garden. He was, according to Hog Lane, a martyr for Hog Lane principles. Hal only hoped they would not put the question as to which particular doctrine had led to his outcasting. He had suffered for the Saints, and the extremists of them looked at him hopefully, wondering if he might not be useful one day in helping to break the power of that grasping and latitudinarian chief, Zachary Elsegood.

For it is characteristic of Puritanism, both English and Scottish, that there never was a sect, no matter how small and narrow, but contained in it a kernel of something yet smaller, narrower, and more bitter. As in the Holy Place there was a Holy of Holies, so in the exalted community of Hog Lane there was an inner sect of Enthusiasts ready to split and re-split infinitesimally till some fiery Gossip Joan should define the future prospects of the world's salvation: 'There are only John and me that are of the Elect, and I'm none so sure of John!'

'But I will try a fall with them myself, these plunderers and murderers, if I can get any to follow me as far as Whittlesea. I know where they are lying this night and to-morrow they will be too full fed with beef and ale to stir far. Dick Lucy leads them - Dick the Dandy - ah, with a dozen or two willing lads we could break him once and for all. Then French Drove and Gedney would be safe!'

'And why doth not your great Colonel Cromwell make them safe?' cried Elsegood suspiciously. 'He has the power if he had the will.'

'Surely,' Hal answered readily, 'but he must wait his orders from the Association, who bid him remain to protect Ely and the road to London. We of the Slepe Troop were all ordered out to Soham

yesterday!’

‘What to do there?’ demanded Zered Tuby, the leader of the malcontents. He was a little man, slim and active though prematurely wrinkled, his hair shining as if with oil, everything about him sparkling, his eyes, his teeth, his jet-black locks, in spite of a thick coat of dust which covered his bare hairy arms, his leathern apron, and lay in curves about the wrinkles of his brow. For Zered was of that sect of Anabaptists who believe that having once bathed in the waters of baptism, it is better to leave well alone.

But he was a man of force for all that, and Hal answered him, ‘What to do at Soham, Zered Tuby - well, I will tell you, knowing that I am among friends. There are friends of the Wrath-men out that way - Astley of Newmarket and others I need not put a name to - ’

A deep growl went up. ‘No need - we know them!’

‘Aye, you know them, but though I am not good enough for the Slepe Troop and Colonel Cromwell - the others can account for them easily enough. It is Dick Lucy and the folk of French Drove that lie on my mind. Lucy knows of your coming hither to make boots for the Parliament, and he has sworn to be revenged.’

‘Well, let him come and welcome, Hog Lane will be proud to see him!’

‘Aye, aye, so ’twill, well spoke, and the power of the Lord be upon you, Zachary Elsegood!’

‘Ah, men,’ said the young tempter on the table, as he swung his legs and watched them furtively, ‘Dick Lucy will not risk himself at Hog Lane. But he has sworn to sweep the fens clear of your kinsfolk. You, Zered, you have a father at home and two sisters,

you, Faithful-unto-Death Jackson, have a mother, a brother, and a brother's wife - '

'Aye, aye,' cried Zered, throwing his rolled leather apron down with a bang, 'we have all kinsfolk out at Gedney Hill - I more than most, but pray tell us how we are to help. We cannot hunt down a band of mounted men, with these poor legs of ours crippled by the lapstone.'

'If any of you can ride I can find you horses, not yet out of my father's hand - Kentish breed and good Essex stock from Danbury and Little Baddow. Henry Speakman bred and broke them. Arms too I can find.'

'No need - arms are not lacking in Hog Lane,' said Zered Tuby, 'find you the horses and we will find the arms. Though we are men of peace, we will defend our own borders and put to flight the armies of the alien!'

Zered assumed command of the gathering and as the twilight was now so dark that none could continue to work, all had gathered about him silent and listening.

'Bid the young men come in, also the foreman, Wolsey Clarke. We shall let them know our mind.'

The rules of Hog Lane were strict. The 'prentices to the mystery worked all the morning with their own masters to whom they were bound and in whose house they abode. But during the afternoon they received instruction from a senior set over them, which duty the fathers of the craft took in turns. Thus the young men learned self-reliance and their elders could discuss the high matters of the community behind the closed doors of the Market Hall.

They trooped in, three or four score young fellows

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so lithe and limber that the very sight of them set Hal Ludlow's mouth watering. With a few dozen of these young sedge-cocks he could soon be as good a captain as Harry Cromwell.

But he said nothing, only watched with eagerness as they ranged themselves along the wall opposite the windows. They listened while Zered Tuby told them of the raid which threatened the villages where they had played and the kindly folk whom they loved. It was hard to be set to making boot-soles in such stirring times, and in spite of all warnings and forbiddings the Hog Lane band of 'prentices lost one or two forward lads every muster day to Manchester's foot or Colonel Cromwell's horse.

'Now, Wolsey Clarke, you that were Scout-master to the great Gustavus, you know our lads as none else can - tell us which of them can ride. All can fight, but not all can ride *and* fight.'

'I will answer,' said the burly giant Wolsey Clarke, 'all can ride and all can fight. I do not say that they will turn and pivot at a review like the Swedish guard royal. But for a charge and a brush with Lucy's Candishers I warrant them. I would that I could go with them, but a wooden-legged man is no man in a saddle - not at least in a campaign which, after all, is only a dash-and-be-done with it!'

Zachary Elsegood, Zered Tuby, and Wolsey Clarke resolved themselves into a committee of selection, and within half an hour Hal Ludlow found himself giving instructions to as likely a set of young fellows as ever joined a foray or threw leg across saddle leather.

The horses were to be taken from the stables at ten of the clock. All the town would then be bedded down, and Hal would see that the grooms were out

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of the way. For the present he would say nothing to his father. If the matter turned out well, he would have earned the thanks of the Houses - if otherwise - it was most unlikely that his father would ever again be troubled either with horses or son.

CHAPTER THREE

HOG LANE

'They do not know it in Hog Lane and it will be none of your business to tell them, but I have ridden in harness before this night - aye, and seen towns taken and streets ablaze - God forgive me - I was then an unsanctified vessel of wrath. But you will be none the worse of Zered Tuby's advice among all these boys!'

They were now riding well clear of Ely, and the waste of Chatteris fens spread before them clear to Stanground and Bedford Old Level. Behind them the cathedral towers still loomed up against a pale sky. They rode freely on into the night. Hamlets were few and small in that marshy country and the inhabitants little inclined to curiosity. The trampling of horses was no uncommon sound, for they were still so close in to Ely that the shadow of Colonel Cromwell seemed to cover the land. The enemy would never harm them while he kept watch yonder. Steadily two by two they rode with greater distance between them than trained cavalry would have used, only tailing out a little also to the rear, where the men were placed who had not yet got well into touch with their horses. Still, in spite of all, the march was proceeding creditably, and, if they were not quite the Slepe Troop, at least they were of similar materials and fully minded to meet foray by foray. Their disposition may be judged by the short dialogue which took place in the third rank between Egbert Oaks and David Pascal, bold 'prentices both and

Hog Laners to their very marrow.

'This Lucy has sworn to sweep the fens of us,' whispered Egbert Oaks, who sat his horse as if he were part of it.

'Hum!' quoth Pascal, 'we shall see when we meet how he handles the broom. He may find something stiffer than dirt to try his hand upon, as Harry Cromwell sent him word.'

'They be going Gedney way - Lord send they do not fash my old mother - what think you - would they touch hoar hairs?'

'Lord help them if they do, hoar hair or brown!' responded Pascal fiercely. 'I say, Egbert, there was nowt said about the giving of quarter?'

'Not a word.'

'Thank God!'

Passing March, they skirted the reedy sedges bordering the great Mere, keeping to the drier eastern side, and so rode straight for New Bridge where the road crosses into the Drovers. The fenmen were now in their own country and knew their way as Zered Tuby said 'by the crowing of the cocks.' 'Broad Drove rooster do sing at midnight!' a wise rider averred. 'Lincoln Leyburn's have got a pea in his throat. Hear to him!' And he would have imitated the effect but for Hal Ludlow's curt order to cease fooling. All was now well-kenned ground. They discussed where they would find the enemy quartered. The twenty miles had been eaten up by good direct leading and fresh horses.

French Drove lay before them, and the road across the fens by which would come the Wisbeach men became clear to their eyes in the dewy glimmer of the summer night. A mist slight but searching lay on the fens - the shaking mist, the men called it.

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‘Out with the strong waters,’ they whispered to Zered Tuby, ‘or in half an hour we shall all be quaking like aspens.’

‘Aye,’ grunted the little shiny-locked man, producing a narrow-necked stone jar, ‘us have been too long in Hog Lane. Other times we could ha’ watched all night by Broad Mere for ducks and been no whit the worse, but now a whiff sets us sneezing.’ And he passed the bottle round.

‘One firm tot, lads, and no more. David Pascal, you get none next time. I heard your throat gurgle twice.’

‘It were so sharp it caught my breath,’ the young man explained, not without a privy grin, ‘but I do admit that it makes a man rare and comfortable under the belt such a night as this.’

Two young French Drovers were sent forward to spy out their village and returned with the news that nothing had been heard there of the raiders, except that many Gedney families had crossed into “the shire” for greater safety - the Candishers under Dick Lucy being notoriously given to the burning of farms and the mishandling of women. Abel Kesteven had been hung in his own byre-court for refusing to guide them in search of treasure. They had tilted up the poor gaffer’s own cart, hung him to the shafts, and driven off the horses. But they had not waited to see him fairly dead. So by last accounts, Abel, cut down in time, had been resuscitated, and with no more than an ugly red rim about his neck, was still to be seen refreshing himself with pudding and double Huntingdon ale.

Every rider was now alert for Gedney Hill. For it was a hill, or rather a ridge, no more by comparison than a vein upon the back of a man’s hand, but in

the eyes of the fen folk a veritable mountain chain. It had a top indeed - that was incontestable - and as they rode along the Lincoln track, it came into sight. The square tower of the church, from which the roofs ran red-tiled and many-angled down each slope. 'Gedney Hill at last!' The Hog Laners drew breath with a gasp of relief. At least it had not been burnt like the other villages of the Low Levels. No hither-and-thither of torches - no flaming stacks and stack-yards - no pour of startled fugitives running wild into the night. Had Hog Lane been deceived? Had its good faith been played upon? Was this a plot to get them to commit themselves by waging war a score of miles from home?

A growing uneasiness manifested itself among the troop, but Zered Tuby bade them be prepared. The enemy, according to Scripture, would come like a thief in the night. And as if to prove his words out of the rough grass ahead rose the figures of a dozen human beings. The locks of pistols clicked back. The matches for the muskets were blown alight.

'Hold there!' cried Hal Ludlow, just in time - seeing clear under the glimmer of the low-lying star-dust and into the summer night which is never wholly dark on these east-looking levels. 'Do not fire a shot, or we may bring the whole wasp's nest upon us. Gipsies, I tell you, not Cavaliers!' And he interrogated rapidly the leader of the band. The troop surrounded them, and yet they seemed in no ways dismayed, though the appearance of mounted men suddenly coming upon them out of the blue deeps of the night must have been far from reassuring.

'Whence do you come, and whither are you going?'

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The bearded patriarch with the flowing locks who led them turned his head about the circle of crowding horsemen. He regarded the stars over their heads. He lifted up his arms with a large vague gesture, a royal gesture, that of a king without a country, and announced in a voice guttural and harsh: 'From anywhere to anywhere, my lord the soldier, we are gitanos. We go on, march, march, marching till we die.'

Hal sounded them as to other troops of soldiers whom they might have fallen in with.

'Aye,' came from a girl who stood close by Hal Ludlow's stirrup gazing upward at him, as if trying to read something out of the figure silhouetted darkly against the indigo vault and the fading stars, 'aye, master soldier, I saw them watching with matches burning just like yours. I crept up close. It was on the wood-edge across the valley below the church, and I heard one say that they would attack at daybreak. They would see better what they were doing, and then the fen folk would not escape for they could be ridden down in the open.'

You should have seen the men of Hog Lane gather up their bridle-reins at the word.

'Come and guide us,' said Hal, reaching out his foot in the stirrup. The girl took it as a bird does a perch, and in a moment was beside him in the saddle, her little hands clasping his broad sword belt.

'Open out there,' he ordered, 'let the rest go. The girl will show us how to overtake them. She can ride back with us when this job's done. We shall do her no harm!'

'No, we be good Christian men,' Zered assured the tribe with quite unwonted amenity, but the chief

threw back his head and laughed in his face.

'Aye,' he said, 'we are ignorant men - poor wandering pagans - but we know you Christians. We have bled under your Christian scourges. We have sat in your Christian stocks and tasted the goodness of your Christian mob. As for the girl, she is none of ours - she can please herself. If she will guide you to kill your fellow Christians, so much the better for the foot-marchers.'

'Go your ways,' said Hal. 'This is no time or place for uncivil tongues!'

'Let him go,' whispered a voice from behind; 'the grandad hath been tried to-day - twice overhauled for money by soldiers and his poor duds shaken out like an empty bag.'

Hal produced a handful of small change and passed it over to the chief, overreaching a number of eagerly clutching hands.

'There, father, - wish, us luck and part friends.'

The Hog Laners eager to be gone opened out and the little band of outcasts rambled off in the same listless way as they had come into view. The hazard of the road lay behind and before them. All to them was equal. No glance towards the small figure caught up behind Hal Ludlow. None indeed wasted anywhere - heads a little bowed, feet planted to go forward, and so under the gaze of the silent troop forward and onward they went till the dark grey fen swallowed them up.

The dawn-wind began to rise up out of the east, dry and brusque. So it did every morning in Kesteven and the Holland fens. The Spalding men called it 'the wind that sharpens the nose.' It certainly gave them that rascal accent which they carried all the way to New England with them in the

bad years before Cromwell and the Long Parliament.

The Hog Laners defiled across the slope of Gedney Hill. A rugged country lay beneath them, coarse bushes of willow, clumps of elder and birch, mixed with occasional scrub oak and Royston hazel.

'There!' whispered the maid behind Hal, shooting an arm under his bridle hand and pointing to the eastern corner of the scrub. 'They are hiding yonder, but they will attack at dawn! I heard them say so.'

Hal turned in his saddle and addressed the Hog Laners.

'We might attack them, but they would hear our horses and make off. We would never track them in that brush wood. We could not charge them there. Better wait here on their flank with the advantage of the hill and go at them as they come.'

There was some threatening of discord. For the Hog Laners were very near their old homes, and they yearned to dismount and fight the cottages and cabbage gardens, each man for his mother, his sister, or his remoter kin.

But it was clear that the advantage was all with the attacking party, and by dismounting they would throw away that advantage.

'You shall do as you are bidden, Jekel Ransome, and you Egbert Oaks - we shall keep your mother's house better by never letting the Candishers come near it.'

Such was the order of Zered Tuby who, though revolutionary in peace times, believed in supporting authority when it came to the clash of arms.

'Thank you,' whispered Hal, sincerely grateful; 'I shall not forget.'

'Oh, Hog Lane is all right, only pigs and pig-skin need managing. A leetle farther over to give the

horses time to find their stride. So - now, lads, be ready. Fear the Lord and naught else. The enemy shall be as chaff before the wind when Hog Lane comes to prove its arms. The dead praise not the Lord, neither them that go down to the place of silence. See that ye serve Him with lusty strokes upon the crowns of His enemies.'

It is a fine thing, to be sure. Hog Lane was the Lord's people, elect and peculiar. The Lucy raiders were His enemies, already accursed and as good as dead. The worst part was done already. As Hog Lane would have expressed it, the matter 'came to ripeness' sooner than they had anticipated. A small hand darted again under Hal's armpit. 'Yonder,' the girl whispered, 'they are mounting!'

And she was right. Matches glimmered in the dusk of the alder coppices. Dark shadows moved cautiously out and officers went hither and thither ordering the march. They were early and there was plenty of time. They would surround the village before dawn so that none could escape.

Hal Ludlow had no mind to charge with that girl bumping on his saddle. It would spoil his sword-play completely merely to have to think of such a thing. He might lop a child's limb - faugh! - and never get the thing out of his mind till the day of his death.

So he pointed to the square church tower on the hill of Gedney, now growing more distinct against an amber and primrose sky.

'See, little one,' he said, 'go up yonder and as soon as you hear us shout, ring the bell, or if you cannot, find someone that will. Where does the sexton live, Dave Pascal? Next but one on this side of the church - you hear, little one. Now down with you.'

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He held his foot well out and the girl glided down like a serpent. She sped away into the dawn, her hair floating behind her, and Hal drew a long breath and then expelled it from his lungs with relish.

'That was a relief, indeed,' he said to his lieutenant Zered. And he tightened his belt a couple of holes after pulling up his coat on either side so that his arms might have free play. Hog Lane, cobbler fashion, spat in his palm.

'Fall on - no pistol shooting - that's Cromwell's way. Drive the horses straight upon them and let the steel talk. Steady there on the left. Now let them have it!'

The enemy were just beginning to climb the little hill, but the Hog Laners did not even give them time to change front. The sun rose out of the fen and tinged with red the swords of the Hog Laners as they flashed in the air. When they had fallen once, they glowed no more. They went through the enemy as fire through stubble, even as Zered had prophesied. But the clang of their meeting and the horrid noise of men and horses rolling on the ground together in a clatter of accoutrements were drowned in the deep universal shout of the Hog Laners. Instantly the bell of the church clanged wildly out. Hal was seeking out Dick Lucy, whom he could see trying to rally his men, but as he cut and slashed a way to him he wondered if 'that wisp' had found the sexton or if she were at that moment leaping and pulling at the bell-rope up in the tower. Then, still fighting his best, he wondered why he should wonder. What strange things went on in men's heads when their eyes and hands were busy!

But the Candishers had no coherence. They were raffish fellows mostly, gathered from nowhere and

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anywhere by the hope of plunder - bull-baiters from wicked Stamford Town and deserters from Lynn Leaguer - Dick, Tom, and hungry Harry from the loafers' corner of every town and hamlet in the ten eastern counties. Who were they to stand against Hog Lane? Every man of them knew that if he died he would, according to a belief so universal as to compel his own reluctant consent, go straight to Hell. As for Hog Lane, the Lord of Hosts was its sun and shield, and its welcome into Heaven would be that of good and brave soldiers going home.

Only Dick Lucy of Charlcote and his man Wallop stood firm, and when at last Hal Ludlow reached them they kept grimly together. Hal attacked alone, for Hog Lane, not yet broken to discipline, was pursuing the fleeing foe across the levels. He was therefore in some considerable jeopardy, for both men pulled their pistols upon him as they saw him come. With a swerve of his rein he turned Hereward aside just in time to spoil their aim. But Wallop drew another pistol, one called a "snap haunch," from his holster, and it came very near being all over with the Captain of the Hog Laners in the very hour of his triumph.

But even as the trigger finger of the servitor Wallop crooked about the pull, and a man's life hung on the fall of the dog, a loud report startled the horses. Wallop swayed in his saddle and fell prone, while Dick Lucy, smitten on the casque by Hal's sword, was beaten to the ground, where presently he yielded himself prisoner, his wits still wandering, as it seemed, for he stood disarmed, rubbing his steel cap from which the fair ringlets hung to his shoulders, and muttering, 'It was a girl, or the devil in the shape of a girl - she did it!'

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The next moment Hal felt something softly familiar behind him. His belt was grasped and a voice said in his ear:

‘Anybody can pull any old bell-rope, but I got the sexton’s gun and came back as fast as I could run. If I had not, he would have popped you! Good luck I came!’

‘Good luck indeed, little one, and thank you,’ quoth Hal carelessly over his shoulder.

‘Do you know, I don’t believe you have ever looked at me. I am not so very little.’

Hal Ludlow hastily turned his head and looked.

‘Great God,’ he exclaimed, ‘it’s a woman!’

‘Twelve pence for swearing. Captain!’ grinned Zered Tuby as he rode up with a couple of horses in leash behind and the battle sweat not yet dry on him.

CHAPTER FOUR

'FOR THE HOUSES AND THE LORD!'

Hog Lane had won a wonderful victory, but then the Lord was the Lord and Hog Lane was Hog Lane. There were no prisoners except Dick Lucy, and in his direction many angry glances were directed. So Saul had spared Agag of Amalek, and all Hog Laners knew what had come of that. Still, the Captain had passed his word - they could not get behind the fact. After all it was his own affair. Right valiantly Hog Lane had done its part, smiting the Amalekites hip and thigh, but to be accurate, more particularly on the head. There was great shearing of love locks that morning, and the Candishers would learn to leave Gedney Hill alone from that day forth. They had gotten their "kail through the reek" - an instalment on account pending full settlement on Gainsborough day, when Charles Cavendish 'of the best blood in England' was to be 'thrust through by an officer of ours,' deftly done too, between the short ribs, and no more said about it than if he had been a common clown caught in arms against the Parliament.

Plunder too accrued to Hog Lane - to each man a horse or two, some saddled and accoutremented for war, some of the cart-horse breed, very useful, and saddle beasts not a few laden with booty and provend.

Ely clocks were striking noon with much lingering clangour when a weary cavalcade rode up to the great open gate of the Tithing Yard. Hal Ludlow came first, his captive behind him, solidly guarded by a detachment from Hog Lane under Zered Tuby.

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For though none of the troop which had ridden through French Drove to Gedney Hill feared the face of man, some of them made an exception in favour of Colonel Cromwell.

The Tithing House family were just sitting down to dinner and at the sound of the shod feet of horses, always the sweetest music in his ears, Colonel Cromwell came forth and stood on the steps with a white napkin in his hand. Bridget and Bess ran to the window and stood there waving surreptitious welcomes directly over their father's head. Evidently something had happened and perhaps, who knew, they would get back their gossip Hal again.

'Well,' said the Colonel, glowering down upon the cavalcade, on the prisoner and the swarthy assured countenances of Hog Lane on its borrowed horses. 'Well, sirrah, what may this mean?'

'It means. Colonel,' answered Hal, 'that by the help of these good fellows I have smitten the Candishers, destroyed four troops of them under Captain Richard Lucy of Charlcote whom I now present to you.'

'He is all that remains - pray look at him well,' put in Zered Tuby who hated being silent when another man talked. 'We smote every Amalekite, yea, with the sword of the Lord and Gideon, we smote them!'

'So,' said Colonel Cromwell, turning an eye upon him, 'and speaking thus and fighting thus, why have you not taken service with me?'

'We are men of Gedney, dwellers in Hog Lane. We make boots and shoes for your armies. But for us you would ride bare-toes to stirrup-iron. No man can do more than one thing well at a time.'

'Ah,' said Cromwell, 'Anabaptists - I understand. So, Master Hal, you have done your deed and captured your man. I thought you took the matter somewhat calmly yesterday. You had a scheme at the back of your head - an excellent thing to have! Well, take your prisoner to Mr. Hicks at the Bridewell and bid him care for Master Lucy along with the other exchangers. Here - give him my authority (he scribbled some words in a notebook, tore out the leaf and handed it to Hal), and then if you will come back to dinner we will talk over the affair of the Slepe Troop - also you will tell me of this most welcome riddance which the Lord hath wrought at Gedney. Give Him the glory, Hal - I missed that point in your first report.'

'Colonel,' said Hal, 'by your leave I shall call on you to-night - this afternoon even, but I must first render back these riding horses to my father, and then to thank my good friends of Hog Lane for their valiance - for without them I could have done nothing, and by this time all the northern Drovers would have been wasted, farm, cottage, and hamlet.'

'Do so, then, friend Hal. My service to your father, and tell him not to be too severe with you as to the horses. I shall account with him for any losses.'

'Us can do that without 'ee. Muster Crum'ell,' said Zered, 'there be naught but one mare that grit Roger Tebbut rode overly hard down hill, and we have taken horses sufficient to horse all Hog Lane twice over!'

'So much the better, friend Anabaptist,' said Cromwell dryly, 'certes, it seems to me that one might find better employment for you than sewing shoe leather, pricking with elsins, and hammering on boot heels.'

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‘And pray who made you the boots in which you stand up? Any complaints about them? None! And the last you paid so dear for in London Cheap? How many times did you lose twelve pence by condemning them unseemly before the troop?’

The grim features of the Discipliner relaxed and he shook a forefinger at Zered.

‘Sam Squire hath been talking, friend, I see. It was only once, and that for a word which I might have passed over in a trooper.’

The girls overhead craned their necks and were consumed with the envy of knowing what was the word their father had let escape him.

‘Lucky we are not so tempted,’ whispered Bess, ‘if these fine big words were forbidden us, I declare I should swear myself into bankruptcy!’

Hog Lane clattered out of the presence after a grudging salute. For Hog Lane’s did no eye service and Colonel Cromwell smiled a well-satisfied smile as he saw them go. Here was plenty of good material yet untouched, and he knew how to use it. Naturally he sympathised with all sectarians, all outstanders, all thinkers for themselves, insisting upon uniformity only in the matter of the regiments and their regulations.

‘A clever young fellow, this Hal Ludlow,’ he meditated, ‘with a little high-mindedness which in another might be insolence, but directed in a godly fashion may be of much service. The lad is no mealy-mouthed prater, and I suppose he will end by getting his troop. He is young, but already he hath proved himself. I think no worse of him that he hath an eye for an honest maid. It were no bad thing - well, well - we shall see - what we shall see.’

And so smiling and muttering the great man went

HAL O' THE IRONSIDES

back to the dinner which his dame was, with flustered patience, keeping hot for him.

Meanwhile Hal Ludlow had his own thoughts, also matters on hand which could not wait. He rode through the streets to Hog Lane, the men following close behind. He found that narrow thoroughfare blocked and guarded. Half Ely was crowding about the entrance.

'Way there,' he shouted, 'Colonel Cromwell's orders!'

A path was made and the men and their captures passed on through a turmoil of admiration and jealousy. But the son of the Commissioner was a known man and the name of the First Ironside, Oliver, governor of Ely City, carried far even in these very early days.

Into Hog Lane then rode Hal, his prisoner, and the troop. They came into a sound of singing, and before them they saw Zachary Elsegood leading a psalm. The 'prentices hastily formed up at a word from Hal, and of their own initiative took off their helmets, hanging them on the saddle-bow in front of them.

'Praise God from whom all blessings flow.'

Hal uncovered also, and signed to his captive to do the same. But young Lucy was obdurate and clapped his gilt casque more firmly upon his head. It was not wisely done, for Egbert Oaks, just behind, knocked it up with a musket butt.

'Do not be a fool, Lucy,' whispered Hal, 'it took all my authority to save you. These fellows are new to the business and obey with difficulty.'

'I am disgraced,' groaned Lucy, 'I shall never dare

to look General Cavendish in the face.'

'Cheer up, 'tis the fortune of war,' said the victor, 'your turn next time.' Their talk was covered by the thunderous chanting of Hog Lane. Between the ranks of the horses a slim girl's figure glided, and next moment Lucy's damascened helmet was rescued from the dust and set upon the saddle-bow of his conqueror.

Hal nodded his thanks, but presently forgot her again when silence was made. Then he called upon the troop which had ridden with him to deliver up their captured horses to his father. On the way he deposited young Lucy with the turnkey, promising to see him on the morrow and if possible interest his father in effecting an exchange - 'which (said Hal meaningly) is more than you would have done for me if you had beaten us and fired Gedney!' And he made the gesture of tightening a rope about his own neck. The young fellow flushed for his conscience was anything but easy. 'Our general is hard driven,' he said, 'what has been done was not done by my will. I acted always upon orders.'

'Lucky for you, friend,' retorted Hal, 'that I acted without any - or you would not now have been at the door of Ely prison. 'Tis not a palace quite, but you will have company and be more comfortable than a-swing on the branch of a Gedney apple tree! Ho, there! Hicks, Turnkey Haggäi Hicks, do not keep Colonel Cromwell's messenger waiting!'

At that formidable name the doors fell back as at a magic "Open Sesame."

'Colonel Cromwell's compliments to Mr. Hicks and he bids him keep Mr. Richard Lucy in all safety and with what comfort is possible - also that he shall give him communication with the other prisoners.

File out there!'

Hog Lane was becoming quite malleable. It went to his heart to lose so many fine soldiers. What a troop he could soon gather if only - well, he would see his father. The residence of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Eastern Association was not so roomy and spacious as the Tithing House, but the feature which fitted it for a base of supplies was the immense array of barns and stables surrounding it, which had formerly been occupied by the Commission of Array. Hal found his father in his temporary office making believe to be immersed in business. But the good easy man had already slipped behind a cushion the book he had been reading, and rose to receive his visitors with scarcely concealed ill-humour. When he saw his son, however, his mood changed.

No soldier himself, and in all respects peaceably minded, he yet longed for military distinction, and believed that his son would realise his dreams.

'Why, Hal,' he cried, 'have they given you a troop, lad? They will look well in the new uniforms - red coats come down from White Chapel and the villages thereabout, all piled in the West Barn - no more mistakes and one Parliament troop charging another as at Saffron last week - what say you, Hal?'

'I say, father, that there is no troop for me till I have gathered men and horses.'

The bald smooth-faced man waved a hand affably in the direction of Hog Lane, sitting their horses patiently, but with some contempt.

'Who then may these be upon my horses? I presume you had the Colonel's permission. You might have asked mine also.'

'You were asleep and I cared not about waking

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you, sir. Besides, the service was secret and urgent. We delivered French Drove and Gedney, kept our borders clear, broke and slew four troops of Candishers and took prisoner their leader, young Lucy of Charlcote.'

'And who did all that - not you, Hal?'

'Not I, father. These good friends of mine did the work. The honour belongs to them - to them and (suddenly mindful of his duty) - to the God of Battles.'

Hal had to be careful of Hog Lane prejudices, especially as he had something to ask of them. Accordingly feeling the moment to be heavy with fate, he turned Hereward about and addressed them face to face.

'Lads,' he said, 'you are good soldiers and the enemies of the Cause are numerous. You have seen to-night what a few men like you can do. Let the elders among you continue to make boots, but God and the Colonel need soldiers to wear them. Your women and children need soldiers to protect them. Where would they have been now if I had not mustered you? The men and young boys and white-headed grandfathers lying in their blood - your mothers wailing over their burned houses, your sisters and kinswomen - but I speak not the shame you know. Why not serve a while in the army of the Lord, for the sake of His Cause and for the safety of those dear to you? I ask not the elders. That were too much to expect, and besides they are needed in their own business. Come now, out with it. Who will keep his beast and ride with me? Ye have proven me. Cutting leather is no young man's trade these days - '

'No,' cried Zered Tuby, snatching his black helmet

from his head, 'the curse of Meroz - think of the curse of Meroz! "Curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof, because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty."'

'God bless you, Zered,' cried Hal, from his heart, for he had not dreamed of such an ally, 'stand by me and together we shall have the best troop in the New Model.'

Hog Lane paused uncertain. Each man had gone his own way so long that a general decision was difficult.

'Come - this way with you - all you young fellows who are willing to stand such another fight as we fought last night. Nerve to your arms, life to your hearts, and God's blessing on all who will run the hazard!'

Slowly and almost sullenly Hog Lane obeyed the summons of Zered Tuby, the man who was of themselves, born in the Anabaptist purple, a Pharisee of the Pharisees. A good score swung into rank behind him, while the others still hung undecided, thinking what fathers and masters might say.

'Fear no man,' cried Zered, divining their thoughts, 'I will answer for you to Hog Lane. Zachary Elsegood cannot hinder you. Have you not saved Gedney and French Drove, besides all the hamlets of the fen? You have rooted out one band of the ungodly, but there are many others. They will come again always from the North, which is the country of the Scarlet Woman. Ye have given her a sore *shog*, but do not flatter yourselves. Babylon the Great is not yet fallen. Come, Issachar Sprigg of Stranground! Be a strong ass, if ass you must be. Crouch not too long between two burdens! You,

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Shem Quarles, think shame! And your sweetheart's tears hardly dry on your coat sleeve because of the safety you brought her. Turn about and get to your place. For the women and children, for the grandfathers and the child unborn, for the lasses you will marry, for the swept hearths and unburned roofs - for Gedney and the fens, for the Houses and the Lord - into place with you there! Wheel, I tell you! Stand not halting between two opinions. Forward there, Alured Promise, let me see you perform. Good lad, good lads all. Now we shall ride back and let them see the Hog Lane Troop!

'Now give the word - quick - set them moving!' he whispered to Hal, 'they will not stop now if we keep them to it.'

'Two's to the right, file out there - sling carbines! Carry swords!'

And with a little rough dressing, hardly the Slepe Troop itself made a finer appearance than the Hog Laners on the eve of their first recruitment, as they marched back to announce their decision to the elders of their people.

CHAPTER FIVE

'SLEEP WELL, CAPTAIN LUDLOW!'

Before they found their straw pallets within the barns of the Commissioner's house, the new troop proceed to choose its officers.

For Captain: Henry Ludlow the Younger.

Lieutenant: Zered Tuby of Hog Lane.

'And with these our officers we will serve - under Cromwell and none other, so long as he be in life - excepting only by his express orders - and if the needs of the service so demand. We submit to all his discipline, but we swear no oaths - our word being according to our conscience, and all under God.'

So they passed their statutes in the quaint formal phrases which now may seem empty but were then so full of meaning. But they meant what they said, these Egberts, Alureds, Piouses, and Love-the-Lords. Strange in other times seem their names. Hardly can one think of them as young men all under thirty (except Zered Tuby alone), full of rich young blood, with bounteous natural gifts, loving life, loving their sweethearts, and looking forward to a home and children. They were, in fact, ordinary young men of an extraordinary time, the like of them only to be found in rugged New England fighting the savages - and that only because these colonists between Cape Cod and Casco were their cousins and uncles - the neighbours and kinsfolk of the men who listed to follow Cromwell and make a troop for Hal Ludlow when he had fallen under the displeasure of his chief in the beautiful Tithe House garden at Ely, in which the sun-dial still stands, cracked but faithful,

to witness if I lie.

That evening at six o'clock exactly Hal took the original of the Hog Lane Troop statutes and the roll of enlisted members to the Tithe House. He was demurely received by the girls, with side glances which intimated to him that Colonel Cromwell was in the adjoining room and might be expected to enter at any moment. But at any rate just then Hal was in no mood for Puss-in-the-Corner. He must convince a man very hard to be convinced.

They sat down to supper and Hal had his precious papers on the tablecloth beside his plate. He saw the eagle eye of the commander stoop upon them like a hawk upon a hare.

'For me?' he queried - 'from your father?'

'No, sir,' said Hal, instinctively laying his hand upon them, 'not from my father. For you, certainly, but they are private.'

'Well enough said, Hal,' laughed Cromwell, 'this is no time for secrets. Help yourself to the brawn, or what do you say to cold duck? My good dame will see that you want not for sweets. She hath the knack of a custard, and I warrant you are hungry enough.'

'Indeed I am - I have not tasted bite or sup since last night, and I was so busy that I forgot all about dinner -'

'Oh,' cried Bess Cromwell, 'to think of it - when you might have stayed - and we had roast pig with crackling!'

They laughed at this, for Bess was called the family glutton. And they were exceedingly merry, even the Colonel jesting in his grave way, for at this evening meal, with his family about him, he was wont to unbend more than at all the other hours of

the day. He told tales of wise ministers and preachers whom he had known - wiser than those of that day, in that they fed the flock and let politics alone - how Mr. Rogers of Dedham, ambling on his ancient pony, was asked by a young fop what made his horse's tail wag so constantly, and how Mr. Rogers had replied, 'Just what makes your tongue wag - weakness!'

Hal listened respectfully - all the more so that he felt that the master of the house was making an effort to do him honour. He was conscious, too, that a little foot was seeking his under the table, whereupon as in duty bound he responded by touching that of Bridget Cromwell, who sat at his right, as gently as a Hog Lane riding boot, spurred and double-soled, would permit. But he started and apologised when he found a stare of cold displeasure turned upon him. Yet he could have sworn - yes, there it was again. Could it be - yes, it must be - that monkey Bess paying court to him from the other side of the table? Bess was only sixteen, but such is the nature of man, that Hal Ludlow began to discover in her a ripeness and perfection of which he had not dreamed five minutes before. Her eyes were merry and her profile certainly better cut than Bridget's. Besides, she had such mischief and spirits in her glance that - that - Hal was a young man and exceedingly susceptible. He did not fall in love, but he resolved to continue and even to pursue the acquaintance of Mistress Elizabeth Cromwell.

There was also a certain dangerous joy in playing with such subterranean fire under the eye and within sound of the voice of the Terror of England. Yet they were grave and sober, these young people. Bridget gave her severest shoulder to the

venturesome Hal, and Bess listened as if in a reverie of admiration to her father's words. Hal's ears indeed burned, but then he was only a man, and small deceits sat not gracefully upon him. But the maids, conscious of all that was going forward unseen, interpreting each jingle of the spurs as the unfortunate moved uneasily, talked soft and mannerly and behaved meekly, so that they were a cause of wonder to the young man, into whose vitals shame ate like a ravaging worm and indeed quite spoilt his supper. The talk falling upon creeds, and the taking of tests and covenants, especially the Scots one to which Colonel Cromwell was bitterly opposed, Hal ventured to say that the wise folk from the north would do well to keep to their original creed.

'And what may that be, Master Theologue?' cried Cromwell, scenting a discussion in a quarter where he least expected one. Whereupon Hal repeated the line he had heard from the singing of Ewan Gordon of the Hog Lane Troop:

*'If thou woulds't come the better speed
Gang no farther than this creed –
"Say well and do no ill"
Shall keep thy soul in safety still.'*

Cromwell shook his head at Hal with a certain contempt not unmingled with paternal indulgence.

'Hal, Hal, if you only knew what you were talking about I would confer seriously with you. But being of another age, I judge that you will grow wiser as the years mount about you. Only remember that creeds and conduct are not as easy as "Tick-tack-toe, Round I go." You are beginning with the fruit

without growing the tree, without bud or flower, without pruning and digging. But I speak Greek to you young people, from whom all that a wise man can expect on the hither side of thirty is a reasonable sagacity and a habit of prompt and dutiful obedience. Bess, fetch the Books. Sir, you will abide and worship with us?'

Colonel Cromwell sat by the window in a high chair, a table before him, and the light of the west shining softly in through the golden haze of farinaceous notes which filled the great Tithe Barn Yards. Bess, with the ribbon of one dainty slipper missing, tripped demurely and unconsciously up and deposited upon the desk a quarto volume bound in massive silver, double-clasped and cornered with the same metal. Then she returned for the Psalm Book, which was of the thin flat pulpit type, but almost equally weighty with silver plating.

The head of the family gave out a psalm to be sung, which he read four lines at a time, in a soldierly voice such as he used when exhorting the Slepe Troop.

It was good at close of day to sing in the safe shelter of that much threatened house - a song of eventide and consolation.

*'The angel of the Lord encamps,
And round encompasseth
All these about that do Him fear
And then delivereth - '*

So line by line and precept by precept that clear firm voice enunciated the promises, as it were laying down the lines of circumvallation about an impregnable fortress, till he concluded with the

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verse in which all joined joyously as being specially applicable to their present situation:

*'The troubles that afflict the just
In number many be,
And yet at last out of them all,
The Lord doth set him free.'*

'The Lord give ear to the song of His servants!' concluded the family high priest, and opening the great silver armorialed quarto he read "in his ordinary" - that is to say, in his steady progress through the Scripture, a stormy battle chapter of the Wars of David, which made his voice shake the roof, and the orderlies, stable hands, and servant maids clustering at the end of the long room, furtively draw together as for protection against some coming catastrophe.

Then quite suddenly he closed the book, and turning his chair towards the window he prayed kneeling into the golden twilight where the sun had gone down. The family and dependents were swiftly upon their knees. Hal Ludlow, a little disconcerted by the unexpected movement, followed their example. The whole little assembly was soon under the spell of the speaker, who, as it were, spoke with his God face to face - all, that is, except Bess Cromwell, who with eyes that roamed everywhere and sought out everything spied a wisp of silk upon Hal's right spur. In a moment she had glanced at her own slippers, discovered her loss, recovered the bow-knot, and with a cunning hitch of a pin drawn from her neck ruffles fastened it again in place. And so to her devotions as diligently as any.

'And to think,' she reflected, 'that some are so

wicked as to deny the existence of a kind Providence. If Hal had not been so slow and stupid, I should certainly have been found out!

* * * *

*

'And now, lad,' said the Colonel when Dame Cromwell and her mother had kissed him on both cheeks, and the girls had demurely presented their hands in token of farewell, 'let us see what is in these papers.' But Hal wanted to proceed in his own way.

'Sir,' he said, 'your pardon and patience a moment. I have done something - as you asked me - no great thing, but something. Your soldiery can tell better than I what it is worth. But the Anabaptists fought well, and are willing to come in with us, arming and mounting themselves as is your rule. I asked them before ever I let them out of the saddle, and little Zered Tuby backed me with all his might -'

'Why was he so keen - I have heard of him as a bitter plant?' queried Cromwell, who took nothing on trust.

'A bitter plant, but satisfactory - and to me indispensable,' said Hal. 'He has tasted fighting and is eager for more. He hates the King's folks as the enemies of the Cause -'

'And of the Lord,' said Cromwell.

'That is what he said,' Hal admitted. 'Also I judge that he is not sorry to play a trick upon Preacher Elsegood, who has set up to be a chief man in Hog Lane. He wants to keep them all out of the war, hard at it hammering lapstones and twitching waxed threads.'

'Aye,' said the Colonel grimly, 'I know Master

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Zachary Elsegood. He has this much of Judas about him that he carries the bag and is anxious that it should be filled with Parliamentary gold. Have a care, Hal, that he does not cheat you. He is a cunning dog, your Zachary. He took some simple scrupulous souls out of our second troop by reproaching them with companying with infant baptisers.'

'I think, sir, that Zered will keep them right. They draw mightily to him, and dislike Zachary, who has kept them working for 'prentice wage years longer than the law allows. Oh, the young men will stick to it right enough. Here are the names and articles of association.'

He passed the papers over, which Cromwell took and smoothed down under the light of the tall wax candles. He smiled well pleased as he counted the roll. 'A full troop,' he said, 'and one of the best, if I know aught of Hog Lane. Ah, but what's this? Choosing their officers! For Captain, Henry Ludlow? Who is he, this Captain Henry Ludlow? This that you bring me is a clear infringement of my prerogatives. Young man, I wonder that you dare?'

'It is not my daring, sir,' said Hal, trying hard to keep the triumphant accent out of his voice. 'I shall be very content to be once more what you promised me, a trooper in the Slepe Troop. But these fellows are wild as marsh curlews. If you do not accept their officers and their rules, I fear we may have to do without the troop. And, Colonel, you should have seen them charge - if only they had known when to pull up.'

'The Hog Lane Ruperts! Not pull up, you say? That I take it upon myself to teach them. Well, I suppose I can do no better than accept your title -

though Sam Squire, my adjutant, has as good as the promise of the next troop.'

'You let Charlie Montague have the troop he raised,' pleaded Hal, 'and his men never proved themselves as my Hog Laners did last night at Gedney Hill.'

'I would that I had been there, sirrah, though I daresay I could have done no better. But let us look at their articles - *umm-umm* - "will fight under Colonel Cromwell and no other." That will never do. Must change that. Colonel Cromwell may be under the sod any day. You must see that changed, Hal.'

'They mean what you mean, sir,' the young man explained, 'only that they will not be sent to my Lord Essex or -'

'I see - name no names, Hal. I think we can arrange the matter. "They desire to incorporate themselves with Colonel Cromwell's brigade of horse which is he now raising for the Eastern Counties' Association - " How will that do?'

'I doubt if they would understand what the words mean,' Hal Ludlow smiled in answer to the twinkle in his chief's eye.

'No matter, no matter,' said the Colonel, 'but we shall translate a little for the benefit of that excellent man, your father, and the War Commission at Westminster, who would not like to have Colonel Cromwell shoved upon them willy-nilly by a Hog Lane armed to the teeth. 'Tis only a difference of expression - as you say. We both mean the same. And the day may come when Hog Lane may be most useful - more than ninety and nine just men who never thought of choosing officers and imposing rules on the Two Houses! Well, I may as well write you and Zered a couple of acting commissions till I

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can get the official ones down from Westminster. Good night to you - you go back to your troop, I suppose. Sleep well, Captain Ludlow!

CHAPTER SIX

THE ISLE JATTE

'My heart, my heart, my heart's dear heart - eat it then and welcome. I stole it for thee!'

The words, spoken in the most caressing tones possible to womankind, came from somewhere unseen. Hal Ludlow had paused before the loose-box in which he had stabled Hereward, who was never so happy as when he had enough bedding to roll upon at his pleasure. It might not be very good for his coat, but it was excellent for his temper and spirits. Hal loved his beast and gave him this indulgence as often as he could. It was dusk in the long stable of his father's official residence, and Hereward's loose-box was quite at the end. Coming in out of the temporary guard-room, Captain Ludlow had picked up a lantern and made his way to give a good-night handful of oats and a caress to his friend.

He paused at the sound of the voice. Surely no son of Hog Lane had ever been made love to in such fashion. "My heart's dear heart" - that sounded like a song such as he had often heard sung when he was a collegian at Trinity.

He lifted his lantern and let the light fall upon the manger which had been fitted into a niche in the wall. Upon the edge of it perched the gipsy girl who had saved his life on the slope of Gedney Hill. She had Hereward's head against her breast and with both palms hollowed into a cup, she was teaching him to eat from them. The horse whinnied with pleasure, and even as Hal approached threw up his

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head and laid a soft nose against the girl's cheek. 'Daintily now or you will push me off my perch!' she remonstrated.

'What is this, you little witch?' Hal exclaimed. 'Hereward allows no one in his stall. He permits no one to feed him but myself. What brings you here, you imp - answer me?' For Hal was suffering from a sense of wrong - jealousy of the girl who had taken Hereward's love - horse jealousy, more bitter with some men than the treachery of a sweetheart. But the fairy-like figure surprised and conquered him. The clothing was scant but scrupulously neat. The dress wrapped the young limbs about as the green sheath swathes the poppy-bud. Hal was conscious of a bare brown neck, and of a little bird-like head poised upon it. Swiftly the single glance which had betrayed her consciousness of his presence traversed him from head to foot. He could see the pupils of the great dark eyes narrow and almost vanish under the glare of the light.

'Hereward and I have made friends,' said the perched imp; 'you see, noble captain, that I saved his life as well as his master's, and he has the grace to be grateful.'

'Who are you?' demanded Hal, more and more astonished, for the accent and speech were not of the country.

'Nay,' said the girl, 'if you tell me that, I shall be grateful indeed! Some say I followed the gipsies of my own free will. But more like I was knocked on the head and tossed into a donkey pannier. Now I am of your troop and my name is on you rolls.'

'Impossible!'

'Not impossible, I put it there myself when old man Zered was not looking - Neña la Fain - a good

name too, as it sounds - for I never had any chance, and I have always been hungry.'

A vague idea shaped itself in Hal's mind that his eye had passed over some such name - registered upon the strange muster-roll of the Hog Lane Saints. What would Colonel Cromwell say? He would certainly allow no fooling, and he would require full explanations. Captain Hal for the first time in his life wished that his past had been clear of "petticoating" - for by that name the Puritans of the East designated the give-and-take commerce of innocent young people. It was discouraged as leading to the fatal gulf of "chambering and wanton-ness," which in turn led directly to expulsion and the blackness of darkness.

The chief of the Hog Laners felt the responsibility of his position, but after all the girl had saved his life. If he were to tell the Colonel, Zered could of course bear him out. But he wished that he had had a more sober reputation. Yet it was not his fault that the rustle of silk skirts and the flutter of bosom lawn disturbed his nerves.

First of all he must dispose of Neña for the night. His father and he were alone in the Commissioner's house. He had no relatives in Ely to whom he could commit this charge. He frowned thoughtfully, and the girl's eyes followed him everywhere, striving to read his purpose.

'I will not go,' she declared suddenly, as if in answer to an unspoken resolution. 'I can provide for myself. See!' And with quick surprising agility she seized the edge of the hay-shoot which communicated with the forage loft, swung herself clear, and was gone.

He had a vision of shapely brown ankles swinging

an instant in space and then lifted out of sight into the dark cavern overhead. He went round by the outside stairs and, opening the doors through which the great pulleys swung the bales of hay for Cromwell's troop horses, he peered in. Nothing stirred but the rats. He saw endless bales and stacks of fodder fading into darkness, huge cross-beams shadowy overhead and the night dimly shining in, star-sown, through ranges of high-set triangular "wickets."

But no light-heeled maid bewitching to horses and troublesome to new-made captains of horse by the grace of God and Oliver Cromwell. Nothing remained therefore but to go decently to bed, which he did on a pallet flanked by his lieutenant, and at twenty paces off all along the opposite wall, from the noses of Hog Lane resounded the serene trumpeting of victorious Ironsides.

How Neña la Fain passed the night was a secret not then revealed to Hal, but about twelve of the clock a slim figure with a bundle of clothes piled upon its head like a dusky turban dropped into the river a couple of miles below the city, where the marsh willows are densest and the salt tussocks grow highest. Hardly a splash - not a ripple of wake - no fish could have been more silent than Neña, little brown Neña the outcast, who carried so old and wise head on such young and pretty shoulders.

She was exceedingly able to take care of herself. Her twenty years had taught her much varied wisdom. The Ronanichels cherish their womenfolk, and though Neña was none of their blood, it was expected that one day she would marry the chief. So that, though one man or two had got a knife in his ribs on account of ill-advised approaches, Neña la

Fain flitted still fancy free. She had known no lord. She had never even had a sweetheart - never lingered under the pines with a lover when the elder women were banking up to-morrow's fire at the base of a great trunk of cedar or pearly beech.

Now she hastily put on her dress and shoes, sitting on a boss of sea-grass well above the tide-mark, and then pushed forward like one who knows the way, to the extreme end of the island on which she stood. It was what among the northern fens was called a wooded isle, though the timber was not of the height and magnificence which makes notable Isle Osea opposite Maldon.

The wind of the night soon dried the brackish river-water upon her lithe body and only a pleasant surface coolness remained upon her skin. She was now far away from all except the fen sounds, and the marshes, though only a few know it, are very busy and populous during the night. On little patches of the mere, ducks placidly swam or lay torpid under the bank, with heads tucked comfortably away under their wings. The thunder of the bittern came from the central marshes, braying like a brazen drum. This waked to emulation a bull on the newly reclaimed polders (called the Bouchier meadows from the family of good Dame Cromwell, with whose dower they had been drained). Neña hardly listened to all this. Her ear took in the sounds certainly. Her brain registered and interpreted them, but she was too intent on going forward to stop because Baisent, the Cromwell bull, bellowed on the Bouchier polder, or Stonehurst rooster marked midnight with a distant trumpet-call as argentine as the ripple of her own laughter.

On she went, ducking under scrub and gliding

through tangled brush swift and noiselessly as a squirrel. Presently there came a deeper darkness, the outline of a ridge pole, the vague black silhouette of a mud-built chimney, a closed door, and Neña was at home.

It was a fowler's hut, such as exist by hundreds in the fens, light in structure but standing well up to the storms under its shade of alder and willow. Set on a platform of peat, peat-banked about, the walls wattle-caulked with stiff Lincolnshire clay, and a low-built brick chimney at one end, such was the refuge of Neña la Fain and at rare intervals the home of Jack Wassailer, which is to say Oiseleur, one of the first arrivals of that fine flight of French Huguenots escaping from Mazarin and Anne of Austria. He rarely remained long in one place and Neña had small expectation of finding him within when she clambered up the rude steps to the door. But the Wassailer was there before her and called out in French, 'A moment, petite mie, and I shall have a light for thee.'

She heard the flint of the steel and divined the careful nursing of the spark among the tinder. Then after the faint hiss of the match cord, a candle was lighted, and to her eyes, accustomed to the spaces of the wide cool dark, the world seemed to rush together, and the night to bank itself solid and ebon about that dazzling illumination. The hut seemed bursting with it. It kindled in the chimney and threw a glare against the skies. Every chink and crevice vomited fire and the very glade itself was inundated with light. The door was outlined with brightness as though framed in fire, and overhead the hut itself raised a humped and hooded back towards the east winds. The door was thrown open, the fly net raised,

and the white beard of Jacques the Wassailer brushed with a wispy paternal benediction the cheek of the girl. 'Why did you not shout for me, to come and ferry you over?' said the old man, sticking his candle on a copiously bedripped perch fixed in the side of the hut above the table. 'Well, child, what of new? Have you found him?'

Neña la Fain was silent a moment, and then lifting her eyes frankly to those of the old man, she answered without flushing, 'I have found him, but he is not for me!'

'For whom then?' The old Huguenot turned an anxious eye upon the girl.

She shrugged her shoulders, 'Oh, I do not know - some great lady. He is a Captain of horse under Colonel Cromwell, and his father lives in the biggest house in Ely.'

'His name?'

'Captain Hal Ludlow - I saved his life. There was a fight at Gedney out French Drove way. His men sent the Candishers flying, but he would have been killed while capturing the leader if I had not shot the man down.'

'And so,' interjected the old man grimly, 'he showed his English gratitude by making love to you!'

'No - no - no - I tell you.' Neña beat on the table with the palm of her small hand. 'He did not know. He thought I was a child. I did but ride behind him and slid off before we got to the town.'

The old exile took his beard in his left hand and crushed it against his teeth, biting it in a manner usual with him in meditation.

He considered the thing unlikely, and with the racial suspicion of a Frenchman where women are concerned, quite disbelieved in the disinterestedness

of the Captain of the Hog Lane Troop.

'He knows well enough,' he muttered, 'the man does not live who would not know if he found favour in your eyes. I can see him - a Jack-a-dandy ape for all his Puritan blood. He cocked his feather at you, I warrant - ah, if he plays you false, it will not be a good day for him when I find my brave gentleman at the end of my old fowling-piece - slugs for such cattle, the slugs with which I killed the wild boar in Netly Thickets!'

Neña la Fain caught him eagerly by the arm. 'You wrong him - and you wrong me,' she said. 'I did not know that I loved him till I fled to you. He came on me feeding his horse and I was frightened and escaped. No, he did not fright me. He was gentle and kind - only he wanted to place me with some of his own people in a built house in the town. I am not made for such - street and company and houses opposite!'

'But the night - the night of the battle?' the old man continued still suspiciously.

'It was so dark he never saw me! I tell you, Jacques, he is in no ways to blame.'

The old Frenchman watched the small brown hands playing nervously with the webbing of a snare which she had picked from a shelf.

'You plead for him almost too well,' he said grimly, 'and for the rest we shall see. That the lad is well-born band of a brave spirit I doubt not, but - the young men of this land are of a wandering mind, and his Captaincy under Cromwell will help him nothing when he comes under the spell of your eyes.'

'But he will not - even if that were true,' cried the girl. 'Wassailer, listen - I will stay with you and go no

more with the tribe. You will teach me your business and we shall catch birds together. I shall cook for you and keep the house, wash and mend your clothes, make and repair your nets and snares - be your little daughter.'

The Huguenot's eyes glowed.

'If only you would - or could! But I fear me you have already drunk the poison. Yet stay with me while you can. You shall be welcome at Isle Jatte. Ours is a good trade, *petite*. It nourishes well its man. And with this little piece of tin (he took a bird-call from his pocket) I will teach you to bring down the plover from the sky so that he will put his head into the noose whenever you want him. He will leave the fat wireworms on which he is busy in Farmer Giles's field to come to you. Besides, fowling does not bow a man prematurely like the labour of the plough and scythe. See the poor slaves, stretched along their plough-handles under the chill ruffle of the winter wind and the bite of an easterly spring. We have only to set our traps cunningly, to shoot straight, and to whistle for the birds.'

The morning began to break upon Isle Jatte and Grande Isle. The Huguenot used the old names as if he still whistled down the larks in the meadows beneath St. Andre and on the islands of the Etang de Berre. Jacques must make haste. The golden plover, wariest and most astute of birds, would be busy at the lower corner of Isle Jatte when the tide was going out. His capture was no easy task, for these plovers post sentinels while the flocks feed. So Jacques ordered Neña to lie down on the bed and sleep till he should return. He would go in his skiff and be back before she was awake. Then he shouldered his snares and game bag, closed the

door quietly and was gone. The oars had hardly plashed in the water before Neña was asleep. The silence of the morning sun brooded upon Fenland. The green-painted shutters were almost closed. Only a single ray of sunlight filtered through the narrow slit, while outside the bees boomed in the clover heads, the mallow and camomile, the mint and lavender with which the old epicure of Basse Provence had surrounded his dwelling in the heart of the marshes. Meanwhile Jack the Wassailer pulled steadily, all the while evolving a great plan. He must keep the maid with him or she would certainly wind herself a skein which she would find it impossible to disentangle.

He had it. He, old Jacques Wassailer, could not trust this girl in the matter of young blood and twenty years. But he could trust her with money. She would sell his produce for him in Ely and Lincoln, or at the manors and villages of the west where fen produce was at a premium.

Neña la Fain had the habit of towns. She was expert in all the commerce of the bourgeoisie. She could speak English more glibly than any native, and submerge in charlatan's patter and gipsy contempt any rash amateur who tried to bandy wit with her.

The Wassailer had the solitary man's horror of crowds. English he spoke ill or not at all, and when he went to market he had often been obliged to stand silently by his basket till some stout burgess, attracted by the quality of the birds and intent on his Sunday's dinner, approached and offered him a price ridiculously low, merely because the seller was an old refugee in a ragged coat. Then Jacques Wassailer would hold up his fingers, two or three to

indicate the price, but he could not chaffer or bargain in rough English. Ah, if only he had had them at Martigues or on the market square of Marseilles. Then would he speak with them in the gate. But Neña, she would sell for him and bring him the money faithfully. He would only send her where the soldiers of Colonel Cromwell were stationed. Cavalier towns were no places for pretty maids. And so she would see many faces and soon forget Captain Hal Ludlow, a young soldier who had very likely never remarked her at all, and who at any rate would have his hands full with the inroads of the King's men. For even this solitary of the Fens knew that in the summer of 1643 the Puritans were hard put to it in every corner of the land.

Thus he meditated as he lay behind his covert of green branches, while the golden plovers stooped boldly above, or alighting walked without mistrust into his carefully arranged nets.

He saw a hearth fire and a home bright with love and youth. He could not expect to hold her always - he, an old man, and of no blood kin, but still - just long enough to settle that tricksome heat of the blood which she called her love for Captain Hal of the Ironsides. He was under no great apprehension of immediate evil. If Hal had been a young sprig of the nobility, a page of the King's household riding out from Oxford - ah, then, he would have carried the girl off to Holland and that instantly. But a Ludlow, an Ironside, and the captain of the first Anabaptist troop - he felt that Neña was as safe as if she were under the protection of Oliver himself. The Fens knew Oliver. His fame had not yet been blown abroad over England, but bide a little. The day of Long Marston was near at hand.

CHAPTER SEVEN

HAL LEADS A 'FORLORN'

The dog days of that year were heavy and anxious for the Parliament men. Everywhere except in Cromwell's country they had been defeated. Even there, pressed from the north by Newcastle's foraying parties and threatened on the south by the coalition of Norfolk squires and a dashing raid from the defenders of Basing House and Amersham, Cromwell needed all his men and all his skill to defend his own borders.

So far he had succeeded, but one morning after a courier had ridden in, he called Hal Ludlow to him in his little office in the Tithe Building, a mere construction of timber and glass window opening cheerfully out upon the balance and weigh-beam. Yet Colonel Cromwell loved it because of the severe silence of the empty yard, and the stark cleanliness of the deal boards which surrounded him. His helmet and sword belt hung on pegs behind his chair, a cupboard of papers neatly ranged was at his elbow, and in this place he dealt man to man with his officers and army furnishers,

'Hast ever been in Essex, lad?' the commander inquired while Hal stood saluting on the threshold. Like most men, even those who had served Cromwell longest and knew him best, he never entered the "presence" without a long fortifying intake of the breath. Every man - even Earls like Manchester and

Essex (so they said) - breathed freer after the East Country Colonel had spoken and they knew what he expected of them.

'I know part of Essex - from Chelmsford to the sea - my father has a property near Danbury which brings him little more than the rabbits I shoot.'

'Then you are the man for me,' said Cromwell, cutting him short, 'you know that Danbury Towers holds out for the King?'

'Oh, Lady Molly,' the young man smiled, 'but that is only a girl's petulance. The Essex men could have taken her defences in an hour if they had wished, but for her father's sake - '

'Well, what for her father's sake?'

'I have heard say, sir,' stammered Hal, 'that her father being my Lord Woodham Walter and a good Parliament man, they let her believe that her foolishness was serious - hoisting the King's standard and so on!'

'I tell you, Captain Ludlow, it is most serious.'

'Not little Molly Woodham with whom I played at catch-as-catch-can among the sand pits of Rodney Dean?'

'I do not know about "catch-as-catch-can," but I do know that your little Molly has flown the King's colours like my bold Lady Derby, and holds Danbury Towers with a full garrison against the Parliament. Now a house on a hill is no great thing, but a hostile place of arms on Danbury is a mighty serious thing. It serves as a rallying point for all the raiding bands. It commands the sea at Maldon Port and the London Road at Chelmsford. More than that your Lady Molly is to receive and entertain a party pushing eastward from Basing, and yet another of the Brown Octobers hiving down out of Norfolk where our Downham lads

have been making it somewhat hot for them in their manors and pleasancess. I half expected a break for Oxford one of these days, though I never dreamed they would make it by the South. But the way we rode furiously upon the King's horse on Gainsborough highway must have discouraged them from trying the straight route.'

Now on Gainsborough day the Hog Laners had ridden with the Slepe Troop and even Sam Squire had allowed that, though still a little ragged on the flanks, they had come out of the *mêlée* unashamed.

'I am going to send you forward as a "forlorn,"' said Cromwell, using his favourite word for an unsupported reconnoitring party, 'a "forlorn" to do what you can without too great risk, and to bring me back the best intelligence.'

'You honour me, sir,' said Hal, bowing low.

'I honour you not, but doing your duty may,' retorted Cromwell sharply; 'you must humour your troop, sir. You are too young to have that skill in hearts and consciences which comes only with labour and experience.'

'But I shall do my best, sir,' said poor Hal.

'I doubt it not,' quoth Cromwell, 'but remember also that your first business is to be obeyed in your troop. We are good enough republicans, but the captain of a "forlorn" must be a dictator. Take counsel with your officers when you feel your need, but remember good Mr. Stone's definition of a Congregational Church as a "speaking aristocracy in the presence of a silent democracy." But I propound things that are out of your knowledge, and must be for a score of years. Go thy ways, Hal. Draw fifty pounds from my auditor Sam Squire, use it carefully and account to me. Pay for nothing that you can get

as a free gift, but rob no man, not even an enemy. Pay a price, but see to it that you get a pennyworth for your penny.'

'And by which road shall I advance?' Hal asked.

The Colonel stretched out a hand and took up a strip of paper on which a rude sketch had been traced with distances and halting places marked in with red ink.

'There is your route map, but use it not slavishly. The leader of a "forlorn" needs judgment. By Cambridge and Braintree lies your way, but leave much in the hands of the angels. I cannot foresee your obstacles, but have faith. Pray, and above all trust in God. Let me not waste my words, and be sparing of your powder. What fighting has to be done, is best despatched as quickly as may be with the clean white metal.'

* * * * *

So there was a great scattering, Bridget and Bess Cromwell in the quiet garden of the Tithe House of Ely regretted the absence of their best cavalier and most faithful attendant. Hog Lane and its womenfolk meditated in grim inward silence upon their lads riding forth against the enemies of the Lord. Zachary Elsegood openly fulminated at what he called the shameful breach of faith. Hog Lane had been enlisted to support and to defend hearth and home, the Isle of Ely and the Gedney fens, but here they were, the whole youth of Hog Lane, sent off to another county, where they might be called upon to company with London trainbands, yea, Presbyterians and rank unbelievers. But Hog Lane had emancipated itself. For Alured Promise, Sim

Cross, and Amos Pall stood about him and swore (as a good Anabaptist may, by the lifting up of the right hand) to make him arm and ride with them as a reinforcement if they heard another word of ill talk from his mouth. Which speedily sobered Master Zachary, nevertheless he bode his time being sorely discontented that he should have lost his old primacy of Hog Lane, by the incoming of the new warlike notions and the departure of the 'prentices whom he had kept so long labouring for the community. Ever since Judas carried the bag, the task of cash-keeper for a religious commonwealth has been an ungrateful one. The loss of the 'prentices, the cost of their armament, and the decline in his weekly receipts profoundly mortified the Hog Lane treasurer. Still more did he feel his loss of influence since Captain Hal had carried away the flower of their youth aided by the example and eloquence of Zered Tuby. The hearts of the women were with the young, and even the old men who congregated in Market Hall listened indeed to his denunciations, but not with the old submission. Sim Cross especially was a thorn in his side - a fine workman and the fastest at putting sole and upper together in all Hog Lane. Against the advice of Elsegood, he had been made a senior companion at twenty-four, when he could easily have been kept other six years a 'prentice, costing nothing to the bag except the meat and drink he took between his teeth. But now the thing was done, and Sim Cross had a following among the younger men. He even wanted to change the name of the society, preferring 'Adult Baptisers,' or simply 'Baptists' to the good old word Anabaptists which, with a history behind it, had come from Germany more than a hundred years

ago.

On Isle Jatte the riding South of the Hog Lane Troop was soon known. It was Neña herself who brought the news. Ely market day was Wednesday, and Neña found the town talking of little else - talking as only a lonely Cathedral city can talk - without knowledge, but with abundant surmise and surprising assurance of statement.

And in those days Ely was a marvellous place, the headquarters of four regiments without counting the black-skirted troop of parsons who held garrison about the Cathedral close - the Isle Rooks, as they were called by the red coats of the Eastern Association. Two or three times an hour messengers rode in with a "haste-post-haste," and a blast of their horn to call the guard. They changed horses and rode on towards Lincoln and the North, often so stiff of limb that they had to be carried bodily from one beast to the other. Then a nod of set countenance, a lift of the reins, a demi-volt, and lo, the messenger of the Houses was speeding northward to carry the bidding of the Parliament to other cities also! Scores of market women in bright costumes lighted up the streets and specially the open squares where stood the booths. The fisher wives were noisy in red and yellow *caracos*, broadly striped and shining with scales. To them were added fen folk in sober butter colour, with a scarf of blue tied about their heads, while citizens gathered in little clusters to hear the London gazettes read aloud, and merchant vendors of all movable sorts pushed about their small hand-carts and cried their wares to sell to the town's wives and especially to the soldiers.

In the shadow of the Cathedral were to be seen

some dozen of figures sitting on stone seats, a chain and ball attached to each right heel, dragged feathers in their hats, ragged lace on their coats and long drooping moustaches twisted upward, vainly seeking for the old conquering Mazarin curl which would not come. These were officers and gentlemen, prisoners of Colonel Cromwell - some from Lincoln leaguer, but most from the nameless fight fought in the evening light on the way thither when the royal horsemen first met the New Model, greatly to their astonishment. A few of the younger men had recovered their air of contemptuous insolence, and looked out on the mixed multitude, making remarks to one another, uttered sufficiently loud to reach the passers-by. Yet it was noticeable that there were fewer of these comments and they were less loudly spoken when one of the dozen "Tawnies" - Cromwellian prison-guards, strode past with musket in bandolier and hand upon sword hilt.

Just then Ely had a very busy population, but that was a new thing. It had come with the regiments and would go with them. The residents of the old gabled Dutch houses would remain, also the tradesfolk who seemed to stand at their shop doors most of the day, and to look upon life in a purely amateur spirit. Strangest of all were the piles of oyster shells, raised on a pedestal of cabbage stalks, carrot tails, potato parings, to be seen and smelt all along the edge of the side walks. For in this matter the Cathedral city had kept its ancient repute, and even Oliver could not quicken the town carts to carry off the *débris* before the close of the market.

Soldiers of all arms swarmed like ants, for there were eight thousand of them in the city. Thus, though regiments were always marching away, so

great an organiser was Cromwell that fresh details of recruits were as constantly arriving.

White-capped Huguenots and Flemish pudding makers cried, 'Cooked food!' 'Cooked food, good and cheap!' from a score of little wooden booths, and certainly to any hungry man the smell of frying fish and potatoes crackling in boiling oil was most appetising. Rings and chains of sausages hung in festoons a little lower down, and from these the sellers cut any length upon the exhibition of the necessary copper coins. Even "a farden's worth" was not to be despised by the hungry Cromwellian who found the army "ordinary" less satisfying than the plenty of his mother's kitchen, with its cut loaf in the cupboard and the remains of yesterday's mutton in the larder.

Neña la Fain pushed her barrow along through the crowd with the easy confidence of many fair grounds and market gatherings, crying her specialty, 'Plovers - plovers from the fen, golden and grey, tenpence the pair. Ducks - fat ducks - wild ducks, fresh from the broads, sixpence and eightpence!'

She was widely known in the army and the providers of troops were already on the watch for her. Also at sound of her voice the dames of good houses called for their baskets to go out and salute "the little Frenchy from Isle Jatte."

Neña could sell when no one else had a chance. Even Dame Cromwell had showed herself at the window and beckoned to the "little Huguenot." For all Ely knew the story of the lonely man of Isle Jatte, and the good keepers-at-home among their womenfolk remarked that her birds and fish were both fresh and carefully chosen. The wise Provençal

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never sent to market his whole catch. He had now two mouths to feed, and he saw to it that his guest was well nourished. She had come to him with eyes so great and dark that they seemed to overflow her white face, but now she had the round contours and the brown cheeks of health. Her lips were red and her eyes brilliant under the dark arch of her brows. Her dress of black cloth had been chosen for her by the Wassailer, but the breadth of red sash with which she girt her waist expressed her own savage taste in colour.

* * * * *

Gainsborough had been retaken, and Colonel Cromwell was back in Ely town. Neña had seen him striding with a frowning countenance in the direction of his office, while she was standing on the steps answering My Lady's questions.

'And - the other - did you see him?' queried the fowler of Isle Jatte. He spoke with a certain hesitation, for on the subject of Captain Hal Ludlow the girl was not always "commode" - or as it might be, amenable to advice.

'Speak out his name, Pere Jacques,' cried Neña angrily, 'I have nothing to be ashamed of. Captain Henry Ludlow rode away south yesterday - some say to London, where he will be sent to my Lord Fairfax's army. At any rate Ely town will see him no more!'

And suddenly she sank down on a low chair, dropped her face between her hands, and wept silently with heaving shoulders. She saw the warm summer atmosphere which filled the Market Square, the reposeful creamy blonde of her whitewash which

HAL O' THE IRONSIDES

has always distinguished Ely from the other fen towns, and riding proudly, as she loved to think of him (and as in her dreams she ever saw him), at the head of his troop, his plumed helmet glittering, breastplated and cuirassed, with Hereward flicking his ears and arching his flowing tail! Ah, Neña la Fain thought there never was any sight like that in all the world. And so, to do Master Hal Ludlow justice, thought Bess Cromwell and honourable women not a few of city of Ely and elsewhere, as the Hog Laners rode southward towards the rallying place of the enemy.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE QUAKER OF BOREHAM BARNS

The Lady Molly held Danbury Towers. The house was an old one, with stout Plantagenet walls, embattled ramparts and a square Norman tower dating from the wars of Stephen.

The Colchester committee knew all about Lady Molly, 'She will weary of her play,' said Sir Thomas Barrington, Parliament member for the borough, to Sir William Masham Mildmay, of Maldon, and Harbottle Grimstone concurred. They had all sat at her father's board and to them the idea of little Molly Woodham, who used to sit sucking sweets while they talked of Ship Money, being dangerous to the Parliament cause, was frank cause for laughter.

Why, it was ridiculous even to think of. Lord Woodham Walter was a good Fairfax man, a pillar of the Association and much thought of by Colonel Cromwell himself.

But these brave squires, Cookes, Calthorps, Talcots, and Thoroughgoods, though excellent enough for raising contributions, were no judges of military operations. The importance of Danbury Hill escaped them. A sterile place, fit only for rabbits and peesweeps, they thought it - and as to the castle - why, a few solid shots from the new battering ordnance would soon bring it about Molly Woodham's pretty ears - which would be a pity, seeing that some one of their sons might prevail on the heiress to attach herself, first to himself and afterwards to the honest Parliament cause.

My Lord was too rich a man and too good a Fairfaxer to be annoyed by any severities against his daughter.

Thus spoke and thought these good neighbours and friends sitting safely in headquarters at Colchester, or mooning along side by side in the cool shade of Westminster Hall. But Colonel Cromwell was not at ease. He knew Danbury Hill. It had been a camp of every invading force since the Danes came up the Chelmer and Blackwater in order to name it. It was within striking distance of London. The sea was at hand, and French cruisers could land or carry off without interference unless the Parliament could permanently occupy the coast towns with force sufficient to prevent them.

'Do your duty well and seemly. Be not put off with excuses. Be slow to accept country talk. See everything at firsthand. Spare your men but be liberal of yourself!' - Such had been Colonel Cromwell's recommendations, hastily scratched on the back of his orders and passports.

Now in a country like Essex, where news spreads from mouth to mouth like the lightning from the east to west, Hal could not hope to conceal the arrival of a troop of forty Cromwellian horse, all of the New Model, fresh from Gainsborough fight and therefore of immense interest to the East Saxons of every shade of opinion.

'Cromwell's "Ameners" won't niver stand up to Rupert's gentlemen. He will scatter them sure-*ly*. For now't but poor yeomen they be after all - a horse and harness, a steel cap and a tawny coat - roll your eyes and praise God through your nose - 'tis well enough for riding the country, but when Rupert do come at them furious, then the man with the fastest

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horse will praise the Lord the loudest.'

This was the verdict of the average man, for no Ironsides had as yet been raised in Essex - though later there were plenty, with possibilities of good recruits even now, for Essex has ever been (and so remains) a land of sectaries. So much so that after he had passed Witham, Zered Tuby found himself among friends.

'Wet or dry?' he queried of passers along the road, when they were serious in their demeanour and reserved in manner.

If they looked at the sky and began to calculate the chances of fine weather or foul, Zered rode on and left them to it. But if, as was the case about once in three or four trials, the man clasped his hands together as high as his heart, then thrust them down with a sudden plunge, it needed not the "Wet in the name of the Lord" which issued from his lips to tell Hog Lane that they had met with a brother Anabaptist.

'Buried with Him in baptism!' Zered would respond, promptly giving the countersign, and the next moment they would be conferring together as to where they were likely to be received as friends, where the troop could lie up a day or two in barns and stables, with good Anabaptists or Quaker brethren to bring them needful provend and succour at dead of night.

Yet it seemed a strange thing that even these men were without any real tidings of what was going forward at Danbury Towers.

They be turning up a fine deal of earth on Coombe Hill side - betwixt East Common and the Rodney - looks like rabbiting, but 'tain't rabbiting neither - just walls o' sand, most such as little 'uns

make within the tide-mark.'

And by that single indication Hal Ludlow knew that Molly Woodham was well advised, and that she had with her some soldier of the wars of Gustavus, who knew that war was not all dashes and "forlorns," in which hostile parties met without intention and parted without anything more decisive than a few heads broken, as many on one side as the other.

The matter would certainly become more complicated if the riding squires and their followers from Norfolk, the Brown Octobers as they were called, had time to wait for the raiders from Amersham and Oxford, who, cutting all the lines of communication north of London, would settle upon Danbury Hill as a camp of refuge.

Hal thought much and deeply, turning the matter over in his mind. He had not previously taken the mission very seriously, and though his commander's manner had impressed him at the time, yet that was because an interview with his chief was always impressive. Little Molly Woodham he could not take seriously. He began now to think that he had been wrong. Colonel Cromwell had had some surer intelligence than he had communicated to him. It behoved him to see for himself, and he set himself to devise ways and means.

The Hog Lane Troop were stopping under the roof of a well-reputed Quaker merchant, who from a tanner had developed into a seller of grain and fodder to the armies. Silas Seale, a douce drab-skirted man with a dry smile and an uncertain twinkle in his eye, was able to lodge many troops in his lofts, nor (it must be admitted) had Hog Lane ever found the fleshpots of Egypt daintier or more

abundant. The plenty which surrounded the Essex Quaker astonished those who had been sparsely reared on the ordinary of the community as arranged by Zachary Elsegood.

'Farmer Silas Seale,' said Hal, to the master of the bounds, 'I do not wish to be burdensome to you, but from the preparations in your yard I gather that tomorrow you send out a considerable deal of fodder and wheat to Chelmsford.'

'Yea, friend,' said the Quaker, stopping and looking shrewdly upon him, 'in pursuit of my humble avocations I take my produce to the town upon the day of public market, trusting in the Lord that my honest goods shall be found worthy of an honest price. For in this world a man of conscience hath many claims upon him, and sometimes the unexpected service cometh like a call from the Lord.'

Hal was a little nettled by the suave vagueness of the address.

'If you mean that I and my troop are an expense to you, be easy, Friend Silas. My father and Colonel Cromwell will see your note of account, and if you have any need of present moneys for your expenses, I have the wherewithal to satisfy you.'

The Quaker threw up his hands. 'I pray thee do not mention a word of expense. I am proud to serve the cause. It is dear to my heart as the walls of Sion, as the courts of Moriah. But to-day and every market day it is laid upon me to walk into a den of thieves, or as Daniel among ravening wild beasts. For upon Chelmsford market green, twice within a month, the King's men from Danbury have robbed honest men of their dues, emptied wains and driven off cattle without so much as a single silver sixpence to be paid - and think thyself lucky if thy horsemen

escape from such robbers. As for me I go in fear and trembling, praying the Lord that He will put it into the heart of the Lady Molly to ride down along with them. For then not so much is taken, and a price is given - not nearly enough, certainly, but still a price.'

'So you sell your stuff to the enemy and yet you call yourself a good Parliament man! - What think you Colonel Cromwell would say to that if I told him?'

The Quaker joined his hands devoutly and with more than his usual meekness looked upon the ground. 'He could but say that I am an unfortunate and ill-used vessel. I must either be robbed or take a price insufficient, which is yet better than nothing. Besides, across the Blackwater I have barns which serve Colchester and the north, where come no raiding thieves, but honest men and honest prices.'

'Then why do you stay on here and run all this risk?'

The Quaker drew his hands in a full circle about him and his eyes took in the barns and byres, the combings, the store-girnels, the stack-yards, and threshing-floors.

'Because, dear friend, all this would go up in flames to the skies if I were a week absent. I am spared because I have been of use to my Lord Woodham Walter. The Lady Mary and her cavaliers will not let them burn out her father's friend.'

'Friend Silas,' said Hal, breaking in upon him abruptly, 'I am coming with you to Chelmsford to-morrow.'

'Nay, friend, nay,' the master of Boreham Barns threw up his hands, 'I tell thee I am a man of peace, and no war man at all. I cannot let a wheel stir if

you take your troop down. I speak, dear friend, in thine own interest. The Danburyites would drive thee out with bloody sconces, and there would be a great peace-breaking. Then the weight of it all would fall on me that I harboured you here.'

Hal stamped his foot with impatience.

'Hear you, Mr. Halting-Between-Two-Opinions, I spoke not of riding with the troop, but, since I have some small knack of disguises, of donning a working-smock, binding my knees with straw, and taking in a wain - which I warrant I can do as well as any man about the Barns of Boreham!'

The Quaker's agony showed in his face. He had not been prepared for this move, and on the spur of the moment had no objection ready.

'Then write a word of cover for me to my Lord Cromwell.' (He tried hard to say as usual 'Friend Cromwell,' but that was a familiarity which even a Quaker was not equal to.)

'I will write anything you like,' cried the disgusted Hal, 'you shall not be touched in an inch of your hide nor a shilling of your purse!'

'I thank thee, friend, I do sincerely thank thee. It is all for the Lord, dear friend. Put it in the paper that you went against my advice!'

'There, sir,' Hal thrust the paper at him with contempt. 'That will hold you guiltless if they hang me high as Haman. You are a man whose charity begins at home and ends there. But if you are disquieted on my account, either by King or Parliament, that writing will clear you of responsibility.'

Still distrustful the Quaker read aloud Hal's testimonial, which with some few additions was as he himself had dictated it.

This is to certify that Silas Searle of Boreham, of the sect called Quakers, an unworthy member, hath no desire but to keep himself safe, to fill his pockets by honest trade. He will hurt none lest he should hurt himself, and he has done his best to dissuade me from reckless adventures while under his roof. If aught happen to me, I leave it to Colonel Cromwell and my father to indemnify him fully for his risks and expenditures.

H. Ludlow,

'Captain of the 8th troop, 1st Reg.
'of Colonel Cromwell's Horse.'

The Quaker's eyes glistened with pleasure as he read.

The contemptuous expressions in the early part seemed to pass him over, and he hastened on to the business guarantee. His face shone as if he had seen a vision. He caught Hal in his arms and kissed him on both cheeks.

The spirit hath wrought by thee, young friend - what an excellent - what an ecstatic phrase - "to indemnify him for all his risks and expenditures." And he repeated with slow unction, rolling the words under his tongue with a prolonged relish highly characteristic of the man - "risks and expenditures," quoth he - "risks and expenditures" - what wise reason, how sensibly expressed! Oh, excellent young man, one day a son of thunder, anon like rain upon the tender grass refreshing the heart of man - "*risks and expenditures.*" Oh, lovely Oracle, sum of miracles - as I said before, most excellent young man!

CHAPTER NINE

RUPERT KEEPS TRYST

That night Zered Tuby bode late at work among the men who were to go with the wains to Chelmsford.

‘Three of the five are Dippers, all sound on the goose,’ he reported in the grey light of the morning when he went in to waken his superior officer. ‘They warrant also the fourth who, though no precisian, is a sure man, so that he drinks not too much ale. His name is Wiseman Phipps and his father a sea captain at Maldon. But the fifth would sell his mother for a dozen shoestrings, his name Doe Royds. In him is no dependence. A charge of lead is the only argument with such as he!’ concluded the Lieutenant, shaking his shining black curls, which though constantly cropped, persisted in wriggling out round the edges of the smooth black helmet which Zered wore on his head.

‘As for this Doe Royds, I will shed no man’s blood save in fair fight or after an honest trial,’ retorted Hal fiercely. ‘But I will tell you a better way. I will buy that load from the Quaker and bid him send this Royds with it to the Commissioners at Colchester, by Captain Ludlow’s orders. They will think it very kind of my father and I must settle the bill as best I can.’

So said, so done. The Quaker was delighted to

send the produce to Colchester, and started the suspicious Royds off with it, with a list of stages and stoppages at which to rest the horses.

'I could do much more with these gentlemen if I had premises nearer Colchester Town,' said the Quaker. 'But they have so much fodder among their own hands that they can (if they will) supply themselves, and keep a string of convoys moving back and forth along the road to London as well.'

And so donning a clean unruffled shirt and a smart waggoner's blouse, with a long whip, a pipe stuck in the brim of his high-crowned hat and his hose tied with a fresh plait of straw cunningly woven, Hal Ludlow, a most handsome waggoner, stood ready for the road.

They went by Great Baddow, halting under the huge black cedar of Lebanon in the rector's garden which throws so deep a sea-green shadow on the white road. It was slow going for the remaining two miles. Drove of cattle plodded along in a sort of placid stream, the moisture going up from them in clouds. It was the early cool of the day and they were not yet fly-vexed. So they went stilly enough, looking neither to the right nor to the left, unless a barking dog appearing among the clouds of dust set them horning one another. Sheep pattered with a noise of hundreds of little feet, their backs even one with the other and curiously piebald from the tar and soap which had been rubbed into their wool. Here there were more dogs, but these wise, and of tempered enthusiasms - one eye on their master with his seven-foot crook and the other watchful of any escape from the steady pour of the herd along the King's highway. The hay-wains of Silas Seale took an hour and a half to cover the two miles to

Chelmsford market on the outskirts of the town. They were still blocking up the narrow lane which leads off the High Street when they heard a shouting behind them, 'Out of the way, there! Out of the way!'

The shepherds strove valiantly to get their droves through the narrow gut. Dogs barked, and frightened bands of woolly backs made dashes to right and left. Bullocks disappeared down side streets with high flourishing heels and brought up with a splash in the waters of the Chelmer, and Waggoner Hal heard behind him the well-known *clip-a-clatter* of a squadron of horse.

'Draw to the side, you fools,' cried Tom the foreman in a terrified voice from the rear.

'Why, what can they do?' said Hal. 'A horse troop cannot override a string of loaded hay-wains.'

'No, but they have their matches, and if we counter them they will think nothing of setting our loads alight.'

There was still noise and tumult in the rear, but by a combined forward movement the waggoners managed to get their wains clear of the narrow gorge of houses before a file of gay riders came dashing by. They rode sword in hand, but they had only been using the flat, smiting and laughing, for their steel was undimmed, and they carried the wide High Street with a gallant shout.

On a beautiful white mare rode a lady, so young indeed as to be only a girl, but of a reckless beauty and bearing which caressed the eye.

'The lady - the Lady Molly!' came from every side. And even in that douce town so near to the Parliament headquarters, and with a commerce which depended upon the goodwill of Westminster, Lady Molly, riding out from her extemporised

fortress of Danbury, gathered up the popular applause. She was habited in the blue-and-white, which were the colours of King Charles of Essex, and were more studiously worn since the issue of the red coats to the Parliament armies. A black hat with wide brim round which curled a great white feather shaded her face, which was oval and a little tanned with the sun. But the blood ran red in her cheeks. Her lips were geranium-red, and her eyes shone dark blue and masterful under the ripples and lovelocks of her fair hair.

Behind came riding two by two a score of gentlemen, all young, bravely mounted, laughing and talking among each other. Immediately behind the Lady Molly, and separating her from the joyous rout, rode a man of fifty-five, grizzle-haired and steel-capped like a Roundhead, a deep scar on his left cheek and his lips firmly compressed. To this man alone the Lady Molly spoke, sometimes carelessly over her shoulder, and sometimes reining in her white mare to let him come up with her.

It seemed to Hal that as the girl's glance travelled along the line of waggons and waggoners, each at the head of his team, her eyes observed him with a certain surprise. It was not possible that she could recognise him in his teamster's disguise, nor yet remember the long gritty days they used to spend in the Ashford gravel-pits, returning at night, happy and guilty, with sand in their eyes and mouths, crunching in their teeth, and coursing raspingly between their skins and their most intimate garments. For these sins of extreme youth they had been warmly received, smacked, washed, and sent to bed.

Nevertheless though he breathed more freely, the

fourth waggoner of Quaker Seale's defile looked after the girl with a curious anger. She had escaped him. She was fighting for the tyrant. All that roistering train were doubtless her slaves, or at least telling her so, daily and hourly, and she repaying them with smiles and encouragements. He remembered how once in Stanger's spinny they had fallen out, and how, the spirit of chivalry still dormant within him, he had beaten her, while she scratched his face and threw handfuls of sand in his eyes. She seemed in some way to belong to him and he felt a strong desire to run in upon her, snatch her bridle-rein and carry her home to her father again to be beaten and locked up.

If Hal had been a little older, he would have laughed at his own heat. What, after all, did he know of the causes of quarrel? He wanted soldiership and adventure and it was easiest to find them on the side he had chosen. Sons in those times went with their fathers. As for the daughters they did not count, except in the preparing of lint and making of garments for the fighters.

Loud Tom Christopher, the Quaker's oversman, who on difficult hills could shout Bible texts so that the very-beasts took them for oaths, swept up the line.

'Get into the Market Square, I tell 'ee! Lord help us if their sutlers come upon us. They will cut us down and drive off the horses. Get into motion, there! Quick with you, Tawny! Was it like this you spurred after Gainsborough fight? If so, small wonder that we lost the town.'

The line of laden waggons ground and oscillated, creaking and jolting across the deep-rutted irregular pavements into the busy square in which the corn-

market was held. They were guided to the stance which had been kept for them. It was the angle high to the left above the water gate, a spot called to this day Quaker's Corner, though the fame of Silas Seale of Boreham Barns has long since died out in the sleepy town.

Here also were hawkers of all sorts, but they were far less free to ply their trade than on the streets of Ely. Waggoners cut at them with long whips for sliding under the bellies of the horses on the way to a possible customer. Here Hal had his hands full in guiding his pair of excited horses clear of the waggons. These remained propped up on the forked branches which had been swung behind for the purpose of supporting the loads. But he was soon at liberty. Loud Tom Christopher would attend to his team. He must see all that there was to be seen. He desired especially to catch another glimpse of the Lady Molly. It would be a certain disaster if she recognised him, yet, merely because the colour of her eyes puzzled him - whether deep sea-green or sapphire-blue he could not have been sure - he must needs seek her out. What a fool he had been not to have made sure during those long days when they played together. But then the colour of eyes mattered far less to them than the fair division of a handful of hazel nuts or a Woodham Walter pippin equitably discussed in alternate bites.

But though he took his stand in the most commanding positions he could see nothing of the Danbury cavaliers. They had merely passed through the town and ridden out along the London road. They must have been very certain of not being disturbed, or they would never have come in such small numbers. Hal thought of what would have

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happened if they had come face to face with his dear Hog Laners. For a moment he wished himself back at Boreham. It would be no small feat to cut them to pieces before their raiding comrades from Oxford or Norfolk could reinforce them.

‘But then (thought Hal guiltily) what of Little Molly Woodham?’

It was taking an unfair advantage. How could any man order a charge against an unequal number of horse commanded by a woman - most of all, by the Lady Molly?

Presently Hal was diverted from this thought by the sight of the street sellers of leaflets and pamphlets. Before the coming of the troop from Danbury fort, they had been littering their booths with ballads and pasquinades against the King. A scurrilous ballad on the Lady Molly (called “The Bantam Hen”) was having a great sale, and the vendors called “Churchyard Bummers” from St. Paul’s Churchyard, where they got their supplies from the booksellers, were singing “The Bantam Hen” so as to be heard halfway to Baddow. But at the first shout of ‘In the King’s name - make way!’ the London tracts were stowed away, and the rascals were out crying, ‘Our King by Right is King by Might.’

*‘Down dogs. Parliament dogs,
Barringtons all lie down.
God save the King and bring him in,
So say the cap and gown.’*

These being contraband, were naturally more expensive. The demand for them was limited in the Eastern counties, and the fear of cart-tail

scourgings, together with the difficulty of procuring them from Oxford, naturally raised the prices. But the young fellows in the rear of the royalist array were free with their money. They accepted the pasquinades by the handful, and tossed their silver pieces on the paving stones with a gay 'Pay yourselves,' whereupon a dozen rascals would be seen grappling for the money in the dust. If one strong enough to keep it managed to secure the prize, as was mostly the case, he would hold it fleeringly over his head. But here and there a man hard pressed would pop the money into his mouth ready to be swallowed, and stand at bay with bared teeth and shining knife in some angle of the wall. If the threatened one could keep off the first rush he was fairly safe. The mob was too busy, business too brisk. They passed on to other matters lest they should lose their market.

But as soon as the last King's hoof clattered through City Port out upon the London Road, the royalist libels were put away and the flying stationers were back again crying, 'The Revenge of God against Tyrants!' 'We'll crop their heads who cropped our ears!' 'Papists Pilloried!' 'Zion's Complaint,' 'The Commoners of England,' and 'The Lord, His Banqueting House.'

Without well knowing why, Waggoner Hal found himself possessed of "Doctor George Brown's Prophecy Concerning the Jesuits," "A Treatise on the Signification of Moles on any part of the Body," a fine new song entitled, "The Whimsical Wife," with the tune thereto. The husband changes work with his wife for one day, and in consequence —

'The pigs they wanted service,

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*They made their wants be heard –
They broke into the dairy,
And served themselves instead.*

*'The cheese and butter suffered
Before he got them out,
The cans of milk they upset
And dashed the cream about!'*

The houses of Chelmsford are wooden-fronted and with bulging foreheads look down on the busy market-place. Under these the Quaker moved quietly from one customer to another, and in an hour the wains were unloaded and their whole contents stored in the granaries of the merchants to wait a chance of being carried to Smithfield and Lincoln's Inn Fields. Hal began to regret that he had come so far to see so little when the idea came to him to follow in the direction which had been taken by the royalist horse. He gained a rising ground outside the town, and there from a little flowery knoll he saw a wonderful sight. The raiders from the West were arriving. Squadrons of them rode on the high ground above the river, their plumes blowing out in the dusty breeze which was raised by the feet of the horses. They were coming in fast, and Hal had not even time to get back before the first riders were abreast of him. The Lady Molly was talking eagerly with a tall man of middle age, whom Hal thought to resemble Colonel Cromwell. He also wore a red Montero cap like that which, when wearied with his helmet, Oliver would often put on.

But by the thick High German voice and the piercing restless eyes, Hal presently made sure that this could be no other than Prince Robber - Rupert

of the Rhine.

The Prince looked up and seeing Hal stand on his knoll, called upon him to come forward.

'You are a fine stout fellow,' he said good-humouredly enough; 'are you content to take service with me, waggoner?'

'I am already in good service, I thank you, sir,' said Hal promptly, knowing that he must answer quickly to such a questioner.

'In whose service, sirrah?'

'In that of Master Seale, the Quaker, so please your highness.'

'Serve a Quaker when you can serve your King - never. Bring up a led horse. Now let me see if you can get astride it. Jack Holmby, guard him and put a bullet through his back if he tries to play us false.'

'Prince,' said the Lady Molly, reaching out a gloved hand to touch his sleeve, 'I am short of stout men. Indeed, I have far more need than you. I think I know the lad's face. He is of our neighbourhood. Give him to me, and I warrant that he shall not seek to escape from my servitude.'

'He would be a fool to try,' cried the hearty Rhinelander. 'I know at least one who would be content to be your slave!'

And he swept the red Montero in a fine curve to his knee.

The Lady Molly nodded a saucy sidelong acknowledgment, more with her chin than with her head, took the Prince's gift of Hal for granted, and swept onward to the town with fifteen hundred of the best cavalry in Britain behind her. Rupert's men had never been vanquished and the proud consciousness of the fact showed in their gallant bearing, in the care of their accoutrement, their

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white and blue ribbons and plumed hats, and their ringlets dancing on their shoulders like a girl's lovelocks. The officers were free with their horses, for they looked on each skirmish as an opportunity of remounting themselves or their troop. Besides, whether in friendly or hostile territory, a horse was a horse to be requisitioned in the name of the King and Prince Rupert. If the owner chose to lament, it showed he was a knave and a rebel at heart, and as such liable to be strung up to the nearest tree. But at this time Rupert's brigade had not met with Colonel Cromwell and the new type of cavalryman he was making out of the tawny-coated levies of the fens. They had indeed heard vague rumours of what was going on. And they had been pleased to laugh. To them Colonel Cromwell was "the Huntingdon brewer" and his Ironsides "the brewer's draymen." But there came a day when they learned better, and then no man was quicker than Rupert of the Rhine to uphold the transcendent merits of the New Model.

Meantime they rode on through the town. They clamoured at the "White Horse" and the "King's Head" till several barrels of ale were rolled out and an army of extemporised drawers willingly served them. For Rupert would allow no man out of his saddle.

Hal managed, however, to attract the attention of Loud Tom, who, seeing him in such company, took one look at his haltered feet and immediately started for Boreham Barns to warn the Hog Laners of the capture of their Captain. They could not hope to rescue him by direct attack, but at least the outhouses of so uncertain a man as his master was no place for a troop of good Anabaptists. So long before dusk Zered had his men safe on the woody

slopes beyond Witham, whence he could keep a watch upon the enemy and wait for the return of Captain Hal.

For such was Hog Lane's belief in their chief, that no man believed he had really been captured. He had let himself be taken in order to gain information - so much was possible and even likely - but he would come back to lead them when he knew all that Colonel Cromwell had sent him to find out.

The Prince detached fifty men to bring in supplies. They seized the hay and oats which had changed hands that day, sweeping the granaries of the London expeditioners as clean as a picked bone. They did not, however, come up with the Quaker, who had ridden off as soon as he had his money safe in pouch. Nor did they find Silas Seale's horses, for Loud Tom had gotten them safely across the water. The hay-wains stood abandoned in the Quaker's Corner of the Market Square and several of these were taken, horsed with the impressed teams of less wise and foreseeing men, and driven off to be reloaded with the provend they had brought to town in the morning.

Meanwhile Hal, the waggoner newly recruited for the service of his Majesty and Prince Rupert, rode calmly on in the rear of the array and kept his eyes about him. There was a curious lack of discipline about the cavaliers, which contrasted with the grim punctiliousness of the Ironside troops. But though they shouted and sang on the march when it seemed good to them, and paid little heed to their officers, Hal knew that it would be very different on the day of battle. Then they would strike together with the force and unity of a sledge-hammer. The men jested with their captains or attracted his

attention by a shouted nickname, because they were all gentlemen, and as capable as he of holding his Majesty's Commission. They had one Chief whom they followed and whose name they bore. They were Rupert's men, and they did right to vaunt him an incomparable cavalry leader. For so he was till the day he met someone stronger than he, who to his dash and vigour added the steadiness which he always lacked in the hour of victory.

The House of Danbury Towers stood a little east of the crest of the hill, clear of the village towards Runsel, and to this day an intricate labyrinth of sunken lanes, filled in summer with wild rose and honeysuckle, indicates the extent and direction of Lady Molly's principal defences. Her saturnine chief of staff, Septimus Hepburn, fresh from his experience of the great Gustavus, distrusted mere stone-and-lime unsupported by trenches and earthworks. So that under his care Danbury Towers became by far the most strongly entrenched position in East England south of the Trent.

The buildings about the castle, already amply garrisoned, could not contain a third of the force which had ridden across country from Amersham. The neighbouring farms and their chief barns and outbuildings, the village of Danbury, straggling pleasantly down from its yellow church spire, the vicarage among the trees, the hamlets of Runsel and Horseshoe Forge, were soon filled to overflowing. When the Norfolk Brown Octobers came in, they would need, in the absence of tents, to go farther afield. And because of this Quaker Seale was at that moment clearing his barns and lofts of all traces of their recent Roundhead guests. Loud Tom was away seeing Lieutenant Tuby into a place of retirement,

and arranging with the neighbouring squires, all good Parliament men, to keep them well supplied. These he found much occupied with cattle-driving, digging, and treasure-hiding. For the news that Prince Rupert was in the land laid the fear of despoilment upon every man. Still, they would do what they could. Colonel Cromwell would not forget them. It was good hearing that they had already one troop of his horse among them. Not far off and where? But Loud Tom was now suddenly Silent Tom. He did not tell a soul where he had left Zered and his men. The provend was to be delivered at the Bishop's Ford early every morning, unless the enemy should be in the neighbourhood. So all along Witham Heights a sharp watch was set, while the Hog Laners kept their arms bright, their powder dry, and prayed God for the swift return of their Captain.

CHAPTER TEN

MOLLY HATES HAL

‘A merry welcome, friend Hal,’ said a clear mellow voice, a throaty contralto, as the false waggoner shut the door behind him. The room was dusky and for a moment Hal Ludlow, coming out of the sun-glare, did not see the lissom girlish figure seated on the centre table, busy with the cleaning of a pair of pistols, ‘What do you here, old comrade? Why are you not with your father at Ely (or is it Cambridge) finding money for the King’s enemies?’

Up to this moment Hal had cherished a belief that Lady Molly had not recognised him, but he was ready and unabashed. He faced the situation at once. He was a spy, and if Rupert got wind of him, he would be strung up to the nearest tree without benefit of clergy.

‘I heard of my friend little Molly Woodham - how she had fallen among bad company. So I came southward to see her, thinking I might be of use to her.’

The girl shook her head energetically. ‘Tell the truth, Hal, if so be you can,’ she said reproachfully. ‘You were ever a bully and abused me shamefully, but you had not used to tell lies. You came to spy us out, to carry back tidings of our weakness and isolation to Colonel Cromwell!’

In fact, Lady Molly accused Hal of the exact identical thing which he had been sent to do. But mark the guile of man - the way of a man with a maid, which in his day Solomon found so

mysterious.

Hal, seeing no one in the room except their two selves, stepped lightly across the carpet, laid one hand lightly on her shoulder as he had been wont to do.

'Do you remember the Sunday we stayed all day in Speakman's Spinny and watched the paternals going to church and the servants scouring the country for us? Did I betray you then? Who was it who received the blame and took the whipping? Do you think that Hal Ludlow would do different now?'

She shivered a little and then suddenly held out her hand.

'No, I do not believe it of you, Hal!'

The young man breathed more freely. He was no better than other young fellows of his age and upbringing, and life smiled upon him. He was pleased with it. He would (and did) risk his life upon the chance of battle, but to be hanged as a spy, while his troop waited for his return a mile or two away, sent a shuddering chill to his marrow.

'But why this waggoner's dress?' she went on. 'Why did you not ride up to the Towers like a gentleman?'

'Would I have been admitted - I the son of Mr. Commissioner Ludlow, nephew of Sir Edmund the republican? Why, I should never have gotten within five hundred yards of you, with all the squirekins of the East Corner about you. Do you want to put a rope about my neck? Let me be waggoner Hal, at your service, and we shall understand one another.'

'Will you, then, serve the King?' She looked at him with a certain appeal to which he answered promptly.

'No, little Molly, I am of your father's opinion, but

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I will serve you and be faithful. Forgive me, Molly, I would give all I possessed to get out of this. I do not reproach you, but by the Lord I cannot guess what set you upon this folly -'

'Take care what you say!' She stood up, the pistol she had been polishing still in her hand, so suddenly that Hal instinctively gave back a step. 'I allow no one to criticise my acts - not even my father, how much less you!'

'Oh, I am not afraid of you, Molly,' he answered, smiling; 'though you look just as you looked when you scratched my face. You can do it and welcome if it will relieve your feelings. I promise not to return you a black eye this time. But I give you fair warning, my Lady Molly, if you keep me here when I should be at my work, I promise and vow to carry you off as soon as I can - aye, if it be packed like a truss of hay across my saddle-bow.'

The girl had moved towards the window and was looking out. At Hal's threat she broke into a ripple of laughter, rather deep than loud or clear, like water running underground. Her arm swept the circle of the great encampment.

'Take me from the midst of all these - my good Hal? Has dotage come upon you so soon?'

'I dote,' said Hal, with some hypocrisy, 'tis true, I own. But this is no dotage. Or rather I dote so bravely that ere long I shall take you back out of this hurly-burly, where designing men are making a figure-head of you.'

The girl moved angrily away, with a movement of the hand which signified that the interview was over. But Hal Ludlow was not the man to be so put down, or to forego any advantage with a woman. He moved swiftly between her and the door.

HAL O' THE IRONSIDES

'Behave now, Molly, or I shall twist your arm,' he said; 'you know you always were a coward about pain!'

You are the same coward you always were, Hal Ludlow, and you serve me so because you know I will not have you hanged as a spy, as is my duty.'

'Nay, hang me if you like, Molly, but remember that if you do, you will never know how nice it is to be run away with, a man's arm about your waist - a man who loves you, and whom you love - '

'I do not love you, Hal Ludlow, I hate you - '

'Whom you love most confoundly, and who is going to teach you how to love him ten thousand times better! Hang me high as Haman, and you shall never know that, little Molly!'

He let go her arm suddenly and went out, shutting the door behind him with a masterful bang, which in turn aggravated the girl so much that she rushed to open it and to call down the stairs after him.

'I hate you, Hal Ludlow. I never hated any man so much!'

* * * * *

Hal Ludlow owned to himself, as he rode away from the outer defences of Danbury Towers, that he did not know he could be quite so much of a brute to any woman. Yet somehow it seemed the right way to treat little Molly Woodham, when she was bent on making a fool of herself. He had always bullied her more than a little and it came natural somehow now - natural and useful.

He had seen all that he came to see. He had been hail-fellow-well-met with the Oxford raiders. Though

an abstemious man by nature he had drunk down squad after squad of Brown Octobers. His head had buzzed, but nevertheless he had sat among them with eyes and ears wide open for every hint of plan or disclosure of numbers which might be of use to his general.

Betraying the woman who was keeping faith with him - who had only to speak the word "spy" to hang him? No, certainly not, the thought that he could possibly be acting thus never struck him. Hal knew better, and was, in fact, never more content with himself than during those days and nights which he spent at the Towers, sounding the spirit of the soldiers, and making himself familiar with every detail of the defences. It was all for the sake of little Molly with whom he had played, who had scratched his face, and told him a score of times what a bold, bad, and utterly detestable boy he was. He knew that he was in no way betraying Molly. Contrariwise, he was going to save her. This he had often done before when she had some mad project in her head. Then he had taken her up kicking, biting, and scratching, tucked her under his arm and carried her into the house - upstairs to her nursery, or in severe cases into one of the tower garrets, when there happened to be a key in the door. Here he would leave her for an hour or two to redden her angry little knuckles against the solid oak, and spoil the toecaps of her London shoes in the vain attempt to kick in the iron-studded panellings by sheer force of wrathful shank.

What else was he intending now? Who had a right if not he? Her oldest friend, somewhat her director through ten eventful vacations from school and college, her father's friend (Hal did not blush to give

the thing that colour!), he saw his little Molly being made a mock of by plunderers and led-captains who cared nothing for her, but would leave her in the lurch, when (as sooner or later must be the case) the castle got itself stormed. He, Hal Ludlow, meant to save her from all this and if she kicked and bit, scratched and fought - well, he thought he could stand that too. Here again we come down to that necessary substratum of brutality, which underlay Hal's gay and light demeanour, and fitted him to be a good Captain of Ironsides, and an inflicter of Colonel Cromwell's discipline upon the New Model army just then springing into being.

He had ridden calmly out of the Eve's Corner gate, near which was an inn much frequented by the few Brown Octobers who had not gone back to Oxford with Rupert upon the report, sedulously propagated by Hal, that Colonel Cromwell was approaching with the whole Eastern army to take the castle and put the defenders to the sword.

Rupert had waited a day and a night on the round top of the Rodney, watching for any sign of the enemy.

Gladly would he have found them then or at any other time, wherever there was plain ground for a charge, uphill or downhill, front, flank or rear. But the business of a siege was noways to his liking. His qualities were lost behind stone and lime, and he loathed earthworks of the latest continental pattern. The ravel of little lanes and communicating tunnels about the east-looking crest of Danbury Hill would be death and destruction to his horsemen. He would not dismount his gentlemen and put them to digging molehills, nor turn them into trainbands and pikemen to defend mud walls. So finding no

advantage in remaining in a neighbourhood while the Roundheads were mustering for his destruction, he swept up such of the Brown Octobers as were young and specially well mounted, or old and with long purses. Then he said a most courteous good-bye to my Lady Molly, wished her all good luck in the King's name, borrowed fifty gold pieces to pay his overnight losses at ombre, and rode away - as fine a gentleman and as unscrupulous a bandit as ever kissed the hand of fair lady.

The day after Hal Ludlow was knocking with his sword-hilt upon the shut doors of the farm-steading of Boreham Barns, and shouting 'Come down, Quaker, or I will set fire to your great barn.'

For long nothing stirred, and then a rustling as of enormous rats reached Hal's ear from the mow at the western end, the sole which still remained, and through a three-cornered wicket poked the frowsy head of Loud Tom Christopher the foreman. His hair was more stubbly in colour and hempen in consistence than ever, and he blinked with the blank goggle-eyed inane countenance of a man who has been sleeping away a rich and profitable day.

This was so far from being Tom's habit that Hal promptly charged him with spirituous indulgence.

'And my uniform, rascal - my headpiece and cuirass, Tom, the Oversman? Hasn't swapped them for bottles of Hollands and drunk up my good harness?'

'Nay, Master Hal, as thou well dost know. I am no friend to excess, though at times I can be doing with a jug of stone ale as well as another. But the steel pot for thy brain-pan is here with all thy other 'coutrements, safe wrapped in one of master's waggon sheets, and a cat's jump to the left of yon

copse is a little hole in the hill with nut bushes and green truck growing about. There is your horse, well stabled and ready for the road. The troop will be blithe to see you, Captain. They are main tired of Witham, where every day the provisions are harder to get - '

All the time Tom was dusting himself down and soon the great door was opened and Loud Tom stood there with a bundle in his arms. The King's hat and lace scarf disappeared, the blue and white favours, Lady Molly's gift, were tossed in a corner, and once again with a great gasp of relief stood up an armed Captain of Ironsides, every button and plate shining and the red cloth of the coat carefully brushed. With exact hand he adjusted to the best advantage the plume of his casque. Then he crowned himself with anxious adjustment, saying, 'Tis a great comfort to a man, a good steel pot!' Which indeed was true in the case of a captain of horse, of that very special New Model breed raised by Colonel Oliver Cromwell, which was to change so completely the course of history.

'Come now, Captain,' said Loud Tom, after he had turned about once or twice to get the straw spikes and burrs plucked out of his tunic. 'One good turn deserves another. We are here four good Anabaptists and we are most dustily tired of this here hanging-on work. Quaking don't suit us. We have horses bought for a price with our own moneys, arms too of a kind. The men are all up at the timber shed at the spinny yonder, waiting for 'ee, Master Hal, till they know what answer ye will make.'

'Answer what, Tom? Out with it! What do you want?'

'Just to ride with you, Captain Hal - ye made a

poor waggoner, but from what I hear from our folk up Gedney way, there be few to match ye in the soldiering trade. We be minded to enlist with our own lads - us all comes from French Drove - not much on drill as yet, how could we? But all, as Israel Toombs said of his missus, "Wall-eyed, but willing-hearted."

Loud Tom laughed at his own jest. 'Aye,' he repeated, tasting the flavour of his own wit, 'that's us - wall-eyed, but willing-hearted!'

They were still in the yard and during a short absence of Tom the Oversman, it seemed to Hal that he had heard a strange whining noise from a range of low buildings which on his former visit had been still populous with pigs. These had now all disappeared, as indeed had done everything about the place. Stillness brooded with heavy wing over Boreham Barns, but like the moaning of the wind through a keyhole, there came to his ears this singular sound, at once persistent and irregular. There was a human something about it too, which bore upon Hal's imagination. He had no objection to anyone suffering for a good or sufficient cause, but he could not bear that any should be mishandled or left without redress. His thoughts flew to his troops. Could one of them have been wounded in his absence, hidden away, and now perhaps dying of thirst in some cellar?

He called to Loud Tom, who came instantly at the sound of his voice. He was carrying a couple of hams, swung one on either side as a maid carries her milking pails. Strings of sausages and dark-coloured puddings garlanded his neck. Dutch seabread and French biscuits made his huge side-pockets bulge. It was clear that in the first of

military exigencies, Loud Tom would make an excellent soldier. He had the instinct of making ample provision,

'Tom,' said Captain Hal, pointing in the direction of the sound, 'what may be over yonder?'

'What may be which, Captain Hal?'

'The noise I hear, as of a man in pain.'

Loud Tom the Oversman laughed gurglingly, and, marching over to the first pig-sty, kicked away the great stone, called "Lazarus" - used to keep in any rebellious "snorter" given to digging his way out - for them "Lazarus" fell upon his upturned nose, filling up the pit already digged and making the too diligent sapper squeal with pain. Then with his loot still upon his back, Tom shot a couple of bolts and swung open a sparred iron door. Hal stooped and through the low and narrow doorway beheld the Quaker sitting wringing his hands in the corner. His complaints filled the narrow prison-house and flowed out in a steady stream.

'I am in Meshek. I sojourn in the tents of Kedar. The bloody-minded have taken vengeance upon me! Woe is me - woe and double woe!'

'Don't mind a word he say, Captain. He sent that Amorite Joe Cormack with a letter to Prince Rupert to warn him that you were a Captain in Oliver's horse, spying within the castle - that the Lady Molly was a party to the plot, and that the only true friend the King had in these parts was his loyal and humble subject, Silas Seale, of the sect called Quakers, frequently honoured in happier days with the King's commands. Oh, Master Silas, do not deny your signature and superscription. I have the letter here, and to the castle it would have gone, if Hairbreadth Billing had not scragged the Amorite's

wicked throat as he leaped the Trysting Stile, shaken him out, pounded him, and so found the letter crackling inside the lining of his waistcoat. So as we had much to do, we shut Master Silas up here and left him water to drink and a loaf to gnaw - which was a deal better than he deserved. But the Quakers are main honest folk - all of them, that is, except Silas, and we spared him for the sake of his kin. One black sheep don't blacken the flock.'

Hal was immediately and fiercely wroth - not because of the man's treachery to himself, but because, being a Quaker, he had abandoned and betrayed the Cause which ought to have been dear to him.

'Tis little use wasting such good words on him. Captain Hal,' advised Loud Tom; 'he has no love save for his strong-box, nor any Cause for which he cares except that which will bring him in more coined money.'

'I am the man that hath seen affliction,' came the voice from the pig-sty. 'He hath led me into darkness, and my heart is humbled within me!'

'Well, let's hope so,' concurred Loud Tom cheerfully. 'I shall keep the letter and if there is any complaint of further treachery I shall show it to Colonel Cromwell. If I do, I warrant you that neither Mechek nor Mesopotamia shall be far enough away to hide you from his halter!'

The Quaker stood shaking on the pavement of the line of troughs, down which in times of plenty the pigs' swill had been wont to run. Loud Tom tossed the keys at his feet with the clash of iron striking stone.

'There,' he said, 'you will find all in order, and under a nail on my desk a note of all our takings in

the name of the army which we are riding to join - all, that is, except Joe Cormack, the Amorite who is in the pig-sty next but one. Be careful how you disturb him, for he took in a brace of brandy with him to while away the time.'

'Where are my horses - my cattle? - you have robbed me,' shouted the Quaker.

'All gone to Colonel Cromwell and Commissioner Ludlow,' said Loud Tom complacently. 'They are both at Cambridge this week, and need service. Most men would like to be robbed in like fashion, for had your friends from the Towers come and taken them off, no shilling of payment would you ever have seen!'

Without another word the two men turned their backs upon the great yard of Boreham Barns, leaving their late master to pick up the keys, forlornly muttering the while the overword of his favourite psalm: —

*'A good man's footsteps by the Lord
Are ordered aright.
And in the way wherein he walks
He greatly doth delight.'*

He, Silas Seale, was *par excellence* the Good Man - nay, speaking humbly yet with just reason, he might be called "The Man after God's own heart." If David could say as much - why not he? Silas hath no little affair like that of Bathsheba upon his conscience, though he liked reading about it too.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

HAL'S HOMING

The Hog Laners had never doubted but that their Captain would return. Yet to have him come back in triumph, plume floating, helm and harness shining and four good Anabaptists well mounted attending him, was an absolute triumph. The shout that went up from the coppices about Witham might have been heard at Danbury Towers had the garrison not been too busy with their entrenched camp to pay any heed. They had need to be busy, for soon Hal Ludlow was riding Cambridgeward with his report.

There Colonel Cromwell, uncrowned King of the fens, a great power in these parts, was gathering in contributions for the Houses. No county gave so liberally as Cambridge - no town so grudgingly and costively as the University seat. For which reason it was well for Colonel Cromwell to be in hand with six troops of horse, and to let the colleges see them march and countermarch, veterans to a man, able and ready for anything, and particularly willing to shed the blood of any armed malcontents who might come their way.

Hal rode joyously at the head of his Hog Laners. Sometimes the little dark ringlets of his lieutenant, crisped under his black "pot," would range up beside him for a quiet word. Anon Zered would rein back to his place, or even fall behind to drop hint to Loud Tom and the new recruits as to the proper answers to give when they should meet with Colonel Cromwell.

HAL O' THE IRONSIDES

'Let the Captain answer what he likes. He will tell the tale better than you. If he wants to bring off the young lady scatheless, saying that she is held in duress and against her will - well, after all, 'tis a good lie, and the wench is my Lord Woodham Walter's only daughter. Moreover, lads, 'tis none of our business.'

'Master Lieutenant, I be called Loud Tom, I know,' the Oversman added, "'tis my habit of speech and I cannot help it. But to be loud is not to be loose of tongue, and Tom of the Barns can hold his with any man.'

He jerked his head in the direction of the head of the troop where Captain Hal, chin in air, was trolling forth the verse of a song.

'Sounds like no psalm that ever I heard,' said Loud Tom, 'not leastways in our parts, but then I hain't travelled much, come to think!'

'Can't always surely tell,' said the little lieutenant, grinning, 'they have got some curious new tunes up Ely way, amazing spritely they be, as my blessed mother said when the cat kittened in her Valenceens cap box!'

'Aye, must be!' commented Loud Tom drily.

*'Ararantha sweet and fair,
Forbear to braid that shining hair,
Like the sun his early ray
Shake thy head, and scatter day.'*

The words came clearly enough, and the Lieutenant blushed for his senior.

'After all,' he said in excuse, 'he's no Anabaptist, and then he is young. What should he be thinking about but the maids? 'Tis natural, so it is, and I am

no friend to those who would make fourscore years out of twenty. You will find him a rare fighting Captain, and stiff on discipline, as his master has taught him. Let him alone to-day. He will sing a psalm with the best of us when we string out our battle front for the charge. I have heard him before now.'

Evening fell slowly as the steeples of Cambridge showed up out of the level fen, looming disproportionately large against the ruddy sky. An immense pile of fleecy tumulus clouds mounted from the horizon to the zenith, bossed and fire-tipped on its western side. There was a teasing wind up there, and Hal noticed that the cool eastern outliers bent over and overwhelmed the sunny peaks. As the sun caught them they glowed metallic like the cuirasses of his own Ironsides. It was a good omen, and he watched with interest what should befall. The towers of Cambridge stood out against a broad horizon belt of pale ærial green, very wistful and solemn. Above the heavens were given up to the simulacrum of armed war.

At that time in London busy with his Latin pupils dwelt one John Milton, who in the oncoming tempest saw the clash of thrones and dominations, all the war of an angel onset. But nothing of this troubled Hal, who was only concerned to get his men dry into Cambridge and his meeting with his chief over.

He reached the guarded gate where the Slep Troop welcomed him with a glad shout.

'Go on, youngster,' cried Sam Squire the Adjutant, 'he is waiting for you at the Mayor's house - your father too, I think. I hope you have a good tale to tell.'

HAL O' THE IRONSIDES

'Capital,' cried Hal over his shoulder, 'I was captured by Rupert and got away!'

'What, not the Prince?'

'Who other? I shall spin you a yarn when we foregather. Can you lend me a clean pair of hose? These I wear are mostly holes, besides being full of ticklesome hay burrs!'

'All you want, lad, when you get clear of the great folk!'

Hal and his troop of Hog Laners went on to the Town House of the Mayor, eagerly guided by a street urchin in the picturesque disarray of a grain bag with holes for his head and arms. The open end made a skirt which reached to his knees. Anything more airy and pleasant for summer wear could not be devised - that is, after one had got accustomed to the rasp of the material on the bare skin.

The rare oil lanterns, hung on posts, were being lighted along the streets, and college halls glowed bright as Hal and his band rode through the town. The green twilight cast rosy reflections on the roadways and Hal quickened his pace as he neared the end.

At the Town House he dismounted, and called out his name to an orderly who stood on the steps.

'Captain Ludlow of the seventh troop to see Colonel Cromwell!'

He passed within, and the patient Hog Laners dismounted outside, still standing in rank, easing girths and furtively rubbing down their mounts, as good cavalymen ought, whose lives are in the legs of their horses.

Cromwell was sitting at the Council Board with two others - one of whom was Mr. Commissioner Ludlow. Hal saluted all three gravely and equally -

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or rather he saluted his superior officer and let his father and the rather frightened Mayor take what part of the homage they might think their due.

‘Well, Captain,’ said Cromwell, ‘we thought you were lost and all your troop. Let us hear what awaits us at Danbury. Is that Hog Lane I hear outside - any losses?’

‘None, I have brought them all back, and five good fighting recruits whom I shall present to you when you are more at leisure.’

Colonel Cromwell became good-humoured at once, as he always did when he heard of suitable enlistments.

‘Tell your story,’ he said, sitting back in his chair, ‘what of my Lord Woodham’s wench and her defences of the Towers?’

So Hal told all his tale of the coming and going of the Oxford raid, his being pressed by Rupert, and how the Lady Molly, recognising an old playfellow, had begged him off. How he had seen everything and finally ridden away unchecked, his escape as good as connived at.

‘Lady Molly is no more a malignant than I am,’ he declared stoutly, ‘her father has been a little too round with her, that is all, and she is a spoilt maid like most only daughters’

‘And sons,’ put in Mr. Commissioner Ludlow, drumming upon the table.

The place is formidable enough, but can do us little harm. The King’s garrison within have no following in the county. The neighbourhood is now swept clean of cattle and provender, and the truth is they must starve or shift quarters. As to Lady Molly, I would stake my troop and stand to it that I could persuade her to come over to our side - or if not, I

could capture her and carry her to her father at St. James's.'

'Hark to your only son, Mr. Commissioner! Crows he not loud, this cockerling? He will subdue fortresses. He will carry off maids.'

Hal flushed, not because of his chief's speech, but because it was spoken before his father whom he knew incapable of taking anything lightly.

'It is a matter,' Mr. Commissioner answered heavily, 'upon which it might be wise to consult my Lord Woodham Walter. I shall write to him to-night.'

'Do nothing of the sort,' snapped Cromwell, sharp as the dog of his own pistol, 'this is my affair. If Lord Woodham Walter could not look after his daughter when he had her in the house with him, what good will it be to write to him at St. James's?'

He turned to Hal imperiously.

'Captain Ludlow,' he said, 'what force would be necessary to reduce this stronghold?'

'Cavalry could not do it,' Hal answered, 'not even a brigade. They have entrenched the place. Old Septimus Hepburn, the Scots veteran with the slashed face, has seen well to that. It would need artillery and infantry, neither easy for us to come by. But let me go back and if I can bring off Lady Molly, I warrant you that the whole defences will collapse.'

Cromwell glanced at his two stolid companions, seemed to find them hopeless, and with something of relief returned to the anxious eager face of his young Captain. As he looked at the dull countenance and flaccid cheeks of Mr. Commissioner Ludlow, he seemed to be asking, 'How came this old brood hen to rear such a cock of the game?'

Something young and human touched him, and

he became again, though but for a moment, the man of the Tithe House garden where stood the dial - armed warrior indeed, but still the man who had tossed his children in the air on his return from battle.

‘Well, Hal, we shall see. You have a persuasive way with dames, I am told. If you can catch the Lady Molly, and teach her to hop on our bough and whistle our tune, it would be no bad thing for the Cause, not to speak of all the pleasure it would doubtless be to you thus to serve the Lord.’

With this characteristic irony Cromwell broke off the interview.

‘Report yourself to Major Ireton!’ he ordered briefly. ‘He will assign you quarters.’

Hal saluted and was going, his heart singing within him, when the voice of his Colonel once more swung him round to attention in the threshold of the doorway.

‘Your pardon, gentlemen, I must speak with Captain Ludlow for one moment on a purely military matter.’

The Commissioner and the Mayor of Cambridge solemnly bowed their heads, like mutes at a funeral.

Cromwell strode across the room.

‘Come without,’ he whispered, ‘I shall not sleep to-night if I do not see these new recruits of yours. Are they staunch fellows? Of our sort?’

He was eager as a schoolboy collecting eggs. He could not wait till the morning. At the first glance Hal knew that their coming had been announced outside. Every man was sitting his horse, motionless and well ordered, for the honour of Hog Lane and Captain Hal.

‘All in good heart, lads?’ queried Cromwell,

peering down their line with eyes that burned like coals. 'Where are the new men? I do not see them?'

'Forward there, Boreham Barns!' cried Hal.

And the five newly admitted men rode up to the step on which Colonel Cromwell stood, impatiently switching his leg with the riding whip which dangled from his wrist.

The front of the Mayor's house carried cressets in which ordinarily during winter nights resinous torches were set. But the nights of the fen were so short and clement at that season that no one had thought of filling the sockets. The chief lost patience. 'Idle dogs,' he cried to the serving men within, 'light your cressets or I shall send you skipping. Is a man blind that he should be reduced to feeling for his soldiers?'

The men sprang out upon the porch and with a splutter or two and a muttered curse (which would have cost twelve pence in the ranks of the New Model), the torches flamed. Very stern was the array of Hog Lane. Each steel "pot" on each cropped head shone like a carbuncle. Buckles sparkled and breastplate shone with a mild austere radiance. The horses tossed their heads, but the men sat immovable as if carved in ebony and steel.

All Oliver's eyes were for the new five. He picked out the leader at once.

'You, sir, what is your name?'

'Tom Christopher, sir, but they do mostly call me Loud Tom, on account of my voice.'

'Hum, of what religion are you, Tom?'

'I am an Anabaptist, Colonel, and think no shame. 'Tis a good staunch creed, and was that of my father before me.'

'A sound answer, Loud Tom, but it were well not

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to be too loud among my regiments. Understand that, when loud speaking is to be done, I do it.'

'I can be Silent Tom as well, sir,' he answered as he saluted and retired.

Cromwell looked after him thoughtfully.

'If he does well I shall mark him to be a sergeant. He appears to have some authority over the others.'

'Undoubtedly,' said Hal, 'the four others follow him like sheep.'

'Say rather - like soldiers, Hal. Remember that a good soldier will follow a man who leads and does not wait, who orders and does not argue, who knows where he is going, and goes. They will never let such a man go forward alone.'

Cromwell, well pleased, dismissed the new recruits. He would order their ordinary accoutrements to be sent to them to-morrow. For their red coats they must go to the Intendance. And so 'Good-night, lads, eat well, drink sparingly, and do not forget your prayers.'

CHAPTER TWELVE

A JUDAS IN THE CAMP

Fields of wheat were waving green about Runsell, and all across the wide valley when Captain Henry Ludlow again rode that way. He had all Hog Lane at his back, fifty-five troopers, his lieutenant and four sergeants, sixty basket-hilts in all. Cromwell, who had gone to the north to help raise the siege of Hull, presently threatened by Newcastle's army, could not spare another blade.

'Besides,' said he, 'you are a junior Captain and any other whom I might have sent would necessarily have ranked you. Also this is a single-handed job. It must be done neatly or not at all. You are a man of woodcraft, you have lived in the country all your life, and from what I can judge, friend Hal, you read sea and sky, marsh and wood with more diligence and skill than you spend upon your Bible.'

'Nay, but that I read also,' objected Hal, with a simplicity which won upon Colonel Cromwell, then with the air of one making a profound and startling confidence, 'and the oftener I read that Sermon on the Mount, the better I like it.'

'Well spoken, Hal - I believe you, lad, and I love you the better that you speak out so boldly such curious likings.'

Hal did not perceive the irony of the Colonel's speech, nor did he trouble his head more about the matter as he rode southward with his command. He kept well east towards the Essex marshes, for he understood that from that direction the garrison of Danbury Towers would have no fears of an attack.

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They would keep no guard save along the great road from London to Maldon. Besides, the fen men of his troop liked the route. They were altogether at home when they passed Mersea and Goldhanger with their green gables ornamented with grotesque figures carved in wood like ships' figure-heads. The Hog Laners sniffed at the smell of the tar and fish. Hal soon had enough of it, and for long after fish was no favourite diet of his. Fish outside and in, fish at breakfast, fish at dinner. The Marsh men were delighted, but Hal, less inured to the single diet, raw, salt, and smoked, spent a good deal of time being "punted" about with an ancient Jacobean swivel gun, great as a carronade and with a mouth like an alm's dish, seeking a change of food for supper.

Lieutenant Zered used to bring a little dark green bottle every time his chief returned from his expeditions and insist on his swallowing a tot. It contained, he said, medicine against the marsh fever - the only specific, brought from foreign parts by the sailors of Brightlingsea. Hal found it a very admirable specific after a night in a punt, but a more experienced man would have found no great difference between the contents of the little dark green bottle and an excellent brand of Hollands.

Hal had hard work keeping the minds of the Hog Laners on the affairs of state. He insisted upon daily drill, but for the rest he found, that so long as they were quartered in the coast settlements, it was as well to let the men refresh themselves. Hog Lane, the waxing of bristles, hammer, knife, and lapstone had not changed them - indeed had only given them a greater lust for their original life. They were more than ever "lads of the fen." Zachary Elsegood was no

more their tyrant, and Lieutenant Tuby assured Hal that Hog Lane would fight all the better for this free run among things primitive.

For Colonel Cromwell had strictly forbidden Hal to do his own advance scouting. The good troop was in no case to be left without a head, at least not until it should come to the "final flurry." So Loud Tom with two of his companions were sent on ahead in plain clothes to spy out the land - honest labouring men, Tom Christopher the Oversman and his friends, well known to all in these parts, not suspected by any, and able to bring back the most reliable news of the position of affairs at the Towers and how the Lady Molly found herself.

For the rest, Hog Lane, in curious fishing togs and ragged long-shore garments borrowed in the neighbourhood, pervaded the upper fens of the Black Water. Thus they gained health and information, but were quite ready to leap into saddle when Sam Squire of the Slepe Troop came spurring with the news that a man, dark and peak-bearded like a Spaniard, was wanted by Oliver - a spy most probably, and a bearer of foreign money to help the Queen.

He was making for the Wash and at all costs must be caught, otherwise Colonel Cromwell would be excellent to avoid for many days to come.

'Bring him to me,' Colonel Cromwell had ordered, but this Hog Lane could not do. Hal found the man in an old black barn, very hostile and most active with gun and pistol. David Pascal and Amos Pall were both hit, neither severely. Then Hog Lane dismounted in wrath, swung a "snodded" tree trunk end-on at the crack of the barn door by way of a battering-ram, burst it open and rushed in. The

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Spaniard stood to his point, but was borne down, and being wounded "even unto death," in the dusky corner of the barn, was carried forth of no further use to anybody - though his money was welcome, four thousand golden double Louis, which would have been enough to have bought the service of a thousand Cambden raiders had it found its way beyond the Wash.

But Sam Squire with his escort of four rode off with glad hearts and jingling saddle-bags.

'I shall let Colonel Cromwell know how well you served him, and what excellent watch you keep. I should never have found the Spaniard but for you!'

'I am sorry he was slain in the tussle,' said Hal. 'Tell the Colonel he had shot two of our men. So that, getting into the barn, they smote while the heat was on them.'

'Never fear,' cried Sam Squire, the Adjutant; 'I also was in the barn and did some little smiting. The chief will understand. Besides there is a notice that no quarter is to be given to Cambdeners. They killed three poor men at Bourne, men not under arms!'

So he rode away, but Hal, while the grave was digging, slipped his hand into an inner pocket in which parchment crackled and drew out a French Commission in the name of the Chevalier de la Brette of the Prades regiment. He was bidden in the name of the King of France to transact certain affairs in England - a spy certainly therefore, but no Spaniard, as Cromwell had been informed. He had fallen in his duty and Hal Ludlow, who had done some spy work himself and expected to do more, resolved to give Monsieur de la Brette a soldier's funeral. So he summoned Hog Lane and with peal of trumpet, chant of battle psalm, and rattle of

musketry, they laid the Frenchman in his grave among the black peat.

'Maybe it was not just according to his own regulations,' said Zered, shutting his Bible on the last chapter of Job, 'but we did our best for him. Had he been Colonel Cromwell or a seasoned "Dipper," Hog Lane could not have done more!'

So the poor Chevalier de la Brette had peace very far from his native Rousillon, the land of black hair and peaked beards which is neither French nor Spanish, but Catalan-Roman, which is quite a different thing. Rest the soul of De Brette (Armande Marie of that name), and as for his body, that lies easy enough under the fairest spread of buttercups in ten shires. For since the draining of these low levels on the Dutch plan, the Blackwater meadows show a broad and bright sheet of gold, out of which white villages peep, nestling comfortably in a land of squires and spires.

Hal and his troop returned to the Mersey village, and from thence kept the country in great order, raising contributions in the name of Colonel Cromwell and Mr. Commissioner Ludlow. Now and then a Brown October squireen would resent the forced loan, but a good look at the steady array of the Hog Laners on his lawn would make him think better of it, and Hal would ride away with fifty or a hundred pieces under the left gusset of his waistcoat, where he could feel it and yet not interfere with the play of his sword-arm.

One day Hal, still waiting for the return of his spies (who had orders to stay till they had made all possible observations upon the outgoings and incomings of the Lady Molly), went to his own favourite post in Hail Mary Wood. He had a book

with him, a squat little volume of French essays by one Michel Eyquem, Lord of Montaigne and sometime Mayor of Bordeaux. He liked carrying it in his haversack along with the pocket Bible which had been his mother's. It had been becrumbed and bedropped, yellow-stained with egg and salad, from being propped among dishes when he had dined alone. It was solidly bound in vellum as more than one cat, untimely orchestral, had discovered to his cost. Altogether it was a treasure not to be valued and (Bunyan's Pilgrim being yet unwritten though not unacted) it formed the entire library of the Hog Lane Troop.

Hal lay on his face after the manner of young people when they read half drowsily. His chin was almost on the edge of the Montaigne. In another moment he would have dropped altogether and the Captain of Troop Seven been asleep. But at that exact instant of juncture when his head was nodding lower and lower, a musket crashed behind him. A bullet tore through the leaves, struck his headpiece and ricocheted away with a vicious zip and splutter. Hal, stunned by the sudden blow on the head, staggered to his feet to look, but though he rushed into a clump of bushes from which the light blue gunpowder was rising he could see nothing. Indeed, the blood was blinding him and he thought himself more seriously wounded than he was. He hastened back to camp where the Hog Laners who were not away in the marshes ran to him shouting with anger and amazement. Zered Tuby washed the wound on his left eyebrow. A flake of lead, splintering upon the helmet, was lodged under the skin. Deftly the Lieutenant ripped it out with a pair of pincers from his housewife, patched

up the wound, and prescribed a "tot" from the green medicine bottle.

Meanwhile, Hog Lane was out hot and angry, galloping along all the roads, pushing through the woods, shouting to each other, searching everywhere but finding nothing. The man who had shot at the Captain remained deaf to all entreaties to come out and be killed. Then having indicated to his Lieutenant Zered the exact spot where he had been lying (well marked, indeed, by the still open octavo), Hal went to his chamber to lie down.

Left to himself, Zered Tuby pursued his investigations with his usual grim determination. He brought out his superior's steel "pot," and laying it on the ground where the head had been, he studied carefully the direction of the shot. He came to the conclusion that Captain Hal had been fired at from the edge of the wood, by a heavy man kneeling upon one knee and using the lower crotch of a young pine as a gun-rest. The bullet had struck the helmet at a very acute angle, glanced off without much change of direction, shaving only the splinter which had cut Hal's eyebrow upon one of the fluted ridges of the "pot." A few minutes more and Zered Tuby, crouching before the rough trunk of the biggest pine in Hail Mary Wood, was busy as a beaver with probing operations. At the end of half an hour he had pushed out something from the glistening white wood. He held it, still moist with pine-gum, in the palm of his hand and regarded it suspiciously. Then he slipped a hand into his bullet pouch and extracted a second bullet to lay beside the first - the one with the sliver missing.

He rose hastily to his feet. The two bullets had manifestly been cast in the same mould. They were

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identical even to the little double circle which marked the produce of the Parliamentary ammunition factory at London Wall.

‘My God,’ the searcher gasped, holding the two bullets close to his eye as if he could scarcely be convinced, ‘it is a Hog Lane bullet! We have a Judas in the camp!’

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

TOBIAS MOLE, EXPERT IN WOMEN

But Zered made no report of his discovery to Hal Ludlow. He must watch and make up his mind. So he wrapped the ball he had dug from out of the big pine in a fragment of cloth along with the chip he had taken out of his Captain's eyebrow, and stowed both in his waist-flap against the day of wrath and judgment. He even encouraged the Hog Laners to go searching, and watched the men who were most forward. But he could come to no decision.

Zered's gloomy brow impressed the men when they returned from their fruitless chase, but they knew the little man's fierce affection for his young Captain, and respected his gloomy silence.

And truly Zered had much upon his mind.

'If there be amongst us a man willing to shoot his Captain when he is lying as good as asleep, then we have amongst us a man who is willing to betray our plans to the enemy and the sooner we get out of Mersey village the better. I must find a reason for crossing the Blackwater before the Captain wakes.'

But he was saved his pains, for a tumult in the camp announced something remarkable in the opinion of the Hog Laners. He looked out and saw Loud Tom Christopher and three followers advancing along the water front, hived about and questioned in vain by the whole troop of Hog Laners. They were making for the Captain's quarters.

'This way - this way,' cried Lieutenant Zered, waving his arms emphatically; 'let the Captain sleep his sleep out.'

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Loud Tom and his companions had now been joined by the fifth of their band, Doe Royds, whom they had brought with them from the slippery Quaker's house at Boreham Barns.

'Come into my quarters and let me hear what you have to say! You men, get to your places. The corporals will see to it that all the men are summoned from the marsh by sound of trumpet and that all the horses are saddled and ready! And now (he turned upon the Boreham men) in with you and let me hear your story. Ha, what are you doing there, Doe Royds? You were not upon intelligence duty.'

'I am of the band,' said Doe sullenly. 'I have always gone with Loud Tom and the mates!'

'Very likely,' said Zered grimly, 'at Boreham. But you will obey orders here. Back to your troop instantly.'

'As you say. Lieutenant, as you say,' the big man answered with something dogged and sycophantish in his manner; 'but I mistook, what with its always being the rule for us Boreham men to stick together. I asks your pardon. Lieutenant Zered Tuby!'

And with a sketched salute the discarded fifth lounged sulkily away.

'Hulking brute!' growled the Lieutenant between his teeth, but he wasted no more thought upon him, being eager to hear the adventures of Loud Tom and his subordinates. Tom began at once.

'We made our first station at Boreham Barns. We found it wholly deserted, but everything had been left in place, the carts, ploughs, harrows, and farm gear each in its separate shed. This caused us to bethink ourselves, and we noticed that - well, that much work had been done about the Barns since

our departure - carefully done too - as if Silas Seale had been looking on. Then we came upon certainty. Tobias Mole, who was ever a great one to take notice, caught me by the arm and led me to the threshing-floor.

'There,' says he, 'this very same Tobias here (he laid his hand upon a grinning colleague, whose expression indicated no such acuity of judgment), this here Tobias, he says to me, "Tom (says he), what do you notice about this threshing-floor?" "Why, that it has been swept," says I. "Swept - aye, so it has, but did you ever see a threshing-floor swept like that before? Round and round, beginning from the outside till all was gathered into the centre and then lifted clean away with one heave of the braded shovel? Why, so old Master did sweep always and never trusted none of us." "Tobias Mole," says I, "thou art no blind mole. Old Master Seale it were and he swept in no great hurry either, for he never did a tidier job. And now, Tobias, what wouldst thou like for thy clear sight and good counsel?"

"Now't but what I can't have. Loud Tom," says he, "and that's a jug of good cider to drink your health!"

"Well," I promised him, "for that thou shalt not lose by the waiting."

It was evident that Loud Tom left to himself would take a long time to relate all the incidents of his adventure, so the Lieutenant, waxing impatient, decided to proceed by question and answer. He evolved with outward patience but with much internal fuming the following facts, which to Loud Tom's mind, aided by the instinct of Tobias Mole, seemed indisputable.

Silas Seale had carried off everything in the way of victual, corn, and fodder to an unknown

destination. This he had done with the help of assistants unused to field or farm work, whose deficiencies he had supplied in person. The trail of the waggons could be traced in the direction of the outposts of Danbury Towers.

Furthermore, Silas Seale had been paid for his goods.

He was no man to work for nothing. Lastly, Boreham was no safe headquarters for Tom and his mates. If Silas Seale was at the Towers he might return any day to see that his goods were undisturbed or to draw upon one or other of his secret caches and graineries.

‘So (continued Tom), us went to the Red Cow, which is a hostel by the roadside with much stabling and a loft with a safe double-exit in case we must be packing in a hurry.’

‘And what about the castle?’ demanded Lieutenant Tuby, fierce as a little terrier at a rat-hole. He contained himself with difficulty in face of Loud Tom’s long-windedness. But he recognised that it was impossible to hurry the ex-oversman. He would answer questions, but the details had to be dribbled out in his own way. As for the others they sat open-mouthed at their superior’s mastery of words. ‘Tom he do speak better nor owd passon!’ was the appraising comment of Tobias Mole the judicious.

So, in a kind of agony lest his Captain should wake up before he was in possession of all the facts, Zered Tuby sat tugging at his short curls or knitting his hands till the joints cracked, in a vain attempt to master impatience.

The little Lady goes not so much about with the officers as she was used to do - never no more

market o' Fridays. She keeps more to herself, and the owd Scotsman with the voice like a braying ass gives most orders in her name.'

'Now we are coming to it,' thought Zered, and tightened his grip upon himself.

'Aye, aye, but we were the cunning lads,' Loud Tom chuckled, turning his alert blue eyes upon his companions; 'we got took on at Woodham Walter to help with the hay, and we helped right enough. Indeed, we might have been there to this minute, but for one thing - aye, aye, ha, ha - but for one thing -'

'And what was the one thing?' snapped Zered Tuby impatiently.

'That one thing were very special particular, eh, mates (he laughed again and slapped his thigh), and well-nigh got us all fitted with hempen collars, eh, lads? 'Twas so, wasn't?'

'Now't less than the sight of old Silas Seale with his broad hat and drab-skirted coat coming dodging between the hay-coles. That was enough for us. We threw down our scythes and broke for the wood!'

'And high time too, it was me what got my eye on the owd badger!' Tobias Mole agreed.

'I do not see that you have done very much after all, and you have been a precious long time about it. I can tell you I should not like to face Colonel Cromwell with such a tale!'

The four men looked at each other and smiled contentedly. It was obvious that they at least thought well of themselves and were satisfied with their doings.

'Maybe,' said Loud Tom easily. 'But you see, Zered Tuby -'

'Lieutenant, if you please!'

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‘Well (as if humouring him), Master Lieutenant Zered, an it please you, we have first to see Captain and he will bear us out - with Colonel Cromwell!’

‘See the Captain - and why?’ Zered almost barked at them, so great was his exasperation. ‘What have you to tell the Captain that you cannot tell me?’

‘To tell him - not much, but we have this to give him,’ and from a capacious pocket Loud Tom produced a dainty letter, written on fine Dutch paper, and folded into the form known as a “Buckingham posy.” It was sealed in pale blue wax, and on the front appeared this image and superscription: —

‘To the Honourable Gentleman, Captain Henry Ludlow, Present These. Haste, Post Haste!’

The Lieutenant turned the dainty missive contumeliously over in his hand, stirring it with his forefinger like medicine in a glass.

‘And where got ye the like of that?’ he inquired gruffly. He saw the best part of the inquiry escaping out of his hands, and with all his heart he desired to have a connected plan ready to lay before his chief when he should awake.

The Lady Molly gave it to us - I mean to Tobias Mole, for ’twas he that passed her Captain’s letter when nobody was looking, and she stood by the gate of Rusty Rook pasture watching us stropping our scythe-blades time about with a Yorkshire hone. Yes, time about we did it and it came to Tobias Mole’s turn when she called to him.

“Mind your blade, man. Why do you look at me all the time instead of minding your business?”

Tobias Mole keckled like a hen which has laid one

whole and undivided egg.

'I always were a great one to take notice o' women,' he admitted, shaking his head.

'Well, and what did you say, you giggling fool?'

The little black-a-vised Lieutenant was almost out of hand now.

'Why, sur, I told her I could not keep my eyes off the prettiest lady I had ever seen!'

'Danged if he didn't,' cried Loud Tom, thumping his knee; 'said that, he did!'

'Twelve pence!' said the Lieutenant, glad to have found a weapon; 'twelve pence for swearing!'

'Oh, never fear but I will pay, Zered Tuby, as soon as I have seen the Captain. He will give me more than twelve pence for this dainty little package. But to the tale - o' course we thought it 'twas all over with poor Tobias, speaking so to a lady. But that only showed what fools we were. She called him up to her and they spoke together private-like for full ten minutes,'

'Haw, lads, I knowed she would, bless her. I know how to speak to womenfolk - always did. 'Tis a gift!'

'So 'tis, and we slipped him Captain's letter to give to her, seeing Tobias and she were such gossips!'

'Aye, that we were, and she took the letter and put it away careful in her bodice, without ever so much as asking who it were from.

'Women are like that,' pontified Tobias; 'they be for ever expecting letters and valentines to fall into their hands out of the sky.'

'And how came the Captain to send a letter to the chief of the enemy's forces, without saying anything about it to me, his Lieutenant?'

The four men winked with such an air of superior

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knowledge that Zered cried out, 'If you want to get your heads knocked together and to ride the wooden horse an hour apiece, keep on as you are doing.'

'Well, you see, Lieutenant,' explained Loud Tom, instantly losing something of his debonair assurance, 'us don't think that he wrote to the chief of the enemy, as your honour says, but more as you might to your sweetheart - always supposing that your honour had such a thing.'

'I beg you will leave me out of the matter altogether - you and your sweethearts.'

'Well, I dun know,' said Loud Tom, 'most of us has to undergo our fate that way some time or other - and some more than wonst! But your honour knows best.'

'Go on with your tale - do you understand that?'

The men saluted and paused for Loud Tom, who could talk like an auctioneer, and was much admired because he had never been known to be at a loss for a word.

'The Lady Molly she took a most remarkable liking to Tobias Mole and -'

'Always knowed how to talk to 'em all my life - always did and always will,' murmured Tobias, not wishing to interrupt, but simply for his own satisfaction, which was great at that moment.

'She bade him come back to the stile of the Rusty-Rook pasture, that night come three. Mole he was there. They talked full half an hour - aye, good - by a stopped clock, as the saying is.'

'Always knew what to say to 'em, always,' repeated Tobias Mole, combing his beard with his fingers; 'never was a woman yet -'

'What did she say?' Zered demanded hotly. 'Tell me without any more fool's talk. What care I about

your sweethearts and sweethearting?'

'About ours - nothing,' said Mole judicially, considering the question, 'but about Captain Hal's - I wager you will think a good deal.'

'Anything more to tell me?'

'Only that the Lady Molly asked about Captain and about her father - '

'You don't mean to tell me that you were such fools as to say that you belonged to Captain Ludlow's troop? That you told her that you were Parliament soldiers?'

'Us told her nothing. She did not need to be told. Captain had put it all in his letter, and said as how she could place the utmost confidence in us. Mole there answered her questions, and spoke sometimes a good lie, sometimes a good truth according to circumstances.'

'Circumstances - 't isn't no circumstances,' said Mole; 'tis knowing how to talk to 'em.'

'Hold your tongue, you fool,' said Zered; 'she gave you this letter and she came to the gate of Rusty Rook pasture.'

'T isn't a gate - 'tis nobbut but a stile, Mr. Lieutenant.'

'And how far from the castle?'

'A good half mile,' said Loud Tom; 'but we could do nothing, for there was one of them pottering little forts with a sentry going back and forth as regular as pendulum stroke only a pistol-shot away.'

The door opened and Captain Hal Ludlow, still blinking from his sleep but with his head wonderfully clear and recovered from the bullet which had dented his helmet, came slowly in.

'What's all this?' he asked sharply, looking from one to the other till he had scanned each in turn.

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Then Tobias Mole rose to his feet and as the man who 'knowed all about it always' presented the letter, with the confidential bow of an expert in such matters.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

LADY MOLLY LEARNS TO SAY 'PLEASE'

The message began with a masterly disregard of introduction or ornamental adjective which had characterised his own.

'Hal (it ran), I have nowadays changed my mind about you though I am now writing to you. Being surrounded by loyal gentlemen devoted to me, I have constantly before my eyes the opposites to your brutality. Nevertheless, to prove that I am in no wise afraid of you, Hal Ludlow, I shall do as you say, and meet you at the stile by which the road into Crow Wood passes out of the Red Cow meadows - you know the place. On the night of Wednesday at ten of the clock I shall be there. So much I promise you, not because I care aught for you, but because of the ancient ill-deserved, ill-requited favour my father has shown you. If any treachery is intended, it shall come from your side, and on your conscience be it.

I know well that you are capable of any baseness and that you have set spies upon me, which is well within the character of Hal Ludlow. I know that gallant rebel of yore, and make him my compliments upon the courage which leads him to reserve his brutalities for women, but carefully to abstain from attacking a castle garrisoned by men.

'My remembrances to my brave Captain Crophead and so no more from

'Molly Woodham.'

Hal communicated a general idea of the contents to his Lieutenant, who pouted out his under lip and mused.

'If Lady Molly Woodham were in my rank of life and sent me a letter like that, do you know what I should conclude about the matter?'

'No,' quoth Hal, 'I do not, except that she was exceedingly insolent and angry.'

The little warrior passed his superior's interpretation without a comment. Anything so commonplace was unworthy of his consideration.

'I should draw the conclusion that she was provoking me of intention, and that she would not be at all sorry to be carried off!'

'Ah, Zered, you little know the Lady Molly when you say so. She hates me - she has always hated me - and told me so when last she saw me -'

'Well, maybe so,' said Lieutenant Tuby; 'Gedney and French Drove are not Danbury Towers and Woodham Walter. Maybe they make the nature of women different in such places. But when I was a younger man and more given to paying attention to the frivolities of maids, if Bess Merridew or Patience Talmash had sent me such a scribble all written in her own hand, with words crossed out and written over, I should have known what to do.'

'What would you have done?'

'Nay,' laughed the little man, 'I have not passed by all these follies and become a head-man in Zion to be giving advice to young men what they should do. Let their own hearts determine. But if it be Colonel Cromwell's orders for us to capture and bring away this spritely maiden, I do not think we

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shall need to trouble about a gag for our prisoner. She will not cry out loud enough to alarm anyone.'

* * * * *

The night of Wednesday about ten of the clock saw the entire Hog Lane Troop ranged in a wide demi-lune about the woods of Rusty Crow, and only the path from the castle left free. It was difficult to keep the horses from tossing their heads and the accoutrements from jingling, but the men managed it somehow. They tethered their beasts to fir trees under which the three-foot couch of dry needles gave no sound. They bandaged the horses' eyes and sank soft noses into nose-bags, cloaks were thrown over chargers' necks and stirrups were caught up to prevent them clanking. Hog Lane, secretly much amused at being called out to assist its Captain's amours in full military array, grinned joyously in the darkness. That is to say all the younger part of the command did so. For the others the fact that it was Colonel Cromwell's orders sufficed. Only Doe Royds, fifth of the Boreham men, a strong sulky brute, tried to spread a vague ill-feeling. But he lacked the delicacy of touch requisite for military sedition. In fact he ran a strong risk of being "buffed on the head" and pitched into a ditch, a fate which would have saved considerable trouble, but owing to the present good temper of the company and their respect for brand-new regimentals, such as he wore, the opportunity was lost.

The sense of life and adventure beat high in Hal Ludlow, Captain of horse in Cromwell's new command. He recalled somehow Queen Bess's words that England would always be saved by her

adventurers. He loved England, or at least he thought so. At any rate, he loved the adventure he was on - Crow Wood, high and black overhead, the distant lights of the castle, and the dewy path, which led through the waist-high meadowsweet and high brome grasses to the stile of the Red Cow pasture. Would Molly bring an escort with her? Would she come at all? Was it not rather a trap, and would they not find themselves surrounded by the entire garrison of the Towers and all the Brown Octobers whom Rupert had not swept off in his company?

Hal waited and listened. It would be a strange love-tryst, within reach of sixty pair of eyes had the night been lighter and, dark or light, of as many ears. Immediately behind was his faithful Lieutenant, Zered Tuby, who held Hereward ready to mount. But of all this nothing appeared. The wind sighed among the tall rookery trees. The birds awoke with sleepy squabblings and dropped off again. Not the clink of a buckle or the jingle of a spur came to his ear as he stood with one hand laid lightly on the broad top of the Red Cow stile, waiting for the arrival of the chatelaine of Danbury Towers, presently in arms against the Parliament - but his own little Molly Woodham just the same.

He was standing thus, every sense alert, when out of the underbrush between him and Zered a slim figure flitted. He heard the click of Zered's pistol as the dog was pushed full cock.

The figure vanished again. Five minutes - ten minutes passed and nothing happened. The strain was telling upon Hog Lane and chiefly upon Hog Lane horses, which did not understand the necessity of standing still so long.

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But at last Hal became conscious that someone was approaching him by the path which leads across the tall grass. He could hear the swish of skirts, and the fall of hasty footsteps. A curlew, scared from her nest, flew straight towards him, and then doubtless scared by the semicircle of mounted men, soared suddenly higher and disappeared with a shriek in the direction of the sea.

‘Are you there, Hal Ludlow?’ cried the voice of Molly Woodham, sounding quite unnecessarily loud; ‘come and speak with me if you are not afraid. Ah, you are there - how gallant a gentleman! Now you keep your side of the stile and I shall keep mine. What have you to say to me, now that I am here?’

‘I say that I love you, Molly,’ the Captain leaned across and spoke low and earnestly. He was morbidly conscious of more than fivescore male ears trained upon him, all most anxious to know how he would acquit himself.

‘I love you, and I cannot bear to leave you among a pack of ribald squires and foreign runagates.’

‘I notice that you have carefully abstained from attacking those whom you abuse,’ said the Lady Molly loftily; ‘you always were free with your tongue, Hal Ludlow, but that proves nothing.’

‘We are coming to that, Molly. Basing will fall, and the Towers will fall. The men who do the storming are not tender-hearted at such times. They lose distinction. I cannot expose you to the risks of a capture by assault - ’

‘You - you - and pray who are you to say you cannot have this and you forbid that where I am concerned? Why, my own father dared not - ’

‘The more’s the pity then, for I dare, Mistress Molly, and I shall see to it that you obey me!’

He leaned suddenly towards the slender cloaked figure on the other side of the Red Cow stile. A long arm gathered her up (by surprise or not, who shall decide?) and in a moment Molly was lifted clear across into the shelter of Rusty Crow wood. She heard the rustle of horse trappings. Her cloak was wound about her arms and head. Willing arms deposited her in before Hal Ludlow, a sharp word of command, and through the night, the troop of sixty Hog Laners took their road for the county boundary.

'Be quiet for ten miles, Molly,' said Hal Ludlow; 'you have been a good girl so far and show your sense by not crying out. We should only have to gag you and tie your ankles. Wait till we get to Witham and you shall have a horse of your own to ride.'

'I am not complaining,' said Lady Molly. 'I never knew that you were so much of a man before.'

'Oh, very well, so be it,' said Hal; 'I am all the man you shall need, little Molly. But do lean a little back and keep your finger off my bridle-rein. Can't you see Hereward does not like it?'

'How can I see anything with this cloak about my head?'

'Well, Molly, wait a little - there, you have more air that way. You shall see everything in good time. I have all I can do to keep Hereward up in this abominable wood. I cannot see to avoid the fallen timber. There goes someone over his horse's head with noise enough to bring all the thieves in Essex upon us. Who is that man?'

'Doe Royds, Captain!'

'I have a new mount, Captain,' growled Royds, gathering himself up; 'won't obey the bridle.'

'What are you doing in front of the command?' Hal snarled angrily. 'Go to the rear and stop there.'

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Doe Royds had ranged himself as close as he could to the Red Cow stile, so that he might hear the better. If the Lady Molly ran for it and made good her escape, he might chance to be able to give her a lift on his horse. He would then decide whether there was most to be gained by turning his horse's head back towards the troop to deliver up his prisoner, or by riding in triumph to the Towers as the chatelaine's deliverer.

Doe Royds believed in making each service pay its own charges. He was a brute who thought himself cunning, and had long got rid of any sentiments of honour or sensibility. Left to himself, he would doubtless have preferred to serve, if serve he must, under Rupert or Maurice, because of the opportunities of rapine and plunder there to be enjoyed unchecked, without Cromwellian articles of discipline. But in joining the Hog Laners he had hardly been a free agent. He knew so many of the secrets of the Boreham Barns' men, that with Loud Tom and his comrades it was a choice of bringing him with them or putting a bullet in his head. They were tender-hearted men and thought they were doing him a service by compelling him to swear allegiance to Colonel Cromwell and the Parliament. Neither religion nor morals, neither honest feeling nor the possibility of honest action, had Doe Royds - only a great brawny carcass given up to all lusts and appetites - a most strange trooper to take his place in a troop of God-fearing, devil-defying Anabaptists. One grace he had, which at first covered everything else. He was no coward. He could and would take blows with any man. He rode undismayed in the charge, rejoicing in the plunder which would be his, and the vinous and carnal joys the sale of them

would procure him in the slums of the first garrison town.

At Great Witham a pony was procured for the Lady Molly. The saddle was old and small, but she mounted with alacrity. Behind her Zered Tuby smiled sardonically.

'What did I tell you?' he whispered to his Captain. 'She is happy to be rid of them. Blood will tell. The wind was contrary and lo! off she went in a fluff of flame like a dry whin bush when a match is set to it.'

The Lady Molly would gladly have ridden alongside of Hal Ludlow all the way. But as they were not yet out of the zone of danger, it was judged best to keep her in the middle of the troop under care of Lieutenant Zered and the big ex-oversman of Boreham, Tom Christopher.

Molly's temper, serene in the moment of capture, flashed out at this indignity.

'Do you think that I would try to escape?'

'Ye might, my lady.'

'And if I give you my word, and solemn promise?'

'Ye might change your mind, my lady!'

Zered Tuby's responses came prompt as "Amen" in a church.

Lady Molly spurred her pony to force a way through the ranks, but solid Hog Lane kept a wall of horse-flesh all about her, and her bridle-rein was seized by Zered Tuby. Then little Molly Woodham gave way. Her face flushed with anger. Her ears grew pink. She looked at Zered with assassinating eyes. 'Mighty pretty she did look,' affirmed that cool warrior afterwards, 'all in a storm, within five seconds. War, fury, and inky-blackness, lightning and thunder-crash and rattle-bang about a man's

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ears - then all over and packed away till the next time in the inside of five minutes. That's the woman she is. No duck-ponds for me!

'Hal, they are laying hands upon me - come and help!' she cried to Captain Ludlow, whose helmet plume she could see stolidly rising and dipping in the front of the array.

'Nor she don't stick at a good whopping lie,' meditated Zered, without letting go. 'Why, nobody has set a finger on her. *'Pony frisky!'* he explained to his Captain, when the latter wheeled to know what was the matter. 'Might have run away with the lady - had her halfway back to the Towers by this time, but for Zered's carefulness!'

His irony angered Lady Molly.

'Ride by me, Captain Ludlow,' she commanded haughtily. 'I am not used to such freedom from underlings.'

Hal looked awkward, for such a word could hardly be applied to the man to whom he owed the incorporation of the Hog Lane Troop. But Zered, over the angry little shoulder of his enemy, winked appreciatively.

'If it be your will, Captain, I can lead the troop. The country is more open here, and there is less danger of that restive pony giving us the slip.'

And Zered rode his charger towards the head of the column.

'He is very insolent, that little man with the black curls,' said Lady Molly, tossing her head; 'he spoke familiarly to me, and snatched at my horse's bridle! Why not get rid of him?'

'His ways are not ours,' said Hal soothingly, 'but he is a good and faithful soldier and a great admirer of yours!'

HAL O' THE IRONSIDES

'Admirer - an insolent psalm-singer!'

'There are worse things than psalms, when one knows how to lead them to a good tune.'

Captain Hal took a soothing tone. He had no desire to quarrel with free-spoken Molly Woodham within hearing of Hog Lane. So, like many another man, he temporised, till he could with safety resume his natural manner.

'Whither are you taking me?' she demanded suddenly. 'This is not the way to my father's house. He is in London.'

'No,' said Hal lightly, 'the road to London is far from safe, and besides, you had so lately left your father's house against his will that - I judged you might not care to be taken back so soon.'

'Taken back - you speak as if I were a child in disgrace - to be whipped and sent supperless to bed!'

'If you had chanced to be my daughter,' said Hal smoothly, 'that is precisely how I should have looked at the matter.'

'Tell me where, Hal - not to prison?'

Lady Molly's voice grew pleading as it was wont to do when, in the days of Woodland play, Hal Ludlow had lifted her into the high crotch of a tree or upon the top of a wall.

'Let me down, Hal - I will say "Please."''

And now Lady Molly, grown to be a woman, was learning to say "Please" in earnest.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE LEAGUER OF TRUMPINGTON

That night they stopped at the mill of Trumpington, a little way from Cambridge. There the troop lay that night, uncomfortably enough, but Hal did not wish to venture on into the town, where his prisoner would be less easily guarded than in the country. His mind was set upon carrying her straight to Ely, to put her under the powerful protection of his father and Colonel Cromwell.

The best chamber of the miller's house was made ready for her service, and there she and Captain Hal supped together, with Lieutenant Zered going out and in, superintending, not (as he was careful to explain) from any desire to play Miss Priscilla Precise of Nag Street, but for the sake of the troop.

'Tut, Zered,' said Hal, 'go and put them to bed, if they are such particular young ladies.'

'It is not the young ladies I am thinking of,' said Zered, 'but the Hog Lane old maids, of whom the chief is named Zachary Elsegood.'

In Molly Woodham's mind a little scheme was hatching. She had certainly had as good a run for her money as any girl in London - the daughter of a Parliament Lord holding a castle for the King, levying war and leading forays. That was something worth doing and she had done it. But now it was over, and she could not hide from herself that she had had quite enough of it. Besides, she had let herself be trapped almost too easily. She would put a little spoke into Master Hal's wheel. He was getting

to think himself all too clever. A little cutting of cockscombs would be good for him.

So Molly resolved to escape, to take the first horse she could lay hands upon. They were stabled quite near. She could hear them tossing their heads and rattling their head stalls. She would ride off astride and bare-back, but she would escape, if only to prove that she could. If, as she hoped, she was retaken - well, there was no dishonour in that, with a whole troop of Colonel Cromwell's New Model horsemen launched in pursuit.

It was twelve of the clock. The chimes of Cambridge came faint and sweet through the still night air. The Lady Molly drew her cloak about her and approached the door. She turned the handle carefully. She heard the latch rise and the way was open. How they had trusted her! They had not even locked her in. But as she moved forward to go down the stairs which led to the kitchen door, she touched something hard like a rim or rail which, however, gave a little under her hand. She pushed a little more strongly and immediately brought Captain Henry Ludlow to his feet, asking if he could be of any use to her. She went in without a word and slammed the door, bolting it viciously at top and bottom. The shameless traitor had placed four oak chairs with their backs to her bedroom door and laid himself down upon them - 'just as if I were not to be trusted!' she said.

Well, she would show him, she would wait another hour and try the window. She sat on the edge of her bed and being wearied, kept awake with difficulty. At times she dozed, swaying forward, and bringing herself up with a jerk. She seemed to have slept hours. The dawn would soon be coming - so

she stood up, and with some silent temper discovered that her right foot had gone to sleep in earnest. When she had patted and frictioned it into wakefulness, she crossed to the window, walking uncertainly because of the pins-and-needles which succeed such localised slumbers. Over the irregular mill building the stars were glittering. It was still deep night. She was in time. Hope flattered her heart. She opened the window cautiously and looked out. A man in a steel helmet with white plumes stood directly underneath. She could see the dull glint of light on his musket barrel, and the broad luminosity of the shining breastplate.

‘A good night to you, my lady,’ said Lieutenant Zered Tuby, in his calmest manner, ‘but the river fog is treacherous on the marshes. If I were you I should shut the window and go prettily to sleep.’

The window was shut instantly, and the Lieutenant chuckled. Molly was so offended by the mistrust of these men that she resolved out of revenge not to sleep a wink that night. That would show them. She took off her riding habit, tossed abroad her hair and lay down, resolved to spend the night brooding upon her wrongs.

And no one who knows what such wrongs are at twenty years of age will be surprised to learn that the Lady Molly Woodham was fast asleep in two minutes of the clock.

* * * *

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Next morning the little lady’s temper was no better, but contrariwise if anything a little worse.

‘How can I ride a brute like that?’ she declared as she looked at the pony being saddled in the mill yard, ‘bow-legged, hunchbacked, and goes like a

caterpillar.'

'I had thought of that, Molly,' said Captain Hal, 'so from the stables of the "Royal Charles" I procured a pretty mare of good Arab blood which once belonged to my Lord Buckingham.'

'I will ride none of your hired horses! What, go to Ely like a travelling packman - I would rather walk!'

To this Hal made no answer. Though he had an answer ready, this was not the time to give it air.

'I will not ride at all. I will ride in a coach, like my Lord Essex. Send and order one.'

'You would not like it, Molly - believe me the roads across the fens are far from good. Six horses could not get you through All Hallow Marsh. The carrier's ordinary went in a month ago and is sticking there yet.'

'Can I have nothing I want? I shall complain to Colonel Cromwell how you have used me. For shame, Hal! Think how we used to run the wood, you and I, listening to the moor birds -'

'If you listen now you will hear them, and riding with me all day, sufficiently far ahead of the clamour of the troop, we shall be alone in the midst of them. The fen is populous with them!'

'The birds weary me. I will not be deafened with their foolish noise, as I am with your talk. 'Tis enough to drive one mad!'

'My dear,' said Hal tolerantly, 'you have slept ill. To-morrow you will feel better. Soldiers' quarters, you know - we shall lodge you differently to-night.'

'Hal Ludlow, I shall not move an inch - either on your borrowed horse or in a coach. I order you to send me back to Danbury where men are men.'

Hal took the big cloak which had enwrapped her on the edge of Red Cow pasture. He cast it about her

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with a cunning swirl, pulled it over her head and swung her up in his arms.

'Now, madam,' he said, 'it is all the same to me if you prefer to go to Ely City wrapped about like a cocoon on my saddle-bow. Only make up your mind, my little lady.'

He was half down the stairs with his burden on his shoulder when the spirit of the old Molly Woodham returned upon her, and she pled with him as from the crotch of the high tree, 'Oh, Hal, do let me down, I will say "Please."' "

* * * * *

It was an hour after Colonel Cromwell's return from the North after making an end of the Cavendish forayers and their chief for ever, that Hog Lane made its second entry into the Ely of steep gables, red roofs, and creamy whitewash.

They were now no longer the scattering crowd of irregular horsemen which had brought in Dick Lucy from Gedney Hill. Hard bitten, close ranked, looking straight before them they passed up the street, their arms shining and their red coats, pride of the New Model men, well adjusted about them.

Captain Ludlow rode at their head with a wonderfully handsome girl at his side - no other (so ran the whisper) than the famous Lady Molly Woodham, Lord Woodham Walter's wayward daughter - she who had ridden with Rupert and held Danbury Towers for the King.

Some said that Hal Ludlow, their own little Hal, whose pranks and mischief were still a winter night's talk about Ely firesides, had with bow and spear taken the castle and its chatelaine. Others,

and these were more numerous and mostly of the female sex, would have it that she had followed him for love. He had held up his finger and lo! "O'er moss and moor she followed him."

It may easily be seen that the second was the favourite theory in the Calvinistic City, for Calvinism always induces much sentiment among its women and young men. For all things produce their contraries, and even down to mid-Victorian times, Defoe's "Religious Courtship" and Dr. Brown's "Blessed State of Matrimony" were reprinted and distributed in neat little keepsake editions with vignettes in red and blue, surrounded with wreaths of gilt roses (I have even seen a bevy of blue cupids each as bare as my hand) engarlanding a page about affinities or the choice of a partner in life. Ah, Mr. Daniel Foe was deeply versed in the ways of the human heart when he edited those two hundred pages of commonplace reflections and called them "Religious Courtship." The title was a guarantee of immortality, for the book passes current to-day, unread but not un-bought, especially in certain corners of the Celtic fringe where grave men with long beards enforce the law and the prophets.

At any rate, the theory that the Lady Molly had come at the crook of Captain Hal's finger hurt nothing of his popularity. Nay, an indefinite number of well-doing and highly respectable young women felt as they looked after his plumed helmet that they would most gladly have done the same.

The cavalcade turned sharply to the left at the head of the market square, and the next moment they were defiling two by two into the great empty yard of the Tithing House.

'Where are you taking me, Hal?'

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'To a family where you will find a mother ... and sisters, fine spirited girls who will love you, and half a dozen soldier brothers, coming and going at all times.'

'Whose house is this?' Molly demanded, suddenly afraid. 'This is not a prison?'

She was alarmed at the air of silence and ordered quiet which impressed most people making their first acquaintance with the official side of the Cromwell mansion. Hal laughed aloud and glanced up at the windows.

'Look,' he whispered, and turning her face as he indicated, Lady Molly saw the smiling faces of Dame Elizabeth, of Bridget and Bess making signals of welcome with their white kerchiefs, and higher up Henry Cromwell, with a tousled head looking out of a garret window, brush and towel in hand.

'Hold hard, Hal,' he cried, 'I will be down in the crack of a pistol.'

'If it be a gaol, you will admit that the prisoners seem fairly content.'

'Yes,' said Molly anxiously, 'but who are they?'

The question was soon answered. On the top step appeared the tall stern figure which already was the best known in all the Eastern Counties, as it was soon to be throughout the three kingdoms.

Him Hog Lane saluted with swiftly bared blade, and at the sight of the lady the tall man came down, moving with a certain calm stateliness to greet her. He did not need to be told that Hal Ludlow with Hog Lane at his back had fulfilled his mission.

He bared his head before the girl and courteously assisted her to dismount.

'The Lady Molly Woodham?' he said deferentially.

'I am Lord Woodham Walter's daughter,'

answered Molly a little uncertainly, for she knew not what reception her escapade might receive from the grim man before her. She would have been more alarmed but for a tag of blue ribbon which had been pinned to his hair, and of which he was obviously unconscious. (He had, in fact, been playing in the Sundial Court with Mall and the Baby when the sound of hoofs caught his ear.)

'I am Colonel Oliver Cromwell,' he said, 'your father's friend - and for his sake, Miss Molly, you must allow me to be yours also. I am counted a rude man, and little given to idle words, but you will find deeds very much in my way.'

He led the way up the steps, taking Lady Molly's hand with more of old-fashioned courtesy than was used by the young rakes who diced and fought in the train of Rupert and Maurice.

'Dame, Dame, where art thou, Lizzy?' he called out as soon as he was within the hall, and out from the parlour came Dame Elizabeth Cromwell, always pleasantly maternal. She had hardly welcomed Molly when a rush from above, a pounding of footsteps which took the ancient staircase six at a time, announced a new arrival.

'My wretches!' said Cromwell, with a wave of his hand by way of introduction, 'Bridget, Bess, Mary, and Baby - I am astonished at your behaviour. Take example by your mother, you never saw her slide down the banisters.'

'No,' answered pert Bess Cromwell, 'but grandmother says she did right from the top to the bottom without once touching, which not even the boys can do, and the mark across the bridge of her nose comes from falling into the staircase well and cutting herself on the tin mug she was carrying.'

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‘That will do, Bess. My dear heart, I leave our guest to your care. She has had a long journey and needs rest. I have some business to transact with this gentleman - so send Harry to the office immediately. I know he is in his room. This way, Captain Ludlow. Dismiss your troop. We may be some time detained. Lady Mary, my best salutations!’

‘A wonderful man,’ thought Hal. ‘He never mentioned a word about levying war and receiving raiders. Yet if she had had a brother he would have been swinging by this time from the joists of the Tithe Barn. Colonel Cromwell does not jest with such things as the succour and entertainment of enemies within the seven Associated Counties.’

Harry Cromwell came hurrying in, his boyish face still bright with the towel friction, and his hair sleek and undried.

‘Take a note, Harry,’ commanded his father, ‘I shall have something to report to the war commission, and still more and better news to give my Lord Woodham Walter than he has been looking for.’

After he had heard Hal’s story he sat silent awhile, thinking deeply.

‘You are the better soldier than I, Captain,’ he said, ‘you have come back having done your commission without the loss of a man. But we also have shown our mettle. We caught the Candishers as they were making off and rode them down man to man. They had barely time to fire their huts before we were upon them. But we lost four good men, and many wounded.’

Harry Cromwell broke in.

‘But the Lincoln men who have not our model and

drill fled by companies and Newcastle's horse rode them down. Then my father with three troops only charged the rear of the pursuit, drove the enemy down the hill, and broke to pieces the reserve when Captain-Lieutenant Berry killed Charles Cavendish with a thrust in the short ribs.'

'I would that I had been there,' mourned Hal, with a sigh of regret.

'Nonsense,' said Cromwell, 'you young men think there is nothing in making war beyond charging the enemy. I tell you, sir, you did as much good by obeying orders. The fine gentlemen at the Towers will soon scatter, or if old Septimus Hepburn holds a few together behind his Dutch dykes, we will send down a score of my Lord Fairfax's loud-tongued persuaders to talk with him.'

'I would that I were at the taking - I have several men who know the country well.'

'I daresay, Captain Hal,' said Cromwell drily, 'but I have other work for you to do. We were a little too closely pinched with only six squadrons. The sight of Hog Lane and its Captain on my right flank would have been blithe and profitable to me as we put our horses to the pace down the slope.'

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

A MIDNIGHT SUMMONS

Colonel Cromwell heard Hal's narrative with an attention at once serene and balanced. The house of Danbury Towers, deprived of its figure-head, would give no more anxiety. The gay young sparks would ride off Oxford-wards. The Brown October Squires would think that they had done enough, and so not unthankfully take their ways back to their halls and granges in Norfolk. In short, the defence would fall to pieces. And if not - why, so much the worse for those who should remain. Most important of all, my Lord Woodham Walter would be spared any painful family scandal.

Oliver bent his brows suddenly upon his young captains. 'Now, Harry, and you, Hal Ludlow - remember, I will have no shaking of lovelocks and twirling of moustaches among my officers on account of the lady.'

'No fear, father,' said his son, laughing; 'we all know she is Hal Ludlow's prize - legal capture, cut out fairly under the guns of the enemy!'

'I have seen occasions, Harry, when you were not quite so wise. But remember what I say, I will have no black blood or promiscuous brawling in my camp. Your swords are to be exercised upon the skullcaps of the enemy, and if I catch one of you vapouring and pomposing for any cause whatever, he shall be expelled my command so quickly, that he shall not know in what direction he is travelling! Let this be known, you two Hals - warn the

lieutenants as well, that if they quarrel with anybody it shall be with me.'

'I assure you, sir,' said Harry Cromwell, 'there is not the least intention - ' His father cut him short.

'So much the better, son Harry,' he said. 'I am understood - see to it that I am obeyed.'

When he was gone and the young men were left alone they looked at each other at first soberly but, after a little, smilingly. Then Hal Ludlow took Harry Cromwell by the arm and they strolled up and down the wide emptiness of the Tithe House yard as they had been wont to do in the school playing fields. Perhaps the thought of the open windows of the Tithe House parlours and bedrooms was not quite absent from the minds of these two young Puritans - Puritans indeed, but young men withal and of as gallant a spirit as any Danby or Stanley in all the King's muster.

Since Hal Ludlow had been made a captain like himself, Harry Cromwell had regained all his old loyalty to their ancient friendship. It is difficult to exercise due military discipline over a comrade who a few months before cheerfully rubbed your nose in the mud! Harry Cromwell was not in the least jealous of Hal Ludlow. On the contrary, it was natural to resume allegiance to one who had always been his mentor and model, who was two years older than himself, and who in spite of "petticoating" and absenting himself without leave was still his oldest and dearest friend.

What they talked about is no great matter. After an hour or two they could not have told themselves. They were, indeed, both of them marking time and waiting for the call to supper.

But they were disappointed, neither Lady Molly

nor Bess Cromwell appeared, and the good motherly Dame, after she had served her end of the table, heaped a silver tray and carried it upstairs with her own hands. It was clear that the Lady Molly had been packed off to bed, and that there she was being duly "mothered" by a woman of much experience. Which would be a thing new and strange to the girl reared without family restraint, except that of going occasionally to her father to ask for money.

Supper was eaten in unwonted silence. The head of the house, after a brief word of greeting, sat moodily abstracted at the table-head. Good Dame Cromwell, indeed, bustled out and in. But Bridget, unbacked by her lively sister, kept a discreet silence, and the two young men seated side by side spoke low one to the other.

When Hal went forth into the night with Oliver's voice, lately uplifted in family devotion, still in his ears, he remarked, high above the court of the Tithe House, two windows glowing athwart the darkness. Shadows moved across and across, and through an open casement trilled a burst of gay laughter. Hal smiled sympathetically. He wished he had been there to join the mirth. Very likely they were laughing at him. But if so, it made no matter to Hal Ludlow, He was troubled with none of that super-sensitiveness which cannot bear to be laughed at. He knew that men did not laugh at him, and had a shrewd idea that in such matters women are much influenced by men's opinion.

He strolled slowly towards the Intendance, to which were consigned for the night the horses and cavaliers of the Hog Lane Troop. Hal Ludlow was not so absorbingly in love with Lady Molly that he could think of nothing else. He had known her all his life,

and in a certain way had always been in love with her - not to the extent of telling her so in set phrases, but only to that of immediate belligerence and personal attack upon any of his own sex who seemed inclined to infringe his rights of property.

So it was rather of the coming campaign in Lincolnshire that he was thinking, of riding side by side with his old friends of the Slepe Troop, of the council of the Captains where now he would have a place, and of the thousand Ironsides coming down upon the enemy swift and resistless - with the great Cromwellian shout, "The Sword of the Lord!" clearing the way before them.

He became conscious of something darker than the night which flitted in front, seen so vaguely that had he not been a man well armed and fearless by nature, he might have suspected some lurking assassin.

But when he came out into the open square opposite to his father's official residence, he saw that the figure was that of the gipsy girl who had so strangely crossed his path more than once.

'Neña - Neña la Fain,' he called out, and she answered to her name as a dog to its master.

'What is the matter?' he asked of her kindly, for he felt that the girl instinctively shrank from his eye. So as his manner was with women when he wished them to obey, he laid his strong hand upon her shoulder and wheeled her directly in front of him. His motto was, "For women older than yourself, all the forms and reverences, but as for the girls, lead them *tambours battants* - drums beating and colours flying." Which was very well for Captain Hal Ludlow in his dealings with his ancient playmate, Molly Woodham, but he had yet to learn that his

experience with one did not suffice for a knowledge of all. But as yet Master Hal was young, forceful, and remarkably arrogant in his dealings with women. And there is no need to hide the fact that his theory, such as it was, had served him well so far.

Neña la Fain trembled under the weight of his hand. She felt the warmth of his fingers through her thin dress.

'Captain,' she said, 'I would not have troubled you for myself, but Jacques the Wassailer lies dying on the Isle Jatte for want of a doctor, and the first I went to pushed me from his door, cursing my impudence and threatening me with the watch.'

'Ah, who was he?' demanded Hal, kindling not a little. The maid was as nothing under his hand and her eyes shone darkly. She seemed so helpless that she appealed to him, but the next words disabused him.

'I should have put my knife into him if he had been worth the trouble, but then I might have seen the inside of the guardhouse in earnest, and the Wassailer would die without a physician. So I thought of you - that you would surely know someone. There is a medicine - Jacques says, but it is very precious, but I have brought six golden plovers and half a Jacobus in gold to pay for it.'

Hal Ludlow knew the Isle Jatte. He had lain long nights in a ducking boat on its desolate borders and hidden himself to watch decoys along its winding creeks. It was a long road and to come and go would take the better part of the night. There was no one whom he could ask except - why, of course, their second regimental surgeon, Roy Lorraine, just returned from his laureation at the Paris school of

medicine. Lorraine lodged in the Cathedral Close, and thither, with a brief summons to the girl to follow him discreetly, Hal betook himself.

Go? Of course he would go if the girl could find the way. What did Hal Ludlow take him for? He was a surgeon, not an old wife.

And Lorraine fired questions at the girl from his window as she stood below in the darkness, dressing himself and gathering information all the time. Jacques Wassailer was hot - yes, very hot, and shook. ('Of course he would shake living on Isle Jatte!') But it was not just chills or ague - something worse. Oh, his skin was the colour of orange peel, was it? And, of course, the medicine he wanted was Jesuit's bark from Peru. He had not much of that. It cost dear, but Hal would go and rout out Samuel Tilling, the herbalist. He had always a great supply, and though he was a noisome tick, he would give credit to the son of the Commissioner of Parliament. Lorraine himself had not credit for three clipped farthings! How should he, on a bare shilling a day, and that mostly unpaid?

So Hal went off well pleased through the silent streets. Ely in the moonless night was like an enchanted city, not a heel on the pavements, not a light in a window, but from the end of one alley which looked upon the open country, far out on the marsh the ghostly flicker of some Will-o'-the-Wisp. The houses with their upshooting gables and beehive-topped staircases, the shutters tightly closed against the night air, took strange forms overhead, enormous and sepulchral, like a town stricken dead in a moment by some black death.

Hal, who had a reminiscence of Shakespeare upon him, called loudly, 'Ho, apothecary!' And the

sound of his voice came back sharply from the walls of the dark houses behind. Through the gap of a window-shutter protruded the wavering bell-mouth of a ducking gun.

‘Go away from there, brawling play-actors,’ called out the man of drugs from his chamber-window. ‘Shake not my door, neither rattle the rasping-pin, or a charge of good shot shall you have.’

‘Come down, you old thief,’ cried Hal; ‘think shame of yourself, Samuel, to lie like that. Your old blunder-buss has not smelt powder for forty years.’

‘I should know that voice, my young friend,’ creaked the voice above; ‘if you be a young gallant seeking his mercurial potion at this hour, I would have you know that I charge double after eleven of the clock - ’

‘Let me but get my fingers about your wizened thrapple, old weasel of the dyke, serpent’s egg, frog’s spawn, I’ll give you something worse than a filthy potion. I am Captain Harry Ludlow, the Commissioner’s son, and if you are not down in one minute I swear by my sword-hilt I will have you set in the stocks and pelted by the mob!’

‘I come - I come!’

And apothecary Samuel Tilling of Dorcas Alley came with such haste that his greasy flannel dressing-gown was closed only by the waist-cord, and his ropy, twisted throat, wagglng beard, and stork’s legs flitted and shifted in the light of the unsteady lantern which he held above his head that he might see the features of his visitor.

‘The Jesuit’s bark, Captain,’ he wheezed; ‘pray come inside - that is very rare and very precious, as doubtless your Honour knows. But I ask nothing better than your Honour’s signature - a note of hand

as it were - fifty silver pieces will buy a small quantity, on account of its rarity, but you shall have it, Captain, because of the respect I owe to you, and to your most worthy father.'

'Keep the rest of your words, Father Samuel, as one might say vulgarly, for the cooling of your porridge. I shall pay army prices in cash for the bark. Paymaster Sam Squire shall tax the amount and if it be charged too high, I promise you a sore back and a promenade at the cart tail through the town.'

The bark, with a double handful added by Hal for luck, was weighed and carefully done into a package for transport, and the apothecary in his perilous dressing-gown of dirty yellow accompanied them to the door, where he stood bowing over his smoky lantern. The night air tasted keen and sweet as they emerged from the musty atmosphere of powdered spices and desiccated bitumen which pervaded the apothecary's den.

Roy Lorraine was waiting for them at the door.

'You have the bark - how much? - why, you must have robbed the old man. How disgraceful, but when were soldiers other than plunderers?'

'Come on, man,' said Hal, 'since when have Scotsmen and Scots doctors been so particular? We must tramp to the boat.'

Neña had at first her hand firmly clasped about Hal's fingers, and seemed to drag him after her, but as soon as she had made quite sure that both men were coming, she loosened her grasp and sped ahead into the rank grass of the water meadows. Her well-accustomed feet made no sound, but the two men tramped like bullocks, and in so doing awakened the creatures of the fen. A great heron

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flapped clumsily up, from where he had been standing sentinel on one leg, a huddled and consumptive shadow against the grey water. Goat-suckers smote their great white wings together as they struck into the alder bushes where the pale fat moths congregate. Lapwings started up at the sound of footsteps and circled clamourously. The peewit sleeps more lightly than any other fen bird and is more suspicious and persistent. It startles all the others and sets them running. A hare rushed by and then another, and the white scuts of the rabbit lolloped by dozens into the dusk and are lost even before they have time to pass. The sedge warbler begins his imitations - the blackbird's flute followed by the triple triumph of the thrush's carol, "Hear me - hear me! Hear! Hear! Hear!" Then came the robin, the chaffinch, and the tit, all marvellously imitated, but all the work of one small mimic on the willow branch, the mocking bird of the fens.

The night about them was far less silent than in the sleeping city. In the water meadow ahead of them towards the Isle Jatte a crake told its name monotonously, and from among the bent grass, the white prickles, and the short bull's-wool heath, came the dry whirr of the grasshopper warbler. Halt! That rustle among the withies may be an adder or a concealed "Candisher" making his way towards the marsh smugglers from whom he hopes to beg or buy a passage to Holland. Three heads peered eagerly between the tail bullrushes, thick as a cranebrake. Something long and sinuous oared its way through the black water. The snake-like head was that of an otter, and the fish warned too late, fled to their pool depths with the loss of the plumpest patriarch of their number.

Twenty yards farther on, in a little covert of broom cunningly arranged, Neña la Fain showed them the boat. The doctor crouched in the stern, but Hal took an oar along with the girl. He placed himself under her orders.

'Straight out till we reach Stand-ground Creek,' she said, speaking low as if still among enemies; 'we can pole all the way. The pass is narrow, but then we can put about and row to Isle Jatte. We shall be in time for the tide. It comes to the flood about one o'clock and the geese float up and guzzle among the grass on the edge of the flat. Then I should have something for the doctor to carry home.'

'Do not trouble about the doctor - he is my friend and therefore yours!' said Hal, fending off the scrubby bushes of the canal with the butt of his oar. Neña was silent. It was pleasant thus to be assured of his friendship, yet in his voice her quick ear told her there was something lacking.

They turned into Stand-ground Creek from which the "broad" stretches away clear to the low brushwood of the Isle Jatte. The dry peaty ridges crowned with pine were over now - lost in the night. Only the water, the flowing tide, and the salt marshes on either hand made a morose and livid landscape which stretched to the horizon.

Neña rounded the spits of ooze and "slub" with practised ease. The sea grass, loved of fish, tickled the bottom of the boat as they slid over the swampy bars. Away on the far side of Grande Island a solitary light could be seen - the open door of Old Man Peter's hut, where doubtless he would be making ready for the morning's catch. He was, as Neña said, their nearest and, indeed, their only neighbour, but Peter was a roisterous man and a

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great breeder of game cocks in the days before the coming of the saints. Now, however, he had little to do except fish the water and bang off his gun at the ducks in the pools. Though they did say that sometimes he would call a main, and fight his red bantam rooster against the grey, all alone on the isle, with no one to look on the night but himself - whereby he swore that he had as great pleasure as when he got fifty pieces from the gentlemen of the cock-pit for the exhibition.

Before them stretched the water dead under the night stillness, but as the salt tide began to push up the scum, growing living again with the breath which the great outside sea breathed into it, the sea of breakers, of green waves shouldering each other, and the white wings of gulls. Here they were among brackish lagoons. Dead Men's Lanterns pulsed fitfully incandescent on either hand, and the doctor sniffed and grumbled, 'We shall have fever if we do not take care. Give me some of the bitter bark and take some on your tongue yourself.'

'A dose of Hollands will stand you in better stead,' said Hal, producing the silver flask which his father had given him. So they drank one after the other to wash down the bitter drug. Neña, chafing at the delay, refused both and continued to scull on her own account.

At last they came in sight of the Isle Jatte - a low purple bar of denser cloud to the eastward.

Presently they were nearer. The brushwood of the isle mounted higher. The girl told Hal to bring his oar inboard. She stood up balancing herself lightly in the prow and swaying from side to side as she paddled. A little jutting pier stole alongside, building itself up out of the blacker dark.

HAL O' THE IRONSIDES

'The Isle Jattel!' said the girl, holding the boat close in for them to land. She took the doctor's case and led the way.

And as they followed through the man-high scrub of willow bush and bog alder, over the lagoon came to their ears the distant mellow clamour of the Cathedral bells, striking midnight.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

BLIND MAN'S FERRY

'A galloping pulse, hot dry hands, tongue like smoked beef, and chills that shake the house - what, my friend, can any man make of that?'

'Marsh fever. Doctor?' said the Wassailer; 'no, Doctor, I have had marsh fever too often not to know that when it comes - besides, 'tis not the time of year, early spring and late autumn I get the shakes as regular as seed time and harvest. But the March winds and the ice on the pools drive out the poison. Neither cold nor heat can the chills abide, but this is worse and grips deeper, Doctor. I doubt it be my call from a far land.'

'Nonsense, man,' said the Scot, 'we will have you right and fit again as fast as a kitten frisks. My friend Captain Ludlow of the Seventh Troop has brought you enough of the precious Jesuit's Bark all the way from South America to physic a sick elephant. Little demoiselle here will see that you take it regularly - mind, three times a day, and oftener, till you hear your ears buzzing as if bluebottles had got into them. That and good Hollands will see you through. Hillo, who is this?'

The door opened and two men came in, whereupon the hermit of Isle Jatte turned his head with a gesture of involuntary annoyance.

'Well, Wassailer,' said the cracked voice of the smaller man, who wore a kind of cloak like a thatched umbrella about his neck and throat, 'I came over to bring you a bit of fish just fresh out of

the net, and to present my friend - why, where is he?'

He turned about, but the taller man had slunk back again into the circle of the night. Old Peter went to the door and called, but his voice only roused the wading birds along the ragged isle-edges. They rose in clouds and circled curiously about the fowler's hut. Old Man Peter, the fighting-cock breeder of Grand Isle, came back into the room with a cracked cackle of laughter.

'Can't abear the military - them as is in authority, as the good book sez. My friend was frightened by your helmet and war-gear, Captain. He has had the misfortune, like many other gentlemen, not to be quite sure which side he is on in this war, which naturally makes him careful. But he will come again. He has taken quite a fancy to your little maid. He has noticed her at the market many a morning.'

'Thank you, Peter,' said the sick man, 'you mean well. But your ways are not my ways, nor those of your friends those of my little maid. I will thank you to see that she is left alone.'

'Aye,' said Hal savagely, 'and you had better take that as said once and for all, Master Cockfighter of Grande Isle. I am Captain Ludlow, son of the Parliament Commissioner, and I tell you plainly, my father and Colonel Cromwell know all about your bog-trotting shebeen over there. You make it a refuge for traitors, sir, and we are almost at the end of our patience.'

The old man combed his mud-coloured beard nervously. 'There is some error,' he said. 'I shall go and see Colonel Cromwell this very day. By my faith of an honest man who earns a pittance by supplying the forces with fish and fowl, I have never had

anyone about my place unfriendly to the Cause. Of course, when an odd time I do fight a main of birds, many gentlemen come from the three counties. Can I ask them all their politics before they set foot in my pit? I would soon get a quarter yard of steel through me if I did. Come, sir, be reasonable.'

'Ah,' said Hal, with his most insolent expression. 'Did you not know that the fighting of cocks for money was against the statute?'

'In market towns, yes, or where there are troops - on account of the young gentlemen betting - but not on the Isle Grande. But why should you not come and see for yourself. You have the figure of a most noble young cocker. I know a gentleman when I see one. We have very fine company at the Grande Isle, I do assure you - why, only three months ago we had Master Dick himself - such a fine young gentleman with a skin like a lady's and his handkerchief scented when he pulled it from his ruffled sleeve - it was like scattering violets on May Day, so sweet it were.'

A sharp pang ran through Hal's heart - fear lest he understood only too well.

'What Dick?' he demanded fiercely, 'young Dick Lucy of Charlote?'

'No, then, soft - ee - there,' said the cocker, 'no rough-riding Candishers among my gentlemen. What Dick, sez you? Why, who should it be but Master Crummle, as fine a young spark of the game as ever you would wish to see twirling a double gold piece on his thumb nail.'

'Idle Dick, by glory!' exclaimed the Scotsman, 'absent without leave from my Lord Essex and his regiment.'

'Perhaps not without his mother's leave,'

whispered Hal, in the doctor's ear. 'I must frighten this fellow.'

And he turned upon Old Peter, who having launched his arrow, now stood with a smile of sycophantish triumph at the corners of his long ill-scraped upper lip.

'See here, fellow,' he said, in a tone of military brusqueness, 'if you want to be hanged, you have only to let that come to the ears of his father. I give you warning. A rope you shall have, my man, and no questions asked.'

'I will tell nothing. It would be very poor advice to my pocket to tell tales of any gentlemen who come to Isle Grande for a little innocent diversion. But Master Dick made no secret of his coming. There were a hundred gentlemen on Grand Isle, besides collegians. Any of their tongues might wag, and am I to be held responsible? Ha, listen!'

He stole to the door and stood with his hand behind his ear. Then an expression of triumph twitched his lips and his great goat's beard wagged with excitement. He beckoned feverishly with the right hand. Hal stepped to the door and listened. The cool purple darkness which circled them told the eye nothing. But from far away, every note distinct, came the bugle-call from the distant town - first the *reveille* and then, immediately on the back of that, the 'Boot and Saddle.' Every note was distinct, but diminished to the daintiest fairy echo, a bugle blown to summon True Thomas by the trumpeters of the elfin Queen.

'If that be not Levi Allister, music to the Slepe Troop, may I never touch feather or fin more!'

It came again, each note ringing light, clear, and delicate, but to the ear of Hal Ludlow distinct as fate

knocking at the door. Then with a 'Hallali' of joyous sound, the bugles of the other troops took up the summons. It was a general muster and he not there!

Pulses beat in his head and he would have run for the shore, but that he knew himself upon an isle girt about by lagoons.

'The alarm can only be because of some foray in the north,' said the doctor, who had been thinking the matter over; 'perhaps you can yet overtake them.'

'They must cross behind Blind Man's Ferry,' said the girl; 'a guard has been posted there watching the bridge of boats ever since the return from Gainsborough.'

'You may be right,' groaned Hal, 'but what good can that do me? I shall miss my troop. They must ride without me - and then all is over with my Captaincy.'

The girl became at once alert and vivid with life.

'It is my fault,' she cried, 'but we shall save you yet. Come with me and we will cut the marsh at the Ferry. Wolfenden Creek leads to Blind Man's crossing where is the bridge of boats. The flood is running a good five miles an hour, besides what we can make by pulling. We shall have the start of them. Come!'

And she pulled at his sleeve almost fiercely.

'Go,' said the doctor, 'I shall wait till your boat comes back. It does not matter for me, Chief Surgeon Baker will be with the troops, and Colonel Cromwell never takes more than one man when he makes a dash.'

He came to the door with Hal and walked a few steps with him, so as to be out of earshot.

'I saw the fellow who slunk away so quickly. He

was wearing your troop's coat and badge. I wager he is the man who sent the bullet at your head. If you come up with your Hog Laners get your senior corporal to call the roll. Good night and good luck.'

Hal was soon in the boat. After the bright light of the hut, the blackness seemed denser, but Neña la Fain never hesitated a moment. She launched herself into a maze of lanes and cross-ways till she reached a wider creek through which the salt water from the sea was rushing with a soft continuous rustle of reeds and whispering bent grass.

'Wolfenden Creek,' the girl explained, handing him a pair of sculls. 'Row - I will keep her head right.' Which she did with a steering oar over the stern. She did not speak again but stood alert and easy, leaning her weight on her oar and taking the boat where she wished it to go in spite of the imperious pour of water. Landmarks were low and to Hal's untrained eye almost invisible. Sometimes they shaved the bank so closely that a little shoot of broom flicked his cheek, dropped a colourless petal or two, and then dropped sharply back like an unbent bow.

The higher they went the more rapid seemed the current, till presently they were whirling along. The bushes on the creek's edge fled behind as trees and hedges do during a midnight gallop. Hal's oars would hardly bite so swift was the current, till finally he drew them in lest one or other should tangle the boat or be snapped off in the impetuous rush of the tide. But except for an occasional eddy, where the mud and scum boiled up in oily bubbles and chattered under the keel so that she danced dangerously, the boat went smoothly enough.

'Steady there! Back water with your left - hard -

hard'

Hal obeyed the order just in time to escape shipwreck on a long dark embankment which crossed the fairway in front of them. Something told him that they were at Blind Man's Ferry and that this was no other than Colonel Cromwell's bridge of boats laid down after Gainsborough Fight.

The boat swerved aside easily and lightly, glided behind a brow of turf and brought up in a little backwater. Neña put aside the reeds, drew the boat to the verge, and fastened her to the stiff roots of the heath which over-spread the place.

The air smelt different here, lighter, stronger, less salt. The wolds were already making themselves felt. Neña la Fain gave her hand to her passenger, and in a moment they found themselves among the birch copse and straggling pines marking the beginning of the sand stretches which lie between the fen and the wolds.

They were at the bridge and Hal was trying to make out by the appearance of the road whether the regiment had already passed. But it was dark and, even if he had seen all that there was to see, the constant passage of troops had worn the pathway into mere trampled sand.

Neña discovered a reason for better hope, however. From a little knoll of dwarf pine by the waterside they could look down upon the bridge. At either end a couple of torches flared murkily, while sentinels moved back and forward guarding the passage, their helmets and breastplates glittering in the ruddy glow of the flaming pine knots.

No, the troops were yet on their way. He was in time, and Hal was thanking God when a fear came upon him, gripping his heart, that they might be

riding south to attack Danbury Towers. But after all he decided that this was unlikely. For the Colonel would certainly have mentioned the matter to him, seeing that he had just come thence. It must be a sudden alarm, a messenger riding in through the midnight, with some tale of a terrified country-side, of smoking and roofless villages.

The night lay black and still from horizon to horizon. Down by the bridge, however, there was a steady to and fro, a clink of accoutrements, and once on the other side of the creek a horse neighed.

But presently Neña, who till now had been silent, grasped him by the sleeve.

'I hear them coming,' she whispered close to his ear, 'then you will not be angry with me. I can go back happy to nurse the Wassailer?'

'I am not angry, Neña; how should I be angry for that which you could not help?'

'Listen - listen,' she cried, 'your head close to the ground.' And then Hal became conscious that the unstable earth of the fen was all tremulous, throbbing and humming like a smitten harp-string. Yes, they were coming. The lights multiplied at the bridge end. Presently the hoofs of the first horses resounded hollow on the planking. Then came a pause, the first troop had passed over in safety. Rumble - rumble - these were the field-pieces which were always taken when the brigade moved out for more than forty-eight hours. It was then to be an expedition of some duration. Again the tramp of troop horses and soon the Ironsides (with Oliver at their head, a majestic figure cut in blackness) were defiling past.

First came the Slepe Troop, which on account of its early enrolment had the right to that position,

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then the St. Neot's men, which ought to have been Idle Dick's had he not been sent in disgrace to my Lord Essex.

'Thank God, I have yet a chance,' muttered Hal to himself. His own seventh troop would be the last. He would certainly find a spare horse in the command. He crouched behind a bushy alder looking into the doubtful shadows, scarce conscious of the slim little figure which crouched beside him or the touch of that small hand so warm within his. He was thinking of strong warlike things - things in which little Neña la Fain had no part - his career - his command, his general. He watched the seventh troop disengage itself from the bridge. That, he thought, must be Hog Lane. Black and sinuous the column made its way up the pathway of trampled sand.

At last they came. He could see little Zered. He could see his own horse, his Hereward, led in his place. Zered had not forgotten him. He started down the slope and with one easy spring he was in the saddle. Zered let go the rein. Hereward turned to bite his master's leg in a friendly fashion, while behind, their Captain being restored to them, all Hog Lane rejoiced.

But under the scrub thickets a little figure watched. He had never said good-bye, but her heart was too proud of what she heard and saw to care.

He, the man she loved, riding his great horse, his white plume blowing out on the night air, his sword clanking against the sabretache - and then the relentless march of the squadrons blotting out the silent stars.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE HARDENING OF HOG LANE

After this there was no rest for the Ironsides till the great fight was over. The business of the war pressed fiercely. The King gained mightily. From north, south, and west came daily tidings of his successes. Hopton had swept the south. Rupert was everywhere in the Midlands. The traitor Hotham had delivered up Hull and the road to London lay open.

But between them and victory over the Houses lay one enemy whose force they had not yet tried - the New Model regiments raised by the Governor of Ely, Colonel Cromwell. But the secret had been well kept. Only Hotham suspected.

'Above all things,' he wrote, when he proposed to deliver up Lincoln, 'Colonel Cromwell must be prevented from riding hither,' his way with traitors was known to be an exceedingly short one.

The swords of Hal's seventh troop mowed a bloody swathe down Slash Lane on the day of Winceby Fight. They cleared all Lincolnshire. They rode with Colonel Cromwell all the way to Gloucester. They captured strengths and country-houses by the dozen - Danbury among the number, lying deserted with no man to defend it, save stout old Hepburn, who, being offered a choice between the gallows and an employment with Fairfax's gunners, very wisely decided for the artillery, where he began most philosophically to do his duty and organise his charge like the stout old soldier of fortune he was.

Once my Lord Woodham Walter came to Ely to

see his daughter, riding in unawares and finding her with sleeves tucked up and shortened kirtle, learning how to make shortcake. Whereat, great man that he was, he stood under the portal of the passage door, and, clapping his hands together, cried, 'Bravo, Moll, this is a better sight for a father's eyes than if I had caught you riding, booted and spurred, by the side of Prince Robber.'

Molly, with the stirring stick in her hand, turned to her visitor and said, 'Better for you, father, for in that case I should have caught you!' My Lord Woodham Walter, after taking counsel, brief and to the point with that exceedingly busy man, Colonel Cromwell, Governor of Ely City, and after smoking much excellent tobacco with his friend, Mr. Ludlow, the Parliamentary Commissioner, decided that he could not do better than leave his daughter where she was, among the lively young people of the Tithe House, which stood open-doored all day long, filled as to its great yard with the rolling of waggon wheels and the clank and clatter of arms, the comings and goings of staff-captains and the breathless entries and exits of gallopers bearing missives from this post and that. Within the house, too, there was stir and bustle. Idle Dick had taken it upon himself to ride with the Slepe Troop as a private soldier. His mother had bought him (secretly, as she supposed) a horse and outfit - and Colonel Cromwell, alert but saying nothing, grimly awaited the outcome. But he conveyed to Cornet Sam Squire a hint that Idle Dick was to be kept remarkably busy, and to Captain Harry Cromwell that he was to overlook no breach of discipline in his troop, no matter who the offender might be.

'If you mean Dick,' the lad had answered, 'I will

thrash him till he can't stand if he so much as cocks a feather at me.'

'Well, lad, he is your brother, and what is more to the purpose your mother's son; but first of all, if he is to ride with the Slepe Troop, he must submit to discipline, which you are there to see enforced.'

As for Captain Hal Ludlow he was kept busy in the north all the winter season. Colonel Cromwell was hardening Hog Lane, and during all these weary months he used them mercilessly in the business of pacifying the country.

He would come into the red-hung winter parlour, where his wife and daughters were sitting with books and workbaskets in the lights of the candles, and with their feet towards the cheerful blaze.

'A good night to you, good folk,' he would say; 'and whom have you had to see you to-day?'

It was usually his favourite Bess who was quickest to reply.

'Oh, father, we had a visit from Hal Ludlow; he came to see us all, but of course Molly in particular (because he calls her his "prisoner" and asks to see her chains and fetters!). But he had hardly begun to tell us what he had been doing, when that horrid little Zered Tuby came in to tell us that the troop was ordered to Lincoln City. We bade Zered begone and leave his Captain in peace, for Hal was weary with much riding. But he would not, and poor Hal must go. I would have given Zered a box on the ears, and I did give Hal a hearty kiss - yes, I did - and I am not ashamed. So did mother and all of us.'

'Poor young man, indeed,' said Cromwell, gravely sympathetic, 'to be snatched away from such sweet-meats.'

'Oh, if he had stayed he would not have had the

kisses - '

'So perhaps on the whole Master Hal is better off as it is,' commented Oliver, pinching his daughter's ear, for Bess was ever his comrade.

'Oh, but we had a thousand things to ask him. He has been away for full three months and we have only seen him twice - and both times he hath been swept off before he had time to answer a hundredth part of our questions.'

'My Lord Fairfax is a very hard general,' said Cromwell, with mock sympathy. 'I suffer from his restlessness daily myself. He is always finding something new for me to do.'

'Father, could you not speak to him for Hal and Harry? The poor lads grow lean as rake handles. Why not let Dick have a troop and go out in his turn?'

'He is helping Sam Squire with the accounting and is more use to us there than commanding any number of troops.'

'Richard is a good lad, and I will not have him spoken against in this house,' put in Dame Cromwell.

Colonel Cromwell patted his wife's comfortable shoulder. 'Dick shall not suffer for being a good son to his mother. Length of days shall he have, but he is less fitted for the hard tumble of battling with Rupert and the Newark rough riders than either of our two Hals.'

'Richard hath much heart and a delicate nature,' said Dame Elizabeth with an air of offended dignity.

'The trouble lies just there,' said Cromwell; 'if the Cambdeners and Rupert's men were all as delicate-natured as Dick, there might be some use sending him to deal with them, but you see they are plain

robbers and strong-handed marauders. So rough, stout, honest fellows like Hal Ludlow and Harry Cromwell must go to argue with them - not at all delicately.'

'Oh, husband, is it true that my Henry has killed a man in fight and hanged prisoners?'

'They were plunderers and deserved no better!'

'Still it is true that he hanged them, and he was such a pretty baby!'

Colonel Cromwell turned away to hide a smile. He humoured his wife and did not argue with her.

'He has his orders for all he has done,' he said; 'a soldier must obey orders.'

'Whose order had Harry?' persisted his wife. 'Whose orders caused a sweet boy like my Harry to be set to doing the work of the common hangman?'

'Mine!' thundered the head of the house explosively, suddenly putting an end to all discussion. 'Bridget, bring the Books for the evening worship of God.'

Hal Ludlow was wholly happy during this period of his life. He was young and weather-hardened. Hog Lane became a seasoned troop, working together like well-oiled machinery. He had quite forgotten the sweet carelessness of summer and the idle days on the edge of Crow Wood which had so nearly cost him his life. His men he now knew one by one. There was no coward among them - how could there be a traitor? Certainly the doctor must have been mistaken.

He met him on his way to the Tithe House the night when the troop was summoned to the relief of Lincoln. He had hailed him to ask after Neña and the Wassailer, and also to give him a dozen gold pieces to expend for their benefit if he found it

possible or necessary. The Huguenot was a difficult object of charity, but the Edinburgh doctor well understood his feeling - a common one among his own country-folk. But he lied most boldly in prescribing medical comforts, and in declaring that they must return thanks to Providence and to the Parliament whose servant he was for the pension which the Wassailer consented to receive.

He had given what help he could, but he told the Wassailer, with the bluntness of his race, that doctor's drugs even of the best would be of little good so long as the Huguenot remained among the dank thickets of the Isle Jatte.

'Man, three months on the hills would do ye more good than a whole apothecary's shop - what am I saying? Three months - one month would do the business. There's no firm soil here. If ye stamp your foot, the island rocks on the rotten water beneath. Never an honest burn running clitter-clatter over the pebbles and the very grass neither glad nor wholesome - and all as weary as Doomsday morning!'

'But how are we to live away from the fens?' asked the Wassailer. 'The birds are here - the fishes are in the hand of God. There are good markets near by where we can sell them?'

The doctor lifted up his hands with a hopeless gesture.

'I don't know where you can live,' he announced a little brutally; 'but I know very well where you will die if you do not flit before long!'

Hal went away sadly enough and often thought of the lonely couple on the Isle Jatte - the man slowly dying of marsh fever and the girl bound sooner or later to go the same way.

HAL O' THE IRONSIDES

But he was soon in the midst of his marchings and fightings again - night surprises and sudden onfalls in desperate winter dawns, white volleys of musketry, and King's horsemen who must be instantly charged and ridden down. For times were changed indeed. No more mere summer campaignings, with my Lord Essex lying months inactive while the enemy swarmed and ravaged up to his very outposts. Colonel Cromwell taught his men during these months that there is no weather too bitter in which to make war. If the enemy was to be reached, no time was better than the long blackness of a winter night. No charge was more certainly successful than that made through the whirling drifts of an easterly snowstorm.

More than once Hal dismounted his men, lined hedges with musketry fire as a dripping enemy toiled heavily up hill in the face of a tempest of rain, waited till they had turned about, and then remounting and reforming his troop, charged like a thunderbolt, and so conquered.

Conquered! Rather so, indeed. For by this time the twenty troops of Cromwell's regiments had come to this of it, that they never thought of failing. They knew they would conquer. The enemy also knew it, and so the issue of each event was certain. The Ungodly trembled at the name of Hog Lane and, remembering certain former escapades, wondered what Hal Ludlow was doing among the Anabaptist prophets.

Rupertian plunderers, long accustomed to the license of locusts, were now hanged upon convenient trees, riddled with bullets against opposite walls, or more frequently driven in, hungry and unsatisfied, upon the main army of the Robber

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Prince. He was hungry also - angry too, and disgusted with the new turn of affairs. Everyone knew that soon an outbreak on his part was to be apprehended. Twenty thousand men could not swagger in idleness along Oxford High Street, gaunt and hungry bellied, merely to see the college windows lighted and the loyal fellows going in to dine. If work was not to be found for these haggard riders there would be the devil to pay one day not far off in the college butteries.

To Colonel Cromwell and the wise cool heads who acted under him (for the most part in perfect independence), Oxford became the puzzle which needed solution. What was going on there? Of what were the King's men thinking? On what were they living? When and whither would they march?

Externally the King had never been so prosperous. But though Essex lay inactive, while Manchester like a good Presbyterian prayed for the Scots, the new Eastern Association troops knew the King's weakness.

All that winter the fighting troops of Cromwell's regiments were kept moving and hardening themselves. The fens were frozen. Sufficient snow had fallen to make every canal an admirable highway of ice.

All South Lincoln from Lindsey to the verges of Kesteven and Holland were swept bare as the palm of a man's hand. Wherever the King's men were met with, day or night, they found themselves charged and swept off the face of the earth, in a hurly-burly of barking muskets and flashing swords - the feet of galloping horses in pursuit falling upon hard earth with the thunder of surf on a pebbly beach.

Hal Ludlow became as weather-beaten and

bronzed a veteran as any general could wish to see, silently obedient mostly, but when left to himself full of resource, and when asked for an opinion, giving it with quick self-respect,

'A precious lad!' Colonel Cromwell had said of him to Ireton, 'There is now hardly a hair to choose between Hog Lane and the Slepe Troop itself.'

But Master Hal himself was not by any means so satisfied, which was the best of all signs.

He had been victorious. Castles and defended manors had fallen to him, but he had found no men within, captured few prisoners of note, and even the St. Neot's men, with whom Idle Dick now rode (the Slepe Troop having cast him quietly out), triumphed openly over them when it came to the division of spoil.

For this last Hal cared little, but he spoke bitterly to his lieutenant of the way in which they were allowing themselves to be distanced.

'There is a traitor somewhere,' he declared to little Zered; 'our plans are known to the enemy. Only last week when we surprised Belvoir, we fell upon a hornet's nest sent from the Newark garrison. Yet the intention was not known outside the troop, and to them only a bare twelve hours.'

'Somebody is certainly a very good guesser,' said Zered. 'But I cannot believe in treachery. Every man fights well and only cowards are traitors. But let us have in the rolls and take the men name by name.'

But they could make nothing of it. 'A few men may be lukewarm and careless in religious observances,' here Zered cocked his eye at his Captain, 'but they have always stood to it stoutly when blows were going and steel was flashing.'

The man who brought in the muster sheets, Doe

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Royds - now on account of his courage and bodily strength doing duty as guard corporal - stood at a distance and watched with sombre eye the discussion he could not hear.

He had in his belt at that moment a rouleau of gold pieces which had never been paid out of the regimental treasury. But though he knew that on account of his late and irregular recruiting he was bound to be an object of suspicion, he moved no muscle, but stood to grave attention at the proper distance while his officers were consulting together, altogether impassive and apparently conscience-free.

Zered made a mistake. It takes a great deal of very real courage to be a traitor of the right sort - one, that is, whose information is worth paying for. He risks ignominious death every moment from the side he is betraying, while from the other he has nothing to expect except money. He knows that he will be disowned if taken, and despised if he escapes. Yet there are men who undertake all this and carry it through with a sort of fierce pride to be thus juggling with the gallows or the firing party. And of such was Doe Royds.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE LAST OF ISLE JATTE

On the Isle Jatte winter had slain the fever of the marshes, but the bitter season sealed the ponds and made shooting difficult for a man as weakened by malaria as the Wassailer. But Neña la Fain, having now to be trapper as well as saleswoman, took blunderbuss and powder-horn in the old fowler's place.

A new freshness sent the colour to her olive cheeks, rounded her figure delicately, and with her wild locks tightly banded about her head Neña added (as it seemed quite suddenly) a full cubit to her stature.

The latent youth within her was breaking bounds, and she never went to market now without receiving tokens of admiration, impertinent or respectful after their kind, to which she had been previously unaccustomed. On more than one occasion the roisterous hermit of Grande Isle, Old Man Peter, had brought with him to Jatte Isle the soldier who had retreated so precipitately at the sight of Doctor Lorraine and the Captain of the Seventh Troop.

Neña did not like the man, but she quite understood his anxiety to escape the capacity for anger she had surprised once or twice in the eyes of Captain Ludlow, and which had been one of Colonel Cromwell's principal reasons for appointing him. For a captain of Ironsides without a capacity for wrath would have been useless indeed. Neña la Fain, ever willing to screen a culprit, never for a moment dreamed of delivering the soldier to justice. She went

about her work and left him in the hut talking with the Wassailer and Old Man Peter. But the word to the doctor was not spoken, and Hal Ludlow she never saw but once during all that winter. He was leading his troop towards their quarters at the Intendance, the horses plodding wearily with drooping heads, and the men with snow crusted upon their shoulders and blown into the plies of their huge grey cloaks.

But the friend who came to see the Wassailer along with Old Man Peter was no other than acting troop corporal Doe Royds of the Seventh Troop, and the secret friend whom he came out to meet was his old master, Silas Seale, of Boreham Barns, Quaker and spy.

It was no wonder, therefore, that between Isle Jatte and Grande Isle a very burbled skein had been reeled up, almost impossible to unravel.

If Neña had had the least idea that such a man could in any way have harmed her Captain Hal, white-plumed and clad in steel, she would have laid information immediately, but to her Hal seemed a hero invincible, and the more so that each market day she made a pilgrimage to the town house, where on a board were placarded up all the exploits of the troops on active service in the government of the Isle of Ely.

She was standing before the sheet on which was written: "7th Troop, Captain Henry Ludlow: taking of Wisby House; dispersal of two troops of Newark foragers under Ensign Cockerill! Capture of thirty men, ten horses, and much provender - wounded in the troop, Oak and Le Blond. Recommendations for gallantry in action, Gordon Ewell and Corporal Royds."

How was it possible for Neña to suspect so brave a man? There was that in the eyes of Doe Royds which she instinctively avoided, but she could not help looking at him with respect as one recommended for bravery by her own Captain Hal, who better than any knew what it was to be brave.

As she stood there a man passed slowly by, and then struck by the immobility of the young figure standing in front of the army reports board, he turned and laid a hand on her shoulder. Neña looked up to find a tall old man in long Geneva cloak of rustling silk, a high-crowned broad-brimmed hat and under it fine white hair falling to his shoulders. Neña knew vaguely that this must be Doctor Peter Fisher, the great Presbyterian divine, who, in the time of Laud's greatness, had been expelled from Cambridge. He had taken refuge in Ely and was now pastor of the High Church, where he was listened to as an oracle.

'Why, little one,' he said, touching her head paternally, 'have you a brother or a sweetheart among the wounded? I have seen you here every market day.'

Neña shook her head. She came to sell wild fowl and fish, she said. She lived on Isle Jatte with an old man who had been kind to her.

'Do you mean Jacques the Huguenot?'

'Yes, the Wassailer - he has been very ill. The surgeon says he will die before the summer if he does not go to a higher place where the air and water are wholesome.'

'Come into my house,' said the minister, after a moment's thought. 'We must not let a fellow-religionist die if we can help it. They were kind to me once in his country. Do you follow me to my study?'

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So Neña followed the stately Doctor of Divinity to a door with a great brass knocker which shone like gold upon the panel. He opened it with a small key and let them both into a wide hall filled with warmth from a great fire of logs which burned upon huge andirons.

Another moment and by the opening of a door Neña found herself in the most marvellous place she had ever seen in her life, the theologian's study - rare books, in serried rows all about it, their backs giving off a kind of golden clarity of light, mellow and soothing to every lover of letters, but simply amazing to a wild girl like Neña la Fain.

Yet she had within her an instinctive love of books. She read and re-read with avidity the few books which Jacques the Wassailer had brought with him - the *Chronicle of the League* in six dumpy volumes, the big folio *History of Provence*, with the pictures and armorial bearings, the French Genevan Bible, identical in type and arrangement with that famous one of 1560 published by the English exiles in their own tongue. But after all what were a few battered volumes tossed about in a wanderer's sea chest to this great four-square enclosure of books?

The minister struck a gong by the door. A kindly-featured elderly woman came upstairs drying her hands on a towel.

'This is the daughter of a Protestant brother, exiled for conscience' sake upon Isle Jatte. Take her and make her comfortable till I return.'

He took up his high-crowned felt hat, planted it upon his white locks, and staff in hand sallied out. He turned his steps first towards the Intendance, where he found Mr. Commissioner Ludlow laboriously passing and signing the reports prepared

for him by his pay and forage clerks. With him was another gentleman, who sate in the fireplace with a long Dutch pipe, warming his hands at the blaze and puffing complaisantly up the wide chimney.

'A good day to you. Doctor,' said the Commissioner heartily. For he was an elder in the High Church, as became every good Presbyterian of note in Ely City. 'This is my friend and fellow-elder, my Lord Woodham Walter - whatever you have to say can be said before him.'

The stately theologian bowed. Lord Woodham Walter rose, put away his pipe, and held out his hand.

'I had the happiness of hearing you preach on Sunday,' he said; 'that day the wall was daubed with no untempered mortar!'

The doctor had preached in the hearing of Colonel Cromwell, and as it were under his nose, a most faithful sermon against the Sects which the great soldier was understood to favour, Independents, Brownists, Baptists, and Anabaptists.

'I only spoke the message as it was given to me,' said Doctor Peter Fisher.

'I would that all men had as faithful a tongue and as clear a vision,' said my Lord Woodham Walter; 'but I detain you from your business.'

And without any further apology he resumed his low stool of black oak set within the great fireplace, and began to draw away at his pipe, leaving the two gentlemen to speak together by the great desk where Mr. Commissioner had been writing. Doctor Fisher told the story of Jacques the Huguenot exile of Isle Jatte, as far as he knew it. The man was dying of chronic marsh fever. The surgeon declared he would not see the summer heats, yet he could live nowhere

else in all that region. He had been a fisher and bird catcher on the salt lakes of Provence. He was too old and too shaken to learn a new trade. It was likely, indeed, that transplantation to a town would be as fatal as continued residence on Jatte Island.

The Parliamentary Commissioner had a mind that worked slowly. He had, he said, nothing to offer except about the barns and stables of the Intendance, or in his counting-house in Lombard Street, but as these seemed barred, he did not see what he could suggest.

Up jumped my Lord Woodham Walter, his pipe falling neglected against the brick wall of the chimney corner.

‘Heavens and earth, man,’ he exclaimed, ‘but you are of small device to be a Parliament member. I always knew that we of the upper house could beat you, man, though God knows little enough attention is paid to what we say.’

‘You are all too busy keeping our armies idle,’ retorted the Commissioner, with a grin, which showed that the subject was no new one.

‘Tut, Ludlow, you never find a jest but you ride it to death out of sheer surprise at your own wit. But I have something to propose to your Wassailer better than forage guard or stable boy. You have heard of our famous Osea Island - no, of course not, how could a Parliament man hear of anything which did not lie between Westminster and the Tower Hamlets? But Osea is part of my estate in Essex. It lies out from Maldon in the full wash of the tides. It is healthy as the German Ocean. My late guard ran off to Oxford during the disturbances - that wretch of a girl of mine ought to be whipped. The place and house are at your friend’s service. Fish and fowl

there are in plenty and no fever within scores of miles. There is a boat which he can sail, a couple of skiffs besides, and I shall pay him the same wages as my late rascal.'

Doctor Peter bowed his stateliest thanks to the emphatic little nobleman. A bargain was struck, and the minister of the High Church hastened back to find Neña comfortably installed by the kitchen fire and in talk with his housekeeper.

'I will come with you to see your father,' he announced as both the girl and the woman rose simultaneously to their feet.

The elder cried out against such a venture - his health - the time of year, the inclemency of the weather, the shortness of the winter days - all were vainly invoked as reasons why he should not stir from home. The doctor was going, the doctor would go!

They went by hard-bitten paths through the winter woods, where the leaves crackled crisp under foot, many of them ice-covered and shining. Neña's young shoulder bore up the old man's hand, and with his stout oaken staff in the other he made brave progress. Only at the point of the Isle could they cross, for there the tides had kept the water free and the ice in motion. They arrived at last, and found the Wassailer preparing supper for Neña on her return. The old Huguenot, by race and training an admirer of order and decency, drew up his long lean body to salute the great preacher and notable man of God.

Solemnly with upraised hand Doctor Peter invoked a blessing upon the humble shelter of clay and wattle. He could not have done more nobly for White Hall or St. James's.

Then he sat down and began to speak, sweeping away doubt, objection, and difficulty in the flow of his argument. It was dark before the anxieties of the Wassailer could be set at rest. But at last he declared that he was ready to go to Osea Island and would serve my Lord faithfully to the best of his ability. Snow also had begun to fall, and as the signs were those of a three days' storm which might block the Isle for weeks, Doctor Peter ordered the Wassailer to pack up his most precious belongings, and return with him to his house in Ely till such time as the remainder of the household gear and hunting traps, the nets and tackle could be recovered. It was past eleven of the clock when Mistress Martha Vines, standing on the storm-beaten threshold of the presbytery, went indoors without a word of welcome, her anxiety concerning her master turning instantly into resentment as soon as she knew him safe. She went into the kitchen and prepared a foot-bath dusted thick with mustard, which she carried to the doctor's bedroom, and compelled him to sit down in his dressing-gown while she peeled off a pair of perfectly dry socks with vicious jerks, exclaiming against men who would follow any run-the-hedge for the sole purpose of causing work and worry to honest people. Then she inserted his feet one after the other into the mustard bath, wholly unmoved by his protestations that she might just as well have thrust them between the bars of the grate.

'I have stood the Star Chamber and in the pillory, but honestly, Mistress Martha, this is worse than either.'

He submitted, however, and presently, re-hosed and warmly vested, he was allowed to go down

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to entertain his guests.

CHAPTER TWENTY

MARSTON MOOR

In the North the armies were gathered. All a summer's day they had watched each other, the Parliament and the Scots upon the ridge, and upon the open moor towards York all that was most renowned and gallant of that England which stood for the King.

Newcastle's famous Whitecoats, who had sworn to dye their uniforms in the enemy's blood, Porter's foot, my Lord Goring's horse, and as Commander-in-Chief over all, the Prince Rupert, with his brilliant division of cavaliers which had never yet known defeat.

Rupert knew that the most famous generals of the Parliament were in front of him - Leven, Leslie, Crawford, and the two Fairfaxes, father and son, but for him only one man counted.

'Is Cromwell among you?' he asked a prisoner, who was brought before him. 'Where is he posted?'

The man showed the extreme left of the enemy's position above the village street. Along the smooth verge of the hill shone the steel "pots," the white feathers and red coats of the Ironsides of the Eastern Association,

'Will they fight?' demanded Rupert.

'Aye,' said the man, who had seen Gainsborough and Winceby, 'wherever Colonel Cromwell is they always fight.'

'Go and tell your Cromwell that if he will fight, he shall have fighting enough.'

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'If it please God,' said Cromwell, when he had listened to the message, 'so shall he!'

Hal was posted in the very centre of the line with all his Hog Laners behind him. Right and left were the Slepe Troop and the St. Neot's men. Only a few hundred yards divided the armies after Rupert had brought his cavaliers to the ground where he was at last to measure swords with Cromwell.

It was weary work under the blazing July sun, but Hog Lane was conscious of its responsibilities. At last that was going to happen for which they had endured such rigours of discipline, such arduous of combat.

They knew without being told, that if they were defeated and York relieved, it was all over with the Eastern Association, all over with the Parliament. King Charles would rule absolutely over the three kingdoms. But in each man's heart was the belief that Hog Lane, Slepe, St. Neot's, and Downham were invincible. Colonel Cromwell (who that day and ever afterwards was General Cromwell) spoke no word to his officers. The officers had not an order to give their sergeants or corporals. Each trooper silently looked to his equipment, and took his appointed place in an impressive silence.

Their cause was the best, their discipline was the best, their General was the best any army had ever known. Some of them would surely die, but all of them would conquer.

The heat of the day was passed when over the moor came the reinforcements for which Rupert had been waiting, the old soldier Eythen, Newcastle's chief of staff, with the Northern battalions of York Castle garrison, a dense and serried array of twenty standards and four thousand men. The sun began

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to descend towards the west. It was six of the clock when the distant cannon began to be heard.

A kind of shiver ran along the ranks - by no means of fear, but rather of men settling themselves more easily in their saddles. Steel "pots" were driven more firmly over the four thousand cropped polls of Oliver's horse.

There was an involuntary edging out towards the left and a measuring of distances so that nothing should impede the rise and fall of the sword-arm.

With his eye Hal marked the ground. He found it just enough for the charge to gather force. The ditch in front of Rupert's men? - he knew that would not stop Hog Lane for a moment. Posedly, with the confidence which men have in a great leader, Hal watched Cromwell, who was sitting his horse a little in advance of the troops. He could see him put his hand frequently to his helmet to shade his eyes in order to judge the number and force of the opposition he must encounter. He knew better than any that the moment for which he had worked and prayed for eighteen months was now close at hand.

The great Prince with all his invincible horsemen was now in his front, come there expressly to try the mettle of the New Model. If they were beaten, all was over. Lucky they who managed among the cargo of a trading ship to escape to the shores of New England.

'Into this battle,' said Cromwell over his shoulder, as Hereward, nervous with the waiting, and the flies, ranged up closer to the Colonel's grey, 'let no man go lightheartedly. If we are beaten it were better that we should not come out alive.'

The sun, sinking lower, flecked the rugged surface of the moor with innumerable flashes of fire. Immediately in front and quite close was the whole

division of Rupert's cavaliers, proud and unbeaten, a mass of brilliant accoutrements, tossing heads of noble horses, and helmets with floating plumes. Many among the princely regiments disdained the fluted casques, calling them "Puritan pots," "Scots' saucepans," and other more opprobrious terms. They were gentlemen, they said, and would go into the battle like gentlemen, with a Vandyke hat and sweeping plumes of blue and white. The red Montero cap which Rupert ordinarily wore had also been adopted by a great number of troops.

Away to the right Hal could see the long array of infantry regiments, now being strengthened by the garrison of York which had come out with Eythin. Every moment the colour of the array changed as a new regiment moved into place. But in the centre the renowned Whitecoats of Newcastle held the van, giving the effect of a patch of close-growing marguerites or gowan daisies upon the brown barrens of the moor.

To the extreme left not much could be seen, except standards pricking out of the dense gorse-cover which encumbered that part of the field.

After that rapid glance Hal succeeded in reining back Hereward to his troop, though that lordly animal snorted indignantly, and kept up a dance of restless feet, as if to remind his master that the business of a war-horse was to charge. Hereward did not understand this waiting hour after hour. He had seen the enemy and he snuffed the battle from afar. He had been accustomed to the short thunder of the charge, the breaking noise of hostile squadrons meeting, and then to the sight of the enemy fleeing wildly every way before him while he and his master careered as fleetly after them. This was Hereward's

programme and he was restless and uneasy, because that grey horse in front was blocking the way. He had tried to pass, but had been roughly checked back into place, an operation he hated. Oh, if only he could bite the grey horse with the tall man who sat so stolidly upon it. Then perhaps they might be permitted to fall upon that insolent array in a thunder of hoofs and a storm of whirling swords.

The artillery spoke more often from the moor, and the great shots ploughed up the hill behind. A galloper brought word to Cromwell that his nephew, young Val Walton, had been killed.

But Cromwell never took his eyes off Rupert's array as he received the news. He heard as though he heard it not. But with a great forward leap of his heart, Hal saw that his commander suddenly straightened himself in his saddle. Up went Cromwell's sword high in air, a slender flicker of gold in the level evening light. A single trumpet stridently sounded the charge. The charge! All down the long line of two thousand sabres the answering flashes burst into flame. Cromwell glanced once behind him and even his iron composure was stirred.

'Behold, Great Babylon that I have built!'

In his heart the words rose unbidden, but he checked them back. 'Not I, but the Lord,' he muttered, and waved his sword. Already he was a score of yards in front of his battle front.

'Charge!'

Two thousand men heard Cromwell's voice of thunder, his "battle" voice as the men said. The mass of the troops, marvellously ranked, rocked with the coming excitement. The horses began to trot, quite quietly at first. Instinctively the enemy's

fire concentrated itself upon the Slepe and Hog Lane Troops which Cromwell led in person. The speed of the horses quickened as the ground sloped. The whole line was galloping now and the horses were as eager as the men. Cromwell kept his distance from the main rank, but Hal and Zered were close behind him. They could see the cavaliers of Rupert in solid masses preparing also to charge, but not clearly. All had become swathed in a mirage, as though they saw through a thin veil of golden mist with rainbow lights shooting through it. Otherwise it seemed to Hal that all these two thousand men behind him were charging silently as in a dream. He saw nothing but a misty glamour shot through by lightning flashes. He heard not the thunder of the hoofs, only the beating of his own heart. He seemed to ride, not upon honest Hereward, but upon the viewless air. Yet his brain was wide, cool, and empty as after extreme bodily pleasure.

Gradually the command drew together till each rider's boot could touch that of his neighbour - that they might fall in a more resistless avalanche upon the enemy as they serried their ranks more and more. They would not let a single man through their files.

The gallop had become wild and desperate. The horses stretched themselves like coursed hares. More than one man shouted aloud from mere tension of nerves.

'The ditch! Beware the ditch!' shouted Cromwell over his shoulder, and the Captains repeated the warning. But strangely enough the squadrons passed it as if lifted over by the mere impulse of their speed. Fifty yards more - thirty - ten! And then the crash, when with a noise which was heard all

over the battle-field, the Ironsides flung themselves upon Rupert's battalions.

The first lines of the Prince's force had been planted too near the ditch. There was no room for their horses to gather way. But the Ironsides came upon them with scarce diminished speed, rolled them up and cast them back upon their supporting squadrons which in turn were thrown into instant disorder. But Rupert had kept well to the left with many unbroken regiments, and with his usual audacity pushed a charge upon the head of Cromwell's column.

But it did not seem to Hal that their advance was much more difficult. The Ironsides, accustomed to victory, continued to carry all before them.

Suddenly they saw Colonel Cromwell, whose sword had been rising and falling like a flail on a threshing-floor, bend forward and snatch at the pommel of his saddle. Two Rhineland men had attacked him at once. One he had killed, but the sword of the other had slipped from his helmet and wounded him in the neck. Hal and Zered were at once by his side. The Hog Laners opened out and checked long enough to allow a handkerchief which had served Hal as an arm badge to be tied round Cromwell's neck. The wound proved nothing but a scratch, but the blow on the head had momentarily beaten the leader down.

Nevertheless, the few seconds requisite for adjusting the handkerchief caused a slackening, during which the fate of the day hung in the balance. But the moment that Cromwell was again seen erect in his saddle, the Ironsides swept all before them "like a little dust."

'The Sword of the Lord!' he shouted.

'And of Cromwell!' chorused the triumphant Ironsides as they chased the hitherto unconquered Rupertians off the field.

In the centre, of which they could see nothing, the Scots grimly gained ground little by little, but on the right the army of the Fairfaxes had been utterly swept away by the charge of Lord Goring's horse, which had lain in wait for them as they struggled up by the narrow lane which led through the wilderness of furze.

The wind from the south bore back the gunpowder smoke, so that when Cromwell checked the pursuit to face about he found himself quite unable to see his whereabouts. He detached five hundred men to follow up Rupert and see that he did not return.

Cromwell hesitated what he should do. To the right and in the centre the enemy were evidently still unbroken, for there was no pour of fugitives such as trickles backward from an army which is getting the worst of it. He took off his helmet and tried to fan away the smoke. Hardly had he replaced it when out of the swirling reek, limping and wounded, came a figure so black with smoke and red with blood as to seem hardly human.

'They swept us away,' it cried; 'they crushed us. I have lost my father.'

It was the younger Fairfax.

'Why, man, what has happened?'

'We were caught in the Moor Lane like mice in a trap,' young Fairfax answered.

'Who caught you?'

'Goring's horse. They were all over us in a moment, and now they are plundering the waggons.'

'Come on,' cried Cromwell, 'give him a charger,

someone. Now do you lead us, and we will catch them as they come back with their loot. Ha, whom have we here - white on the left arm - our men then. Sir David, I never was so glad to see you. Between us we shall make this a great day for the Houses - '

'And for Scotland,' quoth Sir David Leslie drily, who had with him the Scottish horse, the pick of his countrymen; 'we come from painting the Whitecoats red.'

'Are they broken?' demanded Cromwell.

'They are dead to a man!' said Leslie.

'God rest all gallant souls this day,' said Cromwell. 'Now lead on, Tom, and we shall make a good end.'

The reinforced Ironsides rode straight across the grim tussle of the central battle where the three Scottish foot regiments were standing firm, and pushing back Porter and Eythin inch by inch, till they came to the head of the lane where the Fairfaxes had been overwhelmed. Goring's men were now returning laden with plunder, riding easily with loosened rein, the battle being well over for them, when like a thunderbolt Oliver fell upon them, David Leslie at his elbow, Hal and Hog Lane, Harry Cromwell and Slepe leading the onslaught. They were taken unawares. They had not even time to draw their swords. They were rolled over and over, pushed out of the narrow lane and slaughtered among the gorse, holding out in little knots, while Fairfax's vengeful muskets had their turn. Few of them escaped, for the Ironsides were between them and the road to York.

So in the gathering gloom of that summer twilight there was a long killing, done with full intent and purpose - to break once and for all the King's power

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in the North and to finish with it before the night should fall.

So Hog Lane, smiting and glorying, rolled the fight up like a crimson carpet into the glowing west, so that only when darkness fell so black that friend could no longer be distinguished from foe, did the fighting cease. Bugles called here and there unheeded. Men picketed their horses and cast themselves down in the darkness to sleep, the living among the dead. But Hog Lane kept watch and ward with Slepe and Downham and St. Neot's, while on a piled "biggin" of peat, a formidable figure in glancing armour and steel-capped head, his neck bound in Hal's napkin, sat Colonel Cromwell, the conqueror of Rupert, burnishing his bloody sword with tuft after tuft of dry bent grass plucked at the hazard of his arm from the trampled face of Marston Moor,

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

A LITTLE ESCORT DUTY

Lieutenant-General Cromwell was striding up and down his office, biting his under lip and frowning, six steps and turn - six steps and halt at the window, as if the empty clean-swept yard of the Tithing House would bring him council. Save in the presence of danger he made up his mind slowly.

Presently he turned sharply upon Hal Ludlow who stood respectfully at the far side of the plain deal table, ink-stained and knife-hacked like a school desk.

'I think it had better be so,' he said. 'You will conduct my family to Danbury which my Lord has put at my disposal. I myself shall be infinitely busy for some time. The King's successes in the West are nothing to the babbling fools at Westminster, and our own divided counsels.'

'I shall faithfully perform all your orders,' said Hal, feeling that he was speaking as one of the foolish, for the thing was a matter of course. But the General's eyes were fixed upon him with such intensity that he was compelled to say something. To the spoken words Cromwell paid no attention. It is unlikely that he even heard, his mind being upon the battle he was to fight - one that irked him more than the prospect of many Long Marston charges.

'You will have Dame Cromwell and my four daughters - it is not likely that Grandam Bouchier will consent to leave the Tithe House, but as to that, no matter - the serving-maids look after her. The

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Lady Molly also must go with you. I shall explain my wish to her, and Doctor Fisher hath been wearying me with a certain Huguenot and his daughter, to whom my Lord hath given employment.'

'I know them, Jacques the Wassailer and Neña la Fain.' This time Cromwell paid attention.

'Ah, you know them - how so?'

'I took Doctor Roy Lorraine to the Frenchman, who was in a fair way to die on Isle Jatte from marsh fever, and the girl saved my life at Gedney Hill when we captured Dick Lucy.'

The Lieutenant-General darted a look at Hal which searched his soul, but the young captain's conscience was so much at rest that he did not even observe the scrutiny. Slowly Cromwell's eyes returned after taking in Hal from head to foot, weighing his words and peculiar usefulness, and laying out future work for him to do.

He nodded his head with the grave sententiousness of an elder.

'Look,' he said, 'you are now one of my senior Captains and I look for an example. Let me tell you that I have a service to be performed so difficult and dangerous that whosoever satisfies me and returns alive shall not have to wait for his colonelcy.'

Hal flushed hotly. He had not dared to acknowledge even to himself that this was his thought by day and night. But he was loyal to those who had been loyal to him. 'I would rather,' he said, 'serve as Captain to the Hog Lane Troop till the end of the war, than leave them behind to command other troops who do not know me -'

'Ah, yes, I remember - "under Captain Ludlow and no other, with Colonel Cromwell and no other" - I know your articles of association. But pray

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remember, young man, that the Parliament cannot be dictated to twice.'

'Nothing shall stand in the way of the service, sir,' said Hal, 'but I shall not do it for the reward's sake.'

He was in hopes that the General might there and then tell him the nature of the service. Cromwell divined the unspoken question and shook his head a little grimly with the words, 'All in good time, young man, when I have need I will send for you. Then will be the time to put spurs to your horse.'

'Hereward needs no spurring, General,' Hal said proudly; 'he is as keen as myself.'

* * * * *

The procession which Hal conducted to Danbury, a healthy spot within riding distance of Westminster, resembled a royal progress. His father had offered his own coach, a huge, unwieldy, but comfortable vehicle, with wheels as broad as those of a wood merchant's "jankar," and quite as roomy inside as an average cottage. It was drawn by six stout horses, while as many more could be attached by chains and cordage in bogs and sloughs, or where the hills were steep and difficult.

Hal detached Loud Tom Christopher with his Boreham following to ride on ahead and make arrangements for shelter and provisions along the road. Hal went slowly, not more than twelve or fifteen miles in a day, because Dame Cromwell, no hardened traveller, was unhappy without her honest three meals a day, and what was sometimes more difficult to obtain - quiet for a siesta of an hour in the afternoon.

Hal solved this last difficulty by constructing a

plank couch within the coach, requisitioning a feather bed, and setting a guard - a duty which was popular enough, for Dame Cromwell always woke up in her most pleasant and generous mood. And the well-advised youth of Hog Lane, though they freely gave their lives for the husband, were not above accepting a little of the wife's money. Moreover, they earned it. For the road, roughly mended with masses of earth and stone and even trunks of trees, often taxed the united skill of Hog Lane to conduct their charge to the next stopping-place.

Dame Cromwell kept Bridget and the little girls with her in the coach, but Lady Molly, who had had experience, refused to set foot within, and as she could not be left quite alone among the troop, Mistress Bess, nothing loath, was told off to ride with her.

Never had late August been more magnificent. The still hot days, resplendent with sunshine, but cooled by a slight breeze out of the north, succeeded each other day after day and week after week.

In the Parliament army it was called "Marston Moor weather," and sometimes "Rupert's bane."

In the rear of the cavalcade, as humbly and as unobtrusively as possible, Jacques the Wassailer rode a cream-coloured pony which had been given to him by Doctor Peter Fisher, along with a copy of Calvin's Institutions printed in the French language. The theologian accompanied the whole with so detailed and rigorously logical a Benediction that Bess Cromwell (who heard it) said that it might well provide even the Almighty Himself with matter for consideration at His leisure.

Had this speech been repeated to the young lady's father it is probable that she would have remained

upon bread and water in her chamber at the Tithe House instead of trotting on ahead of the troop with hair streaming in the wind, tempting Lady Molly to similar follies.

Hal often dropped behind to see the Wassailer, for he was no respecter of persons (a certain Oliver Cromwell excepted). He loved the old man's rambling talk of white limestone hills, scented with thyme and romarin, of wondrous high heavens sweltering in light, a world still, blue, and mild, the sea one sapphire, and all day and every day the cool wind at its appointed hour singing among the cordages. It was good hearing, and the home-keeping Hal, all whose life had been love and war, with some taste of books from his brief days at college, set himself to picture the wild sea-board of Provence which (said the Wassailer) was Italian or Spanish - and still more African - anything indeed but French.

'But you are French?' Hal objected.

'I speak French, but I am Latin by race, and French is not my mother tongue, but another richer and better for those who understand it, as all do between Genoa and Barcelona, whether they be Catalans, Provençals, or Ligurians.'

Hal with a natural (as well as a cultivated) taste in feminine beauty listened while he watched Neña la Fain managing a wild troop horse, sitting astride the saddle, booted and spurred, wearing the red coat and white badge of the Eastern Association and armed at all points like one of the Hog Lane Troop.

Somehow she had managed to make good interest with Zered who winked at the masquerade, and Hog Lane, in consideration of the high Puritan standing of the Wassailer and also agreeing in the main with Milton as to the flighty irresponsibility of women,

permitted her to follow the troop with an indifference which was almost contemptuous.

Neña however had a serious purpose in thus arraying herself. She knew that the uniform of his troop was dear to the heart of Captain Hal and she judged, not without cause, that it would give him pleasure to see her wearing the badges of his corps in which she had, however irregularly, early enrolled herself.

Of course Hal would not have suffered such a thing in Ely, or where Hog Lane had to range with other troops. But out on the open road, with nothing to do but escort ladies, the matter was altogether different. The figure of the young girl took on a new beauty. She rode better than scout-master Wishart - almost as well, he admitted, as he rode himself, which was no slight thing for Master Hal to allow.

It was moreover, he owned, a pleasant sight, and together with the conversation, always instructive and agreeable of Jacques the Wassailer, brought Captain Hal Ludlow very often to the rear of his cavalcade, especially on long up grades, where trace horses were put to, and the men dismounting, eased girths, loosened straps, and walked for three-quarters of an hour or more to rest their horses. At such times Hal would often put Hereward under charge of his groom and walk between the small-booted foot with its silver spur (his own contribution) and the Wassailer's cream-coloured pony. He talked so frankly that Neña would laugh heartily and then be astonished at the sound of her own voice. She had attracted his attention, and, wonder of wonders, he was talking to her as gaily as he ever did with Mistress Bess Cromwell or the Lady Molly.

She began to tell herself fairy stories. She was still the little gipsy girl abandoned by the gipsies, but somehow or other (her mind glided lightly over particulars) she had become a fairy princess. She had delivered a fairy prince and now that prince, in gladness and gratitude, was walking bareheaded by her bridle-rein. Then Neña would swing her foot over, smooth down her brief kirtle, and for the space of a mile or two (as long as Captain Hal remained by her side), she would ride as became a princess of the ancient house of Bois Dormant guarding the litter of True Thomas and attended by an exceedingly hard-featured troop of elves and fays all in steel "pots" and the red coats of the Eastern Association.

When Captain Hal talked to True Thomas (that is, to the Wassailer), Neña liked it quite as well as when he told her stories of the herding and sweeping operations of South Lincolnshire when he rid that district of the Candishers.

For when he talked to the Wassailer, she had time to continue her tales to herself. She imagined conversations such as she had read in books, but decided very soon that her fairy prince would not throw himself at her feet and cry, 'My life, fortune, and crown are thine, most adorable Princess!' She had heard with what sharpness he had chid Bess Cromwell and the Lady Molly for riding too far ahead, and she recognised that it was thus that a man ought to speak. She liked it better so, and she made her horse curvet and rear, she even put him to a gallop, swung him round and reined up again beside the slow-padding ministerial pony which carried True Thomas, with a kind of wilful defiance in her manner, at once defiant and provocative. But Captain Hal only watched her with an expression of

amusement and the desired reprimand did not come.

Still she was content, for each time that he rode away to take the head of the column and assure himself of the well-being of Dame Cromwell and her brood drowsing and jolting inside the richly padded coach of the Parliamentary Commissioner, she repeated over and over to herself, 'He has found me, I am no longer alone - my prince - my prince!'

The incidents of the route amused Neña, and to these she adapted herself with admirable readiness, for she was a true daughter of the road.

The scattering of the King's forces in the North and the Draconian laws enforced within London city had brought out a great many plunderers who watched for ill-guarded coaches and weak bands of merchants. The Essex marshes where the road from Cambridge passed southward harboured many of these, and gave occasion to an incident, often afterwards told in Hog Lane and throughout all the north bounds of Essex with applause and glee.

It chanced one rare fine day towards eventide that the cavalcade had come to a long and difficult ascent a few leagues from Maldon. Hal had ordered a half-dozen men to strip and corduroy the road with branches and brushwood, before attempting the long pull up the slope. Then he had allowed the rest of Hog Lane to dismount in one of the sunk roads common to the neighbourhood, where they sat down each man by his horse's bridle and shared the provender they had brought with them. Now the sunk road chanced to be within eye-shot of an outpost of the Maltover Troop (captained by Guy Maltover, a deserter from Lord Essex's horse). The coach was a large one and in manifest difficulties.

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The men in the grey shirts who were labouring with rope and mattock were evidently peasants and would run at the first alarm. There were rich ladies on fine horses, and some great moneyed magnate would doubtless pay dear to get them back.

'Come on, then, Maltover men, Standerton men - all who love loot or love a lass!' So from the shadow of the woods where they had lain all day in hiding, sucking straws and eating wild berries, the Maltover gang came down yelling. They hooted, thereby meaning to put to flight the yokels at the trace ropes. A few bullets would settle the outriders, and that great coach, the finest ever seen on the Marshes, packed with riches and ransomable grandees, was their own. They arrived in a whirlwind of noise and pother, Guy the renegade at their head.

The coach was surrounded. A huge hairy varlet had his fingers on the handle and was feasting his eyes on the ladies and children within. He reached over to snatch a bag which Dame Cromwell had kept upon her knees, but at that moment, out of nowhere in particular, armed Ironsides in full panoply rode them down before they had time to turn their horses. Hog Lane gave no quarter to these plundering wretches, and though they were not half their numbers, when they pulled up to return towards the coach, Maltover and Standerton had ceased to exist. Renegade captain and cruel lieutenant lay on the ground, honourably cleft by the steel which had chased Rupert across the moor of Long Marston.

Hog Lane laughed. For the idea of a gang of cut-throat plunderers of their own free will charging a full troop of seasoned Ironsides seemed to them

humorous beyond measure. But Hal and Zered bade the girls ride on and keep their horses near the coach windows on either side till they had left behind the scattered relics of miscellaneous rascaldom which bore too eloquent witness to the power of the Puritan sword-arm.

Such was the adventure of the Sunken Road, long a merry jest among the Roundheads, but somewhat less so to the slashed and haggard survivors of the renegade's band, who painfully dragged themselves into various woods and shelters, a very few to get well and plunder anew, but most to die of cold and exposure. For Hog Lane had fulfilled the Scripture by making the way of transgressors hard indeed.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

WITHOUT ARE WOLVES

They were approaching Danbury, and Hal was riding in front with Lady Molly and Elizabeth Cromwell, when from the gate of the Barns of Boreham an escort of well-mounted and equipped gentlemen rode out to meet them.

My Lord Woodham Walter had taken some pains to have the best blood of Essex there to welcome his sometime prodigal daughter back to a reorganised and purified Danbury.

Young Walter Barrington, son of the county member and a most promising youth, had given three long weeks to undoing the work of old Hepburn, the Scots engineer. Ditches had been filled up and planted. Earthworks levelled and made into gravel walks. He had brought many thousands of plants from his father's nurseries at Colchester. A score of the finest young men of the shire, all of ancient family and agreeable person, had come out with my Lord Woodham Walter to bring home his daughter and to welcome the wife and daughters of the new Parliamentary General, whom Marston Moor had made the idol of one half of England and the bogey of the rest.

Hal Ludlow, after a brief salute to my Lord, fell back to his troop. His steel cap and war-worn uniform were more in place there, and he left the presentations and pretty speeches to be made without him.

Doubtless something of jealousy mixed with this

abstemiousness, but there was in it something noble as well. Why were there here so many bold young men who might be organising, commanding companies and troops, merely riding at ease, tricked out and befeathered like so many idle cavaliers?

He vented this bitter feeling upon Zered, who, as was usual with him, had an answer ready.

'Not at all surprising,' said Zered Tuby, in that keen, high-pitched preaching voice which had carried conviction during his anti-Zachary crusade in the old Hog Lane. 'Do you not see, Captain, that in these counties, and I suppose everywhere except in Lancashire and the West, the Parliament, disposing of money and favours, took over the official, his sons and his nephews, his ox and his ass, and everything that was his.'

'I know,' said Hal, peevishly enough, 'but look at these fellows. Why, Colonel Cromwell, with a month's drill, could make an excellent troop of them - of all, that is, whom he had not hanged or sent home. And what good are they now? They cannot sit on committee and advise. They are too young for Parliament, even supposing their fathers did not block the way. Yet they are tall young fellows who, if they were of the King's party, would be captains under Hopeton, or better still privates in Rupert's horse?'

No wonder Hal regarded the laughing group about Lady Molly with sullen and malevolent eye.

'I wish I had these same pretty gentlemen in my company,' he growled; 'I could find them other employment for their leisure moments.'

Zered knew well enough that his officer had been "broken" while in the Slepe Troop for "petticoating" - indeed, what was there which could long remain

unknown in such a close commonwealth as the original "Tawny," or Ironside companies? But he allowed nothing of his secret amusement to appear on his countenance. He merely continued his explanation more posedly than before.

'Official class propagates officials,' Zered's eyes were less complimentary than his tongue, 'so you must not blame them if, while waiting for dead men's shoes, they flaunt their town-bought finery somewhat too garishly.'

'But if they are town bred and official born, I more!' broke in Hal, unsatisfied and truculent, 'What are these little justices and district committee men to my father, for twenty years adviser to the Exchequer and Clerk of Requests? If I could fight, so surely can they!'

And Captain Hal showed his ill-humour by a tug at the reins, which pampered Hereward at once resented by lashing out behind.

'Easy, my Captain,' said Zered soothingly; 'all young roosters cannot grow spurs and become cocks of the main. But here comes my Lord.'

Hal saluted the great man with respect. He was his father's friend, and, what had still greater weight, he was Lady Molly's father.

'Why, sir, have your Marston Moors laurels made you so bashful that you will not wait to receive our thanks?'

'I thought, my Lord,' said Hal readily, 'that you and your friends might wish to inspect the Seventh Troop.' And he wheeled Hereward, so that my Lord might have a good look at the steadfast front of Hog Lane, which Zered had drawn out in array of battle. Very grim and dour looked Hog Lane under the gaze of the Peer of Parliament and his finely attired

company.

'I would little like to meet them when their blood is up,' said my Lord, thinking to show himself complimentary. But Hal, who at that moment could take nothing well, answered that perhaps Hog Lane was most to be dreaded when most humorous. Whereupon he related the story of the renegade and his attack upon the coach. Hal did not tell the story well. He was too sulky, but his very sulks gave pith and dourness to the facts.

'Rob the Ironsides!' cried my Lord, clapping his hands. 'What will Speaker Lenthall and Dr. Prynne say - a hundred rake-hells knaves to cry, "Stand and deliver" to the veterans of Marston Moor! I hope you have brought them to us - your prisoners, I mean. There are several justices of the peace present to-day, and we can empanel a jury.'

Hal stared with a bewildered expression at the man. Could he be jesting? But my Lord called two of the local squires, Cook and Calthrop.

'You will act with me - it seems there are some rascals to try.' And he glanced towards Jacques the Wassailer and Neña la Fain, waiting patiently in the rear of the troop. My Lord Woodham Walter told his two friends of the renegade's mistake, and they also laughed, though not so heartily, for they resented the coming of General Cromwell's men into their county as a kind of coercion.

'Essex money for Essex men' had been their answer once when Colonel Cromwell had asked them for their share of the subscriptions due from the seven Associated Counties.

'Wait a little till I come,' Cromwell had retorted, 'and I shall take Essex men and Essex money too.'

They feared that that time had come.

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Lord Woodham Walter waved his hand with the large gesture he used when leading the House of Lords.

‘Let us see your rascals,’ he said. ‘I caught just a glimpse of them, but I would fain speak with them face to face. Such daring knaves one does not meet with every day!’

‘There are no prisoners,’ said Captain Hal, a trifle impatiently. ‘The Seventh Troop does not take prisoners of that class. You will find the rascals over yonder in the bottom of the valley and scattered along the slopes of Sunk Lane Hill. But they are in no state to be tried by jury. Not one of them could plead - no, not before a Committee of both Houses.’

A clang of bitter irony had in spite of himself crept into Hal Ludlow’s speech, and the peer started at the sound. It was the first authentic ring of the new spirit of justice by armed force which was to end the lies of Charles at Oxford, and clear Westminster Hall of the plague of vain babblers which already had begun to infest it.

‘For God’s sake, Hal, you don’t mean to tell me that you slaughtered them all in cold blood without a trial?’

‘They had had a good trial - of strength,’ said Hal grimly, ‘and all that I regretted was the waste of good cut-and-thrust on such paltry rascals.’

‘I presume you had your orders,’ said my Lord, ‘otherwise you took a somewhat serious responsibility upon yourself.’

‘That I am quite willing to take,’ said Hal, with the same irritating ring of authority which had grated on the peer’s respect for law-and-order. ‘General Cromwell sent me hither to assume responsibility.’

My Lord turned sharply and rode away, muttering

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to himself, 'Cromwell and his Captains take a great deal too much upon themselves. If we do not look to it, they will put us all under foot - Lords, Commons, and Civil powers!'

And though he did not at the time believe it himself he never spoke a truer word.

* * * * *

When the cavalcade arrived at Danbury Towers, the retainers of my Lord were turned out to welcome his guests - among whom, however, he did not appear to number Hal and his company of Hog Laners. Dame Elizabeth was received in front of the gates by an elegantly equipped guard in lace cloaks, velvet knee-breeches of my Lord's colours (vermilion and puce), and what provoked the secret laughter of Hog Lane, dress swords at their sides in velvet scabbards.

The Ironsides were evidently expected to go no further.

'We are my Lord's guards,' said a young man, scented and ringleted like a girl; 'you can have no passage here.'

'We are come by General Cromwell's orders to be responsible for the defence of the place, and of the ladies whom we have brought hither. Deny us at your peril!'

Hal's voice rang out dangerously. He was not in a pretty humour, and a curious chill traversed the marrow of the fine young man with the velvet-sheathed sword of office set so sprucely at his side. He was the son of a rich city merchant to whom the exchequer had more than once been much

beholden.

'Take care what you do,' said the young man. 'I would have you know that I am my Lord Woodham Walter's secretary!'

'Forward there, Seventh,' said Hal, 'and do you, Mr. Secretary, come with me. If you stay you may get hurt.'

So Hog Lane defiled two by two into the gate of the Towers, and soon filled the courtyard with the clangour of champing bits and ironshod hoofs. The delicately attired young men who had challenged their right of way had been driven against the wall by the mere scour of the running tide.

'Now find me stabling for my horses, and sleeping accommodation for my men!' commanded Captain Hal. 'Your master? I will charge myself with your master - only as you value your neck, do as I bid you now!'

'I know not a great deal about this matter,' said the perplexed youth, who wished himself safe back in the offices of Whitehall; 'the grooms have always attended to such things.'

'Then call a groom,' thundered Hal, 'my men cannot wait all night while my Lord's underlings find their wits. Ho, there, a groom, I say!'

What might have happened it is difficult to imagine, if Alured Promise had not slipped from his saddle and run like a terrier which tries one rat-hole after another in the ranges of stabling. At last he brought out an ancient man in withered moleskins, bespattered from head to heel.

'Ah,' cried Hal, 'we have left behind the velvet and dress-swords, the bow-knots and the ribbands. So much the better. We shall chance to get some sense out of this fellow. Now, Gaffer, show us the best

stables.'

'They be all filled with gentlemen's fine horses,' said the old man, but he led the way notwithstanding. Hal glanced within. He knew that four hundred horses had been stabled at Danbury Towers in the days of Rupert and the Brown Octobers.

'Show me the cavalry quarters, sirrah,' said Hal, 'where the Prince's men put up their horses.'

'Lord now, what be oi thinkin' upon,' said the old man, slapping his knee; 'of course, being soldier-men - 'tis the great barn ye are seeking. Brave comfortable quarters be the great barn - yes, yes, as ever was.'

So the doors of the great barn were thrown open and there were the rough mangers, the whitewashed walls, the huge fodder racks leading from the lofts above, and the tiles laid down for sluicing purposes on either side.

'Make yourselves comfortable, lads,' Hal called out; 'this is good enough for us.' He had just come down the ladder from the loft. 'With excellent bedroom accommodation above stairs!'

And he went off to arrange about supplies.

He was passing through the court when my Lord Woodham Walter looked out of a first-floor window. His face was flushed and angry and he spoke hastily, his words tumbling over each other. The secretary had been talking to him.

'Go away, I cannot have you here,' he shouted; 'get away at once. You will find quarters for the night at Boreham Barns.'

'Sir,' said Hal coolly, 'I do not discuss my instructions by bawling through windows. All I have to say is that I call upon you in General Cromwell's

name to supply me with three cooked meals a day for fifty-three men, for which I shall give you daily a requisition in the morning and a quittance in the evening.'

Which having said, he went about his business.

The Hog Laners made themselves as comfortable as possible, chatting outside upon the well-kerb and scattered about wooden benches. As the twilight deepened they saw the lights being kindled in the banqueting hall which ran along one entire side of the court. My Lord was entertaining a great company to dinner. And Hog Lane noted with surprise and indignation that its Captain had not been invited.

They waited, however, patiently for their own supper, content that the great folks should be served before them, but jealous also for the honourable standing of their leader, and prepared to back him in any quarrel which might arise.

Hal paced to and fro in front of the great barn, between the winnowing floor at the windy south-east corner and the great door of the faggot-house where the winter fuel was beginning to be stored.

He raged incessantly, sometimes in speeches which would have cost a man of the troop the statutory twelve-pence a word. But Zered, who alone heard, was far too anxious to quiet him to pay any attention to oaths, either broad or minced.

'Let me go,' he pleaded; 'no man in anger is fit to carry out a delicate negotiation. If it were not for the ladies, I would leave it to you. But remember our General's wife and four daughters are here, besides there is my Lady Molly.'

'I care not,' interrupted Hal, who was indeed hardly responsible for his words or actions; 'I want

provender for my men. I have asked for it in my General's name. I have waited two hours, and I tell you, Zered Tuby, I shall wait no longer. I will see my Lord and demand an explanation, if we have to force the doors with musket butts.'

'Captain,' said Zered soothingly, 'we all love you and will follow you through hotter places than the Moor Lane at Long Marston. You can depend on the Seventh Troop, but you also must trust it, and yet more you must trust a grizzled old fellow who loves you. There must be no brawling before the ladies. It would do us small honour. Let me take a dozen men unarmed, and I warrant you I shall bring back supper for all the troop.'

Zered had his way. He chose with care a dozen of the spriteliest and most active of the young men, as carefully pruned them of their helmets, breastplates, and weapons, whispered some private instructions, and disappeared in the direction of the kitchen.

Here he found the cooks, as he reported afterwards, 'In a prodigious pother.' Men and boys hasting to and fro from the banqueting rooms kept the place in a clamour. 'For the High Table! For the Long! For the Cross! For the Gentlemen-in-Waiting!' they cried, sometimes snatching dishes to which they had no right out of the cooks' very hands. Zered, undertaking the policing of this turmoil, cried, 'Stand back there - faces to the wall - all except the servants of the High Table!'

And to emphasise his order he made his scabbard ring on the stone floor - for he alone had kept his full equipment.

The London valets and drawers obeyed mechanically. They stood with their noses to the wall, studying the whitewash most attentively.

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'Now when you are ready, Cook, serve for the High Table!'

The waiters rushed to seize the dishes where, on the long service tables, roast and stew, beef, mutton, venison pasty, and fowls both wild and tame were planted down in smoking rows.

'Now, lads, let us see you march - Alured, ready with the lantern - the others help yourselves from the fork basket.'

Hog Lane armed itself with that highly persuasive instrument, a two-pronged fork,

'Face about there. Take up the dishes and follow the lantern-bearer out at the kitchen door.'

A few turned in the direction of the stairs which led to the banqueting hall, but the forks in the willing hands of Hog Lane soon brought them back to the right way.

The meats, thus borne out in triumph, were served under the soft glow of the stars upon the benches in front of the great barn, and Hog Lane rejoiced, though it drank only pure water drawn from the well by the strength of its own arms. While at the Great Table aloft knives clattered and tongues wagged as the viands disappeared.

But the Middle, Cross, and Gentlemen's Hall tables sat glum and silent, wondering when they were going to be served.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

GREAT PAINS TO LITTLE PURPOSE

But the next day it became evident that the dislike of my Lord Woodham Walter extended no farther than the Captain of the Seventh Troop. He sent a couple of foresters to conduct the Wassailer and his daughter to Osea Island. Breakfast, also, was brought out and set upon tables improvised in the court. A young marmiton (or kitchen servitor) in flat white cap of linen, white smock to his knees and wide French "slops," directed the manœuvres.

To him Hal paid no attention, engrossed in writing a letter to Cromwell which he knew must be sent off at once. From this task he was presently distracted by the coming of the Wassailer and Neña la Fain. They were setting out for Osea Island, and there Hal, in order to have peace to finish his letter, promised to visit them as soon as he was settled in his quarters.

After the Wassailer had mounted his cream-coloured pony and ridden away with the foresters, Neña tarried behind. Hal fidgeted, pen in hand. At last the girl broke silence.

'She does it pretty poorly,' she said, pointing to the white-bonneted "marmiton," under whose orders the scullions were clearing the tables after breakfast.

'Eh, what is that you say?' exclaimed Hal, turning bewildered eyes in the direction of Neña's pointing finger.

'You do not mean you do not know that the Lady Molly has come among your men in masquerade! How blind men are! Do you not see how she has her

hair turned up under her cap behind, and then her figure, that is never a boy's figure. It would not deceive any woman for a moment. Now when I ride as a boy, neither man nor woman shall be able to tell the difference.' And she followed her adopted father without once turning her head or crying adieu.

Yes, now when he came to notice, the slim youth in the kitchener's whites was without doubt the Lady Molly.

Hal's humour was instantly restored. He threw his pen on the table, slipped the unfinished letter into the case which contained the troop papers, and strode across the yard to thank such a benefactress.

'Lady Molly,' he said, more ceremoniously than was his wont, 'I did not perceive your presence amongst us till this moment. Though the costume is no suitable one for your father's daughter, I owe you my best thanks.'

'Oh, the ingratitude of man! Now I think it is rather pretty.' She held out a small white-sandalled foot, above which the ill-fitting slops showed a few inches of shapely ankle.

'Pretty enough,' said Captain Hal, softening; 'but if your father knew, Molly, what would he say?'

'He would have me locked in my room. The key would be in his pocket, and you would be gaily doing without breakfast!'

'But some of these underlings will be sure to tell him - if only to curry favour!'

'I do not think so,' said Lady Molly; 'the others would trample the life out of any tale-bearer. I am, you see, somewhat popular among them.'

'So I see,' said Hal gravely; 'but are we to have no food save what you manage to procure us by

opening the buttery?'

'Oh, no, you are to have enough till a messenger can get back from General Cromwell.'

'From General Cromwell!'

'Yes, he left early this morning, carrying letters from Dame Elizabeth and one from my father, asking for your recall. I saw it. I looked over his shoulder when he was writing.'

'You are entirely capable of it,' said Hal.

'Be thankful then,' retorted Molly; 'your attitude, let me tell you, is neither grateful nor becoming. But, it is entirely what I should have expected of Mr. Señor Captain Ludlow!'

She gave her marmiton's broad, flat bonnet a saucy cock, and strutted away in a transport of righteous indignation. But midway she turned, and running back to him she caught him by the embroidered sleeve.

'Hal,' she said, 'if I were you I would send someone to Ely who could get there before young Calthrop!'

'Thank you, Molly,' said Hal. 'Indeed, I am very much of your mind.'

'But we are not friends for all that,' she explained, 'so do not imagine it.'

'I shall keep my imagination in check,' he said calmly; 'and now if you will kindly be gone, I shall finish my letter.'

'Brute!' said Lady Molly, and went within.

In half an hour Zered, with an escort of two men, was riding towards the North. At first Hal had been unwilling to let him go. But Zered soon showed him that it would be wiser to send someone who could answer the General's questions - someone who knew all that had taken place, who knew how well Hog

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Lane had conducted itself - how their Captain had dealt with the Renegade and his band, and how entirely without excuse a quarrel had been forced upon him by my Lord. To this reasoning Hal could not but yield, especially as he knew that of all the Hog Laners no one but Zered would be able to speak to Cromwell. And even Zered Tuby admitted that it thickened a man's tongue and dried the back of his throat when the Colonel turned his eyes full and looked you through, body and soul.

Still, Zered was a man of courage and Hal left him free to plead his cause as he judged best. He had good reason for trusting Zered. The Lieutenant of the Hog Lane Troop reached Ely Tithe House eleven hours before my Lord's man came jogging in, and long before that Cromwell knew the story of the rupture in its minutest details. He wrote a letter to his Captain which contained no word of blame, and indeed as much praise as he ever bestowed. 'I am glad to know that you acted wisely and promptly in the matter of the Renegadoes, as well as in other things. While my Lord Woodham remains, leave a small party in his house, and occupy yourself with the defence of Maldon harbour and Osea Island. I send you a requisition for supplies and tools, also for men to dig, to be given to the Mayor and Councilmen. For the payment of necessities bid them look to me. Spend nothing but what is needful - of that I need not warn you. For, as you know, money is harder to come by than men or arms, and I will send down Sam Squire, my assessor, to see that you are not cheated.'

'Captain Hal Ludlow is a brave and most useful officer,' General Cromwell wrote to my Lord. 'I have

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no fault to find with his conduct, and any private grievance you may have with him will be sufficiently removed by my sending him to lodge in Maldon, where he will busy himself with the defences of the port and adjacent island. A section of his men only will remain at your charge, as I cannot allow such a strength as Danbury Towers, so lately defended against us, to be completely without garrison. I trust to see you at Westminster during the week when I will again thank you for your kindness to my family.

Your faithful servitor,
'Oliver Cromwell.'

'The man is little better than a sectary and an Anabaptist himself,' growled my Lord. 'So that a man be a good soldier and useful to him, he cares not for remonstrances from the whole body of peers.'

In saying which my Lord was entirely within the facts. Hal Ludlow's value to the organiser of the Ironsides was entirely personal. He would have risen just as high if he had been a "homespun" Captain, who (as smart young men in Westminster Hall jested) were "filling dung-carts this time last year." A man's value was his fighting value, his obedience, his initiative, his readiness to take responsibility. To be his Excellency the Chief Commissioner's son was no assistance to a man in Colonel Cromwell's regiments, but then neither was it any drawback.

It did not take Hal Ludlow long to make his dispositions. He left Sergeant Pascal and Corporal Royds at the Towers with ten men to mount guard and report to him daily at Maldon. Pascal was an excellent steady fellow, and nothing was known as to the treachery of Doe Royds. He was, indeed, accounted sullen, but he had conducted himself

bravely when it came to blows, had steadied the charge when Rupert attacked at Marston Moor, and though little accounted of by Hog Lane was understood to merit his rank. Like his General, Hal took a man at his fighting value, but not always with Cromwell's long-sightedness. For with Cromwell "fighting value" meant all-round serviceableness to the Cause, not mere strength of arm when steel clashed against steel - though that had its value also, especially in a soldier of the troop. These two were to keep camp week about with the Osea engineers and the garrison of Maldon.

The Maldoners had suffered much from the raids of the King's garrison while Lady Molly kept the royal flag flying. They therefore took a more serious view of the situation than their neighbours, being within an easy half-hour's ride of the castle gate.

The experience had been amusing for Lady Molly, no doubt, but not so much for the merchants and forage sellers whose cellars and stockyards had been pillaged. Now they counted on Lady Molly to speak a word to her father on their behalf, but my Lord had refused to grant them the least remission.

'After all,' said my Lord, 'it is your own fault, Essex is a backward shire. You should have raised a couple of thousand horsemen as Colonel Cromwell hath done in Cambridgeshire.'

'Very well said, my Lord,' said Mayor Staines, of Maldon Wester; 'but where are we to find our Cromwell? I have not heard of two.'

'No,' said my Lord, 'and I doubt if all England could hold two.'

Finally, though declining all responsibility for damage, he let it be understood that leniencies of rent and benefits of leasing and pasturage would be

granted to such as could satisfy Mr. Mayor Staines and his own agent as to the justice of their claims. For my Lord Woodham Walter was of those whose wrath runs so fiercely that the reservoir is soon empty. So, when once he had succeeded in obtaining the exile of Hal from Danbury, he began to feel compunctions. On the morrow he rode round to see him at his entrenching work by the river, and being touched by the young man's simple directness of manner and speech, he proposed to send him a score of stout labourers better accustomed than Hal's Hog Laners to the labour of the spade and mattock. As for Osea Island he would have barges loaded with stone for the fort which General Cromwell had ordered to be built on the point of the Island, and he would speak to the masons' guild of the town that they should take no other work on hand while their services were needed by Captain Ludlow. For all which excellent good things Captain Hal very soberly thanked my Lord, while little Zered grinned behind his back, thinking of the letter which General Cromwell had contemptuously tossed across the table for him to read. 'What is wrong with that Captain of yours,' the General had demanded, 'to have my Lord Woodham Walter write of him to me thus?'

'Methinks,' said Zered after he had glanced over the letter, 'my Lord hath one opinion of the Captain, because his daughter, Lady Molly, hath another.'

'Ah, say you so, Zered?' said Cromwell thoughtfully. 'Now I remember my scatter-brained Bess whispering some such folly. Well, if my Lord imagines he can drill and discipline the likings and dislikings of young people he hath before him great pains to little purpose.'

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

THE SUBSTITUTE

The wind was blowing steadily up from the sea, filling the estuary with short-running little waves, and tossing the branches in the woods towards Woodham Mortimer and Danbury. Oaks groaned under the sudden push of the gusts. Ash trees moaned softly overhead like a woman in pain, and here and there a treacherous elm-branch came down with a rending crash and the sullen sound of leaves threshing the ground.

Captain Hal had had a busy day. He had been over to Osea Island with my Lord's stone barges. He had planned and laid out the new works at the seaward end, for which the General was sending down guns from Westminster. Upon his return to his quarters in Mayor Staines' old house between the woods of West Maldon and the sea, he had found an invitation from the Castle. He was to go there to dinner that night. Lady Molly insisted upon it. Dame Cromwell sent her salutations and Bess added a malicious entreaty urging him to come, promising to keep his secrets if he would, but otherwise to divulge "the records of his crimes" to the whole dinner-table.

Hal smiled drily, gave the letter to his Lieutenant and asked for advice.

'Go by all means. Never refuse an olive branch,' said Zered. 'I shall take the evening trip to the Island

and perhaps stay all night. You can make the rounds here for me before you turn in. You are likely to be kept late if my Lord and his Westminster flagon-emptiers are of the party.'

'I shall not wait,' said Hal emphatically.

'I am not sure,' counselled Zered with his habitual finesse; 'there is never any harm in finding out what the enemy is thinking - especially an enemy in liquor.'

Hal Ludlow laughed.

'They would soon have the better of me at that game. I should be babbling before their eyes began to gleam. The Slepe Troop and Hog Lane are no schools of toping.'

'But you were at college, Captain. I have heard that the gentle Johnians sometimes look at a wine glass without trembling.'

'Such was never my folly,' said Hal.

'No? Well, now comes back to me that I had heard as much - I mean that your youth hath been singularly abstemious!'

'You mean nothing of the kind, my good Zered - I understand perfectly, but since neither you nor any of Hog Lane can find a fault with their Captain since the troop was raised, we shall, if you please, let the dead bury its dead.'

'Well said, my young Captain. There you had Zered Tuby, the more shame to him for pestering you in the style of grumbling Zachary. The Lord hath turned the sins of your youth, such as they were, into the crown of your manhood. And so much He doth not for all the world.'

'You speak riddles, friend Zered.'

'They can be read, my riddles,' said the little man with the black ringlets beginning to grizzle under his

steel "pot." And he pointed to the invitation which lay on the ground between them.

'My Lady Molly, our excellent Dame the General's wife, and his daughter all pleading with the Captain of the Seventh to sup with them - would they have done as much, think you, for Zered Tuby?'

'If they had known you as I know you - yes!' said Hal Ludlow stoutly.

'Do not wile me with willy-whas - do not lure me with Will-o'-the-Wisps,' the little man waved aside the compliment, not, however, altogether ill-pleased. And refusing further to discuss the subject, he undertook the direction of his chief's toilette with the same scrupulous exactitude with which he would have seen to the equipment of a recruit for the Hog Lane Troop.

Hal was compelled to take a couple of stout soldiers with him. The road was not safe and three men were better than one, Zered averred; and so to Danbury, along the leafy lanes strewn with twigs and leaves brought down by the south-east wind. Captain Hal Ludlow rode with his escort. All the way he had been fearing that the Lady Molly had taken advantage of her father's absence to send him an invitation. He had no wish to visit the Towers like a thief in the night in the master's absence. Yet how delightful it would be to see the girls by themselves and talk to them after dinner while, with her usual consideration, the Dame Elizabeth went placidly to sleep.

But when Hal rode into the courtyard, he saw my Lord descending the broad staircase to welcome him. The pride of Hog Lane was satisfied, the private hopes of its Captain less so. Still, it would please Zered to be able to tell the troop, which had spoken

of ducking my Lord in his own pond, for the insult offered to them by excluding their Captain from the banquet of the first evening.

My Lord was cordial, even with an effort, heavily jovial. He asked for his friend Mayor Staines, for whom he professed a great respect.

'An old family, Captain Hal - an old family, I tell you. Good blood, the Staines of West Maldon - a thing too little looked to in these days, father offered a baronetcy by his late Majesty soon after he came from Scotland. And pretty daughter, ah, you dog, I have heard of you before. You had an eye in your head when you picked your lodging. Well, I think no worse of you for it - I should have done as much when I was your age, as I told the ladies to-day at breakfast.'

Hal whistled softly as he saluted the great man. But, as he followed him into the hall, he muttered between his teeth:

'So the old fox has been setting the maids against me and Dame Elizabeth also with his tales. If I knew the young whipper-snapper who had been priming him I should twist his neck.'

For he was not yet old enough to know that a reputation for being a favourite with women never yet hurt any man with a sex which can be excellently logical upon occasion.

Even good Dame Elizabeth welcomed him as a son. For such prodigals the women kill the fatted calf which might have grown into a peaceable ox, sooner than for scores of irreproachable young men who never crossed deserts or went "petticoating" into far countries.

My good Dame Elizabeth, do you know that you are setting a premium on evil-doing? Young ladies,

is it wise or maidenly to encourage dangerous young men!

“Very likely not,” they say, “but how much more interesting!”

My Lord had some reason to doubt the wisdom of women, when he noted how little chance the wise secretaries and lawyers of Westminster and the Temple had with the hard-bitten young Captain of horse who had been in more than fifty charges, including the great twilight of Marston Moor, and had seen Rupert broken and Goring driven before the wind “like a little dust.”

The Lady Molly sat silent listening, her eyes wide, her pupils dilated, and her breath coming fast, while Bess Cromwell lost her slipper three times under the table.

For all which, and for other reasons as well, Hal had made himself well hated before the dinner was half over. But for all that, or because of that, he was well content, and enjoyed every minute of his stay. He would not remain to drink when the ladies had retired, giving as a reason that he had to ride the rounds on his return.

He closed the door and the storm broke immediately upon his retreating footsteps. He was a vauntard, a boaster before women, a fellow who was afraid of a glass of good Burgundy.

My Lord sat listening, and though he was ill-pleased with the foolishness of women, he was by no means sorry to have a chance of giving his young placemen a lesson.

‘A vauntard, the young man is not. Our ladies made him speak against his will - and it was of his chief he spoke, who is to him as a god. Even if he were, he has something to boast of - fifty charges

before a man has half as many years, with Gainsborough and Marston Moor to end all - 'tis harder work than shaping pens and scribbling sonnets upon the desks of Whitehall.'

The young officials were abashed and surprised, but they consoled themselves with abundant cups of my Lord's admirable Chambertin. So that when they heard the trampling of horses' hoofs in the courtyard beneath, they rose with one accord and went outside with my Lord to bid his guest God-speed.

The ladies were there before them. Lady Molly had caused a couple of torches to be brought, and Hal, helmeted, plumed, and breastplated, a very proper man, stood ready to make his adieux.

Silk and velvet, even the best the city could supply, made a poor show beside Hereward and his master in their stained campaigning gear, but with every bit, stirrup, spur, corslet, and helm glittering in the ruddy torchlight.

A courteous salutation and Hal swung Hereward round, the two guards fell in behind and they rode forth into the blue-black night, intense with stars. The men went back to their wine, but the women stood listening so long as the sea-wind brought to their ears the beat of the horses' feet and the light tinkling treble of their bridle-chains.

* * * * *

When Hal arrived at the temporary headquarters of his troop, he found that it wanted only a couple of hours of the time he had fixed for riding the outposts. A vessel of three masts had been seen that morning from the fort at the point of the isle. It was

known that the beaten Newcastle was anxious to make a landing of the force which still remained to him somewhere along the Essex coast, whence he could threaten London, and it was partly on this account that Hal and his troop had been posted at Maldon.

Removing his "pot" and breastplate, loosening his belt and drawing off his boots, Hal threw himself on the straw pallet in the guard-room.

He had two good hours to sleep and he had been in the saddle since five in the morning, except the time spent on Osea Island directing the fortifications.

Sergeant David Pascal, in whom had grown up a blind adoration of his Captain, watched Hal throw himself down on the straw and fall instantly asleep. Pascal was a Huguenot of the South and so a countryman of the Wassailer. His Captain had rescued him once at Gedney and a second time in the Goring charge, when he had been isolated in the midst of the enemy. Hal had thought no more about the matter, but Pascal had not forgotten.

Exiles have long memories, both for wrongs and kindnesses. So the sergeant sat and watched the energetic look fade out of the boyish face. He saw the peace of childhood return, and with a muttered prayer he bowed his austere Roman profile towards the blonde head lying on the rude pillow of hay.

Hog Lane snored peaceably all about and the hour of midnight slowly approached. Then Pascal rose and laid his hand on Hal's shoulder to waken him. The five men were already at the door and the horses were champing bridles in the keen night air. Hal moved a little impatiently in his sleep. The sergeant's will was changed.

'Let him sleep - he is young and very tired. I will ride the rounds.'

So strapping on the Captain's "pot" with its white plume and drawing about him the dark cavalry mantle of grey, he strode out to ride the outposts in his Captain's place. He was, as he well knew, taking a liberty, but when a man has twice saved a man's life, as his Captain had saved the sergeant's, one does not stick at trifles. The six men found all well along the town posts, sentinels on guard and many little choruses of snoring noses. They had turned to come back along the river-side, when at a point opposite the fort on Osea Island, a sharp voice challenged. The five drew closer together their reins loose, their fingers on the triggers of their pieces, vainly spying out the night. Something blacker than the dark water which lapped the pier posts showed in front. The sergeant rode forward alone, thinking that Osea Island had something to communicate concerning the brig which had been seen the day before.

'Has the fort been attacked or a landing effected?' he shouted, never doubting but that he had to do with his comrades.

A single shot fired steadily as from a rest struck him full in the neck. He fell forward with a dull clash of arms. His lurking adversary had had him clearly silhouetted against the sky.

'So much for Captain Hal!' cried a mocking voice, as the boat detached itself from the solid blackness of the pier.

The muskets of the five men went off in a scattering volley, which was followed by a laugh from the boat now rapidly being lost to sight as the tide swept outward.

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When they took up Sergeant David Pascal he was dead, but when they brought him into the barrack chamber in the grey dawning, Hal Ludlow still lay asleep on the clean straw of the pallet where he had thrown himself down.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

HAPPINESS CORNER

Corporal Doe Royds gained the foot of the isle of Osea in a very exultant mood. He had slain the enemy, whom he had twice missed before. There was no Captain Hal Ludlow any more to order him about and to take the eyes and the hearts of the girls. Now Neña la Fain would cease to scorn him - she who could not waste a civil word upon him, a man in her own position, but would run like a dog at a whistle from Captain Hal, a man who cared not the snap of his finger about her, who never looked her way, who only made use of her as he would have ordered about any of his troop.

As for Doe Royds, he had brooded over his wrongs till he actually came to think himself the most wronged of men. Though he would have killed his Captain if he had seen him lay a hand upon the girl whom he watched with vulturine jealousy, yet he hated Hal still more for not being susceptible to those pleading passionate looks for one of which he would have risked his life.

Sullen, silent, intensely vindictive, he pursued Neña with awkward gallantries. He brought wisps of flowers plucked on the mainland thrust into his tunic where they were crushed by the straps of his breastplate - or a pound of butter half melted and imprinted with the marks of dirty fingers, a tiny pistol, taken from the breast pocket of a dead cavalier. Such were some of the love-tokens of this dangerous Caliban.

He would sit watching her with a hunger of

bestial envy gnawing at his vitals. Never had he seen anything so fine, graceful, and agile! Yes, he would have her. She should be his and he would use dagger or bullet against anyone who stood in his way, or against Neña herself if she resisted his will.

Now Doe Royds possessed a stolid and impregnable courage, without spirit or enthusiasm, but entirely under control. He did not see much of the world out of those small porcine eyes sunk in that massive square face disfigured with curious white marks of which no one but himself knew the meaning. These stood out a ghastly whiteness, the whiteness of bleached bone, as often as Doe Royds took to drinking his favourite Rotterdam schnapps. When his face showed purple speckled with white, his comrades kept out of the way and warned each other to look out for Doe Royds. These curious scars, of which no one had ever guessed the origin, were bites gained in the rat pits of the Borough, in a well-hidden space of ground behind the Anchor Tavern. There Doe Royds, in a period of acute financial disaster, had killed rats with his teeth, running naked on all fours like the wild beast he was, while the magnificent bucks of the palace antechambers cheered him on and wagered broad acres and ancestral manors that Royds would kill his thirty in an hour. Once he had been matched against my Lord Buckingham's Tiger which should kill the most, and the man had the dog well-beaten when at a '*St - ssst*' from his master Tiger flew at his rival's throat and the bets were declared off. But Doe Royds killed the dog with his naked hands.

With such episodes happening to him as a daily portion, no great delicacy could be expected from Corporal Royds. He had, indeed, boxed the compass

of sordid crime, served on shipboard, mutinied, and saved himself by swimming, cut throats on the Kent Road for a handful of coppers, played the highwayman on Blackheath, and lurked under the creaking chains of the gibbet without shivering, to catch the obscene crows that congregated there, with sieve and string as in the days of his innocent youth. Innocent - had Doe Royds ever been innocent? If so, he had utterly forgotten the fact.

But he had happened to be of use, in the way of his business, to the great Mr. Silas Seale, and had been hired to protect him from the fury of enemies who disapproved of his business methods. He had stood manfully to his engagement because the other side would not offer him a larger price. He had saved Friend Seale from tar-and-feathering - if not from something worse. And the grateful Quaker had brought him to Boreham Barns, where he became for a while a promising convert. But the Society of Friends would have none of him, and after a brief trial the Anabaptists cast him out. Indeed, they had never believed in him, and finally by his master's advice he had taken service as a spy in the Hog Lane Troop.

And the dogged sleuth-hound energy of the man made a good soldier of him - as it were in spite of himself. He cheated, betrayed, plotted, and murdered. But once in the ranks he would ride with the best, and in the charge no man save Hal and Zered fell faster or more furiously upon the enemy. His badge of corporal had been well-gained, well-deserved, and a source of no grumbling in the troop save what came from Doe Royds himself.

Why could they not leave a man alone? He was very well as he was. He asked no favours from the

great and he would gladly have done without this one.

Which in a way was true, for Doe Royds as a troop corporal found himself a more marked man than plain Trooper Doe Royds. It was harder for him to steal off in the twilight unremarked, leaving a post without a commander, and Hog Lane was not long in scenting a mystery.

‘Surely our corporal is a bold man,’ some of the younger whispered among themselves, ‘to go “petticoating” with a face on him like a badly cooked plum-pudding.’

Doe Royds had strong nerves, and he had need of them when looking up from the polishing of his accoutrement he saw, standing in the doorway of the fort shelter, within arms’ length of him, the man he had left for dead ten hours before on the old Baskerville pier.

‘Sergeant Pascal has been killed,’ Captain Hal announced. ‘They mistook him for me, because he had put on my helmet to ride the rounds. Bring over the men to the funeral.’

With the wailing of bugles and the blast of volley-firing the Hog Lane Troop laid their sergeant in his grave. And the man who seemed to grieve most decorously and sincerely was his successor, Sergeant Doe Royds of the Seventh Troop of the First Regiment of Cromwell’s Horse.

To be a good soldier covers a multitude of sins. Doe Royds was not even suspected. The gap in the numbers of the troop was filled by the enlistment of Lieutenant Zered’s nephew, a fine tall French Drover, who arrived with horse, bridle, arms, and accoutrement, needing only the scarlet coat of the Eastern Association and an hour or two a day of

extra drill, which was supplied to him alternately by his uncle and Sergeant Doe Royds.

So Death, with silent mouth and inscrutable eyes, went to and fro in the Seventh Troop, saluting and commanding, an obedient and dependable subaltern, a fine and ready fighter, a model soldier. But for all that, whether he listened to his Captain's orders, or looked towards the Isle House where about the doors Neña la Fain went and came, flitting like a busy butterfly in her blue cloth dress sashed with scarlet. Death looked out of the deepest beady eyes, and as it were, Hell followed after. Yet no man was quicker in the saddle, none more ready in reconnaissance, none more forward in the charge, none so well fitted to lead a "forlorn." He held his own life cheap, which enabled him to do as much for that of others. Certainly he had failed once or twice. His bullet had miscarried, but in the long run he must succeed - because, being unsuspected, he could choose his time. And Doe Royds was by no means an impatient man. With steel and lead he would make a wilderness about Neña la Fain, so that he alone might possess her. As for love, Doe Royds took no account of that. She should be his to have and to hold.

Meanwhile Hal and Zered, all unconscious, made themselves strong at Maldon and fortified Osea Island at their pleasure. Every day Hal rode with an escort to the Towers to take news of the ladies and to change the men of the guard, so that the ten men left there might not miss their due proportion of spade and mason work, or grow idle in that Capua of great folk's cookery.

Sometimes, especially in the heart of the week, Captain Hal found that my Lord with his train of

secretaries had departed Londonwards. He always knew this long before he reached the gate. The men on guard, stripped of their gay coats, were busily engaged in splitting kindling wood, bringing in faggots, carrying water, and even under the personal conduct of the spruce laundry-maids hanging out clothes - upon all which occupations Hal turned an eye conveniently blind. Nay, he regarded the scene with the toleration of a fellow-culprit - at least by intention.

For to these days of peace Master Hal found himself looking forward, and as they trod the leafy aisles and deep lanes of Woodham Mortimer, the feet of Hereward lifted more lightly and fell faster. For he knew that his saddle and trappings would be removed, and he turned out into that earthly paradise, a shady green paddock, where he could roll under trees, and so fulfil the desire of his heart.

After dinner (or even after breakfast if Hal came early) the girls would disappear, leaving Hal talking to Dame Elizabeth, who on pretext of seeing to the domesticities would presently descend upon the kitchen to levy war, or ascend of an afternoon to doze behind closed blinds in her own room. For Dame Cromwell, contrariwise to her Lord, was a good easy dame, who loved delights and scorned laborious days.

This was just as well, for during those autumn days a busy or suspicious chaperon of damsels would certainly have surprised in the deepest shade of the orchard a scene which might have proved displeasing to her. But Dame Elizabeth could be counted upon.

The younger children played boisterously on the far outskirts, fed Hereward with sweet cakes,

starting back when his moist breath blew upon their bare arms, or deep in the pastures lost themselves among the ragweed and tall blonde clusters of meadowsweet. Bridget had forbidden the orchard to them, from the heights of her twenty years. Bess, with characteristic virulence, had threatened chastisement. So Bridget, Bess, and the Lady Molly sat on the wall, broidering or shamelessly dangling legs and sucking apples till Captain Hal, eased of his armour, a Montero cap on his head and a book under his arm, appeared from the back door of the barn, and strode meditatively towards them as though studying the whole art of war. At sight of him Bess Cromwell leaped from the wall and running towards him before he could defend himself (poor unfortunate!) had her arms about his neck, crying, 'Kiss me, Hal. These others won't say so, but I don't mind. Kiss me, I have not been kissed for oh, so long a while!'

Which desire being fulfilled to the lady's content, Hal soberly kissed the hand which Bridget tendered to him nonchalantly, but the Lady Molly from her perch leaned forward with her hands on either shoulder, and offered her lips - 'to keep that shameless Bess in countenance,' she explained. But Bess rejected the glose. 'Nonsense, Hal. 'Tis because she likes it! She would be too jealous else.'

So between the differing of such doctors Hal was left to make his choice. In any case the result was equally pleasant, for after a time or two Bridget, feeling herself out in the cold, submitted with an excellent grace, as if in a fit of absent-mindedness being of that large female clan who permit that which, if asked, they would refuse. It was a good time for Captain Hal when the children were sent to

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play in the water meadows.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

THE AMATEUR WIZARDS

When the order came from General Cromwell, now for three days only at Westminster, Hal took it at once to his Lieutenant. 'Zered,' he said, 'an order is an order, and, as there is but one God, so Oliver Cromwell is his prophet. This I believe like any Turk. But this goes farther than my father's son ever bargained for. I did not enlist in the Slepe Troop, one of the first draft, to be a spy.'

'A spy - how so?' grunted Zered, reaching out his hand to take the letter, a broad sheet much folded, upon the ample breadth of which some words were hastily dashed as by a man with infinite business upon his mind. And, indeed. General Cromwell had written in an ale-house, his horse saddled and bridled, stamping impatiently without, audible as he wrote:

'Sir, - Deliver over the Troop to your Lieutenant. There is a work which presses. We are sorely needing news of Oxford. The man who went thither, a cousin of the accursed Hothams, hath played us false. We are wholly without knowledge of their forces or intentions. I know you take your life in your hands, but so do we all every day - though I do admit it is one thing to be hanged like a dog and another to die like a gentleman, sword in hand. Yet knowing not where to turn, I put this matter confidently in your hands. I would send one of my own sons, but Harry is too young and headstrong, Richard without dependence, being cursed with the

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curse of Reuben. Go then and God be with you! Take what armour-bearer you will, and return as speedily as may be, for the King threatens to overcrown all in the South and West, making our good day's work at Marston Moor of none effect.

I am, with a faithful heart,
'Oliver Cromwell.'

Hal sat watching Zered as he read and re-read the General's orders.

'An order is an order,' said Zered, 'and must be obeyed - that is point first. Point second, you must depart openly as if summoned to London by the General. I will call up the men and you will read Oliver's direction that I take over the command. Point third, you are left free as to your choice of an armour-bearer; now I should advise you - ' And here he leaned close to Hal Ludlow and whispered a name which seemed vastly to surprise that young gentleman. He gazed a long moment at Zered to see if he were in earnest, and then muttered, 'Would you have me disgrace myself for ever?'

'Nonsense - there is no disgrace. If the business should come to the General's knowledge, I will undertake to make the matter clear.'

'It was not of General Cromwell I was thinking,' said Hal dejectedly. Nevertheless he suffered himself to be persuaded.

* * * * *

In the cornfields by the way the right yellow was full on the wheat, but there were few men to be seen as the little ass caravan creaked its way along towards Oxford. Rupert had pressed most of them and the rest were in hiding. Now in their absence

their womenfolk handled the reaping-hook. Children, brown and gaunt, were gathering the crop hastily, and as each half-dozen sheaves was knotted into a bundle, it was carried away by long-legged lasses to some hiding-place. For these were not times in which sheaves can be left for a single night in the fields.

Yet all of them are glad to abandon the dry snipping rasp of the hooked hand-sickle and the warm breath of the encircled corn, to run to the edge of the road to marvel at the yellow-peaked hat of the elder traveller, covered with gilt pasteboard and inscribed with mystic Chinese signs.

'The wise men out of the East,' they cry, 'give us a charm, Master Melchior!'

The Mage is a tall man with vividly red hair, a drooping moustache, and a little apple-pip of beard in the dimple of the chin. He is dressed in flame-coloured silk, embroidered in black and red with squares and triangles, crosses and crescents in an intimate tangle of design. The flame-coloured robe reaches his feet whenever he wears it, but on the silent spaces where none come to see the dress of ceremony is carefully stowed in a linen casing like a long sausage roll and swung across the saddle of the mouse-brown donkey. The nimble apprentice sorcerer runs hither and thither, a stimulating ash plant in hand, which is used vigorously whenever the caravan lags, owing to the donkeys pulling furtively at tempting tufts and thistle-heads by the roadside.

Melchior, the wizard healer, and Sidi, his boy, are on their way to cure the King's troops at a cheap rate, and to amuse Prince Rupert, who has heard of them and whose safe-conduct is ready to the hand

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of Melchior the Mage in case of need. For Rupert's sign manual is worth a hundred times that of the King among the riotous and marauding troopers with whom the daring wayfarers are likely to meet.

Sidi, too, is worth looking at. He is of an even hue, face, hands, and legs bare from the wide white *bragas* of linen to the sandals of leather fastened with the thong which passes between the great and second toe of each foot. The colour of his skin is of dusky lemon with an underglint of something metallic like dim gold shining through. He wears a short pigtail carefully braided with silk which he often carries in his mouth or coiled about his head, caught into place with a two-pronged Oriental pin of yellow ivory. His eyes are oblique and with long black lashes, and the scanty down on his upper lip is carefully darkened. A handsome young barbarian enough in his white turban and blue linen robe, which is generally tucked up under a belt of crocodile skin so as to leave his limbs free for his constant dashes after those pestilent asses. These he addresses as Djered and Djebel - names which, Arabic enough in appearance and provenance, become in his mouth reminiscent of Lieutenant Zered of the Seventh Troop and of a personage never long out of the mouths of Puritan sectarians, especially when set to drive asses. So "Zered" and "Devil" are soon popularly known as the names of the wizard's donkeys, and Sidi becomes famous all along the Oxford road for the vigour of the apostrophes addressed to his charges.

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'Neña,' said the Mage, retucking his gown which

had been threatening for the last mile to break loose, 'you must give me another lesson in patter-talk.'

'Better keep to "Sidi,"' said the apprentice; 'you might make an awkward mistake over yonder among the King's men. As for the patter, you had better leave the gipsy to me, and do you speak English fast and a little broken. You are the learned man, and if you can throw in any scraps of college Latin or odd sounding names, it will do no harm. Ah, Devil - come away from the beehives there, or we shall have to run for our lives.'

And the ash plant played a merry tune on the mouse-coloured flanks of Djebel, whose evil disposition had earned him the vulgar cognomen by which, at the pitch of Sidi's voice, he was generally addressed.

These anathemas delivered in an unknown tongue, with only the one word intelligible, uniformly impressed the natives of the loyal counties west of the King's circle of fortresses. Within this pale the Sages were received with joy, and certain of Sidi's pranks, which in the Puritan east would have ended in a drubbing at least, were applauded and encored. But till they had passed Reading, Sidi and his master observed the unobtrusive decency of foreign travelling merchants.

Thereafter the wizard's outfit was added to gradually according to Sidi's sure taste for the strange and exotic. The silver collar which marked him as a slave had been graven with his master's name by a jeweller on Tower Hill, to whom as a fellow-Anabaptist Zered Tuby had given them an introduction. Thick silver chains tinkled at Sidi's ankles, and the key of the collar padlock hung at

Rabbi Melchior's girdle.

Almost the only buildings which had neither been plundered nor wrecked were the mills. It was pleasant to come upon them on the woodland valleys, cool and quiet, the brick redder than elsewhere from the constant drifting of spray from the great wheel where it splashed above the pool.

'Aye,' said the goodwife at one of these, 'we were much troubled at first, before we got our protection, by the plunderers. But after the Prince had hanged half a dozen at Oxford town gate and written on their breasts, "FOR MEDDLING WITH MILLS AND MILLERS," they have let us alone. You see they need us to grind their corn, and cannot do without us at any hazard. How do we live? Better than you might think - but what is the use of telling you, Master Wizard, who must know everything?'

Hal became absorbed and intent. He had played in the Wold mills as a boy and remembered something of millers and their ways.

'I see a by-pass in the great funnel,' he said gently. 'It opens and shuts, and when the wheat is all ground, there is a little pile far down below in the darkness of the cellar.'

The miller's wife was a comely dame and good-humoured. She laughed merrily.

'I see that you are of the brotherhood. Methought I saw the meal-dust among your hair when you came in. You know that we must have our little profits, or how could we live? And where would the siftings, pea-meal, bean-meal, and other stuff come from for the fattening of our porkers?'

So on the strength of this vague fraternity Hal and slave-boy Sidi were invited to stay with Miller Tibbetts and his wife, and the earnest expectation of

the pair did not go unrewarded. For, being too great a Mage to condescend to such trifles himself, Rabbi Melchior ordered his servant to give such an exhibition of legerdemain as caused the honest people to cross themselves to avert the evil eye. It was all of the simplest sort, but Sidi's manipulation was of the finest and his passes the most dexterous. That night the Mage slept in a great oaken bedstead of the time of King Harry, while Sidi occupied the truckle bed on little broad wheels which during the day reposed underneath.

It was scarcely midnight and Sidi not yet retired to his truckle bed when a great noise of battering and shouting arose outside the mill-door. 'In the name of the King - open there, miller, or we will burn down your mill!' From their chamber they could hear Goody Tibbetts waking her husband, who apparently slept his stoutest, as one might say, upon both ears.

'Go down and speak with them, John,' she was saying. 'I'll wager 'tis the same troop of fly-by-nights who came hither to rob us a month ago.' Miller Tibbetts groaned and gathered his clothes somehow about him and groped his way downstairs. At the sound of his voice the brawl redoubled.

'Open the door - we are sent by the King! We must have flour and meal - aye, aye, oats for our horses and money for our pockets. Millers are all rich, as rich as misers!'

Hal and Sidi could not hear the miller's protestations, but the answering threats came over the wall and the solid wooden gate "dithered" upon its supports. The chamber in which master and slave-boy lay communicated by a small door and a flight of steps with the upper part of the mill, which

poked a gloomy forehead of gable out over the gate. The door was open and a windlass protruded. It was to this granary that Miller Tibbetts lifted his spare sacks of wheat, both full and empty. Sidi took an empty sack, stuffed it with straw, wrapped a linen sheet from the bed round it, and tied a rope about one corner, so that the head hung down in a way surprisingly suggestive. Then having procured a large sheet of paper, he printed some words upon it, and leaving Hal to attach the placard to the breast of the stuffed and swathed figure, set off to search among the cargo of conjurer's tricks which had been placed in the great storehouse on the ground-floor.

Here Sidi came upon Goody Tibbetts wringing her hands. She called out at sight of him, 'Oh, run and hide, little wizard, else they will kill both you and your master, and they will burn the mill and steal all our goods and gear. What shall we do?'

'Do?' quoth Sidi, hastily rummaging among packages. 'Do - go to the window and look out!' And he sped upstairs with his find. Captain Fly-by-Night's gang had no direct connection with the royal forces, but was composed of those rough unstable elements, thieves and broken men, who sometimes took a hand in the later stages of a siege in order to be first at the plundering of the burghers. But they could give and take blows also, though they never attacked unless the odds were at least ten to one in their favour. They had one fear in the world and that was Rupert, who, indeed, plundered himself, but did not allow mere irregulars and camp followers to strip his men of their dues.

So beneath swarmed and clamoured the crew of ruffians, partly on foot and part mounted on lean nags and stolen cart-horses. They had found the

trunk of a small fir tree laid out to season for next winter's fires. Of this they had made a rude battering ram which they had swung against the great spiked wooden gate with a thud which shook the framework of the mill.

It was time to be acting, and Sidi ran out his stuffed sack to the point of the windlass, and giving the rope to Hal bade him 'lower away.' The dangling figure with the bobbing pendent head over which Sidi had tied a white handkerchief was let down. Dreading some trick or dangerous explosive the besiegers gave back a little, and the apparent corpse descended, dipping and dangling, the head sagging aside in a manner horribly suggestive. The troop of plunderers paused a moment uncertain what to do. But from the window over their heads burst a ghastly flare of blue which lit up the dangling figure, and especially the white oblong of the placard pinned to the breast:

"FOR MEDDLING WITH MILLS AND MILLERS."

While with one hand on the windlass, and dressed in buff jerkin and Montero cap, they saw through the blue glare a figure like the Prince Justicer who cried, 'Rascals - I know you - must I hang the whole of you that my mills may have peace?'

They scattered as if the devil were at their heels, yelling to each other that Rupert was coming and pursued even into the depths of the forest by the image of that dangling figure with the swathed blind face, the awful voice, and the keen blue flame which seemed to write every man's name upon his brow.

From that night forth Miller Tibbetts and his

Goody were left in peace. For Captain Fly-by-Night's gang spread the report to explain their defeat. The Prince often spent the night there. It was not good to pass that way, and they added considerations which, though damaging to the good name and fame of the miller's wife, gave complete security to her husband from all future depredation.

And so did Sidi and his master, but especially Sidi, requite right royally so excellent a reception. Miller Tibbetts had entertained angels unawares.

But it was not often they could count upon such a reception. Nor, indeed, did they greatly desire it. The shelter of their tent, set up ten or twelve feet above the stream, on a promontory if possible, with a wood behind, and a view up and down the valley - such an encampment was good fortune for them to find. Or sometimes they camped high up on a side brook which came racing down from the ridges, the water clean, cool, and hard from the limestone. They slept soundly, the asses clicking heels and pulling at their halters where Hal had tethered them out, or rustling furtively among the osiers of the "roddam."

Sidi, with his back against a great trunk and his feet to the camp fire, slept and waked alternately, nor could Sidi himself have told at any given moment whether he was asleep or awake. But he mended the fire at the right moment, and when the first breath of morning blew, he opened wide the flaps of the tent door. The fresh sweet air entered, fanning the sleeper into instant wakefulness. Hal was on foot and alert. No drowsy stretchings and yawnings such as happen to those who sleep in shut houses. He had been asleep. He was awake - that was all!

In these days Sidi was wonderful. Never had he

HAL O' THE IRONSIDES

been so happy. His idol went by his side all day, talked to him, was instructed in all the new wisdom which is outside the range of college-bred captains of horse. That wave which came up the stream yonder was no mere wave, but an otter swimming silently as if in oil. The water vole dived from the bank to cut the fresh reeds on the succulent white roots of which he made his breakfast. All was new and wonderful to Hal. Best of all was when, gold and purple against the pale green sky of late evening, Sidi pointed out the towers of Oxford, the King's city, very far away.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

OXFORD IN THE KING'S DAYS

Rupert's sign-manual and seal had admitted them into a wonderful city, or rather a city which formed but the kernel of a great entrenched camp, the Oxford of the King. Such a press of people, such galloping of orderlies, and gay young Captains of foot walking arm in arm, ogling the damsels as they went by. For the King held court in Christ Church hall and the guard royal, with gilded breastplates, stood at intervals along the crowded ways. The church steeples and grey colleges were gay with bunting, blue and white, and from many hundreds of masts floated the red cross of St. George. But colleges and churches, nay, even the loyal town itself, were almost lost among the wilderness of tents and wooden erections which extended on all sides both up and down the river. These huts of plank and rough-hewn logs from the Berkshire forests were laid out in regular alleys, some with pompous names - Coronation Highway, Three Kingdoms' Avenue, Love-Charles Lane. Others had printed placards which showed the wit of the gentlemen cavaliers. "Traitors' Gate," had a lych-gate in the form of a gallows from which little figures were dangling. These, to prevent mistake, were labelled, "Essex," "Fairfax," "Manchester." A little farther on a long building of many doors and small unglazed windows bore the sign, "Prynne's Quarters," and on looking up the head, legs, arms, and trunk of the great Parliamentarian were to be seen empaled on spikes

on the flat rook, drooping red rags most convincingly as the wind swayed them about.

Patiently and meekly Sidi and his master drove their asses before them through a wilderness of storehouses, cattle sheds, sheep pens, pig-sties, and cellars recently dug, with the earth still piled high in front. They passed reeking brickfields and stores of sea coal from the Forest of Dean, charcoal sheds and wood reserves, hay and straw in huge stacks each a hundred yards long, all duly thatched and battened down. Then came a wider avenue with guarded magazines of powder. Here sentinels compelled them to keep rigorously in the middle of the road, where the dust was ankle deep. Presently the camp opened out on a wilderness of field tents, innumerable picketed horses, all the ordered bustle and beehive diligence of a long-occupied cavalry encampment. Here were no gilded guardsmen, but rough-clad men sat in their shirt-sleeves mending their uniforms or burnishing their accoutrements.

Something told Hal in a moment that he had seen these bronzed veterans before. He recognised the soft yellow leather Mazarin riding-boots which were held up by bands of hide, the hacked casques and scarred breastplates which strewed the ground in front of the tents.

Where had he seen these last? It came back to him in a moment. Why, where but at Marston Moor, in that fateful moment when Cromwell, wounded on the neck, had been beaten down upon his horse's neck - when Zered and he had driven in before him, lashing about them fiercely, their swords rising and falling upon hosts of just such men as these.

They had arrived. Mage Melchior and Sidi his slave were at last in the cantonments of Prince

Rupert. And there on the tall flagstaff of a whitewashed cottage of two stories, garreted above with *tabalière* skylights, blew out the many-quartered red and gold standard of Rupert of the Rhine.

As they came near, hoping to find an orderly, who for an opportune greasing of the palm might take their credentials to his Highness, Rupert himself came out with his brother Maurice. They were laughing heartily like men who had already both eased their hunger and slaked their thirst. Rupert clapped his brother on the shoulder and in a voice audible to the whole square of busy cavaliers, accused him of trifling with the fair fame of a certain Lady Lulu - a name at which the soldiers paused in their stitching or polishing, each to wink knowingly at his neighbour.

But the small cavalcade of laden asses, the peaked hat, gilt and tinselled in red and silver, the gorgeous magician's robe, Sidi with his golden skin, his blue robe and silver collar, instantly arrested Rupert's attention.

The russet-clad hearty man pushed back the broad-brimmed Vandyke hat from his brow that he might see the better. The asses stood patient and blinking, while Melchior the Mage bowed low, spreading abroad his hands in a reverential salaam, while the lithe slave springing forward threw himself upon his knees at the Prince's feet, and knocked his forehead three times on the ground. Then he leaped up and presented a folded paper to the Prince.

'Melchior the Mage out of the land of Mesopotamia, and his servant Sidi from Cathay on the confines of China!' he read aloud.

'So Frank Hotham hath kept his word after all,'

Rupert explained to his brother who stood looking on indifferently enough; 'I little expected it, seeing that the Hothams have other fish to fry just now, than to think of mages and their predictions.'

He beckoned Hal to approach. The Mage strode forward haughtily and stood waiting to be questioned.

'What can you do?' Rupert interrogated with more than his usual brusqueness.

'I heal diseases with my marvellous oil - I know all herb-cures and balsams. All poisons are under my control. I can gain love and I can break it. Hardest task of all I can keep love - that is, for others. I can foretell the future, by the lines of the hand, by the inkpool, by the grounds of coffee, but especially by the peculiar study of the stars after the manner of Chaldea.'

'Can you amuse us? Can you perform feats of wonder-working, or legerdemain?' said the Prince, whose ideas were eminently of the present, and who knew quite as much about the past as he wished to know.

The Mage waved a haughty hand.

'Not I, but my slave - he is exercised in all such things which are but secondary and superficial - '

'Very likely,' said Rupert; 'we shall have some amusing secondary things this evening. I prize particularly the superficial.'

He was about to turn away when Melchior asked for the Prince's gracious permission to set up his tent within the cantonments, and also that by his favour he might be allowed to practise his healing arts among the soldiers and camp followers.

'If he will cure my Lady Lulu's spaniel for me, he shall have all the protection he wants,' broke in

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Prince Maurice. 'Let him follow me and he shall see the brute.'

'Pardon me, noble Prince,' said the Mage, with grave apology, 'that is more difficult, for I cure by the influence of mind on mind. But still, since it is your desire, I shall do my best and have little doubt but that I shall succeed.'

The enclosure of Prince Maurice was much more private than the great square about Rupert's quarters. The elder loved to live in the midst of his troopers, and would sit down to share their ordinary at any camp kettle. He would gossip by the hour in any tent door, and the men adored him accordingly.

But Prince Maurice was a young man of many good fortunes in a city where such were numerous and easy. He was a favourite among the ladies, especially those of heavier purse and riper years. He therefore lived more retired, in a square of sycamores, palisaded all round. And in a corner of this, remote from the low ivy-overgrown Elizabethan mansion, the Mage and Sidi were allowed to erect their tent, and pasture out their caravan asses. A door in the palisade and a fence cutting off their corner were arranged for them, so that, while fully protected, they could neither spy upon the Prince's guests nor cause trouble by entering or going out by the main guard.

Prince Maurice sent down an officer with the sick spaniel daintily deposited upon a cushion, and a written word in a lady's delicate hand to say that she entrusted her heart's darling to the wise man from the East. He was difficult as to his feeding and would sometimes snap when irritated. But that was only the poor darling's way. To this was added a detailed list of the meals and special dishes which

would be sent down each day from my Lady's house.

Hal glanced once at the King Charles as he lay, fat and plethoric, on his cushion of down.

'I can cure him in a week,' he said with the slow grave smile of a true Mage. Here at least was something he thoroughly understood.

The officer went his way, and the Mage Melchior rudely jerking away the cushion, fastened a stout cord to his gold collar, and tied him up in an empty stall beside Djebel and Djered. A basin of cool water was put within his reach, a little straw to sleep upon, and the darling, after one whipping for snarling and another for whining, was left to work out his own salvation in the dim light of the stable.

When the repasts came down by my Lady's gentleman, Melchior and Sidi gave thanks and shared the dainties complacently between them. As for the darling, his business was not to whine, to keep out of the reach of the donkeys' little hard heels, and to drink as much water as he liked. He was already on the highroad to health. Three days of excellent spring water changed his outlook upon life, and when the wonder-worker appeared on the fourth morning with a basin of crusts boiled to a sop, he ate modestly and with a changed heart, not snarling once but, contrariwise, licking the hand that fed him. Melchior was a Mage indeed.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

CAMP FIRE MAGIC

Upon a platform, composed of the two waggons, securely propped upon trestles with boards laid crosswise, under the light of flaring torches planted at the four corners, appeared nightly Sidi and Sidi's master.

Overhead a crocodile grinned and swung open-mouthed, and the impish tricks of the apprentice distracted attention momentarily from the preparations of the grave Mage, who in a mood of solemn abstraction was setting out his remedies.

If the night were still, as it mostly chanced in Oxford camp at that season, butterflies balanced and fluttered about a pair of fans in Sidi's clever hands, rising and settling, or with an outward sweep falling among the audience, while the apprentice wizard manufactured others of filmy paper quicker than the eyes of the on-lookers could follow him. When this palled, candlesticks, bottles, and eggs became suddenly possessed with devils, dancing wildly in the air and coming to rest where and how the juggler willed. Or, most popular sight of all, a stalwart trooper in full panoply was pushed up on the platform, where he stood foolishly grinning, while from his mouth, out of his ears, and from the stalwart breadths of his back, issued yards of ribbon, bolts of shavings, and links of sausage. He was invited to sit down on a bottomless chair and immediately began to lay an unlimited number of eggs in view of his rejoicing comrades, while Sidi

imitated to perfection the self-satisfied keckle of a hen proclaiming her latest maternity. But the climax of the joy was reached when from the helmet of some new arrival in the camp, an officer if possible, Sidi produced with extreme surprise a tame rat, a pair of pigeons, a live rabbit, a suit of baby clothes, and on one occasion carefully led up to the actual authentic baby itself. This, though brilliantly successful, could not be repeated, owing to the unwillingness of the mother, a certain Bridget Sheeny who followed the camp, to have her little Michael laughed at.

But all these accessories were in a moment swept away and relegated to unseen parts of the caravan when Melchior waved his hand in a triple spell to the four great winds of heaven. He called these by their names. He called spirits, Heth, Toth, Astoroth, and Demogorgon, up from the vasty deep. He invoked the great healers and wonder-workers, pattering names easily and confidently, Tubal-Cain, Solomon, Cydelezius, Cornelius Agrippa.

'These are my authors,' cried the Mage Melchior. 'From them springs my power. I can tell the past of any man or woman by a glance at their hands. Four farthings and no more is the cost - no, not from the Prince himself, by whose favour and protection I stand here, do I ask more.'

'Hurrah for Prince Rupert!'

'Four farthings, two halfpence, or one penny buys a full view of the past, the present, the future, but also of the health of your head, heart, stomach, and bowels - not dear at a farthing a-piece. Thank you. Maid Marion (to a towsy-haired trollop of a camp follower). You have fared hard and fared soft. But though seldom you have eaten bread twice under

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the same roof, you have kept a kind heart and a heavy hand. In your life there is a fair man and a dark. Both love you. You prefer the fair man because he is young and handsome, but then the dark man is rich. Him you will follow, and (with a sudden jerk into song)

*'Down the hill and up the hill,
He shall be Jack and you shall be Jill.'*

There's enough for a penny, Marion. I defy all those who know you to say that I have uttered one word contrary to verity. And now to business. I have here - ' (He lets fall the lid of a case and shows blue phials ranged in endless rows, each tied down with curious foreign withes and capped with gold lack paper like that which had glittered on the wings of the butterflies.)

Here we have the most holy Eden oil, direct from the Garden. Of this rare drug there are four sorts, Euphrates, Tigris, Gihon, and Haddikil, according to the name of the river on whose banks the sacred balms were culled. I come from Mesopotamia, gentlemen cavaliers. With my own hands, and according to the ancient directions of my ancestors, the Chaldeans, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, and Iranians, I have distilled this miraculous juice which heals all diseases. Gentlemen, I speak to men who have seen the world and know that all mankind is subject to disease. Here is a man who thinks himself in perfect health. Really his heart is weak, his purpose feeble, his wrist easily fatigued - '

'You lie in your throat, dog of a foreigner,' cried a tall, sturdy trooper, whom Hal had chosen to tease because of the wrathful countenance he carried

about with him. 'My wrist weak? - why, I cleft a man to the chine only a week agone at Basing - as I will do for you, if you will take off that yellow blanket and stand up like a man.'

Mage Melchior had been watching for such a chance. He did not get it every night.

'I will humour you, friend,' he said; 'your hand is feeble on the sword-hilt - I can see it wicker, and the wrist - why, it needs a full sixpenny-worth of Eden Balsam.'

'Step up here and I will prove it, my good Captain!'

The man stepped up on the platform, sword in hand and eager for the fray.

'I will carve him to Eden chops!' he shouted down to his comrades.

'I am a man of peace - will any lend me a sword?' A dozen were instantly at his disposal. He took the nearest to his hand quite at random, dropped his long mystic robe, and showed himself in knitted jersey and close-fitting knee-breeches.

'Not fair, Will Make,' cried the crowd; 'how can he fight against a man in armour?'

'Fair it is,' quoth Will Make, 'since he said I had a poor heart and a weak wrist.'

'Fair indeed, comrade,' agreed Hal. 'I have my magic cap ... of pasteboard - the gift of Assurbanipal, principal magician of Persepolis, the chief city of my nation.'

And he made the peaked hat revolve and pirouette as if alive.

'On guard there, William! If you are strong enough to stand up alone.'

'I give you the lie,' roared William, thrusting desperately, only to find his sword glide aside from

the ready guard.

'Stand to it, William,' shouted the crowd. 'He called thee a weakling.'

'I'll "weakling" him!' retorted sturdy Will. And the blades met with a clash. What happened after that passed too swiftly to be written down in detail. William was conscious that his sword had been taken possession of, beaten up and down to right and left at his opponent's pleasure, finally snatched from his hand and sent spinning into the sycamore, where it stuck crosswise among the branches.

Hal ran quickly and grasped the outstretched wrist which William Make was regarding open-mouthed. 'Quick, Sidi, a drop of the Elixir! There, my good Captain, my noble soldier - what did I tell you?' (For the man winced and gasped as the fiery spirit passed down his throat.) 'Now, Captain Will, I will try no more bouts with you. Now your wrist is like steel. You can fight with the master fencer of the army - and all only costs you six pennies - I thank you! Here is your sword which my slave Sidi has brought back out of the tree tops. And thank you, sir, for the loan of your good blade!'

The Mage Melchior bowed low to the smart young gallant of Prince Maurice's corps, whose sword he had used.

'Mage or no Mage, I must get him to show me that *botte*,' muttered the owner. 'It was as clever a trick of fence as ever I saw. Only once did I see a young fellow do the trick in old Rouvigny's *salle* behind the Globe Cock Pit.'

'And who was he?' asked his companion carelessly.

'Oh, I know not, a young collegian from Cambridge, they said. But I forget his name, a lad

half this conjurer's age. But the trick was the same - a beating of the opponent's sword this way and that, benumbing the fingers, then - whoop, sudden lift and the blade flickered to the rafters of the fencing hall.'

But there was no pause in the patter of the Wise Man from Mesopotamia.

The Balsam of Eden cures all maladies, spleens, hypochondries - better than all dill, aniseed, germander, and ground pine, whether sodden in water or drunk with wine. The sacred remedy may be taken inwardly or applied outwardly. Euphrates and Tigris for the inward parts, Haddikil for wounds, and Gihon as a liniment, plaister, or ointment, excellent for toothache, heartache, the pains of unrequited love, and for blistered feet - four-pence only to a foot soldier, and to each lover who will publicly declare the name of his true mistress, I will present a phial as a free gift.'

By this time trade had grown brisk. The sale of the bottles fell to Sidi, who handed them out with Oriental indifference, clinking the change into a brown leather bag at his girdle.

'Tis good for the sick. It cures them of their pains. It is good for the well. It prevents him from falling ill - for the strong, it makes them stronger - for the weak, it makes them fierce as Numidian lions.

'See what it hath done for Will Make! Who will try a bout with him now? The sick, the well, the aged, the weak! Nay, a man must be devilishly dead, indeed, if it does not bring him alive again!'

A curious quiver passed among the ranks of the listeners as the Mage continued to speak rapidly. Hal glanced about but could see nothing. Sidi's sharp eyes, however, made out a party of three

which approached from behind, the Princes Rupert and Maurice in plumed helmets and breastplates, while between them with a certain austere dignity moved a third in black cloth of wondrous fineness, black buckles on his shoes, and confining the plume of his broad hat, only upon his shoulders the creamy lace collar spread in graceful folds.

'*The King ... behind you ... with the Princes!*' Sidi whispered in his chief's ear, and without a break the voice of the charmer continued.

I have also remedies for the spirit, food for the mind. The latest pamphlets damp from the press, written by the wisest men. Doctor West's *Defence of the Dispensing Power*, the Bishop's *Proof of the Divine Right of Kings*, Sheldon on *Non-resistance to the Lord's Anointed*, Young's *Sin of Rebellion*, and *The Iniquity of Schism* by the same notable author - all fresh from the secret presses of the city and none ever yet seen or read in this or any other camp. Who will read? Who will instruct themselves?'

Behind him, Hal was conscious of a movement, and Sidi, turning half round while apparently still busy with the box full of pamphlets, observed the King bend towards his right-hand companion. Presently Prince Rupert passed up a lane which opened automatically before him.

'Give me one of each,' he ordered roughly, 'and heark ye, lad, sell no more till I give you leave.'

Sidi made a packet which he tied with a blue and white favour and presented it to the Prince. Rupert flung a gold piece on the platform and strode away, with the injunction, 'Bide indoors to-morrow till you are sent for. There may be questions to ask.'

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

THE LADY LULU

On the next day Hal was interrogated with much strictness before the King and the Princes. How had he come to be in possession of the pamphlets, yet was unable to give any account of political matters in the city?

He answered with the confidence of truth that since he landed at the mouth of the Blackwater coming from Holland, he had not entered the capital, but had made his way as directly as possible to the city of Oxford. He had obtained his letters of recommendation from the Hotham family while yet abroad, while the English part of the stock-in-trade, the pamphlets and news sheets, had been sent on by gipsy friends of his slave-boy Sidi, who made a traffic in such-like throughout all the loyal parts of the kingdom from Cornwall to Lancaster.

The King nodded assent and approval.

So long as he was served, he cared little by whom, and indeed few ideas pleased him more than that of the highways of England being filled with strolling Egyptians and harmless secret folk, scattering belief in him and his divine mission in cottage and hall. For to the last he retained the belief that if only he could appeal directly to the common people, who loved him, he would soon get rid of that wearisome and obstructive Parliament which did nothing but stir up strife between him and his people.

It was not long, however, before the King wearied of Sidi's gibberish and Hal's interpretations, which added nothing to his knowledge.

'The pamphlets are excellent. Let these people sell them. The more good seed is sown, the greater will the harvest be.'

So Prince Maurice rose and led the Mage and his slave to the door. They left the presence with many reverences of which the King took no notice, but continued talking in a low tone to Rupert. But Prince Maurice took Hal by the elbow and said hurriedly, 'Go as fast as you can to my quarters and persuade the Lady Lulu, whom you will find there, to accompany you. Entertain her as best you may till I come for her. The King takes dinner with me to-day and will inspect my quarters. See to it as you shall answer to me, that she leaves no woman's fopperies behind her. The King will send me to black Wales or to rot in moist Cornwall with Ralph Hopton.'

A little uncertain as to his reception, but taking Sidi with him as a competent adviser on matters feminine, Hal hastened to carry out his instructions. He found that the Prince's servants had taken occasion to absent themselves, all but the cook, who was startled out of his decorum by the news that the King was to dine there. He instantly sent one of his satellites after the truants, and another to the market, while with his mouth filled with Alsatian oaths, German "donnerwetter," and Rhenish "verdomptische schweinen," he proclaimed anathema on all the kings of the earth.

Now Lady Lulu was a remarkable person, known at every great court in Europe, as well as several small ones. Born to a great name and early married to one still greater, she had deserted both to become the companion of daring and adventurous men, princes or gamblers, crowned kings of the earth or

gentlemen highwaymen. All that the Lady Lulu demanded of her lovers was that they should in no sense fail her. And that in intercourse with her they should be ready at all moments to show their valour and conduct themselves as men. Lady Lulu preferred physical to moral advantages. She passed from one to another with the air of one in a rich garden, picking a fruit here and there with a careless wilful pleasure.

And in this lay her charm, or at least one of her charms, for she was a kaleidoscopic person and showed a complete range of rainbow facets to each new possessor.

Wholly without self-interest was the Lady Lulu, not venal, frank, and willing to tell a man when she liked him, equally frank of discourse when she liked another better.

They entered unannounced. A voice from a figure sitting cross-leg on cushions before a mirror cried 'Cuckoo' over a bare white shoulder and went on arranging blonde curls about a low brow. A loose robe of pale blue muslin caught about the waist with a bevy of butterflies, the colours eminently well imitated in precious stones, enveloped her beauty without concealing it. She had kicked off her brodered Turkish slippers, and the alabaster of one bare foot peeped out, the toes rosy, restless, and mobile.

Something in the mirror warned the lady of the presence of strangers. She turned easily as on a pivot, glancing up at them and covering up her bare feet with exaggerated modesty in the semi-transparent veil.

'Lady Princess,' said Hal, respectfully bowing, his ridiculous pointed hat under his arm, 'I am charged

by the Prince Maurice to beg you to come with us to our poor encampment in the corner yonder under the trees.'

The Lady Lulu clapped her hands.

'Why say you so? Of course I will,' she cried, rising erect and extending an arm from which the wide sleeve fell back showing a warm whiteness which culminated in a gold-flecked armpit.

'Why, you are my forbidden fruit. I was not allowed to see you or go near your camp, and now, you tell me Maurice sends me to you of his own accord. Eve, can you resist?'

Hal began to explain, but the Lady Lulu did not seem to pay much attention. She stepped forward, bringing with her a heady swirl of blonde perfume.

She pulled aside the weighty official robe, dropped it suddenly and laughed.

'There, I knew it,' she cried, 'you are no old grey-beard, but a very proper young man. I knew it, when they told me how you disarmed that roistering jack-pudding of a William Make. Wizard or no, that is no old man's task, and oh, your lovely slave-boy! I could kiss him and shall. Come, let us flee.

*'Why should youth and beauty stay,
Love has wings and will away.
Pleasures shorter are than day.
Wherefore should we then delay?'*

She had taken his hand and was proceeding to the door, her large liquid eyes looking at him languishingly and with visible provocation.

But Hal was faithful to his trust. He looked well about the chamber and removed a Castilian mantilla from a bedpost. He took down a long, black wrap-

rascal cloak from the pin whereon hung the Prince's cavalry sword, and threw it about Lady Lulu's shoulders. It seemed to him that he had done enough, but Sidi's eyes saw more clearly.

'Take her away, my master,' he said; 'I will follow.' And drawing a great bedspread of rose silk, covered with lace fine as spider's web, the slave began to collect within it all the objects which struck his fancy as unmeet for the chamber of a cavalry commander and the brother of hard-riding Rupert.

From the table he picked powder-puffs, and rouge in dainty shells, with perfumes in small round Venice flagons. A pair of La Vallière corsets in flowered silk trailed on the carpet, their purple silken lacets disordered by the haste of removal. A lace cap and a long night rail ornamented the shutter knobs, and a morning wrapper marked as having been made by "Madame Lafollie, Rue des Reservoirs à Versailles," hung over the back of a chair. All these and a score of other things, kerchiefs and slippers, stomachers and aprons, ribbons and wisps of embroidery, went into the bedspread of rose and cream upon the floor.

Before Sidi of the Silver Collar finished with Prince Maurice's quarters, not only haughty Charles but jealous Henrietta Maria herself might safely have inspected them. Then with his load the slave-boy took his way unobserved along the shady walk which led to the Palisades, for so the Wizard's camp was called, from the high fence which shut it out from view.

With wise and silent skill Sidi arranged the cushions and bedspread upon the rugs which the Prince had sent them for their encampment. The Lady Lulu was instantly at home, all the more so

that she had her personal belongings about her. She couched luxuriously upon the cushions, drawing in and extending her toes like a purring kitten. Her fingers netted themselves behind her head and she reclined on a corner of the rosy coverlet, lazily pushing out one bare foot or rhythmically retracting and extending a knee in a manner fitted to play havoc with St. Anthony.

‘So - I am banished,’ she said laughingly, ‘and by decree royal. Come, Master Wizard, sit beside me and of your wisdom, tell me why?’

‘Perhaps,’ said Hal, ‘because the King loves you too little or because his Highness the Prince loves you too much!’

The Lady Lulu frowned and pouted with adorable nonchalance. ‘And yet,’ she said, ‘I am of as good blood as any Stuart in all Scotland, and better than all Rhineland princes from Holland to the Three Crowns of Basel!’ She waved a light hand, small as a child’s, with rosy nails tinted like sea-shell, which she clicked like castanets against her teeth and then tossed a kiss in the direction of Prince Maurice’s quarters.

‘That for the royal shanks of King Stork,’ she cried mockingly. ‘Heaven pity the woman who loves a stock-fish. He would do nothing but confess each day’s transgressions to Bishop Juxon, or Master Laud. Worse still, he would go off weeping to make peace with his Henrietta, who is the better man of the two. Well, they are all off next week. That is one comfort to think on. The King goes to the south with twenty thousand. Rupert makes another push for the north - Lancashire at least, and Prince Maurice, though he knows it not yet, rides with him. We shall be left alone, my sweet captors. I shall learn magic,

i'faith - all that you can teach me, while I shall teach you such witchcraft as is not to be learned under the twelve signs of the Zodiac.'

They sat long thus, the lady half reclined on Hal's shoulder, and Sidi at his master's feet looking on the ground, his hands joined palm to palm and his head bowed with Oriental submission. The Lady Lulu looked at him often, taking him all in from his silken skull cap and braided pigtail, his red lips and almond eyes to the brown-sandalled feet and ankles about which the silver chains looped and tinkled. It was clear that she had never seen anything like Sidi the Slave of Melchior the Wise Man from Mesopotamia. Most curiously of all she regarded his silver collar. It fascinated her, and of all desires, that of the unknown was the most itchingly keen with the Lady Lulu.

'Come hither, child,' she said, beckoning to Sidi; 'come and sit beside me. I would give - not all that I possess, for that is never any great matter, but all I might possess if so I pleased, to have such a slave. For how much will you sell him, wise Melchior?'

'Not for money,' quoth Hal; 'he is as my own son - my child, and I will neither sell nor part with him.'

'Ah,' sighed the Lady Lulu, 'I feared as much - then you will have to take me with you and let me work magic - for I have fallen in love with you both. I am nothing if not frank.'

And she encircled each with an arm, but withdrew her left with a hasty cry as the rounded softness encountered the chill of the metal collar of rough silver.

Instantly she was on her knees before Sidi, trying to undo the padlock with her slender fingers.

'Oh, I cannot - I cannot loosen it. Do you, quick,

Sidi, quick!’ And the blood rose to her cheek and flushed her delicate body under the vaporous folds of muslin. A pulse beat visibly in her neck. Her eyes glowed large and mystic, as though their dark softness would overflow her face, and the ruby-winged butterflies of her drooping cincture glowed over a golden foam as of sparkling wine. Her bosom rose and fell with her quick breathing, and in every nerve and fibre she was a woman alive, eager for the satisfaction of her desire of the moment. She clapped her hands together with that impatience which of a princess had made the Lady Lulu.

‘Quick, open, open! I will it. You must open or I shall die.’

The Mage took the key from about his neck and in a moment the collar swung free. She handled it with childish pleasure. ‘Oh, how soft. It is padded with leather delicate as a lady’s glove!’ And she rubbed it against her cheek, murmuring, ‘Soft, soft!’

Then with a proud humility she poised it about her own slender neck. When Hal pointed out the inscription cut upon it, she examined it carefully.

‘Sidi, slave of Melchior the Mage.’

‘I also will be your slave,’ she cried with a sudden catch of her voice, and clasping it round her neck she let the catch click, and snatching the key, she locked it and flung the key over the palisades.

‘Now you cannot help taking me with you, for I dare not go back to Maurice, and what is more I will not. Maurice - what is Maurice to me? There is no Maurice. There never was a Maurice in the world, or a Rupert or any other man except you!’

* * * * *

Soon she quieted a little. 'But for all, it is the time for eating,' she said, 'Go, Sidi, and bring a provision from Brunner, the cook. Tell him it is for me and he will pile your platter and fill your wine-basket. Oh, a brave man, Brunner. Haste to go, Sidi. I have much to say to your master.'

What the lady said and how she said it must be the subject of a new chapter of history, because many matters historical and otherwise depend upon that conversation.

Sidi being temporarily removed by her orders, this was the manner of Lady Lulu's communings with his master. In the warm dusk of the tent she clung suddenly about him. Her lips sought his and the Lady Lulu affirmed by unmistakable signs that, after many mistakes, she had indeed found her long-sought lord and master. Even while, with the instinctive subtlety of youth responding to youth, the Mage soothed her to the comparative quiet of recognisant sighs and a happy April of mingled tears and smiles, he still kept clear and dominant his Puritan head. The object of his mission was not to pleasure the Lady Lulu nor a score like her, but to find out the movements and numbers of the King's troops and the intentions of his generals.

For this purpose the Lady Lulu might serve him perfectly. Hal was a youth of some experience before taking service with Hog Lane and Oliver. He had been at college and had lived in London with his father. He knew that such sudden passions as the Lady Lulu's were like fires among whins, quickly alight, blazing high, and as quickly sinking to red embers and dead ashes. Let him profit, then, while the fit lasted.

She drew him down beside her and regarded him

with lustrous, over-brimming eyes, under eyelids so heavy and languid that each moment they seemed ready to close. Her lips were red and her breathing quick and troubled like a sea subsiding after storm, as she reared herself on her elbow to look down into his soul.

Hal Ludlow let her look her fill. He knew well that she could not see what was in his soul. He was a direct, and as the times went, fairly honest young man, but he was well advised how to profit by such circumstances. The modern scruple had not yet arisen, and men took what the gods gave without remorse, knowing well that it was their business to benefit by the follies and wilfulness of women, or at least of such women as the Lady Lulu. Yes, he would pay her with the money she desired, full tale and a bounty over. Love was a word which would be much in the lady's mouth, but the clear-headed youth knew well that if youth and warm blood answered for him, Lady Lulu would be satisfied.

Now Hal Ludlow had no particular desire to make love. Nor, left alone, would he have done it. But on the other hand, in the interests of the Cause, he had no objection to being made love to. And that precisely was the door which fate was opening out to him.

'Well, cost what it would,' said the young man to himself, with unconscious hypocrisy, 'he would go on to the end till every scheme of the King and his counsellors was an open book to him. What else were such women for? The great pity which would have filled the soul in a more sensitive or sentimental age, the chivalry of the books of bygone romances, troubled him no whit. He was in no danger. The flame might warm but would not scorch

him. He loved, as he had ever done, the Lady Molly Woodham - and in his rude, hectoring, masterful way he was faithful to her, but if Bess Cromwell pressed his foot under the table till she lost her slipper, if Lulu, the uprooted Princess, cast herself into his arms, what did it cost to show himself not insensible? Hal of the Ironsides, the Puritan with the *panache*, possessed the morals of his time and class, which were not those of a sectary like Zered or an enthusiast like Cromwell. He had lived among the enthusiastic young royalists of his college, without partaking of their opinions, yet in his manner of life he was of them. He had watched under his father's roof the wiles and stratagems of Parliamentary leaders, and so far he had learned the game of caution. But he was not of that faction. He had the instinct of the born soldier, and he knew that it was not in committee that the King could be checkmated. One man only could win for the parliament, and so while his ancient friends were flocking to join the royal standard, Hal Ludlow became a common soldier in the Slepe Troop. He saw his chance and made a weapon of the fanaticism of Hog Lane. Now, once more Fate stood on tiptoe. This fancy, sudden and passionate, of the Lady Lulu would speedily fade and disappear. But all the more reason, then, why while it lasted it should be used by a practical young man zealous for the good of the Cause.

Strangely enough, in making this severe sacrifice to the good of the Commonwealth of England, Hal was wholly unconscious of the real sacrifice which was being made for him - that of the youth, the beauty, and the life of Neña la Fain. Her conduct seemed so natural to this spoilt young man that he

actually thought no more of her self-abnegation than if she had really been Sidi, the slave of the Mage Melchior from Mesopotamia. If Hal Ludlow, indeed, came from that country, he had been born some distance from the innocence encircled by the Eden wall and watched by the flaming sword which turned every way.

Presently Sidi returned with a piled tray upon his head, while a pair of kitchen scullions clinked tableware and bottles outside. Hal went to the door to scatter small change, but Sidi would have none of this waste.

'They are well paid,' he whispered, and then, turning to the camp followers, he commanded, 'Come back in an hour for the dishes.'

They ate and drank gaily. The Lady Lulu, rejoicing to cast off the etiquette of princely establishments, bubbled over with tales of Versailles and Vienna, Florence and Modena.

'When I am your slave we shall go thither again, and where I have ruled as princess I shall dance on the platform under the torches to draw you an audience!'

And Hal nodded assent, smiling approval, but well determined that the Lady Lulu should return to Prince Maurice that very night, that she might learn the result of the deliberations of the King's generals about the royal council-board.

And during the meal the chains at Sidi's wrists and ankles chimed softly, and the Lady Lulu turned to look in his dusky face.

'Oh, Sidi, you and I have a noble master - one for whom a woman would be content to die!'

'Even so,' said Sidi imperturbably, and served the golden Moselle wine.

CHAPTER THIRTY

A CROMWELL OF WOMEN

Hal had never taken himself for a great man, but wholly without knowing it he was in his way a Cromwell of women. He not only succeeded in making the Lady Lulu help him, but induced her to take off the silver collar after Sidi had climbed the palisades to retrieve the key. Most difficult of all he persuaded her to return with Prince Maurice without too great unwillingness when he came seeking her.

As a reward he presented her with the spaniel, now in excellent health and appetite, marvellously cured of snapping and all snarling humours.

Strangely enough the King Charles failed entirely to pay any attention to his mistress, but fawned upon Hal and licked his hand.

'Oh, Brownie, Brownie,' she cried, 'you have broken my heart - I who sat up with you all night when you were a little whining puppy with the distemper - I, your own dear mistress, you to forsake me for that man! He hath cast the glamour over us both, and we can only fawn at his feet and kiss his hand.'

Which, so far as the Lady Lulu was concerned, was a somewhat incomplete account of the transaction.

Two days afterwards the great camp at Oxford was broken up. The King with his chief advisers, some squadrons of my Lord Goring's horse, and the whole army of foot, supported by a well-ordered park of artillery, moved away to the south to join Greville and Sir Ralph Hopeton. The West was to be swept from Bristol to Exeter. The fortresses which still held out against the King, garrisoned by the *débris* of Waller's army, were to fall one by one. There were traitors in many of them, or at least men of a yielding disposition, who, cut off from all support and despairing of relief, would be content to yield up their towns and citadels on reasonable terms - nay, who might even like the Hothams be willing to take service with His Majesty.

Of Reading the King was already secure. The governor, a former knight of the shire, was secretly in the royal interest. The trainbands of London, few and disaffected, were all that lay between that town and the capital.

On the other hand, Rupert and Maurice, with the great body of the royal horsemen, a cavalry force so numerous that the like of it had never ridden behind a single commander in England, were to sweep northwards, gathering recruits from the borders of Wales, joined by all Lancashire, that stronghold of loyal Catholic gentlemen, and, avoiding the sluggish and ill-paid Scots, the whole array was to fall upon Cromwell in the Eastern Counties at the very moment when he was distracted by the loss of Reading and the news of the march of the King's southern army upon London.

It was urgent, therefore, that General Cromwell should have news of this great combined movement.

But Hal did not dare to provoke the Lady Lulu by any hasty attempt at flight. So passionate a lady was quite capable of denouncing her faithless friend to Rupert, and of repenting only after the bullets of the firing party had done their work.

Then, indeed, her sorrow would be intense, her repentance and remorse without bounds, but these would do him or the Cause but little good. On the whole, it would be safer to postpone any thought of departure until the break-up of the camp at Oxford.

It was all one to the Lady Lulu. After dark she sat on the roof of the caravan cloaked and masked, listening to the clatter of question and answer, the changing patter of the salesman, the quick judging of characters necessary for the fortune-telling, and felt that she had found her career at last. She could have gone down among them there and then, but for her fear of what the princes might do to her new idol.

When once Maurice was safely off in the train of his whirlwind brother, she would be free to masquerade in spangled tights before the booths of fairs. The prospect smiled upon her and set her body swaying and her feet tingling to be dancing to the rattle of her castanets and the wilder strains of Sidi's cornemuse before the inhabitants of peaceful towns or under the shadow of tall ash trees on distant village greens, the sunset dying rich behind in a flurry of scarlet and gold.

She did not ask herself how long such a life would content her. She had wearied of many things. So she might of this. But in the meanwhile she longed for it all the more strongly that it seemed impossible of realization.

During the days of final preparation the Prince

had little time for her society. His brother's ardour carried him off his feet, and he was all day drilling troops and loading waggons. The Lady Lulu, thus left to her own free will, spent the whole of her time in the small orchard enclosure where was the encampment of the Mage Melchior and Sidi his servant.

And because it interested the Wise Man, she babbled complaisantly of the latest plans and preparations of the royal armies, of lines of communication, and the strength and fitness of regiments - how Rupert said that the Welshmen made the best foot if only there were time to train them, and how he had promised to be careful of his gentlemen riders, because (as he said) there were no more where they came from. Marston Moor had noways discouraged Prince Rupert, but it had taught him some elementary caution.

On the evening before the breaking up of the Oxford camp, Hal had made all the plans for his own escape. He had the grace to feel some rudimentary qualms of compunction in face of the glowing delight of the Lady Lulu, who babbled of freedom and of the dancing costume she was preparing in secret.

But after all (he told himself) it was but a woman's whim, a fancy like so many others which had had their season, blooming and withering betwixt sunrise and sunset of a summer's day. Yet he had no scruples about using her horses in order to escape out of the city. She could get him the King's pass, which, with Rupert's, would carry him anywhere.

But it was ridiculous even to think of a Lady Lulu among the camps of Cromwell. What would Hog Lane say to her? With what unanimity would they

cast their Captain out. Only Sidi must know, and Sidi did not matter. As she herself said, the Lady Lulu was 'a deep well from which many men might drink.' And so Hal, with the easy morality of his age and class, was grateful for the inestimable information which she had given him, but entirely free from any remorse - considering, perhaps correctly, that he had paid the lady well enough for her favours and complicities. After all, he had asked nothing of her, made no promises, seduced her from no vows. She had fallen into his arms like a ripe fruit, and if she had waxed romantic over village greens and dancing by the light of torches under immemorial elms, she had had the imagination and expectation which Hal knew would have proved by far the better part. Soon she would have wearied of the crowded tent, of the narrow caravan bumping along the uneven bridle-paths or stuck in the sloughs of mud left by the autumnal rains. Better that he should leave her to what, after all, was her life - to camps and courts and the society of the great.

So at least argued Hal Ludlow, a young gentleman of an easy and self-congratulatory conscience.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

'HOG LANE AND COLONEL LUDLOW!'

Two days afterwards Captain Hal Ludlow, worn with hard riding, was entering the presence of General Cromwell presently in garrison at Ely, while a transformed Sidi, in the dress of her sex, slowly and sadly drove a pair of grey asses across country in the direction of Osea Island.

General Cromwell was little changed from the tall soldierly man who was seen in early chapters tossing his little girls upon his shoulders. His hair was a little more grizzled about the temples, perhaps, his face thinner and more commanding. He had the look of a man whose will was law, but the victor of Marston Moor who now received Hal was the same Colonel Cromwell who in that same garden, within sight of that grey dial, had broken him for "petticoating." But now Hal in conscious virtue awaited his chief, quite oblivious of the distant angers of the Lady Lulu and the lonely figure trudging through the green Essex lanes in the direction of the tall trees of Osea Island.

'You are welcome, sir,' said Cromwell as he threw himself upon a garden seat and beckoned Hal to take another. But Hal was far too excited. He sat down indeed, in obedience to a command, and in an instant he was up again, hot on his tale, striding up and down as he told of Oxford, of Rupert, of Maurice, and of the King - of Lady Lulu also (but here he trod lightly over the ground), and all the time Cromwell sat back, his chin upon his clenched

knuckles, watching him intently.

'You have no notes?' he said presently. 'Nothing on paper - numbers are often hard to carry long in the head.'

'Nothing,' said Hal, rather taken aback. 'In fact, sir, I thought it better not. I was compelled to run very considerable risks. But I have made no mistakes. Be sure of that. I repeated each set of figures over and over till I could not forget. I trusted my memory.'

'So?' said the General. 'Well, we shall see. Go now and change into uniform.'

'I am afraid I cannot, sir; I have only these clothes in which I stand up, which I had from a good friend of the Cause in a house near Amersham where I sheltered.'

Cromwell smiled quietly.

'Go to your old quarters in Mr. Commissioner's house and there you will find most of your old command. I rather thought we might have need of them when you should come back. Zered Tuby has your kit. But come back at eight for the Council - Fleetwood, Ireton, and Montague will be here.'

'But - but,' objected Hal, a little breathlessly, 'that is a Colonels' council!'

'And what of that, sir?' said Cromwell grimly.

'But - '

'But me not buts,' interrupted Cromwell; 'do you think nobody has been doing anything except yourself? There is a new regiment of Cambridgeshire men wanting a colonel. Well, I appoint you. Here is your commission. What have you to say?'

'Can I take Hog Lane with me? - I cannot go without.'

'You are a peculiar people indeed, you Hog

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Laners. Zered had the face to tell me that if you did not command them, every man would go home. Aye, and the rascal stuck to it though I threatened him with the hangman.'

But there was something in Oliver's tone which intimated that he was not angry. 'Well,' he continued in an altered voice, 'I suppose you can take them. They are veterans and will firm the backs of the Cambridgers - overawe them too, for there are a few of the stiff-necked among them. Now go. Take some rest, Colonel Ludlow, and do not forget eight o'clock. No - no thanks. I count myself lucky!'

* * * * *

Hal trod on viewless air. How he reached his father's house, he never knew. The few who recognised him in his weather-stained country clothes had to pass on without any answer to their jovial salutations and inquiries as to what he was doing in masquerade dress at that time of day.

Somehow, however, his coming had been anticipated. Zered, with his new Captain's badge at sleeve and helmet, came forward to receive him and Hog Lane, excited and unanimous behind him, saluted him with shouts of, 'God keep you, Colonel.' 'Hog Lane and Colonel Ludlow!' 'We shall show the Cambridgers what a charge means!' 'Aye, and Rupert too - as we did at Marston Moor.'

They broke ranks and swarmed about him, grasping his hands and finally carrying him on their shoulders to where his father appeared on the portico, made a little anxious by the shouting within his quiet precincts.

Hal stood before his father with more of emotion

rising in his throat than he had ever known in all his "petticoating." The ring of these men's voices welcoming him home gripped him by the throat. He could not thank them. He could not speak to his father. He had never felt like this before. Was it possible that he, a Colonel of Ironsides, was going to cry? Certainly not, but still a good deal of honest moisture stood in his eyes.

His father was taking the commission out of his hands when he came to himself. He had not been conscious that he had carried it all the way through the city as if it had been a banner in a procession.

'Well, lad,' said the nobly attired Commissioner, 'what is this you have found? Come, you serve it upon me as if it were a writ. Have you learned no better manners than that at Court?'

But the old man was proud of his son, and even while jesting stood patting him on the shoulder before all Hog Lane, at respectful attention.

'This is a great day, Colonel Ludlow,' he said; 'a great day for me and for our family. Come your ways in.'

He led the way into the house, but Hal turned towards Hog Lane and struggled not to leave them without a grateful word.

'I cannot - I cannot - ' he began and stopped twice.

'Wait till thou hast to exhort the Cambridgers to fall on, then thou wilt talk fast enough!' The voice from the ranks was an infringement of discipline, but it conveyed the sense of Hog Lane so completely that Zered let it pass.

After Hal had enjoyed the supreme luxury of a bath, he entered his room to which, during his absence, a large box had been transported. To the

lid was attached a card which read: —

*From Mr. Commissioner Ludlow,
to Colonel Henry Ludlow.*

It contained a full new suit of Colonel's uniform, sent expressly from London with a plume and badge of the new regimental colours, scarlet and white. The helmet and armour were magnificent, the best work of Liege, and Hal felt that he must put them on in order to please his father. He was conscious that the door behind him had opened a little and that his father was watching him. So he acted a delight he was very far from feeling, and promised himself to slip into the old hacked armour and weather-rusty trappings which Zered had so carefully brought him before the hour of eight. He could never go among Ireton, Fleetwood, and the rest of Cromwell's *etât major* looking like a peacock with a new tail.

Still, he appeared delighted with everything, and was rewarded when he saw the old gentleman's tears when his son stood up before him.

'My Hal,' he muttered. 'A colonel at twenty-one - oh, if only Mary had been here to see it!'

But the clock had not struck the hour of eight when from a house in Hog Lane issued a much more workman-like figure than had entered Zered Tuby's low doorway. That dented "pot" had borne the brunt of twoscore good charges. The battered breastplate, the twisted silver spurs, the rusty coat with almost invisible facings, only by the necessary badges of his rank carefully sewed on by Zered - these added an air of experience and ripe age to the youthful figure of the Colonel of Cromwell's Second Cambridgeshire Horse.

'The others will serve when the day comes to make him King!' said Zered, as he packed them away carefully against the day when the Ironsides should set above all men as ruler of England their creator and idol, King Oliver the First.

Hal sat abashed and silent among the high captains - all except Cromwell still young, but, as it were, men of war from their youth up. Ireton especially daunted the new Colonel. For he was the next man to the General in all that great array, so secretly raised, so strongly officered, so perfect in equipment and discipline - the value of which as the Sword of the Lord was just about to be revealed to a wondering world - a world which had never seen such a marvel.

Yet he must fill in the story as the General told it, and Hal blushed as the eyes of the stern men turned upon him. But he answered with prompt exactness. He was certain of the number of each fighting unit. He could point out the weaknesses. He knew the looseness of the Welsh, and how the least attack, sudden and unexpected, would stampede them in the direction of their hills. He told them how the Yorkshire men in Rupert's train swore that if once they got to the North again, the hither side of Blackstone Edge would see them no more - how in the hospitals the wounded cursed the King's commission of Array - which had brought them so far from home to fight in a quarrel of which they knew nothing.

'Pay not too much attention to that,' Ireton interrupted. 'I have heard the London trainbands grow openly mutinous as Lady Day drew near - yet fight well enough when it came to push of pikes.'

'There is a difference,' said the General; 'observe

it, Ireton. The trades grumbled as free men missing good money by their soldiering. But they were free volunteers for all that, and went soldiering because they believed that if they did not, the King would ruin every man between Tower Hill and Temple Bar. Our grumblers will go home to their ellwands and scales if we leave them unemployed after a victory, but the King's pressed men will scatter even before a battle if they are not herded like sheep.'

Ireton shook his head.

'What would happen, sir, if you were to fall - aye, even to the New Model?'

'Why, you would take my place,' Cromwell's voice rose, 'and Fleetwood yours, and Montague Fleetwood's, and Harry Ludlow Montague's. So the division should go forward only one man short.'

Then, no one venturing an opinion upon this, Cromwell put it to the Colonels whether they should give chase to the King, or follow Rupert again to the North. Cromwell and Ireton were for finishing with Rupert, which they could do with their own forces, Fleetwood and Montague believed in joining forces with Fairfax and keeping between the King and London.

'Our new counsellor sits silent,' Cromwell said presently. 'Colonel Ludlow, pray give us your opinion. You have but newly come from Oxford and have seen these things with your eyes.'

Hal flushed as the grave eyes of the veterans were turned upon him.

'Gentlemen,' he said, 'it is my opinion that we should let the King go South. No good can be done there, nor yet will Rupert do us harm in the North. But all the King's forces, North and South, are using Oxford as their base of supplies. If we ride round

Oxford, we shall cut all lines of supply, as the sticks of a lady's fan are snapped close to the handle. We shall sweep up every draught horse within a hundred miles, and not a cannon can be moved after Rupert or towards the King!

There was a moment's silence and everyone looked at the General. Cromwell smiled grimly and a little awry. Ordinarily he did not like it when a better plan than his own was suggested. But Hal was of his own making, and he clapped his hand on his knee triumphantly and looked round the circle. 'What did I tell you? That the young man would be worth his place at the board!'

And the Great Raid was resolved upon instantly and well planned before they separated.

'And Ludlow's Cambridgers - can they ride with us?' queried Cromwell.

'As to that,' Ireton answered him, 'they are not, of course, all Hog Laners. They are not Huntingdon, nor Dedham, nor yet the Slepe Troopers. But they are as good as we were when we charged on Gainsborough Highway. Besides, Hog Lane will tune them up and teach them humility. I vote for letting them ride.'

Hal darted a grateful glance at the speaker, but Ireton was drumming with his fingers on the table. Cromwell, ever alert, his eyes seeing into every man's heart without having the appearance of looking, picked up the message. 'Ludlow is your debtor, Ireton,' he said; 'a month's drill and a month's clearing the country would have been good for them, but after all - *solvitur ambulando* - we can take it out of them as we go. And their Colonel we cannot leave behind. That would be too cruel. This is Ludlow's Ride!'

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

THE GREAT RAID

It was the first time they had acted all together under their own General, and hope beat high among the Ironsides that night. Nearly two thousand sabres were to ride forth on the morrow. In spite of Cromwell's words, so often quoted against him, the Ironsides force was for the most part officered by gentlemen.

'I had rather,' said Oliver, 'have a plain russet-coated captain that knows what he is fighting for, and loves what he knows, than that which you call a gentleman and is nothing more. But I love a gentleman that is a gentleman indeed.'

And in his Ironside regiments he honoured them so well that of thirty-seven officers who rode out with him there were only seven who were not "gentlemen born." But of these seven were Pride, the drayman, and Hewson, the Hog Lane cobbler. Even Zered Tuby's father owned Gedney Grange and might have borne arms on his shield.

Quietly and easily the raiders filed out, and disappeared into the west without leaving a clue to their destination. 'For the defence of London,' some thought. 'To put down a new raid of Rupert's men,' said others. But none thought that, for the first time in the war, a great striking force was manœuvring by the will of a single man. No Eastern Association, timid like all Committees. No wise civilians at

Westminster to turn Cromwell's path by a hairbreadth once he had left Ely town behind!

By Banbury and Edgehill he rode straight for Oxford. But he had with him no battering guns, no siege train, nothing but what each horseman could carry, and that was ammunition for the most part.

The men were in high spirits. No man except the generals and the four colonels knew whither they were being led. But then, what did that matter? One glance at that tall figure riding ahead to scan the horizon, that Ironside of the Ironsides, gave them confidence.

'Ah, *he* knew - *he* knew!' What mattered it about any other? They followed his star and were content. Thus confident the Ironsides were in the best disposition for accomplishing great things.

From Edgehill the array turned southward, now in Royal territory, but keeping well west of Oxford and its defences. They had their first experience of the work they had come out to do when they crossed the Hereford road. Here they found Rupert's squadrons pouring northward, escorting many waggons of provisions.

To Hal they became apparent as a black trail of ants toiling up a wide valley through which in coils and wimples a little streamlet shines silver among loose waterside foliage. Cromwell waved his hand. The various commands spread out to right and left. Up went the General's sword, a line of steel glittering in the full sunshine. Whether by accident or by intention Hal found himself in front of the main body of the escort. Hog Lane was in the centre behind him and the Cambridgers, split into two, extended on either side.

'Charge!'

It was the first time he had given the order to a regiment.

Generally, indeed, Hog Lane charged without needing to be told. Just how the new command came down the slope has not been put on record. 'Raggedly enough!' reports Ireton, who seems to have had a hasty glimpse of them in the heat of his own engagement. But it was one thing to lead the first regiment of Cromwell's horse into action, all veterans of fifty fights, and to conduct five hundred men and horses through their first action. But the spirit of united action was upon them. They drew closer, each foot feeling for his neighbour's stirrup. Hal saw beyond the blue-and-white plumes of Rupert's men a glimmer of rusty red - prisoners from the Parliamentary defeats in the South being taken to some stronghold on the Welsh border.

The shock of the onset came with shattering suddenness. Hal at the head of Hog Lane broke through instantly, but the new men on the flanks were in some confusion. The risk was that if they did not push through, the charge would degenerate into a vast number of hand-to-hand encounters.

So Hal, checking the pursuit, divided Hog Lane in two so that Zered with one part and he with the other could fall on the rear of the enemy.

The result was instantaneous. The Royal horse fled. The Cambridgers came through in fairly good order, and finding that all was safe, gave themselves whole-heartedly to the pursuit. Not vainly smote the Sword of the Lord that day, till Hal stopped them after two or three miles. In that direction lay Rupert and his whole force. Hal feared the counter stroke, and was content with the steadiness of his men. When he got back to the green valley, all that could

not be transported or used on the spot was being burned, and the tall pillars of smoke rose into the still air.

Cromwell had cut one stick of the fan. But he had no time to spare, so driving the captured horses before him, he went forward, his eagle eye scouting ahead. Nothing escaped him. He would summon a strong castle to surrender, threatening battle, murder, and sudden death in case of refusal. He had, indeed, no means of making good such a threat, nothing heavier than a musket in his whole army, yet such was the terror which his name already inspired that as often as not the place was rendered up. For such a shameful surrender, poor young Windebank, the Secretary's son, a young man personally brave, was shot by orders of the King in the castle garden after Cromwell had passed on.

It was a wonderful dash - all done in haste and fury. He rode about Prince Maurice who was bringing up the artillery to his brother at Hereford, and swept off every draught horse within the bounds of six shires. He swooped upon Islip, and routed Northampton with a great loss. And here for the second time Hal's new regiment learned steadiness, for it was their lot to charge under a fire from the enemy's field-pieces. The fight befell on an evening of drenching rain, and the Cambridgeshire men looked grimmer than usual as they thrust down the points of their "pots" over their eyebrows so that the drops might not spoil their sword-play.

Thereafter Hog Lane for the first time spoke civilly to the newcomers, and intimated that in a hundred years or so they might become soldiers, or at least something vaguely approaching thereto.

Hog Lane was mostly slim, dark, restless-eyed,

true storks of the fens. The Cambridgers on the other hand were tall, stolid men, with square shoulders, high-narrow foreheads, prominent cheekbones. They were strong Puritans - Presbyterians or Congregationalists - and they cared for their horses as if they had been children. Cromwell passed and said a word of praise and encouragement to the debutants. He crossed Hog Lane with a mere nod, which was the greatest compliment of all, in that it said, 'No need to waste words on you. We are acquainted, you and I!'

And Hog Lane felt the honour thus done them as it were in secret, and thrilled to their hearts' deepest deeps. Little rest for man or beast during the great ride round Oxford - a few hours to rest and feed the horses, then Allister's bugle-call (for in those days the "music" of the Slepe Troop was Cromwell's shadow).

'Ta - ra - ta - ra - ra - ra!'

And instantly the remains of the pasty were wrapped in paper and thrust into saddle-bags, long boots were pulled up, sword-belts tightened, pistols and flints clicked, charges drawn, reloaded, and reprimed. Out in the chill air damp from the woods of the new spring, a fine drizzling rain was falling and the men sat lower on their horses, their helmets shining with moisture. Here they must go warily and by night. A guide had been obtained, a gold piece given him to purchase good behaviour, and Ireton's pistol cocked behind his ear in case of treachery. So led and protected the party set forward. Often the road was so abominable that they took to the higher woods.

Once or twice they heard the crackling of branches among the brushwood to the left, the

shouting of a gay chorus. The neigh of a horse would betray their presence, but the Prince's patrol party sent out to search for them went merrily by, careless of being heard, noisy and reckless as a party of boys nutting among the hazels in late October. Crack! A musket went off and for a moment there is quite audible stir among the silent ranks on the hillside. Had the jabberers stumbled upon a troop of Ironsides? No, some lighthearted cavalier, filled with good liquor, had fired his piece in the air.

'Fool! Dolt! Calf's head!' growled Hal between his teeth; 'ah, if I had such a man in my regiment!'

But Hog Lane and Cambridgeshire Puritan were alike incapable of any such folly.

So they passed on, keeping within view of Rupert's camp fires on the slopes of the Hereford hills. Once they approached so near that Hal could see the sentry set his musket against a tree and sit down to warm his heels at the fire. Above was another fire, six guns strongly guarded, stranded there for want of the horses which General Cromwell was carefully shepherding before him in his great circular "drive" through the heart of the King's country.

The command lived well, though meals were a little irregular - consisting of supper principally, with what remained over for a hasty breakfast in the morning. Long-legged, lean-ribbed Berkshire pigs roamed the woods. Poultry was plentiful, and Cromwell paid fair prices when the owner could be found. In the villages no men were to be seen - all swept off into the King's array, or gone into hiding. But the women came out in their smocks and clean white caps to welcome the first Parliament men they had ever seen.

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At Bampton there was a smart fight before Sir William Vaughan could be dislodged, but Hal and his men who were scouting towards Fardingdon, only came in for the short pursuit. 'We are pressed for time. I am in enemy's country, therefore I prefer to do the retreating myself!' was Cromwell's version of his tactics.

'Come down and fight, Marius, if thou be a great General,' quoted Hal to Ireton who loved learning.

'Aye, and what said Marius, I forget the tag?'

Marius answered to his adversary. 'Nay, if *thou* be a great General, force me to come down and fight!'

'Good - good,' approved Ireton; 'college lore never yet spoilt sword-stroke. Go on to thy Cambridgeshire, and give them no Plutarch, but the solid Scripture. "The horseman lifteth up the bright sword, and there is a multitude of slain They stumble over their corpses." Surely old Nahum the prophet had our General in his eye. Come, let us see if you are as ready with Holy Writ as with your Plutarch.'

'Upon the bridles of his horses there shall be written - '

'Holiness unto the Lord,' quoth Hal promptly.

'Excellent young man!' said Ireton, with something as approaching cordiality as he ever showed. 'We shall make it the watchword for the night.'

They were turning full circle now, and the broad swathe of conquered and desolated territory began to close round Oxford. Tewkesbury, Gloucester, and Cirencester, Crickdale, and Malmesbury. These were now solid for the Parliament - at least so long as Oliver's arm rested upon them, and as the preachers reminded them "the snorting of his horses was

heard unto Dan."

'All very well, Mr. Mayor,' quoth Cromwell, who harboured no illusions, 'but you will bring the same address to Rupert when he comes, and just so your burgesses will wave flags and your commons shout. We are deliverers and so will they be. But take good heed, friend, it shall not always be so, and you and your facing-both-ways gentry will learn that "Whosoever is not for us is against us." So a good morning to you, Mr. Mayor, and better consistency of behaviour when next we meet.'

And so terrible was the look in Cromwell's eye that the Mayor betook himself to bed, resigned his chain of office, and never again took part in public business either of town or county.

Two strange incidents marked for Colonel Hal Ludlow the close of the Great Raid. News had been received that from the west Oxford city lay wholly exposed. Whereupon Hal had been at once consulted, and gave his opinion that a strong party of horsemen might very well ride to the walls of Oxford, rolling up and destroying everything in its way.

'But,' he added with the curt decision which came natural to him, 'even you yourself could do no more than flout them. You could not carry off the cannon you might take. You do not want prisoners, and cavalry are of no use against solid and well-guarded walls.'

'But are they?' demanded Cromwell.

'My eyes have seen,' Hal answered; 'but for all that gladly will I go and make sure.'

'I am no unfriend to plainness of speech,' said Cromwell; 'I can do something in that way myself upon occasion, as you know. Go then. Colonel, take

your command and ride to Oxford, picking up what you can on the way.'

Hal bowed his head, and Ireton frowned a little because he thought that, as the senior, the post of danger should have been his. But Cromwell, who as good leader of men divined all things, tapped him on the shoulder. 'Tut, man, tut,' he said in his ear. 'Let the young man knock his head against a wall. It will do him good. But you - I have need of you at my elbow!'

And Ireton, swift to anger but easily pacified, used the old and well-beloved title. 'Colonel,' he said, 'I am a fool!'

'Tis no fool who knows that of himself,' said Cromwell.

Meanwhile Hal rode on towards the loyal city, whose very bells proclaimed, week-day and Sunday, the divine right.

*'God bless King Charles -
God bless - God bless King Charles,
Cast down all knaves
Into deep graves,
GOD BLESS KING CHARLES!'*

And the last prayer was sent throbbing into space with such a clash and clangour of brazen sound that the Cambridgers, hearing it afar off, looked at each other and marvelled.

A few miles from Oxford, Hal's "forlorn" came quite unexpectedly upon a snug little camp surrounding a park of siege artillery. The smoke of the evening fires was going peacefully up and the men lounged smoking and gossiping about, some with their backs against trees, and other merely idle

and waiting for supper.

Into this peaceful and almost familiar scene the Ironsides charged full tilt. Hal had ordered them not to be too intent on killing. It would be enough to make the rogues run, and then destroy their pieces and ammunition. And, indeed, the flat of the sword was more used that evening than the edge. Few of the cavaliers had so much as a sword or pistol about them when suddenly out of the gloaming mists they saw endless files of steel-clad men charging upon them with the famous Puritan shout, 'The Sword of the Lord.' Now this was enough to daunt mounted men in array of battle. But the poor artillerymen had scarcely time to snatch a horse's bridle and ride off before the enemy was among them. Lucky it was that not a pistol was fired, for had it been otherwise, they might have been ridden down like sheep.

Hal sent Zered to head them off the Oxford road, so that they might not carry the news of his coming to the city.

A pavilion in the centre of the encampment remained closed and silent in the midst of all this hubbub. Could it be that Maurice the Prince was on his way with the guns for Rupert at Hereford? With a heart that beat at the thought of such a captive, Hal lifted the fold of the tent door. A woman in a pale blue robe falling in folds to her feet, and belted with a golden girdle fine as spun silk, stood before him.

The Lady Lulu, paralysed with terror at the stern shouting of the Ironsides, stood a moment transfixed with astonishment before what her eyes revealed to her - an array of glittering swords, tossing horses' heads, jingling bridles, and all the panoply of war. Such men as she had never seen were before her,

every detail of their outfit as austere practical as their visages.

She stood a moment astonished and as it seemed bewildered. Then feeling instinctively where there was hope for her, she threw herself forward towards Hal and clung desperately to his stirrup.

'Save me - save me,' she gasped, turning upward the wild eyes and pale lips of the most beautiful face in the world.

'God in his heaven, Melchior!' she cried and fell fainting among the horses' feet. Hereward trod delicately and did her no harm, leaping aside daintily as a doe leaps a fence on her way to the drinking pool.

But Hal Ludlow - Colonel Henry Ludlow - was in an evil pass, for there sat watching him five hundred good Puritans, Calvinists, and Anabaptists - with extremely acute views as to the total depravity of man, and of that original sin to which he had doubtless added much actual transgression.

But our hero's heart had that of stubbornness in it which fitted him to be a Colonel of Ironsides at twenty-one, and also perhaps to rule in the hearts of women - to wit, stubbornness and also that touch of brutality which has been noticed before.

Not a line of his face moved as he sat and regarded the Lady Lulu.

'Here, Lieutenant Zered, and you Sergeant Royds, take the lady to her tent, and see that she is sent back to Oxford under a guard after our demonstration of to-morrow morning.'

But in spite of all his steadiness and self-command, there were some among his followers who communed thoughtfully the one with the other.

"Melchior - Melchior," she called him Melchior. I

wonder why - perhaps because he came out of the East - "bringing presents!" chuckled another. 'He knows more about women than their maiden names, doth our Colonel - and i'faith, come to think on't, was he not "broke" from the Slepe Troop for "petticoating"?'

Such a thing it is to have a reputation ready made, but curiously enough the sternest Puritan of them all thought no worse of him.

'Did you see how he met it?' they summed up the case for the defence. 'He is not one ever to shame us. He puts Hog Lane and the Good Cause before any petticoat that ever rustled.' 'Aye, he does that - and the more's the wonder, he so young and all.'

And in the meantime with something very like oaths - an hard thing to say of so good a man - Zered Tuby stood watching the recovery of the Lady Lulu. Zered was no more sentimental than a piece of wood, and the Lady Lulu had no chance of cozening him to let her see his Colonel. But at present he was employed in abusing that Colonel, who had left him planted there - 'like a calf in Horeb, like a tent-keeper in Baal-Peor.'

What cryptic meaning was hidden in the last phrase is known only to Zered, but he was manifestly well pleased with it, for he repeated it in various forms.

'I am made a door-keeper in the tents of Baal-Peor. What have I to do with Midianitish women with jewels on their ears and rings on their fingers? And all the while my master Zimri, that son of Salu, is riding out on his "forlorn" never thinking of me, his lieutenant, an old leather-headed beast who would sell his soul to give him pleasure!'

Then at last Zered could stand it no longer. His

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horse was stamping without. Doe Royds was a good man. He would convey her safely even as the Colonel commanded. After all, why need he stay?

So, having laid strict injunctions upon Doe Royds, that trusted soldier, he mounted and rode off after the regiment, having disobeyed orders for the first and last time in his life.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

THE HEWING OF AGAG

Zered arrived in time to hear Allister of the Sleppe Troop, lent by the Commander-in-Chief for the occasion, summon the Virgin city to surrender 'in the name of General Cromwell, of the Lords and Commons of England.'

It was done in mockery, and was doubtless a hard thing to bear for so loyal and haughty a city.

'They flout us to our beards,' cried a secretary of State. 'Well have they chosen their time, when the King's army is already in Devon, and Rupert sitting idle and horseless at Hereford.'

So having done his part, Hal brought back his regiment to the artillery camp, destroyed the guns and finding the pavilion deserted, rode towards his rendezvous with Cromwell without giving a thought to the Lady Lulu, who had indeed put his repute in some jeopardy, but to whom after all both he and the Good Cause owed much. He had put her into safety where she would live her own life. The Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans - or, if they had, be sure that the Samaritans, a simple pastoral people, had the worst of it.

Hal had been too busy looking out for rushes and ambushades before the walls of Oxford to give any attention to the Hog Laners, of whose steadiness he was sure in all circumstances. Still less did he suspect the presence among them of Lieutenant Zered who discreetly commanded from the rear.

So when he thought at all of the Lady Lulu, it was of her as safe under the protection of Zered and that

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brave and trusted soldier Sergeant-Major Doe Royds of the Hog Lane Troop.

It chanced that they were marching towards their rendezvous, scattering a little and beating the woods as they went, when far off and indistinct at the end of the green vista Hal saw a figure flit-flit across and disappear in the thick brushwood. It was but an instant, but Hal could have sworn that he recognised the red coat and white badges of the Hog Lane Troop. And what was a Hog Laner doing there without his horse? Why again did he skulk and disappear at sight of his comrades? For whoever he might be, he must know that orderly and silent advance.

Hal instantly touched Hereward with the spur, not to hurt but as a simple indication that he was to do his best. Hereward threw up his head with something like indignation. Charge? How could anyone charge among trees, and if he, Hereward, did charge into such a den of small brittle sticks, snapping and spitting like cats and scratching his legs, which of these lumbering Cambridgeshire brutes could follow him? Nevertheless, because he knew better than to dispute a command, Hereward launched himself down the long clearing, and Hog Lane, with Zered now shamelessly in front (and willing to lie as to how he got there), followed as best it might.

It was a long and difficult chase. A man can conceal himself in so many different places in a wood, or lie hidden among leaves and roots under lee of an upturned pine which has brought away the earth with it.

Such a game of hide-and-seek was never dreamed of. The troop might have been cut off to a man had

an ambush been in readiness. They were scattered, seeking they knew not what or whom - though the veterans thought that it must be a spy. But on the edge of the wood, mounted on his own horse, alert and soldier-like, they came upon Doe Royds riding tranquilly towards them.

He saluted promptly at sight of Hal and the disordered bushwhackers behind him.

'I have come back to join my troop,' he said,

'And where is Captain Tuby?' Hal demanded, his soul angered at the strange turn of affairs.

'The Captain rode on ahead. He was anxious to see Oxford!'

'Anxious to see Oxford,' cried Hal. 'Why, if he has arrived, did he not report to me - and where is the lady?'

'She is in safety among her friends. She sent her compliments and thanks for the safe-conduct.'

And immediately at these words a suspicion of Doe Royds began to form itself in the breast of Colonel Ludlow.

'Get out of this wood,' he exclaimed. 'Close up about that man. Take his weapons from him, Royds, you are under arrest. Take those pistols. Now we shall look into the matter.'

With some difficulty the troops drew clear of the patch of woodland, and there on the open space of green, smooth and short, turfed like a parade-ground, Hal got his dishevelled regiment into order. He was only in time, for General Cromwell and his staff rode up just as the captains were gathering about to hear Doe Royds' explanation.

'What of Oxford?' cried the General, his brown face working with eagerness.

'We captured and destroyed twelve of Rupert's

guns, because we could not bring them off. Then we rode straight up to the walls and by trumpet sound summoned the city to surrender in the name of General Cromwell, of the Houses and the Lord.'

'Good,' said Cromwell, 'and what answered the garrison?'

'Only with a straggling fire of muskets which did no harm, and a few round shots which passed over our heads. So thinking I had done all you would wish, I brought off my men.'

Cromwell nodded and glanced at Doe Royds. 'Whom have we here? A senior sergeant of Hog Lane without arms?'

'He is under arrest - I have summoned the officers to examine his story,' said Hal, who was unwilling to inculcate Zered or to mention the name of the Lady Lulu.

'Ah, a drumhead court-martial,' said Cromwell. 'I conduct these things myself. Ah, sirrah, what would you there? Ireton, get down and search among the grass. I saw something drop from his left hand!'

Doe Royds turned instantly, put spurs to his horse, and was plunging into the wood, but Hereward was infinitely faster and quicker. Hal's sword was at the man's throat, and Zered coming behind took his horse's head and led him back into the circle of waiting officers. After that one dash for liberty, Doe Royds resigned himself doggedly to fate, and from that moment no shade of hope or fear crossed the dense sullenness of his countenance. His small deep-set eyes glittered as he followed the movements of the seekers among the grass.

At last, after an interminable pause, Ireton uttered a shout of horror, and leaping to his feet held something which glittered and was white -

something which made the cheeks of even those seasoned warriors turn pale and the breath wheeze in their throats as they gasped for breath.

It was a woman's forefinger, delicately formed, and very white. It had been cut off near the knuckle-joint, and carried upon it a large ruby ring, heart-shaped, and set about with diamonds.

* * * * *

Nothing was heard for a minute while Cromwell examined the relic, with a face so terrible that innocent men shrank from it. Then he took a folded white kerchief from the breast of his tunic, wrapped the poor fragment with reverence within, and carefully placed it in his holster.

Where shall we find the woman to whom this belonged? Speak, traitor - you have worn the uniform. You have had honour among comrades. You have not feared death. Speak now. Where is the woman?'

But Doe Royds looked him through with eyes of red coal and kept silence.

'Search him!' commanded the General.

From his pockets and the folds of his garments where they had been roughly sewn they took a double handful of jewels, rings mostly, but a sprinkling also of brooches, chains, and bracelets. A rich tiara of brilliants had been rudely broken as with a sword-hilt and the fragments heaped into the bottom of his holster where they were covered with a torn lace veil.

And then came Zered - Zered who had never been in fault before, confessing bitterly, how he had longed to see Oxford and to be with Hog Lane at the

flouting of the enemy's proudest citadel.

He had left his Sergeant-Major to carry out the orders which had been entrusted to him and

'We will attend to your case immediately, Captain Tuby,' broke in Cromwell. 'Lead on - let us find - what there is to find.'

So Zered led the way towards the pavilion among the burst and cracked cannon, and among all that cavalcade which followed him there was no man whose face was so serene and impassable as the Sergeant-Major of Hog Lane, though he rode with his feet tied under his horse's belly and without any hope in his heart. For he alone knew what they were going to find.

And what they did find was the Lady Lulu with two deep stabs in her breast, lying pale as a lily amid the stained disorder of her white robe.

'He brought her back - she was not there when we came from Oxford,' said Zered.

The council of the Captains was soon over. The punishment was in the General's hands, but all knew that it would be exemplary and worthy of that stern and terrible imagination. Cromwell ordered two graves to be dug with the entrenching tools found in the camp, one in the open square facing the pavilion, and the other far away under the first green fir boughs at the edge of the wood, where a wealth of primroses delicately pale looks down on a little babbling brook.

The Lady Lulu had brave and honourable burial. General Cromwell did nothing by halves. So the body was brought out, swathed in her own coverlet of rose silk and creamy lace. The folded kerchief which had come from Dame Cromwell's housewifery store was laid within the folds. The Captains carried

her on their shoulders, Zered taking the right, and by this he knew that he was forgiven. They laid her gently down among the red earth, the men leaning on their spades and pickaxes as if they had been on duty at a dangerous outpost. Every man's face wore a stern and waiting aspect. Hog Lane had been disgraced, but they must clear the troop of that stain. The regiment took station about the grave, while Cromwell, bareheaded and helmet in hand, said a brief prayer of pity and leave-taking.

He stood back, and the three volleys of the firing party crashed out. Then before the smoke had cleared away the grave was filled up and the green sods replaced. Allister's trumpet rang out in the funeral call. This (the men averred) was what it said:

*The End of All
Am I come.
Wearily - wearily,
Glad to be done,
I lay me down
Cheerily - cheerily.*

But to none in the regiment did the burial-call speak with its old appeal. All sympathised with Hog Lane, and Hog Lane had no thoughts to waste on sentiment. They had buried the dead with honour - now they must cleanse their dishonour.

'He shall be tried by his peers,' said the General. 'God forbid that we should condemn any man unheard.' But Doe Royds, though threatened with death, confronted with evidence - the dagger with his name engraven on the blade, found cast away among the rubbish of the deserted camp, the great

double handful of jewels in his pocket, and the dreadful crowning horror of the severed finger dropped among the grass and discovered by the red shining of the ruby heart - all were in vain. Doe Royds stood silent, impervious to pity, untouched by threats, unblanched by fear.

And then came the sentence.

‘Doe Royds hath slain and defiled a woman committed to his charge. He hath shamed the good name of his troop and regiment. *Let him be hewn in pieces before the Lord.*’

The twilight was closing in and the mists rising in the long forest aisles before the preparations were complete. They were rude, but marked by an austere grandeur. A post made out of a felled tree was driven deep into the ground at the head of the grave, and upon this Doe Royds was seated, his legs closely tied about the wood and his arms pinioned behind his back. The badges of his rank were torn from his sleeve and destroyed. And then in an impressive silence, the regiment formed three sides of a hollow square facing towards the post. All the western sky was red like blood, and facing it the Sergeant-Major of the Hog Lane Troop sat immovable on his post, looking in the direction from which his doom was to arrive. Helmet on head, corseleted and breastplated, he waited, an erect and soldierly figure. His face showed no emotion, and he neither vaunted nor wavered. He merely sat silent and looked death in the face - so great a thing is personal courage.

From the other side of the deep grave Cromwell, surrounded by his officers, watched the execution of the traitor and slaughterer of women - the first in the new army.

‘Hog Lane,’ he commanded, ‘clear your name!’

The troopers were gathered at the upper end of the enclosure like men about to ride a tourney. At the word of command they put their horses in motion, riding one by one towards the doomed man, and as they passed at full speed each sword struck a full stroke. A long hollow moaning sound broke from the Cambridgers, massed black against the red sunset. But Hog Lane did not pause nor hesitate. As each horseman went whirling by, striking and disengaging his arm, another was hard on his horse's heels. Nor did they cease till all that had been Doe Royds had tumbled piecemeal into the grave, the head with the helm still firm upon it, arms, legs, trunk all piecemeal, and the clean, kindly earth pushed down to hide the horror.

Only the haggled and blood-stained post remained for a memorial, dripping a ghastly viscous dew upon the trampled earth and speckled grass.

The Cambridgers filed out, silent and afraid, their skin mere creeping gooseflesh upon them, and wet with a clammy sweat as chill as death.

But Hog Lane, though stained red as after battle, rode with heads up, alert and determined under the stars. Their eyes had seen, their swords tasted, the vengeance of the Lord and of Oliver Cromwell. They had cleared their honour, and in the silent glade where they had left two graves, the haggled post would stand as their memorial. Winter rains would wash it clean, the grass would grow about it, but the scars and notches, never made by axe, would remain to testify how Hog Lane had wiped out the sin of Doe Royds, Sergeant-Major of their array.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

NASEBY MORNING

All yesterday the army of the New Model had poured northward through Northamptonshire to check the King's advance towards Yorkshire and Scotland, where Montrose had been winning great victories.

'Come thou thyself,' he had triumphantly written to Charles, 'lest the country be called by my name.'

But Cromwell was keen and anxious, and succeeded in making Fairfax as keen as himself. Part of the New Model horse and all of the foot were raw troops and had never seen a battle.

'Well then,' said Cromwell, 'the sooner they see one the better. We will brigade them with the veterans.'

Upon Naseby Broad Moor he had his way. He forced a battle upon the King, and Rupert, ever willing to fight, was opposed to Ireton and the new horse. Through these Rupert broke, head down like a bull through a thin hedge; Ireton was wounded, but nevertheless he easily rallied the better regiments of his horse about him. As usual, Rupert had spurred on and was soon out of the fight, drunken with apparent success and furious that the baggage train should escape him. So Cromwell, without undue haste, divided his Ironsides into two parts - one to charge the enemy and drive him before them; but the other, which he led himself, he kept in hand to fall upon the Royalist centre. To this belonged the original Ironsides, the Slepe and St.

Neot's Troops, Dedham and Hog Lane, with Colonel Hal and his Cambridgers.

When they saw Rupert crumple up Ireton's regiments, plough through them, and disappear, the heart was in Hal's throat. But Cromwell sat holding his reins and glancing this way and that as was his wont.

'Charging does not win battles,' he said, 'but knowing when to stop.'

And, indeed, Cromwell never saw a gladder sight (save perhaps one day at Dunbar) than the tails of Rupert's horses disappearing towards the baggage waggons. And then he set himself to crush in the King's army on all sides like a nut in the nut-crackers.

Some Cromwellians went down shouting, 'Thou hast given me the necks of mine enemies,' but the old regiment sang their favourite:

'Be thou the Governor!'

So, long before Rupert had checked his pursuit, the Royal foot had been destroyed or taken, full five thousand of them, the centre and right were in furious rout, and the King had been snatched out of the last clash of arms where he was found wandering, brave as ever but still irresolute.

No man had more reason to be proud than Cromwell as he gathered in the spoils. His nominal Commander-in-Chief, brave, loyal, and modest like all the Fairfaxes, had served under him like a common soldier. Ireton, of all his officers the closest to his heart, had allowed himself to be sacrificed that Rupert might run himself clear off the field. The Ironsides had driven the Yorkshire horse before

them like blown dust on a highway, while the precious regiments of reserve - the flower of Puritan chivalry— had charged and halted, wheeled and re-charged in front, in flank, and in rear till there was never an army in England fit to fight a pitched battle under the Royal colours.

'I could not,' said Cromwell, 'riding alone about my business, but smile to God in praises, thinking how, out of a company of poor ignorant men, and out of things that are not, He had brought to naught things that are - cast down the mighty from their seats and exalted them of low degree!' In one day Naseby Hill and the crushing of the King upon Broad Moor made Cromwell the first man in England. The ride round Oxford had cut the loyal part of England as with a sharp sword. Naseby ended the great battles in the field, army ranked against army. There were many good fights yet to be fought, many strongholds held by brave men and women to be reduced. But all that became an affair of time merely, and for this Cromwell gave God the glory.

'The shadow of death hath been turned into morning by Him who made Orion and the seven stars.'

Which was true, but the man who had made the Slepe Troop, and after that the Ironside Horse, and last of all the New Model Army, counted for something too.

And instantly like the passing of a furious tempest, the thunder of war ceased and the sunshine brightened all men's faces. Specially was this the case in the Eastern Counties. They had borne the burden and heat of the day. Theirs were the men who had won the victory. The dead were

their sons and brothers. Cromwell, that Arm of the Lord, was bone of their bone, flesh of their flesh.

The bells of Maldon rang out bravely that bright Sunday morning when the news of Naseby Fight reached the little town. The burgesses went processioning in their best, winding up with morning thanksgiving in the church.

There was no mistake this time. The enemy was routed, horse, foot, and artillery, and would never make a stand in England again. The ministers preached, good Presbyterians all, sober and learned men, but dwelling in harmony with the sectaries and speaking respectfully of every man's belief. The news had come first to Danbury Towers, from which a flying messenger had been despatched to Maldon - direct from Dame Cromwell to her friend Mistress Staines of the West House, whose servant Anne was even now hanging out flags and strips of red flannel in festoons over the front doors, plain to be seen of all men.

At the Towers, everything was in a joyous confusion. Dame Cromwell, between laughter and tears, was hastily packing up to go back to Ely. My Lord's coach was being prepared for the journey, and such of the household as could be spared were to ride with the convoy. Lady Molly made no attempt to retain her guests. She was troubled and uneasy, and by the haste and temper which she manifested among the stablemen and postilions, she seemed rather anxious than otherwise to get rid of her guests.

Indeed, she loved Bess and Bridget both, and especially (as all must) she loved the good Dame Elizabeth, but she had that upon her mind which made her restless and unsatisfied. She longed to

have a wide and empty dwelling and to be responsible to no man for her outgoings and incomings.

Dame Cromwell neither claimed nor assumed any authority in the house. But she was so genuinely anxious and grieved if Lady Molly were late for a meal, or not present at the time of reading evening prayer, that rather than vex that loving motherly heart, which yearned over her as over her own daughters, the Lady Molly forbore many an interesting sea adventure and wild course among the woods and dunes.

So no sooner had adieux been said, and the lumbering coach-and-six with its guards and running footmen had disappeared over the brow of the hill, than the Lady Molly, who had watched them out of sight from the stair-landing outside the house, the stone "perron," as it was called at the time, turned away with a sigh and ran upstairs.

She came down in half an hour, her hair in waving love-locks about her shoulders and carrying a bundle under her arm. Without once looking behind her, the Lady Molly cut across the belt of grass in front of the house, threaded her way among the shrubberies of laurel and evergreen bushes her father had brought back with him from Holland after his exile, and letting herself out at the water-port, entered the dense woods which stretched down from the base of Danbury Hill to the sea.

She moved nimbly as a cat among the debris of fallen trees and rotten branches. No crackle of broken brushwood, or twig snapping marked her progress. Now and then the shining curls flowing upon her shoulders, tied in a true love-knot, could be seen flitting across a glade where the sunshine

wavered in golden blots and wavering patches. But before the eye could take in the rest of her figure, it had melted again into the deep green solitude of the leaves, which are here so dense and umbrageous that even the winds were still and no birds sang.

Molly made straight for a little creek which ran up from the estuary. Here in a well-kept boat-house my Lord had several boats, from a tiny skiff to the tenton sloop in which, when occasion called for sudden expatriation, he had more than once made the voyage to Holland.

Letting herself in with her pass key, the Lady Molly soon had the oars in the skiff, and, having again secured the door, let herself drop down the narrow waterway easily and silently. The fresh breath of the inpouring salt water, grey-green and troubled from the North Sea, aided her to keep the boat's head in the direction of Colonel Cromwell's deserted fortification on the lower point of Osea Island. Indeed, she had little more to do than steady the boat with a stroke or two of the steering oar till the high trees of Osea rose against a pensive horizon of primrose and violet.

Lady Molly was speeding to find Neña la Fain. For by the common report upon embroidering which the Cromwell girls had expended all the wealth of their imagination, Neña had been to Oxford with Hal Ludlow in the famous spying venture which had won him his colonelcy, and so nearly cost him his neck. She had gone disguised, as the slave of a necromancer, and had returned driving two asses, and - what was more mysterious than all - she had not stirred off Osea Island since, nor yet had Hal Ludlow visited her.

All this wrought powerfully on the imagination of

the Lady Molly. It was gall and wormwood to her to think that another had dared life and honour for her old comrade Hal, put her all at his service, told fortunes and performed antics before gaping troops and stolid villagers, seen the King and the great camp with him, and returned to obscurity that he might have the glory and the honour. No, that was stupidity. She, Lady Molly, would have stayed and had her part of what honour was going. If she had done all that - she would not have come quietly back and gone on fishing and looking her stake-nets with the silent Huguenot Wassailer for all companion, save the gulls and curlews flying in flocks overhead.

She found Neña busy in the house. Her hair was growing again, clustering about her ears and falling low upon her neck. Her brown colour was now no deeper than it had always been, but under the lace collar of her dress she still wore the silver collar with the inscription, 'Sidi, slave of Melchior the Mage.' Within the first minute of their interview the Lady Molly had divined what the white ripples of lace about Neña's neck concealed, and within her the soul was consumed with envy. She could hardly be civil and yet she must, for all depended upon that.

'I am weary of great houses and entertaining great folks,' she cried. 'I have come down here to you. Oh, the servants - they will think nothing save that I have gone off to London. They are accustomed to me. They were all there when we defended the place - for do not forget that I have seen war and danger as well as you. But oh, I need not pretend. I grill and boil when I think what you must have done and known. If only he had asked me - but no, that could not be. There are too many at Oxford who would have known me.'

'But not as a slave-boy with your hair cut and dyed, a stain upon your face, silver rings in your ears, your legs bare and brown with silver chains tinkling about your ankles - '

'Oh,' cried Lady Molly exasperated, 'how dare you remind me? I can hear them ringing - and I have pretty ankles - why was I not born a gipsy and taught conjuring?'

'I could really do very little,' said Neña softly, 'and I was well paid for my pains. Look at my wages!' And she pointed to the two grey asses tranquilly cropping the thistles and bent grass on the slope beneath the house.

But Lady Molly would have none of this. She knew better. 'You - you need not trouble to talk of wages to me - you went because of the adventure and to be with him. You took my place. He ought to have thought of me ... for I love him!'

'Ah,' said Neña with sad tranquillity, 'do you love him also?'

'Also? Then you confess it. Oh, it is shameless. But, of course, I knew it. I knew it always. Why else should a girl follow a young man, if not for love? You have robbed me of what was mine from the time when I was a long-legged child climbing trees and mocking him from the branches that he might catch me and carry me home. You have stolen Hal from me, Neña la Fain, and I shall never forgive you.'

'You are quite wrong,' said Neña, 'he never lifted an eye upon me, nor touched me with his hand. He was all for his mission and the regiment he was to gain. Besides, there were others - princesses and companions of princes, who were more useful to him than either you or I - to them he listened - only too readily!'

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‘Ah, do not tell me,’ cried the Lady Molly, stopping her ears, ‘the madams, the hoydens, the evil minxes. I will not hear a word against him. But please go on - ah, quickly. Tell me all about them.’

‘There was but one. She was a true princess - but she called herself the Lady Lulu. She followed him from the first sight of his face - ’

‘And he— did he love her?’

‘Love her? Can he love any woman? He treated her as so much earth to be trampled under his feet.’

‘I know him. That is his way. So he does with all. But did he listen to her?’

‘Listen? Aye, with both ears and his mouth and his eyes so long as she had anything to tell him.’

‘And what did she say to him, this ... *Woman?*’

‘Ah, that I do not know. He sent me on errands to keep me out of the way. I leaned against the orchard trees and saw the pavilion glow in the darkness.’

The Lady Molly leaped to her feet with a glad light in her eyes. ‘Then you do not love him as I love him. I should have crept up like a worm and listened. I should have slit the tent with my dagger point and seen!’

‘Perhaps there was nothing to hear or see? At any rate, all he cared about was the number of men and cannon - the size of the pieces and how many horses were ready to draw them, which General was to go with the King and who with the Princes - ’

‘She told him all these things - the traitress?’

‘Yes, Lady Molly, a traitress, indeed! Neither you nor I would have done the like!’

There was such a point of irony in this that it aroused Lady Molly.

‘Oh, as for me - I make no secret of it to you - what need? You cannot tell me anything about Hal

Ludlow I do not know. He is selfish, masterful, not a little brutal. That is his way with women - with you, with me - and I do not doubt with this woman who called herself a princess. What became of her?'

'He sent her back where she came from, as soon as he had wrung out all she knew, as one squeezes a wet sponge in the hand - so!'

'And you came back together, you and he?'

'He rode straight to Ely where was his General, and I came home driving the asses which I had earned. Are you satisfied?'

Lady Molly paused a moment pondering.

'There is no more in it than that?'

'Not so far as I am concerned,' said Neña with the pensive tranquillity she had maintained all through.

'Then what is that about your neck? If it is not a love gage, show it me?'

Very quietly the girl undid the fold of lace and showed the broad collar of rough silver.

'Sidi, slave of Melchior the Mage,' she read. 'Then you do love him?' she cried, her first exasperation returning. 'Give it me, quick. It is mine. I will have it.'

'You are welcome if you can undo it. But only he who put it on can take it off, and I fear he has lost the key. So I shall wear it till I die.'

'I will make him give me one - the same, but heavier and in iron!' cried impetuous Molly. But Neña la Fain shook her head.

'You shall carry your collar, surely, if you love Hal Ludlow as you say. But it need not be in metal nor yet covered with lace. Yet just the same he will clasp it about your neck - and lose the key.'

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

A STATE BANQUET

It was the night of a great dinner given by Mr. Chief Commissioner Ludlow in his house in Westminster close by St. Margaret's Church. Even before his Commissionership Mr. Ludlow had been one of the richest merchants of the city, and to him before any other the Committee of the Houses had applied for money. If Essex grumbled and demanded payment for his troops, it was from Mr. Commissioner Ludlow that advice was taken how to raise it. He had his hand deep in the finances of the Parliament. He had been contractor for the New Model Army, and now at Ludlow House, close to the centre of authority in England, and acting unseen almost with the power of a spring in a watch-case, the great man had his dwelling.

His show of gold plate and liveried valety was such as no nobleman in England was in a position to make at the time. They had grown poorer while, as honestly as any great dealer in money and state contracts may, the Chief Commissioner had waxed ever richer. How rich that was only his chief clerk knew - a little wrinkled man who lived over the Ludlow offices in the East Cheap and rubbed his hands each time he thought of the balance-sheet he would have to show his patron on the thirty-first December of the current year.

Ludlow House had been built and beautified by a great nobleman now living frugally in Paris on forty sous a day and his gambling gains. But it had been

remodelled as a place of entertainment by the Commissioner, and Scots Smith, his trusty servant of fifty years, was in charge of everything between roof-tree and cellar. In spite his name Smith was a border Scot who had come up in the train of King Jamie Baggie Breeches when he brought so many hungry dogs to hunt the forests of England. And Abiathar Smith had hunted well, so well indeed that he had safely stowed away with various trustable jewellers of his master's friends a sum quite large enough to pay for a good estate anywhere between Sanquhar and Nith Waterfoot. And this was the night of the glory of Abiathar, the crown of his pride. As he himself said, he rejoiced like a calf of the stall, like a wild goat upon Mount Carmel. And sometimes (it must be added) his words stung the idle or the stupid like the scorpion of the rocks which carries a sting in its tail.

'The General Cromwell,' announced Abiathar, opening the door of the Hall of Assembly, in a lower tone, adding, 'Lord save us. Here's promotion! Maist as great as my ain, though a heap less secure.'

'The General Fairfax, Commander of all the Armies in the Field!' And then in a lower tone - 'Aye battlin' and fetchin', thae Generals, and as like as no turned oot of their job next month - only him wi' the big heid and the wart on his nose will no be easy to turn - aye, a gey dour stick to handle, him.'

With the great props of both Houses were joined a few younger men, soldiers and politicians for the most part, whom the far-seeing Commissioner considered might be of use to his son in his military career.

Even here, however, Abiathar counselled his master. 'The son o' General Cromwell - aye, gie him

an invite. It will please his faither and wha kens what may come to pass. And that young Hampden, though he's nocht this day may be as great as his faither was.'

So that on the night of the great dinner in the wainscoted dining-room Hal did not find himself alone wagging a young head among the seniors. Yet among those chiefs few showed signs of age. It was a time of shaven faces, which of itself so levels men as to make uncertain ten years of their age.

At the door, and especially outside the archway of the court, the usual motley crowd had gathered, amphibious scum of the ferry landings, haunters of the slips where false watermen touted for tipsy revellers who were next heard of at Greenwich or Rotherhithe. But these had been pushed aside with very little ceremony by the New Model guard, sturdy troopers in red coats, dark grey knee-breeches and top boots, helmeted and breastplated from the wars. The spawn of the Westminster purlieus and the murderous or merely thievish water-rats, male and female after their kind, pushed and crawled among the horses' legs to see the great folk go in. Entertainments of that kind came not so frequently as in the day of kings and princes.

But there was no mistaking that the musket-butts of the Cromwellians were harsher than the halberds of the royal guards. These were men by no means to be trifled with, and so to assauge themselves the cruel crowd turned to rend in pieces anything weak, unknown, or unprotected. A young fellow in a rough costume of sailorly cut, which hung loosely about him, had his pockets picked, and the pickers, not finding enough upon him to quarrel about, promptly knocked him down with a 'Take

that, loblolly! That's for coming here without your month's pay!' The lad fell, and would have been trampled to death but that his shrill cry of distress was heard by a sergeant, who promptly rescued him from among the heels of the horses - and only just in time, for the well-exercised troop was pushing the crowd steadily back. An officer upon the steps, standing a moment in conference with the haughty Abiathar, called out sharply, 'What is the matter there, Sergeant Peter Yabbs?'

'A young man, hurt, asking for the Colonel!'

Captain Zered Tuby came down the steps at a run. What interested his superior officer was very much his business, and it came upon him that, for reasons which were quite apparent to Zered, his Colonel was often as he expressed it 'sore pestered with women, and the poor lad has not the heart to say them nay.' He judged that this would be some messenger or servant despatched in haste. At any rate it was no time to have the name of the Colonel of the Cambridgers bandied about in hearing of the mob about his own father's door.

'This way with him, Yabbs - close up there, men!' And a young man, his face indistinguishable with dirt and blood, his sailor slops torn to the knee and on his stained features an expression of absolute terror and bewilderment, found himself hoisted up the steps by Zered and Sergeant Yabbs. The door was shut, and behind it, in the soft glimmer of many wax candles and the silent to-and-fro of liveried servants, each busy on his affairs, they came face to face with the true master of Ludlow House, Abiathar Smith.

'What's this - wha are ye bringing into ma clean ha'? Somebody asking for the Colonel, say ye. What

Colonel? Wha needs to be speerin' for a bit Cornel when there's Generals by the hogshhead up yonder?'

'Tis Colonel Ludlow the lad is asking for,' said Zered shortly, 'and what is more, I think he had better see him.'

'Colonel Ludlow, quo he!' muttered the Scots major-domo, 'fegs, it will be oor young Maister Harry he will be wantin'. What deil's ain ploy has the chiel' been at noo? Here, into my private parlour wi' him, and we will make him confess - aye, if we have to put the branks on him!'

Zered had to remind him that while branks, pilniewinks and other curiously named instruments of extracting evidence might be current in baronial Scotland, they could not be used with impunity in England nor under the shadow of the Houses.

'But perhaps,' suggested Zered, 'he is a friend of our young master's.' Abiathar glanced at the shrinking figure with one look of enveloping scorn. 'Him a friend o' Maister Harry's - him! ... Man, it's little ye ken aboot young Hairry Ludlow. Rather 'tis such as walk haughtily, mincing as they go, in the bravery of their tinkling ornament and their tires round as the moon - it's them that will be the lad's hobby, mair's the peety - no the like o' him - a mere wisp o' rags! Dod, but he wad be the better o' a wash. We will tak' him up to Maister Harry's room and lock him in till I get a chance to sough a word in his lug. For ye see the young man's at table - no exactly at the high table. Ye couldna expect that, but kind o' croupier at the foot as becomes his father's son. But get ye the laddie washed and faceable, Abiathar Smith will be responsible for the rest.'

So it chanced that just as Hal was leaning back after explaining the Cromwellian theory of a cavalry

attack to a most worthy member of the Committee of Both Kingdoms, a voice spoke in his ear.

'There's a laddie will be wantin' to speak to ye, Maister Hairry. Ye had better gang up to your chamber - as it were, makin' an excuse as that one of your captains is waiting for you - whilk is God's truth and no lie. For Zered Tuby, that Amalakite Anabaptist, is washin' the glaur aff the laddie - aye, and sair he needs it.'

Hal looked much astonished, but excused himself to the company about the table-foot on the plea of military duty. He ran up the stairs three at a time, and bursting in the door with his usual headlong abruptness found Zered putting gold leaf on a cut deep-hidden among the short curls above a young man's brow. He was in shirt-sleeves, and the collar had been torn at the neck by rough hands. Also the youth wept, moaning softly and rocking himself back and forth.

'Lady Molly!' cried Hal aghast. 'What are you doing here?'

But before he received an answer Zered Tuby had faded from view. Simply he was not, and the door was shut. Even an Anabaptist Hog Laner can conceive when the nature and functions of a gooseberry become superfluous.

And still, with her face between her hands, the tears dropping through unregarded, the girl who had held the Towers of Danbury and ridden with Rupert sobbed on convulsively.

'Oh, the brutes, the brutes!' she repeated, 'they knocked me down and trod upon me, when I only asked for you!'

Hal was touched by her distress and kneeled beside her, much perplexed in mind, but still with a

sudden hot flush, recognising that, whatever his experiences in “petticoating” may have been, he had never truly cared for anybody but the little Molly Woodham whom he had bullied so.

He was, however, in no mind for bullying now.

‘But why did you come, and like this - your father is here - in this house?’

‘Oh, will he come in? Lock the door, Hal, my dear Hal. I have been abominable, I know. I am a shameless girl. But oh, I could not have that Neña going everywhere with you, with her conjuring tricks and her silver collar! Oh. it made me desperate. I could not stay. So as my father will not let me marry you, I have run away to be your slave. And you have just got to bear it. For you know you told me that you loved me and wanted me to be your wife. You never said that to *her!* Swear you did not!’

‘Never - never - not to any *her!*’ said Hal promptly, performing his function of good male by lying with effrontery.

‘I knew it - I knew it,’ she whispered, clinging to him. ‘Let me stay with you. You can get me a silver collar exactly the same - as hers - and if my father will not let us marry, he cannot prevent me being your slave.’

Hal felt that it was no use arguing with the Lady Molly in her present state of mind, still stunned by ill-treatment and not yet returned to herself out of the hurly-burly of a world so different from any that she had imagined.

What should he do with her? My Lord Woodham Walter declined to wed his only daughter to the son of a city merchant and the nephew of the reddest revolutionary Anabaptist in England. He could not speak to his father. No, he certainly had no idea of

opening such a matter as the presence of Lady Molly in his house to the financier of the Parliament.

He had it - the General!

He would rather face the lightning at once than have it strike him if scandal were to come of this.

'Molly,' he said, 'stay here. I have military duties to perform, but I promise you to return. Do not be alarmed at the noise of the carriages. My father is giving a great dinner to the chiefs of the Houses. But lest anyone should come in and find you here, I shall lock the door!'

Molly clapped her hands and laughed as if everything were now plain before them. She stopped him at the door, running up to him and whispering, 'Do not forget the collar - the same size as hers, but heavier!'

'I shall not forget,' he answered gravely and went out, locking and double locking the door after him.

But as soon as he had passed the portal his face fell. He had as little desire as ever in his life to disturb the great General on such an occasion. He was sure to be in a bad humour, for he loved not what he called "glorifyings of the flesh," knowing that a man who rode and fought as the greatest cavalry leader in Europe must ride and fight, had better live spare, hard, and clean. Nor would he suffer any others in his command.

In the dining-room Cromwell, placed between Mr. Speaker Lenthal and my Lord of Manchester, neither of whom he loved, leaned back and gazed abstractedly at the massive gilt cornices of the state banquet hall. Really he saw nothing but some vision of red coats galloping through the white reek of battle, or perhaps (and the thing is more likely) his own good Dame at her broidering by the fireplace

and the children busy with their lessons in the quiet parlour of the Tithe House in Ely Town.

Hal, with Zered summoned in support of his Colonel, appeared at his elbow.

‘General,’ he said, ‘I am sorry to interrupt at such a moment, but I have something of importance to put before you.’

Cromwell, who was bored to distraction, made his excuses and was on his feet in a moment. Every man in the room observed the summons of the General by two of his officers. And heads were drawn together and surmises passed from mouth to mouth as to the meaning and outcome of these things. All the world knew that Cromwell had sources of information quite special, and also that, sole among the generals of the Parliament, he had grown great enough to initiate a movement for himself without waiting for orders. Had the King made a dash out of his Oxford fastness? Was another great cavalry raid in prospect? For already the voices of the greatest began singularly to soften, as if already the name of Cromwell had begun to cast, as it were, over the land the Shadow of a Silence.

Meanwhile in the little hall parlour, with Abiathar’s household gods all about - Knox’s *History of the Reformation*, Mr. Gillespie’s *Sermons*, the new Truro psalter with many criticisms and suggestions marked in a fair and clerkly hand - Cromwell, seated in the high-backed, soft-cushioned grandfather’s chair in which Abiathar took his scanty ease, awaited his officer’s report.

Hal made it as briefly as possible.

‘General,’ he said, standing stiff by the little table, ‘it is upon my own affairs I have to consult you. It

may be known to you that there has long been purpose of marriage between the Lady Molly Woodham and myself. So much was known to your wife and daughters, who showed me sympathy when my Lord forbade me the house.'

Cromwell nodded, but warily, with the air of a man who knows not what he may be called upon to approve.

'And now, moved by some fancy, she has left home and come hither in a boy's dress, in which she was most inhumanly treated by the crowd outside, from whose hands she was rescued by Zered, and is now in this house.'

'In this house!' exclaimed Cromwell; 'you go fast, young man. I must have a word with the lady.'

'Upon my word of honour - ,' began Hal, but Cromwell instantly checked him.

'No need of that,' he said, 'had it been otherwise you had never dared to face me. All the same, I would speak with Lady Molly - where is she?'

'Locked in my bedroom!' said Hal humbly.

'Very well, give me the key and wait till I return.'

The General was gone the better part of an hour. He came in looking austere as though he had been visiting a battle-field. But there was a suspicion of humour in the droop of the mouth and in the tone in which he said, 'Well, young man, it is clear to me that the sooner you are married and settled the better it will be for the service and for the Cambridge regiment. But who put all that nonsense in her head about slaves and silver collars?'

'I think she is not quite recovered from her adventures and rough usage,' said Hal.

'Very likely - very likely,' said Cromwell. 'In any case it does not matter. I have bidden her go to sleep

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and be a good girl. I have sent her up some supper, and seen that she ate it. Then I locked the door and brought away the key. As for the father, I charge myself with him. Before I have finished with him he shall be glad and happy to find such a husband for his daughter as one of my colonels. Now let us go back to dinner. You come home with me to-night.'

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

HIGH STRATEGY

General Cromwell's quarters were of the sort that might be called strictly military and rudimentary. He had caused a wooden partition to be put up, cutting off a triangle. Then he had knocked a hole in the outside wall, inserted a circular window, and so within sound of the snoring of his troopers made his home on the second floor of the new barracks behind Whitehall.

Shoulder to shoulder the General and Hal passed through the black and silent streets, while the coaches were still whirling off the guests of Mr. Commissioner Ludlow to their mansions in Norfolk Street or the city.

They walked long silent under the stars, sometimes striding carelessly through a maze of streets, sometimes skirting the river bank. Night-hawking figures raking a livelihood out of midnight London now and then approached them thus promenading at their ease, but at sight of the insignia of military rank, and of those two strong-armed men passing so serenely along, they slunk back into the obscurity natural to their deeds.

Something eminently secure and even peaceful radiated from the companionship of the great man of war. Hal walked grateful and almost happy in the pregnant companionship of this man's silence. The mere ring of his spurred heels on the paving stones seemed somehow to solve the problems of existence, or to make them so little that they solved themselves.

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This man thought for the welfare of three kingdoms, yet he could find time to take trouble about the tangled love affairs of a somewhat careless young officer. Now and then a patrol would jingle up, flash a lantern upon the two, salute, and pass on, marvelling greatly what General Cromwell and his aide were doing within Temple Bar at that hour.

They looked down upon the great flood which passes under London Bridge, and watched the reflected stars tremble and dissolve as the flaws of night wind stirred the surface into small trembling wavelets.

‘Can any man cleanse that?’ Cromwell’s voice came to Hal’s ear like that of a man meditating in a solitary place. ‘Once it came from a crystal spring, up on a hillside, cupful by cupful. The lambs drank and were satisfied. So narrow was it that in play they leaped across it. Now who can span it, who touch it without being soiled? Such is our life. God gave it. He alone can cleanse it. Out yonder (he flapped a riding gauntlet in the direction of the sea) is cleansing. A mile or two of salt water and all this flood of impurity and shame shall be cleansed - its filth and our sins sunk in the deep sea of His forgetfulness!’

He laid his hand heavily upon the young man’s shoulder. ‘But I speak things you are too young to understand. Listen!’

The great bell of Paul’s rang out the midnight, twelve solemn strokes, and on the back of that came to their ears the multitudinous clangour of the bells of London announcing the new day.

‘Your marriage morn - I wish you just so much happiness as I have known myself, though I doubt if you will get it. Young women who run off to be

slaves to agreeable young gentlemen will need some leading - more than raising and commanding Hog Lane.'

'And that, God knows, was no sinecure!' said Colonel Hal.

'This time you will have no Zered,' said the General.

'I am not sure - Zered is a man of counsel,' said Hal, encouraged by the tone of Cromwell's voice in the darkness. And he told of Zered's rescue of Lady Molly from the mob, of his careful surgery, and of how, upon his coming, he had left her to the care of his superior officer.

And Oliver, seldom moved to mirth, found nothing to laugh at.

They were walking back now, and pausing before a tall house, the General pointed to the solitary light which lit a window high up under the eaves of the building.

'Yonder dwells a man sometime married - but unhappy. Oh, do not start, I draw no moral. He is unhappy because he hath chosen ill. The thing is simple as cause and effect. He is a wise man, John Milton by name - you have read his tractates, much mistaken on many things, but I shall make somewhat of him. We shall yet do great things for England, he and I.

'But his wife loves not books. Her folk are of the King's party. She is young. She is innocent. She loves gaiety and life - not a husband who sits all day with his nose in a book. To-morrow we shall find something for her to do.'

He waited till the patrol came round and then having commended their diligence he bade the sergeant in command to light him upstairs to the

chamber in which burned the student's lamp.

In a quarter of an hour he was back again, and dismissing the guard, they two made their way back towards the Westminster barracks.

'Seldom indeed does God give any man the mate his honour demands,' so he meditated, 'because for the most part man is a lazy animal and needs the spur of contradiction, the whip of necessity.'

The General paused a moment to let a crowd of noisy young men go by on their way to their chambers in the Temple. Their chants died within them at sight of the glittering helmets with their white plumes and the tall man who stood so silently regarding them.

'I speak not for myself,' continued Cromwell. 'Providence and mine own choice have fitted me like a glove.'

'Never have I gone down the stairs at Ely without my wife Elizabeth (the Lord reward her!) saying after me, "Take care of the last step. It is treacherous. Be sure not to take cold! Remember, your scarf is in your right pocket. Your handkerchief in the left!"

'And then with a sigh the dear soul goes back to her prayers and her embroidery. She has done her part. Now it belongs to God to do the rest. You do wrong to laugh, Master Hal - '

'Sir, I laughed not - there arose something - something in my throat, thinking of my mother.'

'A good lad - good lad! Yes, you have hit it - Dame Elizabeth is as a mother to me. But make no mistake. I do not make light of her warnings. You have seen me take several wounds, but never a cold. Even at Gainsborough Fight and on Marston Moor I never forgot that my neck-scarf was in my right pocket and my handkerchief in my left!'

They slept side by side in the rude pine-boarded angle of the cavalry barracks, Hal on the bed and the General throwing himself down on a mattress in the corner under the window. So the General wished it to be, and so it was. For the difference between Oliver's wishes and his commands was so slight as to be imperceptible.

When Hal woke up he found pinned to the table a hasty note which read, "Go to Doctor's Commons. Buy a marriage license. Here is the money!"

Cromwell had risen early and for purposes of his own had gone in search of my Lord Woodham Walter. He knew that, in company with a good many other free drinkers and large talkers, my Lord made a practice of sleeping where he dined. His London house was not open, since in the gay and careless life he led in London he could not be troubled with an unwedded daughter to chaperon and provide occupation for.

At Ludlow House Abiathar Smith, as precise in well-brushed suit of black with gold chain and silk hose, as if he had never taken them off, received the General.

'My Lord Woodham Walter? - Aye, General, aye. He will be here - where else, and a bonny ruffle o' kettle-drums he will be carrying on his shooters. I hae juist ta'en him up a lang tumbler o' thae uncanny German salts and stood over him till he took them. That's yae guid turn Rupert did us major-domos. Can ye see him? Aye, that ye can, and a bonny sicht ye'll hae o' him. This way, General, 'tis well there are some sober men left on the earth! Oh, usquebee is a good thing in its place, and also a drop brandy by whiles. But this German salts is the real blessin' o' Providence. Instead o' the hoose

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cluttered up till mid-afternoon wi' snorin' folk, ye have your chambers all ordered by ten o' the clock. - But here's the door. Shall I gang first, for he's in nae sort o' a friendly humour. You might chance to get a tankard at your head!

'I must risk it,' said Cromwell grimly. 'I am in no great danger. What I have to say to my Lord would serve to sober most men.'

He opened the door and stepped within. A man with a neck thick and ruddy with fat sat on the edge of a bed impatiently muttering to himself and occasionally stamping his foot.

'What the devil do you want?' he threw the words over his shoulder in the direction of the open door without looking round,

'I am not "what the devil" anybody,' said a grave voice which caused my Lord instantly to wheel about and in the same movement to rise to his feet.

'Your pardon, General,' he said, looking flustered, 'I thought it was that cursed Scotch serving man who afflicts me with his remedies.'

'I must ask you to come with me, my Lord,' Cromwell cut in with much gravity of demeanour. 'I have a perquisition to make in the chamber of the son of our host of last night, Colonel Henry Ludlow of the Cambridge Horse.'

A gleam of malicious pleasure flashed into the eyes of my Lord. 'Is it a matter of treason?' he said, knowing what was the penalty in such cases and how it was applied by General Cromwell without fear or favour.

'I act upon information received,' said the General. 'But we waste time. Smith, show us to Colonel Ludlow's room.'

Abiathar, who was not in the General's

confidence, made a gallant but quite unsuccessful effort to stand in the breach.

'Maister Hairry - the Colonel that is, will be asleep - I mean he is oot on meelitary business and has taken the key with him.'

'I think not,' said Cromwell, taking the article from his pocket and dangling it from his forefinger. 'Now, Smith, no more words. You know me. Lead on!'

Abiathar threw up his hands with a jerk which meant to convey that he rid himself of all responsibility. He stood back, indicating the door with a stately bow and a wave of the hand in the style which he called his "best King Jamie" - being a reminiscent of the Herald's bow before majesty when James Sixth and First visited the Towers on one of his royal progresses. But Cromwell was not impressed.

'Now get away!' he ordered.

Abiathar stared as if unable to believe his ears. His master would never have spoken to him so.

'Get away,' repeated the General. 'Stand in the hall and receive the lady who will arrive immediately. Keep her below till I send for her.'

Abiathar tramped away with his shoulders very square and his head erect. 'I believe he thought - he was of the opeenion that I, Abiathar Smith frae the Tibbers in Disdeer parochin, would demean mysel' by listening!'

He sighed softly.

'Ah, weel, at ony rate I canna! That's plain.'

* * * * *

Cromwell presented the key to my Lord. He took it

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as a courtesy due to his rank, bowed a slight acknowledgment, turned it in the lock, pushed the door and entered, closely followed by Cromwell.

A figure in white sat up in bed, and with a hasty gesture tossed a light foam of ringlets out of eyes still heavy with sleep. A man's shirt with torn collar showed a rosy flush of shame mounting to two pale cheeks.

'Father,' cried Lady Molly, 'oh, father, I love him so!'

'It looks like it,' said her father grimly. 'You shall come with me this instant, and if I cannot shut you up for the rest of your natural life in this country, by Gad I'll make a papist of you and send you to a nunnery in France! Get up at once and come with me!'

'But I can't, father.'

'And pray, why not?'

'Because I have no clothes - only this!' said the Lady Molly, 'and I will not go to a nunnery. I will appeal to Parliament. Colonel Cromwell will speak for me and for Hal. He likes Hal and says that he would gladly have given him one of his daughters. So why not you, father?'

'You shall never marry a money-lender's son with my consent - and my promise to my friend the Earl repeated only last night.'

Here Cromwell thought it well to intervene.

'My Lord,' he said with that composed weightiness of demeanour with which he summed up a campaign before the House. 'If the case were my own, I should say that marriage was the only course left open - and the sooner the better. I speak not of the private scandal, but rather of what is due to the Cause. I put it to myself thus. My daughter (we shall

say) has run away from home dressed as a sailor to join a young man whom I have forbidden her to marry. Most wrong and disobedient, I own. But she has been severely mishandled and even wounded. She has been plucked from among the feet of horses. She has been recognised by officers of Colonel Ludlow's cavalry, by servants of this house. I find her - thus - in the morning - and (to speak plainly, my Lord) in these circumstances I should count myself exceedingly lucky to have such a young man to deal with as Colonel Henry Ludlow, wise and brave in war - if not too prudent in love - his father's only son and the heir to his estates.'

'Oh,' cried Lady Molly, 'I don't want all that - I want Hal to have nothing except me, and I be his slave - with a silver collar.'

Lady Molly had almost leaped from the bed in her eagerness and now sat with the white sheet about her muffled to the chin, perfectly unashamed, her large eyes dark and wet, her mouth determined, and her golden hair falling about her face and neck in twists and tendrils.

Cromwell indicated the Lady Molly with a little jerk of the chin, which meant, 'It is no use, my friend, you cannot coerce a girl like that. I could not and I am sure *you* can't.'

'I consent!' quoth my Lord, ungraciously enough, and turned upon his heel.

'Stay,' said Cromwell, 'there are a few arrangements. Abiathar, let the lady come up and bring her packets. Carry them yourself.'

A blooming little lady, pouting and wilful, but with eyes brimming over with mischief, came pattering along the passage, holding up her skirt so that she might arrive the quicker.

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'Oh, where is she - I could love her - to run thus to find a husband. While I - I should rather run from mine, only that he would never miss me.'

'Mistress John Milton,' announced Abiathar in his pompous way, but with less success than usual, for he was staggering along (as he said himself) 'like Issachar the strong ass, between two burdens.'

The gentlemen looked at each other as the door closed upon the wet-eyed figure in the heaped coverlet and a little lady who danced all about the room with excitement.

'See what I have brought!' she was beginning when the door closed and shut in their conference.

Then Lord Woodham Walter burst into a boisterous laugh, and slapped his thigh.

'If the hen pecks her husband as the chick hath pecked me, I do not envy bold Master Hal of the Ironsides!'

'It might be as well,' said Cromwell, 'to intimate to Mr. Chief Commissioner that his house is to be the scene of a marriage. He might object.'

'Oh, not at all - not at all,' snapped my Lord. 'It is an honour for him, and one I never meant to afford him. But that minx Moll hath forced my card. I believe she did it on purpose.'

'Not she, but I,' said Cromwell.

'You!' cried my Lord fiercely.

'I,' repeated the General, staring him down.

'And why, pray?'

'My Lord, to teach you a little humility!'

'Well, you have taught that lesson to greater folk than I. A poor country lord need not object. But here comes the minister and his clerk. Hal, you rascal, what a trick you have played me! But you shall smart for this. And your father - what - he knows all

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about it? Then with all you against me and my own daughter the worst sinner of all, what wonder I am beaten!

* * * * *

An improvised bride came into the hall in sweeping white, the wild ripple of her ringlets for once decently snooded,

I thought they were about the same size,' meditated Cromwell, who could think of everything. 'How I wish my Elizabeth were here!

'And this bond of holy matrimony I lay upon thee for a badge of servitude,' said the minister, and after the giving of the ring, Hal snapped upon his mistress's neck her heart's desire, the silver collar of Neña la Fain. It had come to him through Zered that morning, but with the inscription erased.

And just then, more joyous than after Marston Moor or Newbury, the bugles of the Ironsides rang out, and as these two showed themselves on the balcony the mighty shout of Hog Lane led the regiment, as the Second Cambridgeshire Horse saluted their Colonel and their Colonel's wife.

* * * * *

The tale as a tale ends here, but one most significant event must not be forgotten. Nor will it ever be by those who have grown up with the new thing which was to rule England and watched it from the day when it was merely the newly hatched Slepe Troop to the day when, as the full-fledged New Model Army, it broke the King and all his gentlemen

upon Naseby Field.

It was Parliament Day upon Blackheath and the army, which had crushed Rupert at Marston Moor, circled Oxford and laid waste the King's array at Naseby Broad Heath, was drawn out for review. All the afternoon the cavalry had wheeled and charged, the infantry rattled shotless cartridges, the artillery harmlessly roared and thundered for the good pleasure of citizens and parliamentarians.

Upon a little knoll opposite the pavilion prepared for the grandees at the Houses - War Department, Committee of Both Kingdoms, Commonwealth advisers and such-like - General Cromwell held himself apart. Behind him were the pick of his officers - Ireton, Fleetwood, Hal himself. A little disdainfully they stood. They had done the work and this raree show was like making a good dog jump over a stick. The review had been left to their subordinates, and men like Sam Squire and Zered Tuby were in their element. It may be that they were responsible for what followed.

At any rate, certain it is that when the time came to salute the State tribune, where were the Lords and Commons of the Long Parliament, the cannon thundered out on the flanks, and when the high dignitaries rose to acknowledge the compliment, seven thousand swords flashed in the air, twenty-one thousand muskets came to the salute.

But not to do honour to the men of committees and associations. As one man the troops had wheeled about and were saluting a tall man in rusty red, dented helm and mended uniform. He sat his horse alone and motionless on a little knoll among the fern and gorse bushes of Blackheath.

And as from horizon to horizon the steel glittered

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to the salute, all comprehended with a sudden shock that the real part of the day's programme had been reached, when with impressive unanimity sword and musket, lance and pike, were depressed before the tall silent man on the knoll, and the old Ironsides' battle-chant surged stormily from wing to wing of that imposing array: —

*'In midst of all thine enemies
Be THOU the governor!'*

And lest there should be any mistake Hog Lane and the Slepe Troop, directly in front, pointed with their swords at the stately figure upon the knoll, while from the thirty-thousand throats of the New Model Army, their backs turned to Lords and Commons alike, pealed the stern summons of the men who now ruled England: —

'Be THOU the governor.'

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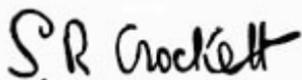
POSTHUMOUS PUBLICATIONS

- 1915 Hal o' the Ironsides
- 1917 The Azure Hand
- 1920 The White Pope
- 1926 Rogues' Island
- 2016 Peter the Renegade

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www.srcrockett.weebly.com and The Galloway Raiders YouTube channel at www.youtube.com

'Mayhap that is the best fortune of all – to be loved by a few greatly and constantly, rather than to be loudly applauded and immediately forgotten by the many.'

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light background. The signature reads "S. R. Crockett" in a cursive, slightly slanted script. The "S" and "R" are large and prominent, with the "Crockett" following in a more fluid, connected hand.