

The Complete Crockett

The Galloway Raiders

digital edition

Scottish works



THE SMUGGLERS

S.R. CROCKETT

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

First Published by Hodder & Stoughton in 1911.

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

Nothing is what it seems in this novel. The staid Barbara Simpson carries a dark secret. Paul and Zipporah's parentage are shrouded in mystery. And the gipsies have so many alter egos it makes your head spin.

At its time of publication in 1911, this was a near contemporary story. Crockett revisits the landscape of his earlier smuggling stories *The Raiders* and *The Dark o' the Moon* and this novel plays an often humorous homage to those times – fictional and real. But there is a deeper story too.

The gipsies in this novel initially seem far removed from the noble lineage of the Faas but we soon discover that they have their own 'royal' past. As time has moved on, so smuggling itself has become considerably less romantic. There is a much darker side to the 'trade' in this novel. The story opens at the Orraland Fair where Paul Wester, the novel's hero, is captivated by gipsy girl Zipporah Katti. As if bewitched, she challenges all his preconceived morality and under her spell he steals his uncle's horse, Glenkens. The gipsy making a thief of the honest man for love is just the beginning of the adventure.

In earlier times, when smuggling was a response to an imposed taxation system, it was participated in by many ordinary people and thus more romantically acceptable; known as 'The Gentle Trade.' However, gipsies and smugglers in this novel are involved in what previously might have been termed the 'Black' Free Trade. Free-trading was formerly seen as a sort of noble act but the smugglers in this novel are definitely more criminal

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than noble. They appear to be little more than horse thieves and later, human traffickers and gun runners, as opposed to the more swashbuckling heroic types who were bringing in tax free goods against a government which they felt was making illegitimate demands on the downtrodden populace. It is not that Crockett has become disenchanted with smugglers, rather that he seeks to show the social and economic consequences of a century of 'Free Trade.'

The Palafox dynasty, while it has its own sort of power, and claims some sort of historic lineage, lacks both the panache and 'legitimacy' of the Faas. The change in the ancient gypsy dynasty is reflective of the huge societal change undergone from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. While set in the contemporary present, the novel is constantly referencing itself back forty years. Crockett has the historian's eye for contextualising. He also has the romancer's skill of adapting history to serve the story.

This is a novel of generations. It is not just a moral tale of how the sins of the fathers are revisited on the children down the generations. It is also an acknowledgement of how times change people. And it is this element which adds depth to what on the surface seems a fairly light story. Crockett took writing popular fiction seriously, so while *The Smugglers* is light it is not trite. In telling the story, Crockett suggests that both adventure and romance have become darker and more complex over the centuries. This is best seen through the various love stories woven into the novel. *The Smugglers*, is not just a tale of young love, it's a tale of old love and love rekindled and Crockett is very concerned to

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look at lives that have been lived.

'Much has been written of the loves of the young, but rarely, very rarely, have the young hearts still subsisting in the hearts of the old been analysed. Yet the true love of such [...] may be a sweeter flower than any that bloom in the spring.'

This 'old' love is a theme he revisits again in his final novel *Silver Sand* published on the day of his death in 1914.

In *The Smugglers* we regularly see how the new ways are pushing out the old ways. How constancy is threatened by change. The Lady of Maxwellton House has to face up to ruin and the new money and new ways threaten the old ways at every turn, both socially and economically. While we always feel that Crockett is yearning for the historic past, he is well able to show the complexities of how old and new can work together. He accepts the coming of the railways and he appreciates that while less romantic, steam ships have their place.

Yet Crockett is uncompromising in showing that the dangers of modernity are pervasive throughout society. *The Smugglers* shows the dangers of a watered down aristocracy, of a religion out of step with the modern world, and of traditional values being under threat. While the plot may seem loose to a modern reader, unused to the episodic style, nothing is wasted and even minor characters add to the central concerns. And we never lose sight of Crockett's trademark humour. The humorous character of 'Clydeside' for example, gives us quite an insight into the changes of Presbyterian religion during the period when rapid urbanisation was fundamentally changing Scottish life for ever.

One senses that Crockett felt more at home in the

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1890's than in the emerging 20th century. By harking back to 40 years ago throughout the story it is easy to speculate that he offers a comment on the fiction he was now writing and the world he was now living in. Because Crockett was, above all, a working writer. He had commitments not only to readers but also to publishers and therefore he could not afford to ignore 'fashion' in fiction. But he always writes from the heart, about the heart. In *The Smugglers* he includes many little scenes and vignettes which one suspects were personal. Crockett's son Philip was about the same age as the novel's hero Paul, and it's easy to speculate that some of the comments about Paul might be applicable to Crockett's own son. For example, '*Paul was undergoing a crisis of that accurate and exceedingly self-conscious youthful nobility which, like measles, is so little likely to trouble a man in later life.*' This is both funny and potentially very poignant.

Typically of Crockett's work, there are many interesting small descriptions of ordinary things. For example, there's a description of Board Schools, illustrating how education changed in the nineteenth century. *The Smugglers* may be fiction, but there is much 'fact' to be gained from reading it.

The action is fast paced as you would expect from this master of the adventure romance, and it picks up even further as the novel works through. There are many twists and turns and many expectations are dashed. The question of who Paul's father is, isn't easily resolved and I for one was barking up the wrong tree for much of the story.

The action moves from Galloway to France and then to Morocco. There is a Kiplingesque sense to

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many of the Moroccan scenes. Modern readers might find some of the description and dialogue of the foreign chapters a touch politically incorrect or even offensive, but we should remember that they represent the contemporary imperialist view of the time it was written in, and Crockett carries it off with his trademark ironic humour. Context is vitally important in appreciating any work of fiction or history. Crockett was definitely writing for the marketplace. His work was read and admired by several soldiers of the period, who certainly appreciated his style. What the modern reader can appreciate from these chapters is perhaps an insight into how the world was viewed and written about immediately pre the First World War. In *The Smugglers*, Crockett shows that times change. Things get darker.

While Crockett shows the danger of change, he also explores constancy. We see this clearly in his choice of Rathen Island, used as a setting for Paul and Zip to spend time alone, learning about each other and about love. Rathen Island will be familiar to readers of Crockett's other Galloway historical adventure romances, and it's a nice touch to see the island as a place of peace and tranquillity with only the shadow of history lying over it like sea mist.

As with all Crockett's novels, the visual description is vivid and realistic, whether its focus is on Galloway, the Moroccan desert, or the headiness of a steam ship in battle. Always, however, the Galloway topography Crockett knew and loved best is most lovingly described. One might say that descriptively, Crockett owns Galloway as much as Hardy owns Dorset.

Throughout all the change and turmoil of *The*

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Smugglers, and however he is buffeted by that change, Crockett clings to one central constancy – love. True love is shown as able to endure however life and fashion try to change it. We can only conclude on reading a Crockett novel that times change but people really don't.

Cally Phillips

March 2022

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DEDICATION To MAJOR MCLAUCHLAN HARPER

Author of 'Rambles in Galloway,' who alone knows what of this book is true, in memory of a Lifetime of Faithful Friendship, I dedicate this book.
Cancale, Brittany, August 21, 1911.

CHAPTER ONE

THE DULSE-EATERS

It was the first time that Paul Wester had been called a liar by a girl. Hitherto, his self-conceit had not conceived the possibility of such a thing.

He was the minister's nephew and even more spoilt than if he had been the minister's son. The minister spoilt him, even in his prayers—and then did mental penance for it all next day, for fear the boy should turn out like his father. The minister's housekeeper, who was supposed to have a heart that had been tanned by half-a-century of protecting her master from tramps, spoiled him more than anybody else. And, following her lead, all the village of Orraland tried its hand. But on the whole Paul, as far as was visible to the public eye, remained unspoilt and unspoilable.

So he was immensely taken aback, having been thus nurtured in the best of conceits with himself, to be called plainly 'a liar,' and that by a bare-legged, rag-and-tag, red-frocked, black-haired gipsy lass whose big dusky eyes had pupils which varied in size with her feelings—a precious inheritance, or the reverse, according to the toss of Fate's halfpenny.

They had encountered on the sands, these two, and he was so pleased with the 'liar' business, that to prove his good faith, he had promptly showed her his most precious asset—a cave where she would be safe from pursuit, from observation, and from interference. He taught her also how to pick and eat 'dulse,' till she waggled her brown legs in great content and enjoyed to the full the clean wrinse of

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the salt in her mouth. She said he was not half bad and thus peace was made.

Yet it was the day of Orraland Fair. All the Green was one big hurly-burly. There, frontispieced by appalling pictures and a real brass band, was Professor Pepper's Original Ghost Illusion. Then came Lord Tommy's Monster Circus—a ringmaster, a clown, a lady who did tumbling and took the money at the door, a cornet and a drummer, besides an imposing young person in spangles who jumped through hoops. For her the young person eating dulse in Paul Wester's cave had a pronounced and virulent contempt, because she would back herself to do as much—not on a saddle padded out to the size of a barndoor, but barebacked. That is, the horse was bare of back. The dulse-eater was a capable young person with an ease of manner and a freedom of tongue to which, in Galloway, well-looking ministers' nephews are wholly unaccustomed.

'What's your name?' Paul Wester demanded, after they had got far enough on with the dulse—a purple tangle of sea-weed beloved of children, and by those along Solway shore believed to seal friendship and heal all diseases.

'Zipporah Katti Lee, just now,' said the girl, biting off another portion from the handful Paul tossed her. 'Mostly they call me Zip, and the 'Lee' doesn't matter. Before that I was called 'Smith,' and before that again 'Palafox.' But it's Zipporah Katti anyway!'

Paul Wester gasped.

'Then you don't know your own name?' he asked.

'What's the blessed good?' the eater of dulse answered, with a careless wave of the hand, 'when you are learning the business you get passed on

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from one lot to the other, just as they have need of you. Our men are horse-coping over in the corner yonder, and old Sarah Lee has on the family dress with the real gold coins and is telling fortunes in the tent. She is the Gipsy Queen. But one day—maybe soon, I shall be the Queen—that is, if I like, and then I shall send her round the houses to beg.’

‘But how can you be a Gipsy Queen if you are a ‘Lee’ one day and a ‘Smith’ another?’

Oh, it doesn’t come so close together as that, changing your name, I mean,’ broke in Zipporah Katti; ‘sometimes you stay a long time with one band. Only if the police get after you, it is best to scatter. And from what I heard this morning they are going to borrow somebody’s horse.’

‘Oh, ‘borrow,’ are they?’ Paul agreed doubtfully, ‘but whose?’

‘That’s telling,’ said Zipporah Katti, presently Lee. ‘But if I swear you to silence with blood—no, not finger blood, nor ball-of-my-thumb blood. That is for kids of the village. But I will swear you with the heart’s blood of the Romany which is in their lip. And then if you tell, you shall surely die—remember, there’s poison, hemlock, monkshood, bloody-finger, and distilled deadly nightshade—oh, and lots more to finish off a traitor. But if you swear, you are not the sort to tell, I can see that.’

‘No,’ said Paul, led on by something about the girl, as well as the eager hope of initiation into the unknown, ‘I am not the sort to tell.’

‘Not if it was your own father’s horse?’ said the girl.

‘I have got no father—no, nor any mother either.’

‘Same as me,’ said Zipporah Katti, cheerfully, ‘bad when you’re young, I dare say, but ever so much

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better when you come to my age—nobody to bother! See?’

She was sixteen, and as for Paul he always referred to himself ‘going nineteen.’

She took a little sliver of hard wood from her pocket and just touched her short upper lip with the sharp end. A tiny speck of blood started out. She came up to Paul, and stood very close to him, deep-blooming, warm, and toothsome as a ripe peach. Her dark eyes expanded with excitement.

‘Hold,’ she said, ‘stand very steady. This is holy wood. It comes from India or Persia or somewhere. The Palafoxes brought it to Spain, and they got it from the Moors and the Moors from the Arabs, and the Arabs (who go everywhere) got it from the Persians. And everything really holy has come from Persia or India one time or another. So at least Lazun Palafox says, and he knows if anybody does. Now stand still. Don’t wriggle—because it is only the point that does any good. Keep your great clumping feet still. Fancy a boy wearing boots and a girl going barefoot! It’s not manly.’

The little straw-coloured spike barely touched Paul’s lip. He stood firm, though the prick of the wood was certainly painful.

‘There now,’ said Zipporah Katti, ‘think hard and pray that the great-god-of-all-the-peoples may grind you between his two millstones of the heavens and the earth if you break your vow!’

She brought her lip close to his face, not laughingly but with a deep seriousness.

‘Now,’ she whispered, ‘thus we mingle our hearts’ blood and are for ever bound to be true the one to the other. Say that after me.’

Their lips met, as it seemed, almost

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sacramentally, and at the faint sweetish taste and wild-fruit flavour Paul Wester trembled. This might be some kind of witchcraft.

But already Zipporah Katti had stowed away her sacred splinter, and was again eating dulse—though, perhaps in memory of the vow, she had kept Paul's hand in hers.

'You may call me Zip, now, brother. What shall I call you?'

'Paul . . . Paul Wester!' he answered, his heart beating quaintly.

The girl stopped and sat a long moment still. Then she said, 'Not the son of the parson with the white hair who lives down the Manse avenue and has the fields above the Fair-ground? His name is Laird.'

'Not his son, but his nephew,' said Paul, and he added, 'He has been like a father to me.'

'Ah, traded something else off to get you,' said the girl promptly. 'I was changed for a little mule with one eye—a mule that kicked—last time!'

Then she mused again, and laying her finger on her lip she pressed the slight perforation till the tip of her finger grew ruddy, when she laid it on Paul's mouth. There was some secret doubling of the symbol in this, which at the time Paul Wester did not understand.

'Well, brother,' she said, 'it is your uncle's pony that the Lees are after, and you and I.'

'Not Glenkens!' cried Paul, getting up from his seat— 'why Glenkens is worth half my uncle's stipend to him in his work. He can carry him about anywhere, and it was Lady Maxwell who gave him to my uncle.'

'Yes,' nodded the girl, helping herself to a new

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handful of dulse pendant from the roof of the cave and putting it to her red-stained mouth, 'He is a good pony. That is why the Lees want him. But tonight you and I, brother Paul, will steal Glenkens!'

CHAPTER TWO

THOU SHALT NOT STEAL!

All the day, to the accompaniment of braying horns and thundering drums down at Orraland Fair, Paul Wester went about, his head full of the strange elastic eyes of the gipsy girl, two filmy dark pupils which waxed and waned to the beating of her heart under the thin sprigged gown. He was back again in the cave. He saw her red lips suck in the purple tangles of dulse. He quivered as he thought of his mouth pressed on hers and of the faint sweet surprising flavour which had moved him to his soul. He sucked his lips inwards as often as he thought about it, in the hope that a little of it might remain. But, except the sting of the slight wound which the small sliver of blond foreign wood had made, his experiment had no result. Yes, perhaps a slight perfume, elusive at the best, and utterly absent as soon as he tried to realize it. And then the inconceivable thought came back.

To please this girl, he was to help her to steal Glenkens that very night! What an absurdity! He would go immediately and warn his uncle. They would get in Danny the beadle and Rob Johnston the stalwart joiner of Orraland village. They would sit up all night and then let the Lees come if they dared. Oh, he would be ready for them.

Paul Wester went to his uncle's study full of his confession. The Reverend Septimus Laird ceased to rustle the leaves of his concordance. He used up one every two years, since his memory was not what it

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had been, and this one was 'pretty far through,' as he said. But for the sake of Paul's education, he made it do longer, eking it out with curiously written tags on which the missing chapters and verses were indicated in script fine as the point of a needle.

Paul stood uneasily, shifting from foot to foot, uncertain how to begin.

'Well, Paul, my lad,' said the minister at last, 'has Cicero been too much for you, or is it the Greek?'

This he said because it was his favourite jest. He knew very well that his boy was more apt to be found out in a broad-buttocked Orraland fishing-smack hauling on a line, or curled up with a book, high in some shy wood corner warmed by the sunshine and over-rustled by the breeze. Paul would not touch his Greek and Latin books till the beginning of the next school term.

True, when Paul first reached home, the minister would appoint a day when the lad was yet fresh off the irons. The 'Pilgrim's Progress,' he would call it, because he wished to test his nephew's advance along the highway of letters.

It was on the tip of Paul's tongue to reveal the threatened incursion of the Lees and the treachery to which, in a moment of madness, he had promised to lend himself. But each time something seemed to seal his tongue. The faint sweetness of the little gipsy's blood glued his lips, together with the admixture of his own, while all the time his ears buzzed with the words she had made him say, 'Thus we mingle our hearts' blood and are for ever and ever bound one to the other!'

He stood dizzy and confounded, till his uncle called him from his daydream by bidding him help himself from the library and be off. The minister was

busy that day and could not work while his nephew—yes, even the flower of his heart, stood awkward and uncertain before him. As he always wanted a book himself, he supposed that was what Paul came for.

So Paul took from the shelves the second volume of Chambers's Ballads of Scotland and departed, the bitterness of a repentant Judas in his heart, but nevertheless supremely happy, because conscious of the faint sweet taste on his lips.

He touched his finger lightly to the spot and discovered the cause. His lip, pricked by the gipsy's wooden needle, had recommenced to bleed.

In love! Emphatically no. Only all Galloway, including even the few scattered towns, scented of spring sweetness. Along every green bank was a riot of pale yellow, broom and gorse and primrose, dotted in the ditches with the deeper orange of buttercups. Higher up among the hills the fine first leaves quivered on the hazel. The larch trailed its sticky roses, and to the very tops of the hill the heather was sprouting green.

The birds? Yes, of course, the birds were behaving (or misbehaving) as they always do at this season of the year. A breath of folly, eye-brightening, heart-dancing folly, breathed over all the southlands from Nith to that wild North Water across which by night shines the steady ray of Donaghadee lighthouse, and in this amorous atmosphere Paul Wester lived, breathed, and for the first time had his being.

The twilight came, as it seemed, far too quickly. Naphtha flares were kindled down on the noisy Fair-green. Paul, drawn irresistibly that way, saw his girl of the cave waving one merrily about her head. He turned bitterly on his heel and with an eye on the

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lighted room where his uncle was working edged silently round till he came abreast the stable, through the door of which he could hear the restless hoofs of Glenkens clicking against the sides of his stall as he fidgeted at his head rope.

Paul went in, and assuring himself that the little horse had eaten his oats and was now biting nervously at the wood of his stall, he undid the rope and led him by the mane into their only loose-box, the door of which had a key. This Paul secured, and put the key in his pocket. It was a simple lock and a poor protection enough, but somehow for the moment, the touch of the cold iron gave Paul confidence.

But as he stood there in the stillness of the dim stable, seeing only Glenkens a ghostly shadow nosing about in his new liberty, a slim dark figure suddenly filled up the low oblong of the stable door behind him.

'Hist, brother!' the words came startlingly clear, 'time to get the beast out of that. We have an hour—no more! And barely that!'

'Zipporah Katti,' he gasped, 'I—I have changed my mind—I cannot steal Glenkens!'

'But you must—you shall. The blood of the oath is not gone from your lips. You and I, brother, will do the trick—unless, that is, you prefer that it should be Toby Lee or Raif Palafox! They both want to marry me, brother, but our chief Lazun, away at Cancale, has not yet decided. Besides, one of them would surely have to kill the other first.'

All this kept Paul Wester silent. It seemed the wildest of wild talk to him. Nobody was ever killed in Galloway now, except sometimes a stray keeper in a free fight with armed poachers, and he stood still,

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acutely conscious of Zipporah's small hand laid with the freedom of comradeship on his shoulder and the restless shaggy head of Glenkens sniffing at them both over the partition.

'Be quiet,' she said; 'unlock the door and let us get him away!'

Somehow Paul found the door unlocked, yet he did not remember to have given her the key. He saw Zipporah move within. The soft buzz of her whisper came to his ear, like the hum of a tired bee. Instantly the quick nervous patter of Glenkens' hoofs ceased upon the stones. She was fastening something soft and silent to his shod feet.

Presently she led Glenkens out, the little horse nosing and sidling against her as he had never done to Paul in all their years of comradeship.

Zipporah led him down the tiny avenue arched by the tall Manse ashes, a landmark from afar, and bulwarked by a dense shrubbery of laurel and holly. The sounds of the Fair came fainter to their ears. Now they were on the little track which led up the valley. Still the tall trees bent about them, but now there was no more underbrush. It behoved them to go softly. Zipporah kept Glenkens as much as possible in the shelter of the rough stone dyke, her bare arm thrown lightly about his neck.

Paul followed miserably. She seemed to have cast the spell of the gipsy upon him also. His treachery to his uncle and the thought of the loss of Glenkens tugged at his heart-strings. But the lips pressed to his in the sacredness of the oath, the words he had repeated after her, seemed to cut him altogether adrift from his past.

For that night at least he was Zipporah's, and hers only.

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She led him in the direction of a little walled 'park,' the gate of which she opened, and whistled very low. A herd of rough ponies, Shetlands and Icelanders mainly, swarmed out, thrusting, nosing, and biting to get near her.

'Raif and Gipsy Lee are away on their business,' she whispered, 'we are not a moment too soon. They may be at the Manse stable door even now.'

And she led them all forth in her train, swarming and kicking up their heels, till the cavalcade came out upon the barren sands of Solway side with the tide lapping and creeping inwards not a hundred yards away.

'That will do,' she said in a satisfied tone, 'you hold Glenkens!'

Paul Wester took him by the mane and the little horse sniffed upwards, finishing by nosing him moistly under the chin. They stood quite still under the brow of a darkling cliff while Zipporah convoyed the other ponies up to the road from which they could see the lights of the circus ground.

Then with a sharp, surprising cry and a clapping of the hands she dismissed them. Evidently they understood. For having bit and kicked each other a little amicably, they threw up their hindquarters and started in a neighing ruck towards the lights—perhaps to find the little walled 'park' from which they had escaped.

'Now we will go find the cave,' said Zipporah Katti, 'or the tide will be too fast for us!'

'But we cannot stop there,' said Paul anxiously, 'I know. Wherever there is dulse on the roof of a cave, the tide washes it out twice a day.'

'True, oh brother, most true,' mocked the maid, who had resumed her hold of Glenkens; 'art a wise

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lad, Paulo, but all things are not yet known to you. For instance, have you ever gone to the end of the cave?’

‘Certainly,’ said Paul, ‘and there is a well of water there which no one has ever crossed.’

‘Then you shall cross it tonight, by the light of the lantern I have under my cloak. Yes, and Glenkens too! He would follow his mistress anywhere. There is a stable for him with oats and straw—enough to make him comfortable till the Lees are a hundred miles upon the York Road, with the fear of the police at their tails.’

Fain would Paul have asked another question, but Zipporah hushed him with the same curious noise as she had used to quiet Glenkens. He obeyed just as readily, the more so, perhaps, that with a gesture of her free hand she pointed to the white foam licking up the level sand only half-a-score of yards away.

Glenkens sniffed curiously as they turned into the low entrance of the sea-cave. The salt smell of the dulse frightened him. He set his feet and ‘stelled’ back. But a light hand pushed across and across his eyes, a whisper in his ear, and he followed Zipporah obediently into the dense dark. Paul stood a moment and then did the same, the sea wrack pushing sullenly forward a tongue of yellowish-white froth that filled his heel-tracks as he made them.

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CHAPTER THREE

THE SURGES OF SOLWAY

The tangles of dulse waved sullenly in the salt wind from off the sea. Paul was the taller, and the thin, cool edges tickled his hot cheek. Zipporah paid no attention, save to the piloting of Glenkens. The little horse was exceedingly nervous, striking the damp sides of the cavern with his shod hoofs, tossing up his head and whisking his tail. But Zipporah went before him, stepping backwards with his nose close against her breast, and whispering into his pricked ears. Glenkens was clearly uncertain. Nevertheless he followed, often pawing tentatively with a forefoot before he placed his weight upon the spot.

'He will never cross the well at the end of the passage,' Paul thought to himself. They were now in a complete darkness and behind him the minister's nephew could hear the roaring suck of the surges in the mouth of the Dulse Cave.

He did not in the least see how they were to get Glenkens into a place of safety, nor indeed how they were to save their own lives. He put his hand up and still the seaweedy tangles, green and clammy (purple dulse no more), were dripping with the salt water from the last tide that had filled the cave from floor to roof.

But they went carefully, and Paul could hear Glenkens shaking his head with nervous impatience, when suddenly a match spurted blue and was held up like a lamp, in the hollow of a

hand, so as to throw the light forward and yet shelter the eyes. The hand was small and rosy where the fingers came together, and through the sunburnt gipsy skin, the blood showed red and warm within.

Zipporah lit a candle, and instantly the cave was bright as with a fierce light. Paul could see the clammy black walls, the tangle of seaweed short and colourless, and underneath the hard damp sand of the pathway.

Zip passed the light back to him. 'Hold it high—higher than that—above your head, silly! I shall have more than enough to do with my hands in a moment.'

The route continued. They seemed to be rising. The passage became contracted, and Glenkens had some difficulty in adjusting himself to the constant windings. But there was still the pallid seaweed along the walls, though perhaps this did not grow quite so high, and Paul knew well that the tide, now sullenly roaring in the arched mouth of the cave, would not be long in following them even thus far.

'Up with the light! Higher yet!' cried Zip. They had come to the oblong irregular piece of water, which Paul had named the 'well' of the cave. It was mostly of good clean water—only slightly brackish after each tide, but of such abundant gush that it soon cleared itself and became drinkable again. As they went, the little horse stepped more and more gingerly, and Zipporah kept soothing him more and more with continuous whispering. Then at the edge of the well, standing before Glenkens, she slipped off her apron, tied it over his eyes and leaping lightly across the yard-wide water, pulled gently at the apron-strings.

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But the little beast held back. Glenkens could not see and he was not satisfied. He knocked his hard little hoofs on the ground. It was of brittle shale and splintered under the shoe-iron.

‘Change places,’ said Zipporah brusquely to Paul Wester. And after he had leaped to her side she gave him the strings of the apron in which the pony’s head was hidden. She herself returned to the left ear of Glenkens, put her arm about his neck, and what they said one to the other no one knows but themselves.

There was a consultation, an assurance given and received.

‘Now, Glenkens!’ cried Zip, ‘you, Paul Wester, pull! Over with you!’

And the little horse lifted himself over the black water as easily as he would have overleaped a tiny brook in the daytime with the certainty of better pasture on the farther side.

‘Now,’ said Zipporah Katti, ‘give me back the candle. It ought to be not far from here.’ And leaving the main cave to narrow into a mere black chink in the rock, she turned sharp to the left up a pathway where the tool of men must certainly have aided nature. It was as rough a flight of steps as ever Paul trod, and the marvel of it was that in all the history of the village of Orraland not one of the boys had ever thought of following this side-track. But for this there was a reason.

The tale of the wandering piper who had wagered that he would play his pipes till he came to the Devil’s Cauldron, a deep pit on the edge of the granite hills half-a-dozen miles inland, had scared the boldest of them. This piper (so ran the legend) had been heard playing his pipes underground for

fully two miles. 'Roy's Wife of Aldevalloch' was the tune. But when two miles were accomplished, with a wild shriek of the chanter and a last fearsome bray of the drones, the end came. Pipes and piper, tune and player were alike engulfed. No more was heard or seen of this tempter of Providence. Some blamed the water kelpie, some a concealed crevasse, some the foulness of the air. But at any rate the laurels of the vanished piper remained green all along Solway-side, and no one has had the courage to follow his footsteps for fear of the terrors which the cave holds in its belly.

But Glenkens, his head in the apron, followed with docility the nervous brown hand on his mane. And as for Paul, he once more held aloft the candle and marched chest-forward like one who leads a forlorn hope.

There was no longer any doubt about it. It grew drier as they mounted. The salt dankness disappeared from the walls. The sand underfoot gave place to rock, waterworn it is true, but with the pavement smooth as that which a burn wears in the granite slabs of its bed. They were above the reach of the tide now, and immediately the air smelt different. There was an out-of-doors breath in it—heather and the winds that blow keen about the crests of Ben Gairn and Screel.

'Halt!' said Zipporah, whose little brown palm had been slapping eagerly the left of the widening passage-way as they ascended.

'If the old man said truth, it must be somewhere here,' she murmured to herself. 'Nobody knew but Lazun and he told only me. He made me promise not to tell Raif.'

Paul Wester turned sharply round. At the sight of

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the candle shining in his eyes through the thin stuff of the apron, Glenkens swerved sideways and striking with his heels, brought out a hollow clang which echoed down the passages.

'The Cove of the Last Smugglers,' said the girl, triumphantly. 'Old Lazun Palafox spoke the truth after all. Here with the candle! Quick!'

They stood before an ancient wooden door, half buried in a drift of sand and pebbles. It was fastened with a couple of cross-bars of solid oak which swivelled into niches cut in the rock.

Paul wrenched one of them off and with it began to clear away the sand and stones. Zipporah laid her strength to the other, and between them, they were not long in opening the great door, two inches thick of hard wood and the inside plated with solid sheets of green copper like a ship's bottom, bossed with brass nails as big as Zipporah's fist.

The hinge groaned reluctantly and then a short passage brought them to a neat small chamber hewn in the rock. A sort of manger or stone trough occupied one end, and above was a worn hole for the headstall. On each side were others, but these seemed in less good repair. Here Glenkens was soon at his ease. There was plenty of hard dry sand to bed him out, and when the apron was taken from his eyes, the little horse instantly indulged in a good roll—bad, perhaps, for the coat, but an excellent indication of temper.

The gipsy girl took from her plaid a provision of oats, half of which she gave to Glenkens now, saying as she rubbed her finger between his eyes, 'Tomorrow we shall see!'

'And now, brother,' she went on, turning to Paul Wester, 'go down to the first spring and bring up

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this flask full of water. Taste it first. I brought a small mutton-ham with me from the wagon. I shall see that it is cut when you return.'

Paul had brought nothing but himself and a tolerable hunger, so he felt stupid and strangely forlorn. But at least he conducted himself as a man under authority, for he took the tin flask and groped his way back into the darkness again. And as he went the roaring of the tide in the throat of the rock tunnel sounded more guttural and menacing.

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE GIPSIES' PURSUIT

As Zipporah and Paul arranged their meal of plain water and blackfaced Galloway mutton-ham, they made a cheerful couple. It was not in life that it should be otherwise—Paul's uncle was safe in his den among his folios. Only the old housekeeper, Barbara Simpson, would be remembering about him, and he could so easily, in the presence of Zipporah, forget about Barbara. For Paul had come to the ungrateful age when the skip of a foot on the stair, the swish of a skirt, the shapeliness of a small head, close-buckled and crisp, weigh more with young men than all the benefits of uncles and housekeepers, past, present, or to come.

Quickly the little feast was dispatched amid whispering and smothered laughter—to which may be added the occasional touching of hands by accident (as it were) across the slab of rock which served as a table.

Then Zipporah rose, bade him follow her and be very still. 'I will show you something,' she said, putting out the candle.

She took his hand in hers, and led him through the confined russet darkness into a fresher air and a rosier light.

Quite without warning they came out upon a kind of terrace in a niche under the beetling black sea-cliffs. In front was a wall to lean upon, not built of stone and lime, but cut out of the solid rock. Zipporah swept Paul's cap off, and taking him to a

spot near the corner motioned him to look over.

What he saw was the sea breaking in a dim froth of foam like daintiest lace all along the cliff edge.

There was not now a vestige of the entrance of the Smugglers' Cove. When the waves retreated farther than usual, little snorts and spouts of foam alone showed how they had entered, and where Glenkens had trodden.

But away to the left towards the village where the tide had not covered the rim of sand, under the dulling afterglow of a gorgeous sunset, many lanterns twinkled, weaving and scattering.

'They are looking for us,' whispered Zipporah gleefully— 'looking for Glenkens, at any rate. They found the stable empty, so they followed as far as the herd of ponies led them. There—they have come to the place where I ordered them back! Yonder they go, searching over the sea-common and short grass back to the road. Oh, I know they are clever, specially Raif Palafox, but his chief Lazun said nothing to him about the wooden door bound with copper, where the Last Smugglers stowed their cargoes!'

Then she set off in a long monologue while they watched together the lanterns losing themselves among the tangled sea-grass country about the peaty delta of the Auchen Water.

'Of course,' she said, talking as much to herself as to Paul, 'smuggling is not what it was in old Lazun Palafox's young days. Then there were armed convoys, gathered from all the farm lads of the country, sometimes two hundred strong, each with a couple of good pack-horses, going openly through the country with the clear clanking of bridle irons and the clash of anker-chains. The trade with the

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Isle of Man is finished and done with. There are no riding preventive men any more, and the old coast-guardsmen spying along the cliffs with a glass under their left arms, get fewer and blinder all the time. The little whitewashed houses, with the square tower and flagstaff, where Lazun told me they used to live, are falling into ruin, and the whole coast lies open.'

Zipporah laughed a little, spread out her arms contemptuously and leaned one hand lightly on Paul Wester's shoulder.

'If only I could write a book' (she went on, more familiarly), 'I would surprise some wise people!' Her eyes followed the vanishing lanterns up the road by which the ponies had gone.

'The trade is dead, they say. All goods come by railway. Pot-stills are only to be seen in the West of Ireland, Connemara-way, where I went once with the Smiths. There is just a coal sloop or two about Palnackie, and some few fishing-smacks at Garlieston. For the rest, Solway is as bare of ships as the palm of my hand. The land lies open from Annan water-foot to the 'back shore' of Leswalt. And it never crosses their minds that there are men as bold as ever there were in the days of Yawkins and Captain Gulden Van Brunt.'

'You don't mean to say,' interjected Paul Avith sudden anxiety, 'that there are smugglers out on the seas today?'

'And why not?' said the girl, removing her hand and turning sharp upon him, 'not so many perhaps. Nor is the thing done in the light of day, with ringing bells and a procession as long as from here to the town head of Orraland. But in the seaboard parishes you will find little dutiable drink except beer. That,

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and that alone, comes by rail. Tell me why, if you please.'

'True,' said Paul, thoughtfully, 'there may be something in what you say.' He began to put this and that together in his mind.

'And where,' the girl's whisper grew more emphatic, 'where are the people who drink the beer? A few English quarrymen and a good many natives who are interested in seeing that the traffic in other matters does not fall off. But most of it is given to the pigs. Why in Borgue...'

'They give it to the bees,' interjected Paul Wester, laughing.

'Yes, you may laugh, but they do, mixed with sugar, and all day there is a small boy with a stick at every feeding trough to help the drunkards out and lay them on the grass till they have got over their headache and are able to fly home! Oh, it is true.

'They do it to keep them near home away from the heather, for that would spoil the light green of the honey. Why, I have been a Borgue beeguard myself for ten days in the middle of the season. Keeping off the wasps is the worst of it. I had gloves and a mask with gauze eyeholes. But the wasps stung through in spite of all.

'They crawled down my neck. They hid in tucks of my dress. Nothing could keep them away from the smell of the beer and the sugar.'

Paul Wester wanted information upon greater matters.

'But how is it managed—this smuggling? I have seen gangers watching the disloading of coal luggers on the sands or at the quay at Palnackie.'

'Yes, I dare say—sitting on a pile of planks

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smoking a pipe,' snapped Zipporah, 'but you never saw one go below, brother. No, and if they had, what would they have found—a little coal dust in a corner, a pile of empty boxes which they would turn disparagingly over with their sticks. Then a stamp or two with the foot, perhaps a stray measurement in search of double bottoms in which they do not for a moment believe, and ashore they go—to the 'Quarryman's Arms,' with the captain of the Good Intent to drink smuggled spirit and smoke smuggled tobacco.'

Zipporah's sniff of contempt was directed against all men in authority who permitted themselves to be so greenly cheated.

'And so on they go till they get their pensions. But never, never do they grapple for the nests of chained kegs sunk out yonder in three-fathom water, and lifted by yachts carrying the flag of the Clyde Squadron. Yachts can do more in this line than all the great smuggling captains put together. Nobody suspects them!

'And for the hiding places, when once the stuff is got on land—are they not here just as they were a hundred years ago? Why, only the other day Sir Herbert turned out one at Monreith under a cottage which he was meaning to rebuild!'

'But, this one is empty,' said Paul a little wistfully, for his father's blood stirred within him.

The girl laughed lightly.

'That's as may be,' she said, 'at least nothing has entered here since the days of old Lazun... But,' (she jerked her head over her right shoulder to indicate the dark interior behind them) 'I warrant there will be walls yonder upon which the iron heels of Glenkens would ring hollow as a drum!'

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‘But come,’ she spoke hastily after a pause, filled with the wash of Solway sea water against the cliffs underneath, ‘it is time for all good little boys to be thinking of getting home—lest they be locked out and whipped in the morning,’

‘It seems to me,’ Paul answered, ‘that unless I could swim like a fish, we are both rather securely locked out as it is.’

‘There is your uncle—and the housekeeper,’ Zipporah went on; ‘what in the world would they say if they knew that you were up here with a stolen horse, and keen as mustard to go off smuggling with old Lazun and a brown gipsy wench from the Fairgrounds?’

‘You are no gipsy,’ said Paul Wester knowingly, ‘you have the good education. I can hear by your accent that you have been brought up in foreign parts, and there is a little medal in gold and blue enamel about your neck—I have heard that they wear such in papistical countries.’

‘What an observant lad,’ she answered, pouting her lips mockingly at him. ‘I had not dreamed that you would pay so much attention to my neck and what was about it. I have not asked you concerning your creed or the lock of hair in the silver locket that is about your neck!’

Paul was taken wholly by surprise.

‘There is no mystery about that,’ he said; ‘I am a good Presbyterian, and I will teach you the Catechism for saving Glenkens.’

‘Thank you,’ said the girl airily, ‘but you have not explained about the silver locket and the fair hair that is in it.’

She paused a moment and then added, ‘Not that I care—it is a woman’s hair.’

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'It is my mother's,' said Paul Wester gravely, 'she was unhappy. She is dead.'

Zipporah made one leap towards him. At first he thought she was going to fling her arms about his neck. From this he would not have shrunk—at least in private. But instead the girl stood a moment looking up into his face, her eyes brimming with penitent tears.

Then she seized his hand and kissed it before he was aware—at which he was hugely taken aback, such kissing being uncommon in Galloway, and Paul Wester (though of small experience) would have preferred a more ordinary sort.

'What a little beast I am!' she said, stamping her foot, 'how can you ever forgive me?' And she dabbed her eyes furiously with her apron, the same in which had been wrapped up the head of Glenkens, at the passage of the cave-well.

The tender mercies of Zipporah's temper were sometimes cruel, but anything more beautiful and comforting than her swift repentances, Paul Wester had yet to encounter.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE SECOND EXIT

So far Paul Wester had not considered at all what his uncle and Barbara Simpson the housekeeper would think of his absence. He had saved Glenkens, that was the way he regarded the matter, and the rest would easily be forgiven.

And now that he found himself in a real smugglers' cave, apparently not half or quarter explored, the waves lashing the solid cliffs fifty feet beneath him, and a pretty gipsy girl kissing his hand, the situation was so novel that Paul was in no hurry to put an end to it. For which, small blame to him.

He became nervous about possible secret exits which he might never find again. How could he leave Glenkens with any justice to his uncle? It would be quite unheard of that he, a gentleman, should forsake a lonely maiden, one who for his sake had exposed herself to the certain hatred of her kin, and cast herself upon the world friendless and alone — save for him, Paul Wester, then present. He remembered what he had read and the dewy darkness of Zipporah Katti's eyes reinforced the lecture—a second lesson tending to the same purport as the first.

Let his uncle say what he would, think what he would, do what he would! Let Barbara Simpson rage after her kind, never would he forsake the girl who had left all to follow him—that is to say Zipporah Katti Palafox-Smith-Lee, also present and with hair

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that blew in his eyes. A very noble young man was Paul Wester at that moment.

Vague memories of the Book of Ruth, heard half drowsy, half asleep during his uncle's nightly readings 'in his ordinary,' that is to say, going steadily through the Bible from Genesis to the Revelation, moved within him as Spring moves in the blood of a young man.

He would never betray the heart that trusted him. By this thought he felt himself inexpressibly ennobled, glorified, aureoled. His life was too little, too mean to give for a girl with such splendid liquid eyes, the same that had looked into his but a minute before—which (though he would have been surprised to know it) were the cause of all this volcanic outbreak of nobility in the heart of Paul Wester.

The only difficulty was that Paul had counted without his Zipporah Katti! He was the older in years, but in experience of life he was a babe to her.

They marry early in Gipsyland, and begin to prepare for this even earlier. Zipporah was pretty. Better still, she was 'clever.' That is, she could earn money readily at fortune-telling, and with her quick retorts which stung like nettles, she had become a fashion among the tawny clans of Lee and Smith, of Bailie and Stanley. Besides, there was a certain Raif Palafox, dwelling in a 'tan' that was not his own that he might keep her in sight and be on hand to cull the flower at the first symptom of ripening. He was as clever at the knife-play as he was unequalled at the horse-coping. So it was no small addition to the attractions of Zipporah Katti, that it had become an understood thing, that whoever pretended to her hand must first stand up to Raif Palafox in single

combat.

So it came about that Zipporah Katti early knew her own value. And now she was going to impress that value on Paul Wester.

'Paul,' she said, abruptly, 'you are a good boy, but there is no use for you here tonight. I want to stay good friends with your uncle, and possibly with Barbara Simpson as well. Tomorrow you can come back with all the news you can gather, and . . . some scraps of good eating for Glenkens and me. We eat out of one manger at present, he and I.'

'Am I to swim for it, then?' said Paul disgustedly.

'And what should that matter to a shore-lad? Could you not swim to the Silver Beach yonder?'

'Aye,' said Paul, 'maybe I could—if there were any Silver Beach to swim to!'

Here he took advantage of his knowledge of the tides in Maxwellton Bay. Zipporah Katti looked hastily over the breastwork, and saw with astonishment that the sands from which her late companions' lanterns had disappeared was a pallid sluice of churning waters. The tide had just passed its highest point, though of the two only Paul knew that, and the ebb-race was setting away to the south-west, sucking the packed waters out of the bay backward into the gut of Solway.

But Zipporah Katti was not to be beaten so easily.

'A pretty gipsy girl,' Paul had said. But was she?

An olive-pale face, features regular and fine, shadowed by a crisp mass of black curls which in the light of the lantern showed of that deep blue-black of the moonlight sky—say, in the great Square of Pegasus where the stars are thinnest sown.

Gipsy—well, perhaps Zipporah Katti had a right to the name. But again she had tented with too

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many families for one to be sure of even so much. But she showed the promise of a great attractiveness, as was no doubt obvious to Raif Palafox and other eligibles who passed over well-dowered and much ornamented maidens of their own folk to demand in just Romany marriage the hand of this waif of many 'tans.'

But already in the slippy lithe girl, watched jealously by the eyes of the women-folk, they divined the matchless whisperer who in time would gentle the wildest stallion, the velvet of whose eye would decide the most reluctant purchaser, with his hand fluttering undecided about the flap of his money-wallet. Other matters also there were. And the sulkiest and least imaginative lad of the gipsy-folk saw possibilities in a little solitary camp in the glade, the water running by, the horses tethered to their pickets, the fire of twigs glittering among the dewy summer grass, and between him and the caravan the slender flitting of Zipporah Katti preparing the evening meal. He ought, by all rights, to have lain on his back, smoking and shouting commands, but in his imagination he was willingly harrying the woods for fur and feather, under the pretext of bringing back an armful of faggots for the slim girl's fire.

Then he licked his lips and thought that with such a gloaming vision in a nook he knew of, life would be worth living.

But as to Zipporah Katti herself, the imaginations of her heart were widely different.

She confided some of these to Paul.

'It is nothing to me to run wild, as folk reproach me with doing. I have defied the tribe. It is the unpardonable sin, though they are only Lees after

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all. Perhaps some day they will come back and kill me for it. Well, that can't be helped. I shall stay on in the cave with Glenkens there after you are gone (and in a minute more you are going) with no more fear than I would sleep in a feather bed. I have never slept half-a-dozen times in one spot in my life, except when Lazun Palafox sent me to school at the convent. But then I was hardly asleep good and sound, before clang the bell would go for prayers in the chapel and down we must troop in the chill dark. But though I prayed, it never seemed to do much good.'

'Oh Zip,' cried Paul, 'I wish uncle could speak to you!'

Zipporah Katti flung up her hands with a little sob.

'Oh, I wish so too,' the words came impetuously, 'I want to grow up like other girls—like everybody—not wild or different, whatever I pretend. I want to wear white aprons—no, not to be a servant, but that rather than be thought wild and a gipsy. I want the boys not to pelt me through the villages—though they dare not do that if any of our men are by—nor the girls to swing their green baize bags and put out their tongues at me. I want to be friends with them—with everybody. You understand?'

Paul did not fully understand though he said he did. He himself was tasting the first draught of stolen waters and the sweetness of them lingered entrancingly upon his tongue. It seemed impossible that any free agent, with the woods wide and open, and the fields and sky all about, with caves full of mysterious effects and unexplored doors leading to chambers of treasure, should wish to change all this for the dulness of life within four walls—going to

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school, sitting in a pew on Sundays and 'behaving'—from all which things the recently emancipated Paul Wester had suffered in his time.

And his conscience smote him so hard that he could not let another give up this wild and glorious liberty—at least not without a warning,

'Zip,' he said, 'you think now you would like all that—being fussed over indoors, checked outside, told you must not do this, and must do that! Why, you would be hiding among the ferns again in a fortnight.'

'No,' said Zipporah Katti, 'I wasn't sick of the convent—in spite of the prayers in a language I did not understand. Besides, if things got too bad the bracken and the heather are always there, and at any rate I should like to try. So if you can say a good word for me to your uncle—he might know of someone—someone who would take me in. I could work. I know a lot—more than you think, grammar even and about the infinitive mood—and what I don't know I could learn. You would be astonished how quick I can pick up when I like. And now,' (Zipporah Katti suddenly changed her tone) 'it is time for you to go.'

'To go—ah, but how?' thought Paul Wester. And he smiled triumphantly as he thought of the many hours which must elapse before the Solway surges would cease to sweep the cave-mouth and break themselves furiously in charges of white galloping horses all along the coast from Portowarren to Maxwellton Bay,

And so, without further word spoken, but with much authority in the gesture, Zipporah made Paul follow her.

'You are to go home the straightest way,' she said,

strenuously as if she had been Barbara Simpson herself, 'you are not to stop by the road, nor tell any one of the cave, lest it be searched. And what is within is neither yours nor mine, but belongs to Lazun Palafox. So when you speak of Glenkens or me, say that we are 'in a safe place and will appear in due time, when the coast is clear.' You hear, Paul Wester?'

'I fear that will but ill satisfy my uncle—and Barbara Simpson not at all.'

'It will have to serve for both, however,' quoth Zipporah. 'You have your instructions and you must get out of it as best you can, or never more set eyes on Glenkens again—nor on me either, if that matters to you.'

'If that matters!' he exclaimed, passing his hand in careless fashion about her shoulders. The arm followed, but instantly, as if used to the operation, Zipporah Katti stood clear.

'Hands off!' she cried in her foreign way, neither surprised nor abashed, 'fingers to yourself, my lad! You are not linking home a sony byre-lass from the Fair yonder. Behave as a minister's nephew, and a man that is friendly with the Greek and the Latin!'

[As if these ever helped a man to behave in such a case!]

But at any rate, though I will not deny that embracing was hot in Paul's mind, he followed Zipporah meekly enough, as candle in hand she led him by strange ways. Sometimes he was out on the bare face of the cliff and could see stretching for miles beneath him the smother of the surge, then the heady swing and tumble as the big black waves prepared to break solidly in the dim light.

The stars showed overhead and in front, looking

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strangely unfamiliar, like the faces of friends met unawares in crowded far-off cities.

Then back again they clambered into the rock, which at this place must have been tunnelled like a rabbit warren! And he wondered at the girl's readiness till he saw that she held in her hand, quite close to the lantern, a kind of chart or plan—no doubt traced for her by old Lazun himself.

And then Paul remembered with shame how he had brought that same girl to the cave mouth to eat dulse, and how grateful she had been. It was small wonder that she knew of a stable for Glenkens and safe hiding for herself.

'You are sure,' said the young man, carefully concealing his feelings, 'that old Palafox only gave away one copy of the smuggling chart—that which you have in your hand?'

'I am sure,' Zipporah answered, 'but do not speak so loud—we are near the skylight entrance now!'

'And how about the gipsy they call Raif Palafox?' queried Paul suspiciously.

'They call him Raif Palafox because that is his name,' said Zipporah Katti calmly. 'But be easy, brother. Old Lazun would sooner give him a knife between the ribs. There is an old blood feud yet unstaunched.'

And Zipporah went forward steadily, mounting all the time, till at last she crawled out into a kind of shelter where the sheep hide on snowy, drifty days (the herds call them 'pents'). She pivoted a flat stone easily with her hands, pushed Paul out with never a good-night, and shut close the trap again.

But Paul Wester was determined that at least he should be able to find his way back on the morrow. So he sat still where he was, one hand on the 'pent'

of the cavelet, while with the other he blazed with his private starfish mark every stone and rock slab within reach. Also he trailed a way through the heather, pulling up tufts and setting them root upwards where they would be easily found, their peaty fibres bare to the sun and the wind.

Paul had no chart like that of Lazun Palafox, but now he knew the cave, both entrance and exit, and he was resolved that, come what might, he would find his way back to Glenkens in his rock stable—and to the daughter of the gipsies, Zipporah Katti Lee-Smith-Palafox, whose face for some reason to him unknown, began just then to trouble his peace.

He had forgotten what she was like. Her features, when he tried to recall them, melted into one another, and the vision of Zipporah Katti as a whole would by no means come at his call.

Paul had not the least idea what this phenomenon portended.

CHAPTER SIX

BARBARA SIMPSON'S WELCOMING

Then Paul Wester fell suddenly lonely. The monstrous indigo of the vault above, the keen air filling his lungs and, as it were, cleansing his whole blood, did not make up for the despairing sense of loss—the appalling inability of Nature to help a merely human need.

His youth had been calling upon him ever since he had first seen Zipporah. Now she was shut away from him. A chance turn, and all at once he seemed sliding down the long unhappy slope of life. His ill time had begun. For him the summer was past, the harvest ended while his grain of hope was still only in the sowing.

However, his way being blazed and his return not only practicable but certain (he made Glenkens his excuse), Paul Wester had his uncle to face, and not his uncle only, but Barbara Simpson. From her he could expect no mercy. At least so he thought.

As he neared the Manse, he could see before him the dark tunnel of the avenue trees, criss-crossed by the white bars of the gate. He could discern also a shadow that went and came, patrolling ghost-white in the dusky ambush of the leaves. His heart beat faster, for this was not his uncle come to reproach him. It was the woman who had brought him up, even old Barbara Simpson. And Paul Wester, though as they said in that countryside, 'man-muckle,' kept a great deal of his childish respect for Barbara. He would not have been greatly surprised if she had

cuffed his ears soundly without a word spoken. Nor was he sure that he would have resented the indignity in spite of his years and stature.

But Paul Wester was not long in discovering that there were quite other ideas and intentions under the respectable black cap of the Manse housekeeper.

‘Oh laddie, laddie,’ she whispered, taking him in her arms as far as he would go, shaking him and crooning over him at once, ‘your uncle is neither to hold nor to bind. He is walking up and down the library like a man distracted. Almost he cursed you at the ‘Taking of the Book,’ and the passage from the Holy Writ which he read was about the sins of the fathers being punished in the third and fourth generations. It was your faither he meant. I kenned by the way he blattered with his hand on the Blessed Scriptures of the Auld Testament as he was reading. He can never abide thinkin’ on your faither. It drives him fair wild, and when he gets to prophesying that ye will turn out like him, I can see his fingers twitching to throttle somebody. Oh, I’m saying no wrong. He’s a grand man, the minister, but there are more spots of the Auld Adam about him than he kens of. But oh, Maister Paul, ye will be canny wi’ him, and no anger him—for his heart is sore set on ye! As mine is, more than on my prayers, I misdoubt—God forgive me!’

‘I will tell him the truth!’ said Paul, trying to disengage himself and stride on past her. But she held him fast.

‘If it be aught to do with a lassie,’ she pleaded, ‘do not tell him, laddie. Tell me instead. There is something that stirs under these wizened breasts that never suckled even the babe I bore. Paul, I have yearned over you more than the mother of many

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over her brood. So if you must tell the Truth—oh, tell it to me. For Truth is not a thing to be handled between angry men. But between a young man and an auld world-weary woman like me—then there is room for patience and understanding—aye, and forgiveness. Lord, forgie me that ever I should have used such a word to the nephew of my master. But ye are to me as the son of my old age.'

Here she wept so softly that, save for the glint of tears in the light of stars, Paul Wester would never have known. But he saw something drop, and it was as if they fell heavy on his heart one by one.

'I will charge myself with your uncle, if need be to tell him anything. But he is a strict man and a just, and before I had time to turn him to the kindlier way, you and he might have spoken words that would sunder you for ever. For I know the blood of your father, and of a surety it runs in your veins. The blood of the Westers is most like gipsy blood, far-wandering, ill to tame, and for ever breaking out in new places. Tell me quietly, lad, and auld Babby will tell the minister the truth. Aye, but not all the truth—Oh no, not all—and the rest she will dress out so fine, ye will never be faulted for it. A house divided against itself cannot stand, and what is the dab o' limewash here, and the crack puttied up yonder, when it is done to prevent the shelter of our age from coming about our ears?'

'But my uncle may find out,' Paul Wester objected; 'and besides I am old enough to answer for my own faults, if faults they be!'

'That is juist it,' said Barbara, shaking him by the arm in her eagerness to enforce conviction, 'it will not be your fault. I myself will take all upon my conscience, and if so be there is a God who prefers

discord in a manse to a bit innocent arrangement of the truth—then so much the worse for the poor useless soul of Barbara Simpson, for forty years a faithful, if faulty, handmaid in the house of His servant.’

They could see down the dark arch of the Manse avenue the figure of Paul’s uncle going to-and-fro, passing and repassing in front of the study lamp.

‘He has been at it ever since Worship,’ whispered Barbara. ‘I will watch that he does not come down while you are telling me.’

So Barbara Simpson, being what she was, a mother and more to Paul Wester, little by little decided him to confide in her. And when he came to tell of the stealing of Glenkens and how for his sake the theft had been prevented and Glenkens put in a place of safety, somehow Barbara was vaguely disappointed.

‘And ye left the lass like that, with your finger in your mouth?’ she cried at last; ‘faith, maybe it’s as well—oh, better, certainly far better. But’ (here her voice strengthened) ‘doom’s tak’ me if there’s as muckle o’ the Wester blood in you as auld Barbara gied ye credit for!’

Paul felt somehow that he had denied his ancestors —also that in some strange way he had disappointed the hopes and expectations of Barbara Simpson, who (as he had long been aware) looked at many things differently from his uncle.

‘And that’s all I’ve gotten to tell the minister?’ she queried. ‘Here, laddie, come close—let me see!’ And she looked deep into his eyes, breathing slowly and seeming to pierce his most secret heart with her gaze.

She pushed him a little away.

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'No,' she sighed, as if she had looked for something without finding it, 'ye speak the truth, laddie, and the morn's morning I will see the lass myself'. She maun be a wonder. There's a pair o' ye, troth-my-troth! But the Lord himsel' would be hard put to it to tell what a gipsy would do or not do—and the black blood of Egypt is in you as well, or something little better! So Paul Wester—mind you that.'

Then Barbara took the young man by the hand, much as Zipporah Katti had done an hour before. Paul was a lad for whom women liked doing things, and of whom (except on occasions of great agitation or danger) they naturally took command.

He was only beginning to learn the advantages of this. Barbara led him to the stable from which Glenkens had been removed. It had been visited since Paul was last there. The harness had been thrown about. The corn-chest yawned open and the litter of the stalls and loose-box kicked here and there. But only a few halters and a wooden 'feed-box,' used to call up Glenkens from the pasture, had been stolen.

'Now,' said Barbara Simpson, 'there's plenty good straw in the corner and a sack or two likewise. I am going to lock you in while I tell the tale to the minister.'

In another moment she had turned in the lock the key she wore on the strong ring at her belt. The solid iron had creaked into place when, through the empty keyhole, she added whisperingly— 'All except about the gipsy lass—mind ye that, lad. In the morning I shall see what is to be done about her!'

So Barbara Simpson went her way shaking her head, in great though wholly unnecessary doubt.

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‘A fine lad,’ she was muttering, ‘oh, a fine lad, and the story he tells may be true. But, och-an-oan, it would have been a weary day and yet a wearier, or his faither had come back from Orraland Fair Tryst with no better a tale than that. Eh, thirty years and maybe a year or two to the waur o’ that, but’ (here she sighed deeply) ‘lads were men in thae days!’

In his stable Paul Wester, without a stain on his conscience and so tired that he had hardly even thought for the morrow, stretched himself on the straw that was to have bedded out Glenkens. He was hardly conscious of drawing the rough dusty warmth of the meal sacks over him. He saw, as it were, Zipporah Katti for an instant profiled against a broad white cloud, bastioned and crenellated. He was aware, moreover, of the scent of wild mint she carried about with her.

Then a deep blue sea without water cradled him a moment. Into it he sank a million miles deep. It’s name was the Ocean of the Stream of Sleep !

After she had made her way back to the rock stable in which she found the little horse, munching comfortably at his oats, Zipporah Katti bethought her of her own bedding. There was but little to be found in that cave, which had not known the foot of man since old Lazun had bidden good-bye to the Free-trading.

But Zipporah Katti was no epicure. She stuffed a double handful out of the pony’s stall into a petticoat, tied it about at either end with a bootlace, and for the rest was ready to lay herself down as comfortably as on the best ‘made-bed’ in the Stewartry. First, however, she went out upon the balcony, and leaning her elbows on her palms, gazed into the large uneasy stillness of the sea night—

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uneasy— because the surges of Solway were breaking irregularly beneath. To right and to left the sands were now all covered, though not to any great depth, which accounted for the chocolate-coloured turmoil. For almost as regularly as the swinging of a pendulum, some ridge or other, barely awash, would suddenly throw up a white hill of water, spout like a geyser, hold itself a moment white against the blue-black night and then fall with a broken splatter over a good quarter-acre of tossing sea.

Zipporah was not anyways eager for sleep. She liked to be alone. The faint glow of a ship's light far out kept her watching for the better part of an hour. It seemed as if it were old Lazun coming back again to find his cave occupied. The girl's heart warmed at the thought. Paul, though a boy, was well enough. He would do what she told him, but Lazun Palafox was the greatest and the kindest man she had ever known. He was a gipsy and a smuggler, but Zipporah Katti had never been taught that there was anything dishonourable either in the race or the calling.

Her idea of bliss was a dainty white and green house on Cancale falaise or along the Concha at St. Sebastian, a cottage with figure-heads and pebbly paths, a flagstaff for Lazun to fly the red and yellow of the country which had discarded him, while she, Zipporah, in a white apron and braided hair knitted and read in the shade of a big lime-tree in which the bees were humming.

She was not certain where, in this daydream, Paul Wester was to come in, but that he had his place in the picture was certain. Meanwhile the lights of the boat winked themselves out away down channel, leaving only Rathan light like a farthing dip

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straight in the Fair-way, and the reflections from the ironworks about Workington and Beemouth on the Cumberland coast, pulsing upwards like northern lights in a vain attempt to reach the zenith.

Zipporah was too young, and took life too much with the zest of a healthy animal to be much affected by the weltering silence of the great estuary. She yawned, shivered, went within and, drawing her cloak about her from shoulders to feet, cuddled down to dreamless sleep on her pillow of petticoat and straw.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE STRIFE OF TONGUES

Meanwhile within the folio-lined walls of the minister's study in the Manse of Kirkpatrick-Maxwellton, Barbara Simpson strove as none other might dare to strive with Dr. Septimus Laird.

'How dare ye, placed minister though you be,' the old woman demanded, pointing a defiant finger at her master, 'take upon yourself to mete out reward and punishment like a God?'

'I arrogate to myself no such right,' the minister answered, his clenched hand planted firm on the folio Turretin open on the table. 'I have greater respect for my Maker. But remember, Barbara Simpson, that you and I have been through all this before. I must keep my house clean, and Paul Wester the Younger shall go elsewhere if he is to copy the life of Paul Wester the Elder.'

'And who,' said the old woman fiercely, 'made you a Judge or a divider? You, who break the bread of life among this flock, are become as one who speaks without knowledge!'

'Paul Wester,' said the minister, like one who poses his conclusions at the bar, 'has been absent from this house since midday. It is the day of the Maxwellton Fair. The place is alive with the same sort of vagabonds with whom, to his eternal loss, his father kept company. He was seen by one of my elders (and your own kinsman Peter Edgar), walking seaward, talking familiarly to a girl of the outcast gipsies—what more do you ask?'

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‘What more, Septimus Laird, what more?’ the old woman’s voice was sunk as it had never been before where her master was concerned, to an almost contemptuous scorn, ‘I take you at your word and I answer from your own preaching— ‘outcast, say you—and pray how often have I heard you in forty years so describe yourself— ‘outcast from the grace of God.’ Aye, and have you forgotten, minister that you are, Who it was who came to call, not the righteous but sinners to repentance?’

The old man, silenced, if not softened, bowed his head. But the wrath, the apparent wrath, that is, of old Babby was not appeased.

‘And this is the boy we have brought up, you and I together. I am ashamed of you, minister, of you and your doctrine. Did ye never hear that ‘the greatest of these is charity’? Oh, it slipped your memory. It is true the lad spoke to the lass. It is true they walked together. And tomorrow I will bring her here to this house that you, as a Christian man, may ask her pardon.’

‘Barbara Simpson,’ said the minister in a choking voice, ‘is my boy with her? Tell me, for I have his father’s sins heavy on my soul.’

‘The lad is with me,’ said Barbara with bitterness; ‘go to your prayers, minister, and ask to be forgiven for hasty judgments and evil thoughts against the lad whose good name ought to be dearest to you on earth.’

They gazed at each other as they had hardly done for forty years. Septimus Laird knew that Barbara told no lie.

‘Then God be thanked!’ he said, and turning quickly on his heel, went to his bedroom above the study. There in the corner by the bed where the

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carpet was worn threadbare with the print of his knees, we may leave him.

Barbara hastened to the stable, empty and chill, and with her hand on Paul's shoulder, awakened her boy gently.

'Come, lad,' she said softly, 'I have made all ready.'

Paul Wester rubbed his eyes, still brimful of sleep. He sat up and gazed in bewilderment at the stable, at the tall gaunt figure with the lantern, and the open door of Glenkens' empty stall.

He seemed to be searching for something or someone, and Barbara Simpson smiled grimly. For she understood—who indeed should understand if not she?

'And my uncle?' said Paul, 'is he very angry?'

'He is gone to his chamber to indulge in religious meditation,' Barbara answered dryly enough. 'He is not to be disturbed this night!'

'You have spoken to him about—about Zipporah?' Paul hesitated. The words seemed to stick in his throat.

'She shall be here the morrow's morn!' said old Barbara with authority; 'and now, not another word. Off to bed with you. You will be the fresher for the clean sheets scented with southernwood, and after that we will see about the bit lass in the cave.'

So with that Barbara shooed him before her upstairs like a brood hen caught wandering where it ought not. And Paul stumbled out, too full of the glamour of sleep to argue or disobey. It was to be all right—all right somehow, because Barbara had said it. The trouble of arguing out the 'hows' and the 'whys' was too great for him, and he hardly felt the ancient wrinkled hands which had put him to bed

when he was a sunny-haired boy (like the child Samuel in the picture) helping him out of his dusty garments.

He would have knelt as was still his custom, but from somewhere there came a voice in his ear, 'Never ye mind, laddie! This night your uncle is saying them for you.'

And the coolness of the fine bleached bed-linen was like water on his limbs as he crept between the nether and the upper sheets. The pillow wafted him away as soon as he touched it. He felt himself going.

'Night, Babby!' he murmured as of old, and Paul Wester turned over with a long sigh and left the old woman standing by his bedside.

She might have stood there all night, for all that Paul knew. At least she was there when he came to himself in the morning twilight. Perhaps Barbara had awaked him. There was freshness and silence all about the Manse, broken only by the crowing of cocks and a dog that barked importantly at the heels of a flock of sheep upon the market road which led by to Palnackie—and then on and on to Dumfries, where every Wednesday fills the town with the lowing of herds and the bleating of sheep.

Paul Wester remembered suddenly that his life was changed. Zipporah had come into it. She was, or had been, in the Dulse Cave. There was also something concerning a map, a lantern, and a foolish dream which he had dreamed about a rock balcony and the scent of wild mint. Barbara too! What had she said—that today she would bring Zipporah to the Manse—to his uncle's house!

It was all so impossible that he did not dare even to ask a question. For all he knew there might be no Zipporah, and Glenkens might be nibbling restlessly

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at the wood of his manger in the stable as his wont was when unwatched.

But the voice of Barbara recalled him to himself and reality.

'Up with you, lad! There is water ready in the bath—wash yourself from head to heel and be ready for me in ten minutes. There is your uncle to speak to!' she added after a pause. And then Paul Wester knew that he had not dreamed.

'Take a good grip of your courage, boy, and tell the truth—such of it, at least as may safely be trusted to a man of three-score-and-ten who has never known wife nor child. Be of good heart, Barbara has prepared the way. I will wager that he has not slept so sound as you—or for that matter the lass in the cave!'

'Have you been there?' Paul inquired anxiously.

'Been there?' cried the old lady; 'where are your eyes? The sands will not be clear for a good hour. Rob Gavin has not yet awakened to look over his nets. Only the minister is up and dressed. He will be waiting with his prayers said and his Greek Testament read. There will be little family worship this morning in the Manse of Kirkpatrick-Maxwellton, save the thanksgiving of the humble and contrite spirit.'

Old Barbara laughed a little.

'There am I talking like a minister myself. But what can ye expect after forty year? All that I meant was that the maister will not taigle us with wise explanations of the dew of Hermon, and the exact equivalent for 'nard' and 'cassia' in the modern pharmacopoeia! Na, he will have other things on his mind,'

A quarter of an hour, and Barbara was

introducing Paul Wester into his uncle's presence. The old man was visibly older and more worn than when Paul had last seen him. At the sight his heart smote him. While he had been sleeping, his uncle had been 'watching and praying'—or as he would have said himself, 'wrestling for the soul of the young lad with the powers of darkness.'

His very clothes looked fatigued, as though he had not quitted them for long and they too needed a rest. But Barbara Simpson triumphed visibly.

'I have brought the young master to you, Doctor,' she began. 'He was tired with a great weariness yestreen, and so I put him to bed at the gloaming and turned the key upon him to keep all safe.'

'And why could you not have told me, woman?' said the minister impatiently; 'this was ill done of you—when you saw well that my soul was indeed in sore travail for the lad!'

'Ill done— well done!' Barbara declared, folding her arms defiantly. 'I acted according to my conscience with which even you dare not meddle. Maybe you would be liking to give me my fee and my leave. If so, I will go and pack my little bit kist. Little do I take out of this house that I brought not into it. But the conscience of forty years of faithful service will I not leave behind.'

'Sit down, you foolish woman,' cried the Doctor. 'I see well that you have some excuse or palliative for your conduct, else you would never venture so to cross me.'

'Poor fallible man,' said the housekeeper; 'if you are not privileged to hear God's wholesome truth once in a way in your own Manse, where and from whom would you be likely to hear it in this parish? From my lady at the Big House to the cottage in the

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clay 'bigging,' they bow down and worship. But Barbara Simpson, so long as she bides within these walls, shall be a sure conscience to you. Hear the lad's story, for which as an honest woman, I vouch.'

'The security is good,' said the minister grimly; 'at least I have to put up with it. Out with it, lad. What have you been doing?'

Paul told the tale of his adventures and of the saving of Glenkens, much as he had told it to Barbara— save that, remembering her advice, perhaps the little horse bulked somewhat more and the little woman a trifle less in one recital than in the other.

The minister listened gravely. Not a quiver about the mouth, not a pucker on the smooth brow, shadowed by the softly falling white locks. But at the end he said—

'I would rather have lost fifty horses than found one Zipporah. But since the thing is done, go and fetch her, you and that other greater fool, Barbara Simpson—who has not even your excuse of youth!'

'Thank you, Doctor,' said Barbara, and uncrossed her arms which until now she had held defiantly akimbo.

'Come, lad, we will see that the Fair-ground is clear, before we make our curtsy at the door of the Smugglers' Cave. If Lazun Palafox knows it well— I, Barbara Simpson, have reason to ken it better, and that without map or plan.'

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE SALVING OF GLENKENS

On they went, first between the hedgerows, sparkling with dew, afterwards out upon the short stiff grass of the seaside slopes smooth as the end-greens of a golf-course. Fine little flowers, clutched low to the undergrowth, were to be found here, blue and yellow mostly, as if fearful of being blown away in the great gusts which came beating and roaring up from the Firth of Storms.

They saw only one solitary dark-blue figure on the Fairground. The caravans had vanished, and they who had dwelt in them were scattered to the four winds. Of caged wolf and bear, uneasy elephant and nonchalant camel, there were left only, what might be called, post-quaternary traces. Add to these a broken tent-peg or two, a wire thrown down, formerly posted along the summit of a humble 'fail' dyke to make it proof against wicked boys who paid not their pennies at the door, but climbed into the many-coloured fairyland of the circus some other way.

Paul Wester had always envied this glorious privilege of the Orraland urchins. But, of course, the nephew of the Manse must have other manners. So with jealousy in his heart he had forborne.

The dark-blue figure resolved itself into a stalwart policeman, new lighted from a quite disproportionate bicycle. He took notes gravely, his feet planted widely apart. Gipsies or other unlawful persons frequenting the fair of the previous day had (so it

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seemed) stolen a very valuable horse, belonging to that famous breeder Mr. Quentain Montgomery of the Inch. So he, Constable Cullercoats, had been sent from Cairn Edward to report.

He was reporting—but—taking his time about it. Constable Cullercoats was inclined to be communicative. Small blame to him, for local sentiment was dead against foreign intervention, and he had ridden all the way from Cairn Edward without once stopping to consider the scenery.

He inquired for further particulars, but a housekeeper of the Manse of the parish had naturally none to give him.

'This is the minister's nephew,' she said, indicating Paul with a reverence she was far from feeling; 'he kens nothing about the matter, having been all day at his books as a young student should, in the midst of such a pandemony.'

I am told that there were gipsies here or hereabouts,' said the officer tentatively; 'an old woman who told fortunes in a tent, wearing strings of gold coins about her brow, as also several lads and men who were making a traffic in horses. Besides, there was a lassie—let me see, by the name of Zipporah Katti.'

He spelled out the name rather slowly from his notebook, but Barbara Simpson, all ignorance the moment before, was on him in the twinkling of an eye.

'The like of that is clean impossible,' she said; 'the girl commonly called Zipporah Katti Palafox had no more to do with the affair than yourself, Sergeant, and the proof of it is that Dr. Septimus Laird, the minister of this parish, will vouch for her.'

The Doctor (so it appeared) had heard that there

were evil and suspicious characters in the neighbourhood, and accordingly he and his nephew had confided his riding-horse Glenkens, a very fine animal, to this very girl for safe keeping.

‘And if you have nothing better to do, Mr. Officer,’ the wary lady concluded, ‘you might come up to the Manse kitchen about one-of-the-clock, which is dinner-time, when I myself, Barbara Simpson, forty years housekeeper there, will see to it that you are well attended to. Creature comforts are a fine thing, and I would not have you carry away poor impressions of our village, so long as there is plenty of good things in the Manse larder and a broached cask in the Manse cellar. Besides, I will show you the animal in question.’

The cycle-riding constable, who had felt the awkwardness of his position in a village where even his other resident brother was strangely silent and suspiciously ignorant as to the names of the stallholders at the Fair, agreed willingly enough.

So leaving him to his task Barbara and the ‘lad of the Manse’ set out over the rolling Nitwood downs, making a long detour to avoid the gaze of the policeman.

‘Not that he would ken enough to watch us as to any purpose,’ said the housekeeper. ‘He’s a puir unobservant landward body, wi’ e’en that are little more good to him than to guide the spoon from his plate up under his moustache. I ken the breed brawly. But for that reason I will feed the craitur, and tell him what he is to write in that notebook o’ his. For the less we are bothered wi’ the like o’ him about the Manse, the better will the minister be pleased.’

‘But you told him,’ Paul Wester interjected, not

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yet returned from his astonishment, 'that my uncle would vouch for Zipporah Katti—and he has never seen her.'

'But he will have seen her by the time that yonder gowk comes blundering up the Manse avenue. It was for that I bade him come at dinner-time. Never fear, laddie, he will smell the pint-stoup and the frying-pan a mile off, and we will not see the end of his nose till the emptiness within his wame warns him that the meat is ready and the table spread.'

'But the truth,' said Paul doubtfully, for he could not rid himself so quickly of his uncle's moral teachings.

'The truth is a fine thing,' said Barbara; 'but unless ye turn its nose to the wind whiles, and whiles gie it a middling strong screw roond wi' the rudder, the ship of state will gang on but ill. For instance, there's the bit maitter o' the minister's sarks, noo. The Doctor wad think himsel' disgraced if he did not put on a clean frilled shirt, white and stiff, every morning o' his life. But what sarks wad stand sich constant washing as that? Forbye the expense. So he gets them day aboot—Monday's sark on Wednesday, and Tuesday's ilke Thursday morn—me being handy wi' the gofferin' iron, and him, manlike, never kennin' the differ. What for should he?

'And so a' folk are pleased, and what ye caa a lee is nae lee ava, but just honest forethought to save siller and keep doon din. If there is sic a thing as 'holy lies,' that's the kind I tell. And in ony eventuality—for your sake, laddie—I beseech ye no to speak of the minister, Barbara Simpson is brave and willing to take her chance!'

By this time they were far out of sight of the

village, and the indigo-coloured note-taking officer of justice. But still Barbara kept a vigilant eye about her, till, being reassured, she set her skirts over the edge of the cliff and began to descend with great agility by a series of iron spikes fixed in the rock, alternately on the right and on the left, long enough for hands and feet to reach them readily.

'This,' she said, without looking up, 'is 'Lazun's ladder,' and nobody in the village kens about it but me—not even your marvellous Zipporah Katti.'

Then, quickly revising her judgment and making amends for her slight motion of jealousy, she added, 'But she will be a very decent lass for a' that, I doubt not. I have kenned the like among the gipsies—for Barbara dwelt among them when she was a deal younger than she is this day.'

It was wonderful how that old woman took the hidden staircase on the cliff. She was readier far at the descent than Paul Wester, who searched painfully for what seemed to meet the feet of Barbara Simpson as readily as the stone staircase which led to her own sacred kitchen.

Zipporah Katti met them at the door of the cave. She sat tranquilly nibbling the purple tangles of the dulse, while behind her Glenkens, after one disgusted attempt to imitate her example, gave himself up to the pleasure of rubbing his sand-filled hide against the rocky walls of the cave, and sinking his hoofs ankle-deep in the firm slaked sand of the lately sea-swept floor.

Paul could see Zipporah Katti flush and thrill at the sight of the staid black dress and well-tended white hair of the Manse housekeeper. Between them took place the usual comprehensive intaking of one woman by the other, far more keen and searching

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than the laboured investigations of men. Then something masonic passed like a flash between them. Paul Wester became instantly out of it. He felt his loneliness when he heard the two women talking together in an unknown tongue—in which the word ‘Lazun’ recurred with something of curious regularity.

Paul Wester had heard tell of the gipsy language, but it had been represented to him as mere thieves’ patter. Yet here were the two women whom he most honoured talking to each other in Romany and he left on the outside.

Like all youths who have read much and travelled little, he had an excellent opinion of his own abilities, and the depravity of Zipporah and the secretiveness—he had almost said the duplicity—of Barbara Simpson took him by the throat, till he could have cried like a child who had been tricked.

He could make out, however, that they were arguing some point of policy with keenness, but without anger. Then Barbara Simpson turned upon him and said, ‘Persuade this headstrong lass that it is quite safe to go back with me to the Manse.’

‘If you say it is safe, it is safe!’ said Paul somewhat sulkily, because he had been left out of the conversation.

‘But Glenkens?’ said the girl speaking to him for the first time; ‘we can’t have his tracks going from the cave to the Manse, plain to be seen all the time the tide is out!’

Paul Wester saw an opportunity of working off his spleen and of distinguishing himself at the same time.

‘I will stay,’ he announced nobly. ‘I will wait here till the tide is coming in again and then ride him

through the surf!’

And he resolved that he would leave the moment as late as possible.

But then he was speaking to a girl who knew all about rough-riding—and to whom one risk was much like another. The proximity of the Lees and the fear of being discovered by Raif Palafox were much more real to Zipporah than riding a pony through a few hundred yards of incoming tide.

So all that Paul got for his offer was a satisfied nod that her objection had been met, and the clean-cut answer, ‘Then I will go with this woman because she knows Lazun!’

As the girl and the woman took their way Manseward they talked of many things, and soon old Barbara began to tell the tale that follows in its place—a tale which continued all the hours when Paul Wester was drearily eating dulse and kicking his heels in the cave, or throwing stones at passing gulls till the nervous little horse winced and shied—a tale which was not finished when the minister, losing all patience, walked out to meet Barbara, only to find them still hard at it under the lee of a great cropped hedge of yew.

But as they passed the Fairground, Barbara Simpson had bethought herself of Constable Cullercoats. He was not to be seen, but she recognized his bicycle at the door of the village inn. In a moment she stood before him. He was comforting himself with a pipe and a glass, but he rose at the entrance of Barbara Simpson. For a Manse housekeeper can do no wrong, though her criticism of wrong-doing in others is pungent and conclusive—indeed the last word on the subject.

‘Sergeant,’ she said—for she knew the power of a

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brevet rank given openly before the landlord—

‘Sergeant, ye are to come to the Manse-kitchen for your dinner as we arranged, but ye will not see the minister’s horse till Master Paul comes home. He has taken him out for a ride. The minister has been sore occupied in his study these days and has not been able to exercise him. But ye can come and bide, gin ye like, till Master Paul comes home.’

The policeman intimated his willingness to be the guest of Barbara Simpson, and cared much less about Glenkens and Master Paul than about the good dinner which he anticipated.

This, then, was the tale which Barbara poured into the ear of Zipporah Katti as they sat together under the sombre shadow of the great yew-hedge, planted after the Battle of the Boyne by the first minister of the reconstructed Kirk of Scotland in the reign of William of Orange, of Protestant memory.

CHAPTER NINE

THE HOUSEKEEPER'S SECRET

A traveller's tale ought not to be interjected into the fairway of a romance of some length and breadth. But in this case there is no escape for writer or reader—for one who can tell and for the other who would understand the wonderful tale of the Last Galloway Smugglers now mostly engulfed by the surges of Solway.

It was in the times when I was as young as I see ye are this day (and foolish as I trust ye are not) that I met with Lazun Palafox. His whistle came clear from the hill at the back of my father's house. I had no more than an orchard to cross, and there at the stile where the sugar-plum-trees grow, I found myself in the arms of Lazun. I make no excuse. Only so it was.

'At that time my mother had long been dead. There was no one to tell me I did wrong in thus meeting Lazun, who, though no more than a sea gipsy, had the manners of a Spanish lord—nay, who has them now, though of that you are a better judge than I.'

'He always speaks like a grand seigneur—indeed they say he is one in his own country,' said Zipporah Katti softly. 'I hope you are not going to abuse him, for he has always been kind to me.'

Barbara Simpson laughed somewhat bitterly.

'Have no fear,' she said, 'you have reached the age too late when the kindness of Lazun Palafox could do you harm.'

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They sat a little longer without speaking, the girl wondering, the eyes of the elder misty and drowned in the past. Suddenly she turned upon Zipporah and pulled from her bosom a little-worn wedding-ring, drawn from a leathern bag which she carried there.

'I who speak to you was married to Lazun Palafox—not over the tongs, but properly by a placed minister. Nor would he deny it, not even now. For the evil he did to me was in his nature, and though the fire of his love flamed high, it went out as quickly—just like a blaze of whins on a windy day. Lassie, hark to me—of all kinds of men, those who never mean any harm, yet whose nature calls them to do it—are the most dangerous. Beware of them, Zipporah Katti! Some day, and it may not be long, they will leave you lonely by the fireside with that within you that will not bear thinking of.'

There were tears now in the old woman's voice, but she kept on.

'True it is what I told you, Zipporah of the gipsies. Never have I suckled bairn of mine own. But I have borne one—a daughter, and she should now be a woman of fifty years, if so be she yet lives.'

'You have never heard?'

'Lazun took her from me and bade me never ask. It was better so, he said, and I obeyed him. Because in those days, even though he had slain my heart, his word to me was as the word of God.'

'Why did we quarrel? Well, mind this, my lassie. We did not quarrel—we separated. But, knowing his nature, I blamed him little. Men are often made like Lazun—some of them, and they not the worst. I heard him one day talking to a Spanish girl whom he had taken off a revenue craft of that nation.'

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There had been a fight and all the dagos except this girl had been killed. Lazun had brought her home, giving her his protection on the journey, which was needful enough among such a crew as sailed with the Palafox—brigands they were and worse, every man of them.

‘And when she came to live in our cottage looking over the cliffs upon the sea, God knows I tried to be kind to her. But as much as she dared, she threw my kindness back in my face—that is, when Lazun was not by.

Then one night because I felt uneasy and oppressed within, I went out for a breath of fresh air. It was at the back of the stack-yard where the winter fodder was ready stored under thatch and rope (for we never knew when the stable might suddenly be filled) that I heard two voices. One was Lazun’s, though I thought him at Cairn Edward market, and the other was that of the girl. I stood suddenly chilled, yet less taken aback than I had expected. It is only afterwards that one gives way.

‘You took all from me,’ she was saying, ‘I have only you. You are my father, my brother—and my ‘spozo.’ I had a promised husband and you slew him—oh, the fight was fair. I am not complaining. But now you must be all these to me—father, brother, lover and husband!’

Yes, she prevailed. I knew she would—knowing the man, who was Lazun Palafox.

Perhaps for one red moment I could have slain them both, but even so I am not sure. For I am a Scots woman of the Lowlands, and mostly we suffer and say nothing. Lazun was my wedded husband—that she could not take. But I still owed him obedience, and when he asked for our baby I let him

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take her. For not only was he the master, but he could provide—which I, not being strong for field-work, could not.

‘So after that, being alone, I took service with the new minister of Kirkpatrick-Maxwellton, and there I have been ever since. Some there were who found that my face was too fresh and young under my white hair. But the lie died down as such talk will, and Barbara Simpson has ruled in the Manse yonder, growing older and more wrinkled—till something of her youth returned to her when it was given to her to bring up Paul Wester the Younger.

You ask about Paul the Elder? He was a dashing blade much like my own Lazun, who was not content to be mine—nor indeed could be any woman’s. Paul Wester was the last of Lazun’s partners in the Free Trade, and indeed they tell me practises it yet, though the business is not what it was. And certainly he practised on Sibilla Laird, the minister’s young boarding-school bred sister, till he prevailed on her to run away with him and get married. She had some little money of her own which would help him in his carrying trade. But there was liking for the lass also—for Paul Wester the Elder was not the man to be swayed by money. But the minister—yes, as you may guess, it fell heaviest on the minister. He saw Paul the Elder once, when he handed over to him in the presence of a lawyer, his sister’s appointed portion, and then he bade him never darken his door again.

‘Do not be afraid,’ said Paul Wester; ‘and neither shall my wife.’

‘Poor lass, she had little time to be darkening doors, for she died when the lad Paul came into the world. I was busy about the yard when one day a

woman brown as a berry came down the avenue and so into my kitchen. She had a bairn in her arms, and was better put on than the common folk that ask for a bite and sup. She held out the bairn, and put him into my arms. Then she laid an envelope thick with papers on the table.

‘That is for your master,’ she said.

‘And when I looked more closely, I saw it was the same Spanish woman who had taken Lazun from me. But wearied and worn and dried, and as it seemed twice my age, which made me glad.

‘So, perhaps because of that, not a word of anger did I say to her, but bade her sit down and rest while I made her a cup of tea.’

‘Her name—what was her name?’ said Zipporah Katti hoarselv.

‘I asked her,’ said Barbara, ‘and she said a name she had no right to, even by the rights of the gipsy-folk. ‘Eza Palafox!’ she said. ‘I am the wife of the man who was once your husband, and you had better have kept him for all the comfort he has been to me!’”

And at Barbara’s tale the young girl bowed her head and wept silently, till from between her palms the tears flowed down her brown and shapely arms.

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CHAPTER TEN

THE SMOKE IN RED HAVEN DELL

While a new Barbara was thus revealing herself to Zipporah Katti under the cropped green peacocks and stumpy-legged dragons of King William's yew-hedge, Paul Wester the Younger (who had never given any thought to Paul the Elder) sat at the mouth of the Dulse Cave in sulky discontent. He threw pebbles with force and venom at a white stone which had never done him any harm.

As a man he ought to have been leading, and he had an acute consciousness that he was being led. This, though unexpressed, was his grievance.

The surges of Solway were now receding far away, mere oval creamy lines, garnishing (as it were) the upturned platter-backs of the slimy sandbanks far out between him and the channel. Nearer the sunshine fell brutally on the staring white sand and bluish shingle. The sky too was crudely blue because of the land-wind which had cleared the sea mists. The capes and 'mulls' no longer lay out one behind the other, painted in their proper perspective of azure, but formed a long rugged peninsula, without a sign of the wide bays between—so clear was the air.

It was, indeed, such a day as comes more frequently with the north winds of March than at high midsummer noon. There was no wind. Behind and almost overhead he could hear the scythe-men sharpening their blades in the hayfields. Krish-nash went the sanded 'strake' as regularly as the cry of a

cricket down among the meadow flats.

Above the lambs called plaintively to their mothers like children with cut fingers, and the ewes ran towards the sound, bleating throatily, as who would say, 'Bide where you are till I come, oh dearest of little fools!'

It is the tenderest and most penetrating of land-sounds, this perpetual calling of the summer flocks. And on some days, like this one, particularly still and clean-swept, the bleating on the distant hill comes to the ear as from over the wall. As on such a day the ranged promontories fall into one solid equal-tinted peninsula, so the small woolly people cry in one's ear as if space and distance had been annihilated.

Little by little the peace of his surroundings wrought a magic on the spirits of Paul Wester. The gulls and terns had followed the tide, and were now mere specks of white on the sands, or swirling clouds about their rocky breeding islands.

On a distant point the useless semaphore stood gaunt, one arm missing—the same which had once called up the preventive men, and so interfered with his father's lucrative, interesting, but illegitimate business. Still farther out, austere and vigilant, shot up the tall whitewashed candlestick of the lighthouse of Satterness.

From where he sat Paul Wester could see across the little bay in which was his cove (and, though he knew it not, the iron staircase of Lazun Palafox), a little sun-warmed Paradise to which, because of a certain difficulty of access, no one ever came, except the leaping goats and stray blackfaced sheep. The grey of Mother Granite grinned through the mottled green bristle of the whin-bushes and the tall yellow

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fishing-rods of the broom. Yet it was no waste place this, no desolation of stone like so much of the Galloway shore which Paul Wester knew. The hazel and rowan bushes came creeping down to the sea edges. Behind them Galloway hawthorns stood up solitary and peace-haunted as in George Henry's famous landscape.

For, above all else, Galloway is the land of colours cleanly laid, dew-varnished, neat and workmanlike. In some places it is almost too pictorial to be put on canvas. The critic detects an overplus of artistic arrangement. He says, "This young man composes too well. He is altogether too 'slick.'"

But then, to know all, he must take W. S. Mac-George or E. A. Hornell for a guide—and, lo, little unsuspected worlds of shore-line and the depths of woodland, that overhang the brimming edge of the salt water, will open to him Edens still unrealized.

I do not say that Paul Wester thought all these things at the time. They were not within his compass. Such ideas do not go with his age. The dark purple velvet in the eyes of Zipporah Katti, the slight boyishness of her figure filled his heart much more.

He found himself strangely angry with Barbara for taking her away, even temporarily—forgetting that he had been the first to ask to stay, so as to play the hero and ride the little horse chest-deep through the incoming surges.

He continued to look out towards the green and purple thickets, the grey granite rocks, the white coves and sands of the Red Haven opposite him. After all, what was there to hinder? He could keep well out, close to the tide-line. He would soon make the land. Yonder in the cove where the lambs were

leaping and butting, scattering the rounded pebbles with their small black feet—there would be his landfall. Paul Wester had his idea—not a very good idea—not very clear, not very well defined, but an idea nevertheless which would show Zipporah Katti what he dared for her sake, since she cared so little for his riding Glenkens home through the surf. Paul would show her.

It was a full half-hour after the turn of the tide, and the youth watched eagerly the slow recession of the waters. He knew the sulky, slimy hollows where the feet sink ankle-deep, and the next step may strike a quicksand. But he was looking for something serpentine and irregularly ridged to appear—marbled black and white with pebble and sea-shells.

It led across to a snug bay with plenty of sand, excellent for bathing, being curved like a hoop with a narrow opening between two brown-russet upstanding rocks. For which cause, no doubt, it was called the Red Haven.

Along this winding track of shells and shingle like the tail of some monstrous sea-dragon, it was Paul's intention to ride Glenkens. He knew this afforded the only safe path by which to escape the lashing of the Solway surges, and the treachery of its ever-shifting quicksands.

For Solway is like no other estuary on the seaboard of the three kingdoms. It is so vast and yet so shallow. The tide rises so fast and far. It empties itself with such dangerous irregularity, that even at half-ebb, when you have your feet on some clear sandbank, down you may suck, or a swirl of unseasonably returning water may impishly snatch at you as though it had been waiting for you round

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the corner, much as an owl carries off a baby bunny from the warren-head before he has time to cry.

As it took a long time for the Red Haven Ridge to rise solid out of the frothing churn, Paul fell to watching the green turf behind, the solitary hawthorn trees on the knowes, the springy bull-dog 'fell of the heathery wastes over which the whaups were willy-wha-ing and the young peewits cheeping low among the bent.

Behind him, towards the Heughs of Rascarrel, from which the grey-green water never retreats, the silence was broken by a sougling, steady and slow—which was just the outgoing mill-stream of Solway grinding its grist of granite pebbles as it hastened Atlanticwards, gorging the North Channel on its way. So with his hand on the little horse's bridle, Paul watched the muddy pour of the water as it ebbed over the Red Haven causeway. The gulls swirled raucously above—crying for the victual which they knew was waiting them as soon as the surges of Solway went their way. For the Ridge or Causeway was the best feeding-ground for thirty miles, and many generations of sea-fowl had handed down this fact to their descendants, male and female after their kind.

At last Paul Wester saw the circling yawping birds swoop and settle. There was no doubt now. It was time to be going. So he drew the leather belt-thong tighter about his waist, and led the little horse out. It was pleasant to see Glenkens snuffing and tossing his head, but that betokened difficulty for Paul also. For he had only a headrope and the power of knee and heel to guide him withal.

Nevertheless he mounted and rode out with his head high and his eyes glad, because of the clear

sunshine and the sweet wholesome smell of open day on the sea flats. The little horse swerved at the turmoil of the birds as they flapped and dipped. He lifted his feet higher when he came to the blue mussel shells which crunched under his tread as they came out upon the crest of the ridge. It was not yet dry after the receding salt water. Indeed, on one side occasional turbid swirls of the ebb still swung the lighter pebbles about, or carried off a small green crab to safety before the swooping sea-fowl was upon him.

Glenkens, save for little wilful starts and swervings, went nimbly as on an open road. The rope thrown on one side or the other guided him—the pressure of Paul Wester's heel, and more than all his own instinct to keep out of danger.

Soon they were leaving the rocky face of the promontory far behind them. The pillared arch of the Dulse Cove with its stalactites hanging down like an old dog's teeth when he snarls wickedly, sank to mere pitted dots on the mural front of the great Orraland 'heugh.' The gallery where they had stood at night together could not be seen at all, and the very cliffs seemed to crawl down as the more distant hills behind shouldered themselves up. But after one hasty glance over his shoulder at what he was leaving Paul gave himself up to the pleasure of the journey. When, on such a day, was a heart-free young man not happy? And indeed, heart-free or no, to be out on such an adventure, with nothing but the swirling tides about, the tremulous drying sands to the left, the ridgy track crunching and rasping under the horse's feet, and the big clouds sailing white-winged and solitary across the wondrous Reckitt's blue of the skies—had Paul been old, these

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things would have made him young again.

He had forgotten for the moment all but the sense of movement and well-being—Zipporah Katti, his waiting uncle, and Barbara Simpson. The land-wind keen in his lungs, the sea-light in his eyes, he found himself all too soon nearing the end of the shelly causeway. Then came a space where the Orraland Water trickled out into a kind of delta. Here he had to get down and lead Glenkens. For the hard ledge of rock and shell had given place to soft sand, sloppy with dispersed fresh water, and the small horse did not at all like the change.

But the moment after this was negotiated, and lo! they were again on the hard wet sand, Glenkens arching his neck and stepping out more proudly, while Paul looked ahead for the easiest way up from the Red Haven sands.

At the end of the hoop-shaped basin of silver sand lay a wholly secluded valley, sloping steeply with craggy sides, but also with the soft grass playing bo-peep among the boulders. Here a path twined among the nearer hazels, while above it more distant hawthorns were dotted. Quite near a birch or two stood daintily poised, spraying restless silvery florn-pieces of light and shadow upon the rocky way through the unceasing shift and quiver of its foliage.

A lovely path and a still—so soon, that is, as one escaped from the crying of the sea-birds and the ever-present sough of the vast six-hourly mill-race which is the Solway. Someday enough of power will be generated by that mighty rush, to run all the works south of the 'Highland line,' to light all the towns, heat all the houses, hospitals, and schools, besides feeding all railway-engines and motor-cars from fixed taps, as a horse takes water at a wayside

trough. Only someone has first to discover practical accumulators of electricity.

But of all these possibilities Paul took no heed. Of course not. He put up his hand and plucked himself a switchy willow-branch—not that the little horse was in need of such aids to wisdom, but out of sheer lack of something to destroy in such a lovely place, and because he was delivered from the cave which he had begun to hate as soon as Zipporah Katti went off with Barbara, leaving him alone.

But, as it happened, it was just as well that Paul broke off that slip of willow, and occupied himself in stripping it leisurely as he rode forward. He meant to take a long circuit, flanking the great houses of Orraland and Maxwellton, and coming down unseen upon the Manse through solitary pastures, by little-used gates only he and the shepherds knew of. These being carefully opened would bring him out at the back of the stable without having to pass a single house. Then he would make Glenkens safe, and steal indoors to surprise them all. He was specially anxious to surprise Zipporah Katti, who had deserted him without a word, and even manifested scorn for so light an adventure as that of riding home Glenkens through the surf of the incoming Solway tide.

But as he went, suddenly the little horse threw up his head and sniffed, not apprehensively, but like one who recognizes his kind. Glenkens was too well-bred to neigh with a rider on his back and that rider Paul Wester. But he made the low vaguely responsive noise of one who acknowledges a compliment which modesty prevents him from accepting at face value.

Paul knew in a moment that there were horses

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ahead and near at hand. But he asked himself what horses, honestly come by, should there be in that wild place with the Cloak Morass on one side and the sea dunes, piled and pegged down with whin and creeping grasses ridging away to the horizon, on the other.

Paul instantly dismounted, and drawing Glenkens aside into a clump of broom, tied him there with the head rope, after which he stole forward with all the skill of an Indian fighter (as frequently practised upon the keeperdom of the Maxwellton woods) to spy out the land.

Lucky it was for him that he had done so. For at the next corner he came suddenly upon a camp in an open space, a bevy of picketed horses where no horses should have been, and, a little farther on, in the hollow of the little glade, the blue smoke of an almost extinct camp-fire filtering thinly upward into the air, palest grey against the sunlit blue.

There was a stallion too, wrathful and excited, picketed fore and aft like a show elephant—the identical animal which Paul had often seen passing the Manse, with his guide riding on a dumpling pony—the very imperial Clydesdale majesty said to be stolen from the great breeder, Montgomery of the Inch, the man who had once shaken hands with the Prince of Wales—and had been held to be above all moral considerations ever since!

No wagons were to be seen. From which Paul Wester gathered that the women had gone on out of harm's way. Therefore something more grave was on foot than mere fortune-telling or horse-coping at a village fair.

But what was his surprise to see Anthony Crossthwaite, the farmer of Bourtree Buss, in whose

waste land they were, standing at ease among such comrades, one hand on his hip and his riding-switch swinging loosely in the other, as he expounded something, the import of which Paul could not hear.

A tall dark man with glossy hair and moustache, whom by some instinct Paul knew to be that very Raif Palafox of whom Zipporah had spoken, stood facing Mr. Crossthwaite with his arms folded, unconvinced and defiant.

Paul crept nearer so that he could hear the voices.

Anthony Crossthwaite was a Cumberland man, and spoke with something of the snell vigour of his countrymen, which shears through the soft south Galloway speech as a scythe swishes through meadow-grass.

'The sooner you get out of the country with the horse yonder,' said Crossthwaite, 'the better will I be pleased. Next ebb he can walk up the plank into his berth in the lugger. There will be an Argentine cattle-ship at the mouth of the Mersey a mile north of the bar sometime tomorrow night. They have a cattle hoist, and—there is a great demand for imported stock in South America. The horse delivered, the money paid, and no questions asked! Plenty of Penrith and Appleby lads out yonder who know a good stallion when they see him without needing a pedigree tied to his tail.'

'All very well, Anthony Crossthwaite—well for you and very kind—to yourself,' said the man with his arms crossed, to whom Paul had taken an instant and jealous dislike, 'but where do we come in?'

'My money is good, as you have excellent right to know,' said the Cumberland farmer, 'and if any man disputes it, let him throw down his knife and with

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my bare knuckles I will prove it on his ugly jaw.'

'I dare say,' said Raif Palafox (for Paul's instinct had not deceived him), 'fists and knives make all the difference—I am for the steel, you for the bones. But the horse can wait—at least we will. There are other matters in the world besides horses—things a gipsy loves more, revenge for one thing and his womankind for another.'

'What have I to do with your revenges and your women?' cried the Cumberland man angrily. 'Have I ever interfered with one or the other? I have a wife of my own and I meddle not with any petticoats, cream or dusky. All I ask is that you should do the piece of work for which you are engaged. What will old Lazun say if I write and tell him at Cancale that a five hundred pound job has run off the rails through your carelessness?'

'He will say much less than if we go back to Cancale without the girl who is the life of his life. Money is sea-sand to him beside Zipporah Katti. He would slay us man by man if we went back without her!'

'Do my business, I say,' thundered the big man, fiercely; 'else it will be the worse for you!'

'I will do my own first,' grinned Raif Palafox, unmoved; 'and then we shall see.'

The Cumbrian threw himself suddenly upon the tall slim gipsy, who ducked under the huge fist and grappled. The backbone of Raif Palafox seemed ready to crack in that strong grasp. But a knife appeared from somewhere, and Paul, aghast behind his tree, saw it flash once, and then with the blade dim to the handle, skirt again and stick.

The two men swayed and fell together. The other gipsies lounged carelessly about as if nothing were

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happening. Raif Palafox stood up, stretched himself, tried one limb after another. Then quite gently he drew the knife from the wound, and, first wiping it clean on the skirt of the dead man's coat, clicked it back into its sheath.

Paul Wester made his way hastily to Glenkens. He had seen murder done before his eyes, under the high blue day of sailing clouds and within earshot of the familiar sounding Solway.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE HOWE OF THE RED HAVEN

Paul returned to where he had tethered Glenkens. He hardly knew how or where he walked. His brain was so stunned that his feet moved forward of themselves—as it seemed in a dream, a foot or so above the ground. He might have passed the whin-bush to which the little horse was tied save that he heard the whinnying snuffle of recognition which welcomed his returning footsteps.

Glenkens recognized his master, though his master, numb and icy within, scarcely recognized Glenkens. But Paul was not afraid. It was something quite beyond that and far different. Great crimes he had read of in the newspapers and had heard discussed by his schoolfellows, but this blood had been shed today and done within a mile of the Manse. This seaboard parish of Maxwellton, the fringe of white houses which called itself the village of Orraland, the opposite hoop of silver that was the Red Haven, and the narrow valley behind where in October he had gathered hazel-nuts every year since he could remember—a murder done there was a desecration of all he had ever known or honoured.

Gradually he grew less frigid. His mind thawed out. He saw that he must act with speed and certainty. His first instinct had been to ride straight to the Manse and warn Zipporah Katti of her peril. Then he thought of the police. There was one in Orraland village—at least in the evenings. During the daytime Authority in silver buttons wandered

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among the farmhouses, nominally getting 'his book signed'—and, in addition, partaking of abundant refreshments, varied according to religious denomination, from plain Free Kirk treacle beer and Cameronian farrels of oat-cake, to sturdy bumpers from the gurgling 'grey-beard' of the Established ruling-elder.

Paul knew well the lack-lustre badges of Simon Heatherbleat, outcast and policeman. Not much could be expected from him. He was a kind of forgotten official castaway dating from the establishment of rural officers of the law in Galloway, somewhere about 1860. He had been overlooked and passed over by his superiors, much like those garrisons of ancient Turkish veterans, recently discovered in out-lying corners of Arabia and Tripoli, established after the wars of Mehemet Ali—and still, a few ragged veterans, holding their crumbling fort, mounting guard, and with flint-lock muskets hobbling on crutches to the daily parade-ground.

With a similar hopeless fidelity Constable Simon Heatherbleat watched over the honesty of a district whose crimelessness had been—except for a little drunkenness when a 'cargo' was successfully run into Balcary, Urr Water Foot or the White Horse Bay—a reproach to all other Galloway parishes, from 'Whisky Jean' herself to half-Irish Stranraer, whose iniquities cannot be washed out by all the waters of Loch Ryan.

Paul had plenty of courage, but it needs something he did not possess to watch, for the first time, unmoved, even a bullock being poleaxed. Paul could not bear to see a horse with a broken knee. Yet if a similar accident had happened to himself he

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would have stood it out without a twitching of the lip. Once on a cliff searching for guillemots' eggs, when at a corner of slippery rock he could neither go up nor down; again, when a swirl of the tide-race tumbled him over, battering and choking him before rushing him outward towards the gullet of the bay, piled high with the tumbling chocolate of the ebb, Paul Wester had fronted death with some calmness and even a certain satisfaction.

But it was a different thing to see this broad-faced florid Cumbrian, full of blood, whom at the 'Three Lions' only the night before, big hearty men of his own kidney had slapped on the back and called 'Roaring Anthony,' stricken suddenly dead. As Paul set Glenkens to his pace he was still shuddering. For he saw before him the mechanical opening and closing of the legs as they drew together, and then straightened suddenly like a clasp-knife opened on a strong spring. And this curious (but not uncommon) sort of vicarious fear it was which lent wings to Paul Wester's flight, and by no means the thought that he was in any danger himself.

It seemed hours before he came in sight of the village of Orraland, laid out in a long white-walled and blue-roofed girdle under the lee of the Maxwellton cliffs. In reality Glenkens was scenting his stable afar off, and his time from the Howe of the Red Haven has probably never been beaten. For Glenkens was a home-loving animal. He had had enough of caves and sand. He loved his comforts. An easy maturity, an easier old age lay before him. He loved the wisps of straw that rubbed him down, the steel-banded measure from which his oats, duly mixed with beans, were poured into the long racklike manger, up and down which the little horse

loved to chase them with snuffling epicurean nose.

First of all Paul rubbed Glenkens carefully down, even though he was all on fire to take counsel with Barbara and to have it out with his uncle. He did not, at this stage, permit himself to think about Zipporah Katti. He wanted to consult Barbara about what he had seen, and (as an afterthought) he desired to know how Zipporah Katti had got on with his uncle.

Paul went out of the stable-yard without seeing anything unusual. He entered the Manse by a faded blue back-door, every scratch on which was familiar to him. Here were preserved his earliest works of art, graven with the point of a nail—ducks on circular ponds with small turnip-headed boys tossing their hands abroad in astonishment, wispy-haired maidens with their profiles all turned to the left (Paul's hand shirked the obverse)—all familiar as household words, but now somehow grown strangely different. It was like entering a house in a dream. All about the silence was clogged and dull, like water in the ears after bathing.

The very kitchen proved somehow uncanny. Instead of the meticulous tidiness which, from time immemorial, had characterized the rule (in early days it had been the ferrule) of Barbara Simpson, with her foot on the native soil of her kitchen, feminine garments were strewn about, a chest Paul had never seen before had been opened and still billowed to overflowing with blouses and skirts. But a large pair of scissors and an open needlebook reassured him. No tragedy had befallen since his leave-taking in the cave when he had behaved with such abominable sulkiness.

Still, the women were not there. The tall eight-day

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clock, old as the Wars of the Covenant, ticked solemnly on. The fire had been carefully built. Preparations had been begun for a meal which Paul diagnosed to be one of Barbara's high teas.

But of Barbara or Zipporah Katti—not a sign. The three big beeches sighed without in the courtyard, and the bleating of a far-away flock came through the door which Paul had left open.

There was nothing for it but to face the study. He must needs meet his uncle, who, good man, in general, was nowise dangerous. But Paul knew that he had twice sinned the sin of sins according to the code of the Manse of Maxwellton parish. He had absented himself from family worship. But of all he had feared, as is not unusual, nothing came.

He paused a moment at the study door, and listened to make sure that his uncle was within. He heard the shuffle of leaves as the Hebrew Lexicon was compared with the passage of the first Geneva version (1560) just then under review.

Then came an exclamation from his uncle, the slam of a book on the floor, and heavy hurried footsteps.

Whereat, fearing to be caught listening, Paul entered, and said as carelessly as he could, 'Can I get you anything, uncle?'

The minister, in his third-best coat (and with his clerical collar laid carefully on the table, where for safety's sake it encircled the ink-bottle), regarded his nephew. 'Now,' thought Paul, 'it is bound to come.'

But apparently all memory of his absence had faded from the old man's mind. At that moment Paul Wester was an interlude merely providential.

'Fetch the step-ladder, boy,' he said; 'and get me down Boston of Ettrick's Autobiography —third from

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the end on the top row—a fine man Boston, though a little inclined to think that his Maker had nothing to do but attend to him.’

Paul dared not ask as to the intervention of Barbara on behalf of Zipporah Katti. He could not augur any good from his uncle’s silence—nor indeed any evil.

For Dr. Septimus Laird, in search of his annotated copy of Boston of Ettrick, was capable of overpassing the very hour of Sabbath worship. Indeed the church officer came down every Lord’s Day at five minutes to twelve to see that the minister was not forgetting himself in his library. This had been judged necessary ever since the Doctor had been discovered, on the yearly communion day, scrambling on the upper shelves in search of Bunyan’s *Grace Abounding*, in order to verify a quotation for his ‘action sermon.’

The elders had to count the ‘tokens’ twice over to give the distracted beadle time to put some order into the Doctor’s ‘bands,’ and brush the dust from the famous new gown—presented by the congregation on the occasion of his election as Moderator of the General Assembly.

Paul Wester found the book and got the Doctor back to his chair in safety. As nothing was said, and his uncle had apparently forgotten all about himself, his absence, the disappearance of Glenkens, or the still stranger appearance of Zipporah Katti, Paul felt that it was by no means his place to recall any unpleasantness, at least till he had seen Barbara.

So without a word he stole away to find her. Yet somehow or other his heart was insensibly lightened within him by the familiar atmosphere, the litter about the Doctor’s desk (which it was rank

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blasphemy to touch), the outlook through the trees upon the distant blue flood of Solway, Rathen Island standing full in the fairway, its rocks fringed with a rim of foam towards the south.

What he had seen in Red Haven Howe in its turn began to appear insubstantial as a dream. His uncle in his great chair, the interleaved and inter-lineated Bible, the battered and tagged concordance —these alone were reality. The fact was, Paul's sense of duty was playing hide-and-peek with his inclination. He tried hard to persuade himself that he had seen nothing and heard nothing in the Howe of the Red Haven, except the silken rustle of the birch foliage (like my Lady Maxwell's skirts as she comes into church), and that Raif Palafox and Roaring Anthony were people of whom he had dreamed in the cave.

But he had little time to strengthen himself in this opinion. A sound of talk from the direction of the orchard at once guided and drew him. The barndoor gaped emptily upon a cavern of gloom—for the minister leased his glebe, knowing nothing of farming later than the Georgics of Virgil. But, nevertheless, in the corner, there was abundance of food for Glenkens, bedding and beans mainly, the oats being kept in a great chest in the stable, its corners all bitten and nipped by the impatience of Glenkens himself. For the little horse never rid himself of the idea that one of these days he would bite his way to the treasure within, where, despising all legal measures of capacity, he would help himself to his own.

Voices came from the orchard beyond, cheerful and cheering. Few good women are happier than when, in an amateur way, they are discussing, and 'making over' clothes. This of course, is not what

they tell their respective men-people. But no one who has watched them disputing about flounces or with intent brows trilling on a sewing-machine, their eyes bright with adventure, can doubt that a heaven where wings are the only wear would prove but a dull place for women.

Zipporah Katti was learning all this highly specialized knowledge under the capable tutelage of Barbara Simpson. It seemed that happiness had at last come to the little gipsy, who had hitherto coursed the world with the Romfords, the Lees, the Smiths, the Pala-foxes, and found no resting-place for the soles of her feet, save the trundling wagons with their dusky, heavy-browed drivers.

But as Paul stood in the dark of the barn and looked under the powdery beams, out through the door which led into the orchard, he saw Zipporah Katti laughing as she bit off a thread with her small gleaming teeth.

There was no doubt that the girl considered she had reached a place of peace at last. The interview with his uncle had therefore gone off well. No need to question further about that matter. The improvised (and still improvising) attire of Zipporah Katti, the smile of proprietorship in the eyes of Barbara, his uncle's complete detachment from anything not written or printed, convinced Paul that, so far as the Manse of Maxwellton was concerned, Zipporah Katti found herself among friends. So it went to Paul Wester's heart to disturb this new-found peace. But, after all, he must tell of Raif Palafox and the dead man in the glade behind the twin pillars of the Red Haven. He drew a long breath and strode forward.

'Gae 'way wi' you!' commanded Barbara as soon

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as he stepped out into the sunlit orchard, booming drowsily with the noise of insects, and filled with the sweet-sour smell of the unseen honey-hives ranged just beyond the wall. 'Hark to me, this is none for you to see, a laddie of your age! Laddies should ken naething about sarks but how to keep their ain clean—eh, what's that ye say? Ye want to speak to me? Weel, speak on. This is no Kirk on Sacrament Sabbath, that I ken. Let no man keep silence if he has aught to say to Barbara Simpson.'

But Paul frowned warningly at her, and while the head of Zipporah Katti was bowed over the white exactness of her seam, he made frantic signals to the old Manse housekeeper.

'I see what it is,' Barbara exclaimed in pretended anger. 'Ye have lost Glenkens, or ridden him lame—and ye are feared to face the minister. I've done enough for this day, laddie. Bear ye your ain burdens, and be aff wi' ye!'

An idea sprang to Paul from out her words.

'Well, at least,' he suggested, humbly, 'come yourself and look at him. He is in the stable.'

Zipporah Katti glanced up and smiled contentedly upon Paul. But the next moment, as if she had forgotten his existence, she was back at her serving.

Barbara preceded Paul Wester to the stable, with her usual hectoring stride, scolding all the way in a loud indignant voice.

But once within, she shut the door, and sitting down on the corn-chest, eyed Paul closely.

'Well, what is it now?' she demanded.

And he answered her in so many words—

'Raif Palafox has killed Roaring Anthony, the smuggler from Cumberland, in the Howe of the Red Haven. I was there. I saw it done!'

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE GAUGER'S HOLE

Curiously, Barbara was not nearly so much affected by the adventure of the Red Haven Howe as Paul Wester had expected. She took the thing calmly, like a woman of experience in such matters. She spoke seriously, but called the murder a 'quarrel'—which had he known it, was symptomatic.

'Only last year,' she said, 'twa bairns that my sister's youngest lass was nurse to, found a dead gipsy on the shore of Loch Linnhe, where the big steamers go by to the Caledonian Canal. One Romany lad had stickit another for a far less quarrel than this of Raif and Roaring Anthony. The Cumbrian would doubtless be wanting more than his share, without working for it—like all the South Shore men I ever kenned. But let that fly stick to the wall. Lazun Palafox shall hear of this, and quick justice be done—oh, not by sheriffs and jurors, but by Lazun himself, from whom there is no appeal—and, indeed, who has a better right? For is he not the head of the family, and by miles the best man in spite of his age? I would admire to see the loon that would dare to cross him in spite of his hoar hairs. Lazun would make him a very small man, before his knife had time to play wheep out of its sheath!'

It was curious to Paul thus to hear Barbara Simpson, who had been several kinds of mother to him, defending the famous old smuggler, of whom

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tales were still current all along the scarped ledges of the Solway shore.

But then Paul knew nothing of what Barbara had told to Zipporah Katti. To him she was just the same lovingly-wrathful old Barbara, whom he had known as 'Babby of the Manse' all the days of his life. He could recall no time when Barbara was not there to pet him and punish him, to call him a fool, and—try to get the moon for him, if he cried for it.

But now in the dusk of the stable with Glenkens nosing and chasing the last grains of his home-coming 'feed,' Barbara was suddenly another woman. Hardly could he believe his ears.

'Have no further thought of the matter,' she said, 'I shall go and see Raif Palafox, and if he will not go to Cancale himself to be judged, I shall find those who can take him thither.'

Paul Wester was already at the door. 'I will get the gun that is hidden behind the oat-bags. I shall have it loaded and come with you!'

'You are good stuff, Paul,' said the old woman, 'even as your father was before you. I ken the Wester breed. But have no fear for old Barbara. She had the liberty of tan and ken, of barn, tent, and caravan long before you, laddie, cried your first cheep in this queer topsy-turvy world. Besides, there is never a Lee or a Palafox that would not kiss my hand—not now for my youth and beauty, but for fear of one whose name I shall not mention.'

'You mean Lazun Palafox, Barbara!' said Paul quietly.

Barbara turned sharply upon him, a frown hanging like a threat between her brows, the first he had seen there.

'The lassie has been talking to you?'

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'Yes,' said Paul, 'in the cave, but before ever she saw you. And she told me that Lazun Palafox of Cancale had all the power among the folk where she had been. He had even sent her to the convent among the nuns, to learn good behaviour, and she was so afraid of him that she stopped, though half-a-dozen wanted to marry her and make her a gipsy queen!'

'Ah,' said Barbara quietly, 'it is a great thing to be a gipsy queen, but the lass is better with auld Barbara, knitting her stockings by the fire in the Manse kitchen. But be off with you, lad, and load your gun. You may have need of it before all be done. I shall go alone to the Howe of the Red Haven. I have a word to say to Raif Palafox that will sound more deadly to him than the click of the policeman's bracelets about his wrists. Bide ye here in the Manse, as I tell you, and if the lass needs water from the well, bring it in! If she lacks firewood, peat or coal for her cooking of the Doctor's supper, let her not go out to seek them. Yours be the charge.'

'And if my uncle asks where you are,' Paul suggested, 'what shall I say?'

'Say—say,' quoth the old woman, untying her apron and pulling her red shawl closer about her shoulders, 'say that I am out among the farms seeking eggs!—Oh, ye needna look. It will be true eneuch. I shall look in at Orchardton and Montgomery's of the Inch on the road back. Their hens are aye laying fine at this time o' year.'

Paul Wester went to find his precious weapon. It was clean enough, but for the mere pleasure of smelling the oily powder-rag, he cleaned it all over again. Then he loaded it carefully and went to the door of the barn, where he placed it behind the open

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half. In the quiet orchard he could see Zipporah Katti still busy with her sewing, humming and whistling over her task. He remarked the pretty birdlike way she had of turning her head this way and that, to mark the effect of her work.

As Paul stood watching, she raised her head and smiled. Paul took this for an invitation and soon found himself beside her under the orchard wall.

Here he can safely be left, till such time as the minister's supper has to be made—when he became a mere hewer of wood and a drawer of water in the service of Zipporah Katti.

From this point the story has to do with the journey of the indefatigable Barbara to the Howe of Red Haven. On she went, staff in hand, striding like a herd on the hill, her brows grey and shaggy, only twitching now and then, while her strong features remained fixed and indomitable. She did not long keep upon the high road. She saw the returning tracks of the little horse's feet, and treasured the fact in her memory, as a count in a future indictment of Paul's carelessness.

Beyond the high-arched bridge, she made a sharp turn to the right. In the corner of a stonebreaker's disused square, was a kind of stile—not a visible lovers' stile with a broad stone on the top from which to sit and admire the view. Though, indeed, from that point the view was fine enough—the nested and nestling village of Orraland, dribbling down from the upper cliff, but the most part of the houses playing hide-and-seek with the narrow green valley, the cattle grazing in the cultivated holms above, and the giant ashes towering up across the Auchen Water, and, farther off, the long curve of the shore—all this was the foreground as seen from the

stile. Behind you saw the Solway, the cliffs of Rathen, and the little white speck of the herd's house thereon, the bottle-green stretch of the Orchardton peninsula, and on clear days the dominating shoulder of Helvellyn and, noblest of all, the clean-cut arrete of Striding Edge. Besides which, all reeking blue, here and there were planted towns and villages, cot-houses and farmhouses a-many—more than Barbara Simpson had time to remark as she cleared the stone dyke with the agility of twenty years, and so took her way through the lush grass of the lower fields on which two generations of the best farmers in the world had made a granary out of the waste flats of Torr.

Slanting her path slightly seaward, Barbara Simpson, careful as ever, strode along the corn edges in the direction of Red Raven. She had no particular plan in her head. But in the hour when she should face the tribe and force the manslayer Raif to stand before the judgment-seat of the Caesar of his folk, she doubted not that words would be given her.

A poacher setting snares on the edge of a distant plantation eyed her curiously. A gamekeeper, out looking for the poacher (but not finding him), took half-a-dozen steps in her direction with a menacing intent.

But after a second or two the poacher returned to his wires, solaced and with a mind at ease. It was only the minister's Barbara, and he would have shown her over his little illegal domain in the perfect security that she would never repeat to any the fact of his presence where he had no right to be, either by day or night. The gamekeeper was equally reassured.

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'Where can the old fool be going?' he muttered to himself. But really he cared little about the matter. Barbara was not on his land at any rate; and, moreover, his master had a great opinion of Doctor Septimus Laird, and, as everybody knew, Barbara held the minister in the hollow of her hand. It is likely that Jo Gash would have made no complaint even if he had met Barbara straying among his sacred pheasant-coops. He would not even have looked into her basket.

In some such fashion Barbara Simpson passed out of the ken of the people of kirk and market, of bein houses, and of intentions more or less good and honourable.

She sank herself among the myriad paths and 'spritty' knowes of the wild country behind that small basin of silver sand, with its two guardian pillars of glistening, tide-washed russet, which men called 'Red Haven.' Barbara knew too much to go straight up by the main path leading from the Haven, the one Paul had followed among the shifting shadows of the birches which cover in the hidden and henceforth fatal Howe of the Red Haven.

'They have not gone yet,' she said, smiling wisely to herself. For off shore, keeping well in mid-channel, she glimpsed a Cancale fishing-boat, broad in the buttock, high in the free-board, rigged like a barque forward, and with quaint lug-sails stuck here and there aft wherever there was room to fly a pocket-handkerchief.

'Cancale, St. Malo or St. Servan,' she said.

'Never went there out of any port (save from these three) a craft like that!'

'They are only waiting for the tide to be off,' thought Barbara; 'but I can guess where to find

them.'

She knew very well that by this time there was no need to look in the Howe itself. Any traces of blood would long be removed. The mortal spoils of Roaring Anthony would rest where no eye would see them this side of the judgment day. Most convincing alibis would be ready in case that the law, always slow to move in Scotland, should descend upon them before The Golden Flagon of Cancale town was ready to take them off.

To the seaward side of the Howe of the Red Haven, hidden from everything landward, among the highest Boreland cliffs, you may find, if you are lucky, a strange place sometimes called the Ganger's Hole. For several hours a day it is safe enough at every 'high' ebb, being only the long rift of a cavern still covered in here and there. It culminates in a 'pot' or cauldron where, at the height of the flood-tides, Solway surge boils like lava in an uneasy volcano, now groaning in pain, now lashing with spray the steep sides, grinding the rocks into pebbles, the pebbles into sand, and ever and anon spouting high into the air, like an Icelandic geyser, columnar mushrooms of churned water and creamy Solway sand. All who know the 'riddlings of creation' called Colvend know where to look for this place.

But when Barbara looked down into the Gauger's Hole, she saw only the clean white beaches, black vertical walls of rocks, and (what she was looking for) in the corner nearest to the covered tunnel not yet broken down by the waves, the faint blue mist of a wood-fire stealing up, to be lost immediately in the clefts of rifted rock and among the tufted sea-plants that smelt and tasted of the brine and the salt firth-mist.

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Barbara was now wholly fixed in her mind. She had only to descend and her men would be before her.

All the more on that account she went carefully. Previous to declaration of her quality, it would not do to be caught by Raif Palafox, clinging to the sheer crags of the Gauger's Hole like a fly to a wall. She might share the fate of the original exciseman who is reported to have tried to find a way to the bottom—which indeed he reached, but—with a bullet through him.

She knew Raif Palafox well enough to be certain that, after one little accident in the Howe behind, he would not think twice about precipitating a possible witness into the deeps of the Gauger's Hole.

Accordingly she made her appearance suddenly round a dripping corner of slaty rock, red like those outside the Haven. Before her were men occupying themselves variously in building a fire of driftwood, and in setting it alight with the dry crackling flare of abundant whin and heather roots.

They turned at the noise of footsteps, and for a moment their faces were not good to see. Raif Palafox made one leap towards her, and there was a general movement of hands to concealed knives which might, or again might not have been purely the instinct of defence.

But the old woman never flinched. She merely threw up one arm, and uttered a single arresting sentence in the gipsy language which halted them like a word of command.

'Raif Palafox,' she demanded, 'do you know me, Raif Palafox?'

The swart gipsy growled something under his breath, but he did not turn to his companions nor

vouchsafe them a word of explanation. Barbara's eyes left him, and roved lightly over the others.

'You, Oliver Rutherford, how about the girl whose brother you fought with at St. Malo?'

'What the devil's own business is this?' cried a broad florid man, starting up from where he had been chopping wood with a short-handled crescent-bladed axe. Nevertheless, he stood arrested in his place and did not threaten the old woman.

'What has come of all your family?' she went on; 'and how many morts have you had since you left your poor Janet to fend for herself at Yetholm?'

'The woman is the devil after all!' said the man whom she had addressed as Oliver Rutherford.

'And you, young man,' Barbara continued, 'you should be a Lannion by the looks of you. Your eyebrows are ruled too straight and there is a thickening tuft where they meet—the sign of a jealous man—Lannion all over you are! Pity 'tis of the mort you have wedded.'

'Lannion—yes, I am Felisque of that name,' said the young man, amid the laughter of his mates; 'whether I be jealous or no can matter little to your white hairs, mother. But what does matter is how you came to be so glib with my name?'

'And what you are doing here? Out with your errand,' cut in Raif Palafox, with a fierceness that had only been temporarily held back.

'If you are a spy of the Malouain smugglers—or if you would sell us to the government—you shall abide in our caverns till the tide comes.'

'And,' said Barbara, defiantly, 'you may pass the Rocher at Cancale once—but never again repass it outward bound.'

'And how shall you prevent me, old wife with the

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Romany tongue and the gorgio face?’

‘Not I,’ said Barbara, striking her tall, spiked staff deep into the sand; ‘not I, but one Lazun Palafox, whose wedded wife I am. There is already gone a messenger to him.’

They looked at one another in some dismay, but after all there was in their hearts a modicum of relief. If this were indeed Lazun’s wife, she would be of the tribe, and they, therefore, safe at her hands.

‘I am Barbara Palafox,’ she said; ‘and though my man went from me I have been true to him. He will not deny me—be sure. More, he will see that justice be done—on you Raif Palafox, son of the Redonaise woman, who dared to call me ‘traitor’ and ‘spy’ to my face—also in the lesser matter of the bullock-faced man from Cumberland, whom ye slew in the Red Haven yonder! And now where have ye put him? If there be search, as is likely—mayhap I may be able to misdirect it!’

‘Spoken like a true Romany,’ cried Oliver Rutherford; ‘no wonder you knew so well about poor old Janet up at Yetholm! Is it possible she is still in the flesh? I would like to drop in and tip down a grog with her for old sake’s sake!’

Of him, however, Barbara took no notice—but again demanded where they had put the Cumberland farmer, drover, and trader.

‘He is at home,’ sneered Raif Palafox; ‘they say that his Ayrshire bull gored him—in the back.’

‘Presently I shall go and see what is truth and what is a lie,’ said Barbara, stamping her foot; ‘and now my orders to you are to give my wifely greetings to Lazun at Cancale. Tell him from me that I charge myself with Zipporah Katti, and that henceforth I shall bring her up according to my liking. He has

had his chance. Now I shall have mine. But if he is on the shore of Solway again, bid him send me word to the Manse of Maxwellton—the commonest tramper asking for bread at the back door will carry the message, and I will meet him any hour by night or day, in the place he and I know of.

‘As for the Cumbrian—I will see to the harm of that, and what is to be done in the matter. Be off with you, Raif Palafox! But be sure that if you set foot again on these shores, or seek to meddle with the young lass, your life is not worth a farthing dip on a barn wall!’

Raif Palafox looked from one to the other of his mates. But their eyes avoided his. After all, it was no business of theirs. They had not killed the Cumbrian. They had not tried to carry off the girl, and, best of all, they would not have to affront the angers of a certain Lazun Palafox, a merchant retired after fortune made, to the little white-and-green house overlooking the port of Cancale to which they were going for the purpose of reporting themselves.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE GLORY OF SUMMER

Barbara went back to the Manse, and resumed apron and cap with the staid dignity which becomes the unquestioned ruler of the house of a Doctor of Divinity and an ex-Moderator of the General Assembly of the Kirk.

As we know, her visit to the Ganger's Hole had not been made wholly unobserved. But even the poacher and the keeper thought that she had merely crossed the Torr flats for the purpose of taking a message more quickly to the Lady of Maxwellton, whose policies, protected by park walls, ran down to within a mile of the wilderness of Red Raven Howe.

The Howe and the Ganger's Hole constituted a kind of No-man's Land, tufted and craggy as to their ramparts and little used except by gipsies and other 'kittle cattle' well advised of their advantages.

Not the least of these was the fact that the Haven had two entrances, one from the front, that by which Paul and Glenkens had entered, and the other leading into the fastnesses of the Ganger's Hole, from which a boat could take off any passenger who, for personal and sufficient reasons, desired to quit the shores of Galloway unperceived.

At any rate Barbara could, with an equal mind, resume the morning working apron, and the afternoon black and rustling silk which she 'owed to her position' (as she said in excuse) to assume whenever callers might be expected.

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Not that very many such were allowed to interview the minister during working hours. Even Paul on the way to the study, if Barbara were about, would frequently be told to 'come back oot o' there.' The Doctor was at his 'firstly,' or maybe breaking ground for his 'secondly, my brethren' and she would not have him disturbed. If Paul Wester wanted a book, he could just do wanting it till dinnertime or tea-time, as the case might be. Or he might go and talk to Zipporah Katti, if she could be bothered with him—which was more than she, the speaker, had any time to be. Therefore, without more said, Mr. Paul Wester was at liberty to remove himself forthwith.

If, therefore, such treatment were dealt out to Paul, the much privileged, ordinary interrupters got exceedingly short shrift.

'The Doctor bade ye come, did he?' she would say to someone whom she suspected of designs on the slender ministerial purse. 'He had no siller on him at the time? No, I should think he hadna. He had sixpence and no more, I saw to that mysel'. 'There ye go. Doctor,' I said, when I saw him go out down the avenue, 'ye will not pauperize this parish on sixpence and a bad ha'penny!'

These were days of a great and wonderful peace. A letter from Cancale had informed Barbara that matters there were in good train, and that she need fear nothing from Raif Palafox— 'whom I have employed on an affair which will occupy him for some time.' It was Lazun who wrote.

The Cumbrian invalid, Roaring Anthony, was recovering—which was more than he deserved—as Barbara explained very clearly to him. She also proved to him that the less he said about the little

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'tulzie' in the Red Haven Howe, the better it would be for himself—there being a certain Lazun Palafox, with methods of his own wholly uncontrolled by the County Police, sheriffs, fiscals, and other apparatus of local justice. Besides which, he, Roaring Anthony Crossthwaite, might be called upon to explain what he was doing in such company, and why, being to all appearance a small and extremely haphazard farmer, he went so regularly to the fishing for which no nets are required, and had an account of four figures in the Cairn Edward Bank.

For these and many other reasons which his own conscience would suggest to him easily enough (said the Manse housekeeper), it would be better to let Lazun Palafox settle the business with his kinsman in his own way.

'With the Palafoxes,' Barbara suggested craftily, 'one never knows where such things will end.'

And Roaring Anthony, remembering how many times he had lied to his correspondents at Cancale and in the outer Breton islands as to the amounts received from customers on either side the Solway, objected not a word. For the fear of Lazun was upon him, and the expectation of being hung by the heels in the Ganger's Hole to wait for the incoming tide, as Lazun was said once to have done to a traitor, chilled his marrow. For these (and other) reasons. Roaring Anthony said nothing publicly as to the true origin of his injury—and, instead of calling in a doctor, Barbara Simpson, unsurpassable in that region as a 'wise woman,' cared for him with her own hands.

Meantime the great days of the warmest summer on record passed overhead. The sun shone undimmed by a cloud. For ten weeks not a drop of

rain fell. Children played in the hot dusty shelter of whitewashed walls, and in the breezy orchard Zipporah Katti, alert at her seam, learned some things from Paul the Scholar, but in return, taught him infinitely more.

Zipporah Katti Palafox had never known such a time of happiness. Doubtless the gipsy love of wandering would return to her. But for the moment it abode wholly dormant. The triumphal march of the long equal days, the occasional waving sough of laden fruit trees in the heated air, the silence of the dusky barn into which she could peep, and Paul Wester's voice instructing her how to read poetry and what poetry to read—how good they were!

Occasionally he would trust her with something of his own, verses light as the petals that floated down upon the pages, but in intention, at least, not wholly unworthy of the time and place.

The letter from Cancale had quieted the fears of Barbara as to the future of Zipporah Katti. It was now permitted to Paul and Zipporah to wander along the shore in the time of the ebb, to sit in the coolness of the Dulse Cave, even to explore the clean delightsomeness of the little sandy inlets, strewn with shells, which are to be found everywhere cutting crescent-wise into the rock barrier of Rathan Isle.

They hunted up a new headquarters every morning, where, with a can of fresh water and a pocketful of biscuits, they established themselves for the day. Here they would wait cheerfully, watching the tide surround the island. Then when the long serpentine back of the causeway had at last been swallowed by the waves, they would give themselves up to the unrestrained delight of having the island

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absolutely to themselves for six long glorious hours.

To make sure of their isolation they would start off in opposite directions, keeping on the height of the cliff. Then when they met at White Horse Point, Zipporah Katti would fling herself down all panting by Paul's side. Whereat Paul, in strict fraternal celebration of their promise to belong one to the other till death them did part, would kiss the girl on the lips. Not one nor the other saw any harm in the greeting. It was a natural outburst of gladness in being alone together. The island was their own. They were wild as the seabirds, and as free—for six hours!

It is curious now to recall the extreme simplicity of their occupations and daily entertainments. Paul had a pocket pistol for which abundant ammunition could be procured at the village shop at Orraland. This weapon had on several occasions been confiscated by his uncle, but had always been discovered and restored by Barbara Simpson—with threats infinite and dire, that if ever it should be used within earshot of the Manse, and in especial, of the minister's study, she would throw it in the tide with her own hand.

Paul would have fired (quite harmlessly, let it be said) upon the swooping gulls and diving terns which shared Rathen Island with them. But Zipporah would have none of any such ruthless slaughter. Paul yielded gracefully, without telling her that he could not have winged one in the course of a long summer's day, and with all the ammunition in Kelman's shop at his disposal.

A white stone was placed against the cliff, distances measured, and in the shade they set themselves to hit the target. Paul, who had most

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practice and perhaps a natural gift, found that he must not be too accurate, or in despair Zipporah Katti would throw down the weapon, declaring that the old pistol did not 'fire straight.'

Tired with an hour of this, Paul would draw from his pocket the little 'Golden Treasury' selection from the poems of Matthew Arnold, which he was at present trying to force upon the reluctant attention of Zipporah Katti, who stubbornly preferred Hiawatha and Longfellow's sea poems. These in turn having served their purpose, the comrades went contentedly down to some pool or cave-mouth to paddle bare-footed and eat dulse, returning with clean-cut, knife-edge appetites, which drove them at once to the biscuits or whatever other provender they had been able to beg, borrow, and steal from Barbara's larder. Zipporah refused to have anything to do with the last-named operation. She had been witness to some very real stealing and could not be brought to see the difference.

Then perhaps they would betake themselves to the ancient tower of Patrick Heron and May Maxwell, still religiously preserved by their descendants. The record of those Rathen Isle adventures they knew by heart. Paul had read them so often that he could recite whole chapters to Zipporah Katti, who had the bad taste to prefer them to any poetry whatsoever— especially the parts about smuggling in the old times before Lazun Palafox.

Presently, under the wide sky of paling afternoon blue, the cliffs of the mainland began to tint themselves with amber and rose. Then the pair, wearied with the heady splendours of the long summer day together, would sit down in the shade,

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with a field-glass, the chief vanity of the minister, and abstracted without leave by his graceless nephew. Through it they saw wonderful things.

Yonder was the very slab of stone, which, when lifted, gave a landward entrance to the labyrinths of the Dulse Cave. There was the open shelf on the face of the cliff, which they had called the Balcony. They could almost see the place where their elbows had leaned that first night as they watched the stars and listened to the clatter of the waves underneath.

Being young, neither Zipporah Katti nor (still less) Paul Wester knew how happy they were, or how little more of unmixed happiness life would have to give them.

Once or twice Zipporah had a glimpse of the keen delight given only to her sex. And it came in a fashion almost motherly. For Paul sometimes dropped asleep with his curly head heavy upon her knees, while she bent over him and soothed him with the soft croon of a gipsy cradle-song, and the touch of her little brown hand, till she made sure it was time to awake.

These were marvellously happy hours for Zipporah. Something sweet and fragrant warmed her heart and wet her eyes. Yet the regular breathing of Paul Wester, the impatient childish way he had of rectifying the position of his head on her lap as on a pillow, did not blind her to the outward lapse of the tide, and the downward track of the sun.

Yonder, much too soon—she had the clear, far-seeing, open-air eyes of all out-of-door folk—was the first glimpse of the cleft of the Dulse Cave wherein so recently, a bare-legged gipsy maiden, she had sat and swung wet brown feet, eating dulse with keen enjoyment of the fresh salt taste. The cave opened

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out all too quickly. First she could see the spring of the arch and then, within it, the white spurt of the foam as the waves kept coming and going pendulum-fashion.

It would not be more than half-an-hour now before they must be stirring. And Zipporah sighed. It was not that she was fonder of Paul asleep than awake. But when he lay thus, so childlike, so young, so dependent, something she could not name moved in her heart.

Nor is it probable that there is a name for the feeling in any language, though all women know it, and some men profit by it—of whom, however, was not Paul Wester the Younger—for it marks something that is as much higher than love, as love is higher than—the other thing.

And so, as the tired day wheeled nightwards and the Ailsa Craig solans betook themselves far across the brown Machars to their rock pinnacle, the seas purpled and stilled amazingly. The sounding tide-race roared in the narrows of Rascarrel, and Zipporah Katti sighed as she lifted Paul's head gently till it rested on a tuft of grass on which she had first spread her handkerchief.

'It is over for today!' she murmured regretfully, as she bent to waken him with a stiff bent grass-spike tickling his ear.

But she was wrong.

It was only beginning.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE MAGIC STIRRING

All women know why Zipporah Katti saw to it that her hair was in good order before she woke Paul with that humorsome teasing spikelet of grass, why she pulled down her skirts closer about her ankles (a thing she would never have given a thought to a few months before—at the date of the Orraland Fair, to be exact), why she carefully dabbed her eyes lest it should be supposed that she had been crying.

No—men are wrong, and only women know anything about such hidden things. It was not (whatever the fatuous sex may think) because Zipporah Katti was 'in love' with Paul Wester. Only a man would be so shallow as to suppose that. A woman knows that it was because of the sacred little warmth (of about the temperature of eggs upon which the mother dove has been sitting) that glowed in the heart of Zipporah Katti.

Sacred, yes, of course it was sacred!—How else would it have come to Zipporah Katti? She knew she was no longer only a little brown towzle-headed outcast. She was never more to be the accomplice of horse-copers, the gipsy 'boy-lassie' who could hold her own with tooth and nail—almost with tusk and claw. That fine first righteousness which is the love of Another, displacing that of self, began to germinate within her.

Paul's personality did not matter, not at least at present. He was a lay figure, a practice target, the willow mannequin on whom this little person was

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trying the range of her nature. Who the man is does not matter greatly to a woman till a good deal later. What does matter is the thing which is going on within that breast where wilful child and unselfish woman are warring for the mastery.

And though there are women who never can be more than fitful, petted children, it is mostly the fault of the men who prefer to keep them so. For the little warm angel that stirred in Zipporah's breast as Paul's head rested upon her lap, was more to her than a thousand votes. It was her woman's share of the immortal. Her soul woke only when it came to her. Without it she might be foolish in a myriad ways which have nothing to do with this story. She might (though God forbid!) even assault respectable police officers and other statesmen in the performance of their duty, but for such exercises the possession of a soul is by no means necessary.

For some time after the settlement of Zipporah Katti at the Manse, she continued privately to call Paul 'brother,' as she had done in the cave after the blood-oath. But finding that Paul was not equally ready with the countering 'sister,' the relationship had been gradually dropped, or at least the outward expression of it.

They became 'Zipporah' and 'Paul' to each other, and Barbara Simpson went about with a satisfied expression upon her face. But there was something behind that look, and the expectation in the old woman's eyes was not altogether on account of her satisfaction with the doings, sayings, intentions, and possibilities of Zipporah Katti and her favourite, the minister's nephew.

What she was waiting for came to her one day by the hand of a beady-eyed slip of a lad, half sailor,

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whole gipsy, who leaped the wall of the drying-green where Barbara Simpson was hanging out the midweek washing.

She advanced towards the lad threateningly, but something in the pale olive complexion, a lissomness of waist and loin which was never Gallovidian, but the mark of a race more ancient and perhaps more Oriental, halted her.

With a winning smile the lad held out his hand. Somewhere, somehow, in memory now as vague and ancient as a last week's dream, Barbara had seen the like. Ah, she had it! He was a son or a grandson of that little Eza Palafox, on account of whom her old heart had once suffered, with a pain which now she could not understand—though she still remembered, because such things a woman does not forget.

'Barbara Simpson?' He said 'Seemson' in a clear voice with a pleasant French accent.

'That same,' said Barbara; 'and who else should it be after forty years at the Manse of Kirkpatrick-Maxwellton?'

'Then this is from the Chief, and to be given only into your own hand.'

He produced one of the common yellowish-grey envelopes of the square commercial type ordinarily called bulle in France, and passed it to her.

She stood with the letter flicking in her hand, regarding the boy curiously.

'You are a grandson of Lazun's?' she asked in a quiet level voice; 'and your mother's name was?'

'Eza—like my grandmother's!' the lad answered with some pride. 'We are all Palafoxes, and that is saying something in Cancale.'

'I also am a Palafox, and next to Lazun—of the

highest place,' the old woman answered, her strong features changing to something of grimness as she stood.

'Indeed I judged as much,' said the boy, 'from what at your bidding befell Raif Palafox. My mother bade me take a good look at you and bring her back word.'

'It is not every woman's bidding that Lazun obeys,' said Eza, my mother; 'take notice, vaurien, for that woman will be worth the looking at.'

'I bear no malice,' said Barbara; 'Lazun and I had our misunderstandings—such as were natural and necessary, but I do not deny that he has always given me my right and place and that with all honour.'

The boy stood uncertain. The house with its curious windows was too near—the sea and the boat's crew in waiting too far away. He glanced over his shoulder like one who meditated flight.

Old Barbara took from her neck a golden coin, very small, very heavy, and rudely stamped with strange contorted writing. It had a square hole driven in neatly about midway, and through this a ribbon was passed, caught, and knotted peculiarly.

'Take this to your mother, by name Eza Palafox, daughter of Eza. Tell her that it is hers by right, and that I, Barbara Palafox, said so.'

'I was forbidden to take a present,' said the boy firmly, looking full at her with his proud black eyes.

'This is no present. It is a right,' said Barbara. 'For the sake of the messenger, and in token that an old wound is healed, I send this to her whom you call Eza. You can show it to Lazun if you like. I presume he is on the ship out yonder.'

The boy glanced at the letter, but did not speak.

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'You have been well taught,' said Barbara, smiling. 'I am to read what Lazun has to say for himself. There is your grandfather's gift. It came from India, and they say it is a charm to keep love.'

She laughed a little bitterly.

'But there must be a flaw in it somewhere,' she added. 'Perhaps it will do its work better for your mother than for me!'

'That it will,' said the lad; 'for it is true what I have been told by an old woman of the tribe, that a love token cannot charm when given by the person on whom its power is to be tried. For such is the nature of love charms. This knowledge comes also from India.'

'You are learned in such things?' Barbara asked; 'in my time Palafoxes such as you trusted mostly to youth and the strong hand.'

'My mother taught me the use of charms—aye, and her mother before her. But I use them not, only a gipsy must never forget anything.'

'Excepting always his wedded wife,' said Barbara, and turned away with the letter still unopened in her hand.

'From Lazun Palafox to Barbara his wife, written from Cancalle on July 18th.

'Barbara Palafox' (the letter began), 'I have no claim upon you save your own word—which has not been broken, though (to my sorrow) mine has. But the breaking was so long ago and so far forgotten, that I trow the kindly earth has covered all.

'But if you still feel towards me as you did, and are willing to meet me, be at the land entrance of the Dulse Cave on the night of Saturday, half-an-hour after the time of worship at the Manse.'

There was no signature, yet old Barbara blushed

like a young maid giving her first rendezvous, and quickly thrust the letter into the swinging pocket by her side.

‘Lazun, the old Lazun,’ she smiled as she spoke, the smile of a woman who has not missed her life, in whose bosom the warm little nesting bird has stirred; ‘just the same, and though he die at five-score Lazun’s nature cannot change. Fidelity to one woman was an egg not put in his basket when he was brooded. And indeed, I am enough of a gipsy to know that ‘tis mainly a gorgio prejudice and mostly practised when men grow old.’

Yet all that day she went about the doors curiously silent. Her eyes had a far-away look in them, and seemed to see through people as though they were ghosts of a dead past.

She saw the sky bluer, the grass of a more enchanting emerald. She had not looked at such foolish things for forty years. Instead she had watched, loved, and listened for the dear homely things—the growth of the gooseberries in the Manse garden, the keckle of laying hens in the barn, the soft shuffle of her master’s slippers as he pursued a recalcitrant second volume athwart the expanse of library shelves. But as she said, the beauty of sea and sky were ‘by’ for her—lost, far away, unimportant. Yet somehow on this day, with the grey-buff envelope in her pocket, she saw them again, with the brightness of an earlier time, even as on their island Paul and Zipporah Katti were beginning to do.

Only to them it was new, and they played with childish enthusiasm at a new game—just as, a few years ago, they might have seen the brighter skies, greener grass, more purple sunsets over

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suddenly unfamiliar fields, spied gates opening and Paradise appearing with no fiery sword flaming every way, by the simple process, practised by all intelligent children, of bending down and looking between their legs at a new world turned upside down, and the trailing clouds of glory they have not yet left behind.

The build, age, and dignity of Barbara of the Manse prevented this resource of childhood. But nevertheless, she saw things somehow small and crystalline, as through the large end of an opera glass. The blood of youth leaped in her heart. Little twitching pulses tingled here and there. Her eyelashes would not keep still, and of all this Barbara was heartily ashamed. She would have been still more so had she known how large and dark her eyes were.

She got a fright when Zipporah Katti, bringing in with her a breeze of orchard and summer, came to ask a question as to the number of stitches or the proximate turning of a heel. The girl stopped suddenly on the threshold, was silent a moment, and then with arms open and a wondering gladness, cried as she hugged her benefactress, 'Babby, Babby! You are really Babby today. You look so young!'

And when Zipporah had disappeared, with a skip and a bound to the tree shadow in the orchard garth, where Paul was waiting for her, the words went on rhyming themselves over in the old woman's mind. 'Babby—Babby—aye, that was what he used to say, and swear I was so young that a sweet pea and I must have grown up, each entwining the other. Oh, shame of me to think of such things with my latter end so near and the minister's dinner due

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in an hour, the wash still on the line—and me, old Babby, that will never see threescore-and-five again! Labour and sorrow, that is what I should be bringing my mind to, and not going about singing like a lass that her lad kissed yestreen for the first time. Think shame of yoursel’, Barbara Simpson!’

But somehow the heart of the woman in whom the little bird has nestled warm—even once and very long ago, never quite grows old.

It was a long day that to Barbara Simpson, and many were the shamefaced errands she made to the head of the drying-green. From the high upper corner she could see the reefed topsails at the foremast of the Cancale ‘banker,’ over the trees of the Manse orchard. The boat was far out, for the tide was low and the sands of Solway had crept several miles nearer that eternal azure streak which is the main channel.

Barbara heard the chatter of Paul and Zipporah at meals, or as they perched on opposite sides of the bakeboard, listening to the soothing crunch-crunch of her wooden roller upon the dough as she kneaded out her oaten cakes.

But she barely answered what they asked her. Sometimes even, they had to repeat their words three or four times. Not that the latter troubled them, being with one another.

For in that age and circumstance youth loves any excuse to hear the sound of its own voice. But when the minister himself explained to Barbara, in view of his Sunday’s sermon, the difference between the Ninevites and the Babylonians, partly for general edification and partly to clear his own mind, Barbara —yea, even the long experienced Barbara, confounded them, him, and herself by repeated

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references to Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

At last Barbara was on her way to the landward entrance of the cave. She had hurried Zipporah Katti off to her room, before Paul had finished his somewhat lengthy and wholly unnecessary lecture upon the French irregular verbs. She had recommended the Doctor to find something in the copying way to occupy his nephew's time. She had no fear of the minister himself. Nothing short of a planetary catastrophe or a Krakatoa eruption under his library could have shifted him from his desk before midnight. And in any case he would have stolen on tiptoe past Barbara's door lest she should reproach him on the morrow for his wicked night-hawking habits, so oft reprovén, never improved.

But Barbara had taken special pains with her toilet, and the cloak she threw about her shoulders was of fine blue cloth, doubled within with cardinal silk, quite unworn. She held it up as she went through the high grass, and her well-greased Wellingtons defied the swishing dew till she found herself up among the heather and rocks of Ben Tudor. Here the short bent and stiff scrub heath held no dew. So Barbara paused to shake out her skirts which, in spots, were touched with random drops. Then with the lighter foot of a youth that had come back to her, she threaded the wilderness of boulder, heather, and bracken as if it had been her own kitchen at the Manse of Maxwellton.

She moved out there on the grey weirdness of the open moor, with large ease and familiarity. Once or twice on a specially sunburnt knoll turning a somewhat heated brow towards the slow breathing sea, she caught a passing scent of thyme, the especial delight of these dry Solway wildernesses.

Like a girl she caught up a twig and thrust it into her dress. She hummed a tune she had not thought of for well-nigh half-a-century. But the lilt of it came fresh to her now.

Barbara paused a moment on the brow of the cauldron into which Ben Tudor has poured for ages all its useless debris of rocks.

Down there she had found him—was it fifty years ago—or only yesterday? Good twoscore she knew, but her nervousness made her think it was but yesternight that she had stood thus a moment to range her curls, crispering dew-wet and wind-distraught.

The sea was muttering below, glinting like an expanse of grey pearl with flicks and flacks of hazy silver shining up as in real pearl.

Down there where the night haze lay thick, of a colour betwixt peat reek and lapis lazuli, was the entrance stone. She would, she knew, recognize it when it came within her ken—a pale lichened grey looming up with almost invisible patches of orange curling at the edges.

Much has been written of the loves of the young, but rarely, very rarely, have the young hearts still subsisting in the bodies of the old been analysed.

Yet the true love of such—having survived the death of passion, triumphed over years, white hairs, spreading crowsfeet, disillusionment, treason even—may be a sweeter flower than any that bloom in the spring.

The 'Last Fruit of an Old Tree' may be the sweetest. There are those who are like winter apples ripened by keeping. But then they must have scented the apple-blossom in the spring, and tasted the startling keen delight of an earlier fruitage.

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Barbara went down, her cloak looped over one arm, and her tall staff in the other hand. The great crimson-lined hood hid her white hair, and her figure and carriage were as upright and alert as ever.

She came to the flat stone within the little shelter of rocks where the ewes gather in snowy weather. Thrice she stamped upon the flagstone with her heel. Then she waited before again stamping twice, listening to the hollow sound below. The broad flat shadow moved aside. Barbara saw a faint glimmer as the stone slid slowly out of its place. Something dim and familiar moved below. Mechanically Barbara took the hand which was extended to her. It seemed like yestereven after all—though her hair was white as snow. He who stood there waiting for her was the husband of her youth, in whose bosom she had lain, for whom alone her heart had beat—aye, and beat still.

‘Come thy ways in, Babby Palafox,’ said a voice out of the darkness of the cave. ‘Have no fear. I am Lazun!’

Whereupon Barbara, steadied by the touch of the hand, stepped down with youthful alertness. She had no fear—save that Lazun would find her aged beyond recognition. She need not have feared, for in her poor heart the little nestling bird was brooding warm.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

LAZUN PALAFOX

They were in the big inner chamber of the cave, Barbara trembling a little as she saw a tall, gaunt, grey-bearded man, with a hooked nose, and eyes whose fire age had not abated, placing carefully an old-fashioned brass lantern on a hook in the wall. She could hear the sea tumbling outside.

At first she did not know the man, but when he stood beneath the light, Barbara recognized the ripples of locks which had once been as those of Absalom. The dark eyes, which had smiled so readily upon women and so rarely upon men, met hers, and the well-remembered look in them made her start.

'Lazun,' she questioned, with faltering voice, 'You are Lazun?'

He held out his strong hands and clasped those which she dared not withhold.

'I am Lazun,' he answered softly; 'still the old Lazun, the more is the pity. God forgive me, Barbara—as I know you do.'

They stood thus a moment, Lazun Palafox still holding her shaking hands. They looked into one another's eyes, till Barbara's grew clouded and she was fain to turn away. She would not for the world have him see her break down. He might think—well, what men are apt to think, and though she was old, she had kept all and more than her ancient pride. For the first time she regretted having come. Forty years seemed somehow but a short time—far too

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short for a woman to forget in. She kept repeating over to herself the words the Doctor had been reading: 'The wife of his youth—the wife of his youth.'

God help her, indeed, poor old Babby! She had not known that her heart could be so sore or that so much of the old would remain.

Lazun Palafox seemed infinitely the less affected. But he had taken on a strange, forceful gravity which Barbara was unfamiliar with. It came from the habit of command—the 'Do this'—and lo! the thing was done. Barbara liked it well, she found that it became him.

They sat down and looked long at one another, their shoulders to the native rock. They were both under the lantern, seated on a stone bench squared by the hammer at some remote period.

Lazun did not sit beside her as he might have done, but his grave and determined face was full of exquisite politeness and something, too, that was almost akin to reverence.

So far as Barbara was concerned he had quite lost his masterfulness. His old loud-mouthed certainty, his open-eyed, dare-devil, laughing carelessness were no more. In old times Lazun Palafox had thought no man his master, and, potentially at least, every woman his mistress. He had held himself as ready to establish his belief upon the forehead of the first as upon the lips of the second.

Yet he had been as swift with saluting hand to pass the time of day to the laird or to bow before the lady (with a grace that was never learned in Galloway) as to try a bout with the local champion at harvest time, or kiss the laughing dimpled chin of

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the prettiest dairymaid on Cairn Edward fair-day.

His glass clattered ever the loudest on the ale-house table. His voice carried the farthest in the famous Smugglers' Chorus—

'And we will go a-Biscaying, Before the break of day!'

Miquelon in Biscay, once Spanish, now in French territory, was one of the last strongholds of England in the south, and had a period of Free trading fame, which lay between the fall of the Isle of Man trade and the rise of Cancale and the Breton Archipelago.

'I have asked you to the old place,' Lazun began to give Barbara time to recover herself. He spoke deferentially and quietly. 'Strange, is it not, that only in Galloway should folk have the cult of caves? Yet what dwelling-places so safe and so comfortable as these by Nature provided.'

'You did not send for me to the landward entrance of the Dulse Cave to tell me that, Lazun Palafox!' Barbara interrupted. 'Speak out. It is because of the girl that you want me?'

'Yes,' said Lazun, as softly as before; 'it is because of the girl. She is of the tribe, being our own Manuela's daughter—our granddaughter—yours and mine. I took her from her mother's breast when she lay dying. Was she not your daughter, Barbara Palafox? As for the man, he was nothing worth. I slew him.'

Under the mild yellow light of the lantern, shining out of the darkness, Barbara's face was waxen.

'Our daughter dead?' she repeated after him, mechanically.

'Our daughter,' Lazun corroborated gravely. 'I took her to unite the two branches of the tribe.'

'And were they united?' said Barbara ironically;

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‘though the man is dead!’

‘United they are,’ Lazun continued, ‘in the person of Zipporah Katti, who shall one day be great in the country of the Palafoxes, from Zaragoza to Pampeluna!’

‘She shall abide with me,’ said Barbara, rising fiercely. ‘I had enough of giving up children to heal quarrels among the horse-clippers of Spain.’

Lazun did not alter his position. No trace of anger passed over his tranquil face, grave even to austerity.

‘A Palafox,’ he said, ‘one like our maid, a queen among the name, should have the wisdom of all peoples, including her own. I have given her the best that can be got in France.’

‘And now,’ said Barbara, speaking decisively, ‘it is my turn. I shall teach her what it is to be an honest woman in Scotland.’

‘An honest woman is an honest woman everywhere,’ said Lazun, as though he were quoting a proverb.

‘As to that you should know,’ commented Barbara bitterly. ‘But what of the man Raif Palafox, who killed the Cumberland Free-trader in Red Haven Howe?’

The grim features of Lazun relaxed. He smiled like one who has found a jest to his liking.

‘From what I hear Roaring Anthony will take a deal of such killing,’ he said. ‘If he forswears cheating and acts honestly, he may live long, ‘If not, NOT,’ as we tell our Kings in Aragon when they are crowned.’

‘It was no ways the fault of Raif Palafox that he is alive this day,’ said Barbara, ‘I will have none of this knife-work in my parish, I told you so long ago.’

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‘And?’ queried Lazun, curtly.

‘You have certainly kept your word—in that!’

Lazun bowed his head with a certain dignity of reproach.

‘I had thought,’ he said, ‘that forty years was long enough to forgive in.’

‘Aye, long enough, Lazun,’ said Barbara, with something altered in her voice which made the chief eye her closely (at home he would have suspected a knife, but then Barbara was different).

‘Long enough and over long,’ Barbara repeated, more gently, ‘to cherish ill feelings. We are old people, Lazun, you and I, but now our child’s child must stay with me. She shall not marry a man like Raif Palafox!’

‘Indeed that she shall not,’ Lazun cried, with his first touch of fierceness. ‘It will be long before Raif Palafox touches land on Solway shore or sees the white houses of Cancale. But I will tell you one thing, Barbara, and it is a thing you should know without telling. Raif Palafox might be ten times a slayer of men. He might be, of all who sail out of Cancale, he roughest and the worst. Yet Zipporah Katti might travel in his company for years through the wilds and never once would his hand touch her. Zipporah Katti abode awhile with the Lees. She was with the Smiths, and yet in the nunnery she was not one half so safe as among these wild folk.

‘Why? I will tell you, Barbara. Because inside the convent walls the writ of Lazun Palafox does not run, while outside with Lee or Smith or Leyland, the wildest dared not meddle with the girl confided to their care by old Lazun Palafox of Cancale Beach!’

‘Then,’ said Barbara, ‘give her the same protection here in my house. Bid your folk respect her and

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me—as is their duty and yours. She has much to learn that only I, your wife, can teach her. And if, when she is twenty-one, the Palafox blood be the stronger, then she can choose. But at present, because of all that was—and all that might have been, leave the girl alone. It is her will. She studies to be quiet!’

Lazun pondered a while. It was evidently a hard thing for him to make up his mind to give up the girl.

‘Then we must think of something else,’ he said at last. ‘The girl Zipporah Katti ought to have succeeded me. I have trained her for that—and she prefers to do needlework in the shade of an orchard! She might have made even the Solway trade what it was of old. With such a girl in command, where is the young fellow, from the ‘bankers’ of Miquelon to the farm lads of the Abbey and the fishers of Garlieston, who would not have burnished gun and hoisted sail for her sake?’

‘She is better in the Manse with me, Lazun Palafox, and you know it,’ said the old woman, throwing back her hood suddenly and showing her white hair.

Lazun looked astonished, but Barbara’s speech swept on.

‘See, I am an old woman,’ she said, ‘and, God forgive me, I came here with the folly of a girl in my heart. Nothing seemed changed. But now— there is question of our granddaughter, and I would prove myself fitted to bring up the young. Lazun,’ (continued she more appealingly), ‘give Zipporah to me to keep, and give her willingly. You are as of old—your eye clear, your hair crisp and hardly touched with grey. Your bodily strength not abated. You are

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feared wherever your name is spoken. But I am old, and in the years that remain to me I would have a daughter—one, one only. You have many children — I only this one!’

‘You shall have her,’ said Lazun. ‘I but wished to keep her brave and strong—so that she might rule men!’

Barbara rose to her full height, grasping her staff. She overtopped her husband by full three inches, and it was with mingled pity and contempt that she looked down upon him.

‘You wished her brave and strong—that she might rule men,’ she cried, ‘and was not I both brave and strong, yet without a thought you cast me aside for the little Eza whom I could have broken between finger and thumb! But did that make any difference? You left me for a flutter of dusky eyelids and a mouth that pouted red. You stamped out my life with your heel—my life when it was yet young. You took my child from me. I saw her no more, and now that she has come back—this new Zipporah is mine— mine—mine—all I have ever asked of you, Lazun— aye, or ever shall ask!’

Lazun Palafox thrust out his hand with a gesture of renunciation.

‘So be it,’ he said, ‘she is yours. Only at the age of which we spoke, the girl shall have the liberty of choice. If the black blood of Egypt speaks within her—let it speak.’

‘It will not speak,’ said Barbara.

‘That,’ answered Lazun, bowing over the old woman’s hand, without touching it, ‘is your affair!’

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

BABBY'S FIGHT AGAINST THE BLACK BLOOD

The next four years passed quickly over the Manse of Kirkpatrick-Maxwellton, and in the procession of the seasons many things went by also. Others wholly new arrived.

The minister grew visibly older. Every spring saw him a little more bent. Also his white hair was longer, and at times, when he resisted too long the commands of Barbara, fell almost upon his shoulders.

On occasions when the need grew more pressing, and Septimus Laird became openly rebellious, Barbara would write to the head of the school where, chiefly by means of cricket and hockey, Zipporah Katti Palafox, a Spanish young lady of a hundred descents, was developing into a tall, shapely girl, more Scottish than the Scots, even to wearing about her neck a little St. Andrew's cross on a blue ground as a brooch, as a sign and symbol of the High Presbytery which Septimus Laird had instilled into her.

Mostly Barbara Simpson wrote the letter herself, but when the head of the school required further confirmation, Barbara stood over the minister till he answered the letter himself.

'If ye dinna send for the lassie, e'en settle your accounts wi' me, and let me be gaun!' she would say doggedly.

'That,' the Doctor would answer mildly, 'is what is called in the newspapers an ultimatum.'

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And he sighed as he thought how he would have to rub up his French and German to keep pace with Zipporah Katti, and how Paul Wester really spent too much time botanizing and playing tennis when she was at home.

But he yielded, because just at that time he had graver things to think about, and he dared not run the risk of adding to his troubles by inciting internecine warfare with Barbara. So she had her way, and the head of the school thought it was by no manner of means a good way. It disturbed her registers and made quite a number of homesick girls green with envy.

Yet Zipporah Katti was not homesick. Indeed she was always surprised to find the Manse of Kirkpatrick-Maxwellton on the same place. It was a wonderful thing to her to see the same quiet Auchen Water running by, the same millwheel turning across the narrow valley, to hear the souging roar of the same millstream as it fell into the same old pool—she who had always (save at the convent) moved upon wheels or glided among the Islands of Morbihan in one of Lazun's fast-sailing boats. But all the more because of these things, Zipporah Katti found great comfort in the Manse. For the first time in life she knew how good a thing is a safe anchorage.

Paul Wester came sometimes—his uncle thought too often, when Zipporah Katti was at home. They wandered the woods together if it were flower time, and snowballed each other briskly in winter. They played golf, and Paul manoeuvred to let Zipporah win, till she found him out, whereupon he set about to deceive her as to the nature of golfing handicaps, declaring that four strokes a hole was the regular

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thing and approved by the 'Royal and Ancient' as making the best game.

Even so, there were difficulties. But Zipporah Katti made matters straight when they went riding. For she could ride barebacked the wildest colt in Quentain Montgomery's stables over at the Inch, while Paul, envious but impotent, had to content himself with Glenkens, now old and slow. It was like 'riding on the rigging of a pigsty,' as Zipporah Katti did not fail to remind him.

At the Inch, Zipporah was often to be found—for which Barbara rebuked her.

It was unseemly, she declared, that a daughter of the Manse—if one might speak so of an unmarried minister—would back, ride, and even break horses, jump fences of which that daft Montgomery of the Inch himself fought shy. She would assuredly be brought home one day with broken bones, and then who would keep the minister in good temper or compel him by wheedling, an art unknown to Barbara, to get his hair cut.

These things Zipporah Katti was to remember. The Doctor had made several attempts to soften the girl's doubtfully Christian names by calling her Catherine! But it was always 'Zip' or 'Katti' that carried the day. They seemed somehow infinitely more appropriate. Besides, at school, among an infinity of Maries and Jeannies, to be called Zipporah Katti was a distinction, and after a while no light one. The girls asked her if she carried a Spanish knife in her stocking, and so Zipporah got a blunt but highly polished weapon on purpose.

It was supposed to be on account of this 'curst Malayan crise,' that Zipporah was treated by the teaching staff with marked deference, and never

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once went up for punishment.

'They know better,' whispered the girls, and in the dusk of twilight clustered about her begging for tales and a sight of the renowned dagger which Don Ramon of her name had worn at the famous siege of Saragossa.

'It doesn't seem to cut much,' said a girl from Glasgow whose father owned a yacht.

Zipporah snatched it instantly and lifted it high in her right hand.

'It is not for cutting, but for plunging— like that!'

And she made the gesture with such dramatic ferocity that the Glasgow girl promptly fainted, while the Seniors of St. Bees thrilled to their marrows, and respected Zipporah Katti more than ever— especially the Glasgow girl, who asked her for a cruise round Pladda and the Kyles next Easter holidays— and please to bring her knife with her!

The career of Paul Wester and the anxiety that weighed on Doctor Septimus require separate treatment.

These present informations are merely to show, as evidence of good faith, how far Zipporah Katti had travelled since the day of Orraland Fair, when she aided and abetted various picturesque horse-copers to deceive Her Majesty's lieges as to the quality of the animals they bought.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

A BLEAK WORLD

‘Pour forth Thy rich grace upon the lad,’ this was what the lips of Septimus Laird, the old minister of Kirkpatrick-Maxwellton, were saying as bestriding Glenkens, his hardly less ancient pony, he went about the business of his calling. The winds of March blew the still abundant white locks shaggily about his ears, and though his eyes wandered over the bleak landscape of the Galloway moors, his vision turned inward and he saw only ‘the lad concerning whom he spake, as a man speaks with his Maker.’

Paul Wester was his own sister’s son, and for the sake of that sister and her son, the minister of Kirkpatrick-Maxwellton had never married. His nephew bore his father’s name, and Septimus Laird was afraid with a great fear lest the boy should turn out like him.

‘Four-and-forty years have I dwelt in this little parish—a full generation and more. Here have I abode, going in and out among my people, my feet beating the roads and pathways till I know the very tufts of grass on the banks, the weeds and the flowers, so that I can say ‘Good-day, little one! You were not here last year.’ But the lad—I have watched him as I once watched over his mother. For his sake I have kept the wicked at bay.’ (He meant Paul’s father, wicked par excellence according to his standards.) ‘I have taught and reared him, sent him to the best schools, and now on this day he will

return to me for the first time after his youthful adventure.

I sent him to the great and wicked city, seated, as my shortness of breathing begins to remind me, upon many hills, where aforetime I have only gone at the solemn times of General Assembly. I sent him there because I could not counter him in all things. First, he would only be a soldier, for the sake of the clattering spurs and the red coat—as if those who wear such had not been the bane of our poor folk of the Covenant on these same moors and mosshags about Kirkpatrick-Maxwellton!

Then he desired to be a sailor. He must needs see strange lands. And to this, though my old heart was wrung, I had well-nigh consented. But circumstances were too hard for both of us. They changed the age for those desiring to go forth upon the great waters in the ships of Her Majesty. So curiously wrought are we that this in turn grieved me, for Paul would have made an excellent sailor. Did he not navigate the Loch of Ken from end to end in a leaky boat, landing to bail her out at every half-mile, and discovering more islands than are to be found on the six-inch survey map which hangs in the factor's room at Kenmuir?

'But, after all the care of his upbringing, and my own refusal of larger spheres of usefulness in the hope that his heart might be prepared to succeed me in this little parish—he has left the kirk to one side and must needs write upon a newspaper—a paper of this world, where the name of the Most High is but little glorified—so far that is, as I have seen—he that might have sounded the trumpet and called up the faithful in the day of battle.'

So Septimus Laird communed with himself as he

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bored his way forward in the face of the keen 'norther' that whipped a frosty apple-red into his cheeks, and at times laid, as it were, a bar of cold iron across his brow.

Septimus Laird had some time to wait at the Great House whither he was going. He was not expecting his nephew for several hours yet. He would come by the little blue wagonette lined with mud-splashed yellow, which once every day made the journey to the junction at Cairn Edward. This easy jogging vehicle connected the silent seawashed hamlet of Orraland with the busy outer world of stations and railway porters. Its driver was looked upon as a travelled man, for did he not hear daily the persistent shouting of 'All Change Here! For Edinburgh, Glasgow, Carlisle, and the South! A-a-all Change Here!'

The minister hardly allowed his eyes to wander as he crossed the stunted grey grass and tufty bent whipped by the wind. For, though a keen observer of whatever was new, Septimus Laird, D.D., was this day deep in his own meditations. He would, indeed, have remarked anything which he had not seen before—an extra molehill by the wayside, the red leaf of a docken permanently upturned by the wind, a frozen clump of moss trampled flat by a careless foot. But as it happened he saw none of these things. Therefore by consequence there was none of them to see.

Large and far spread the still wintry plain, the sea black with a white fringe, the purple March woods making a continuous fence to landward, huge and vague, and only some patches of snow still hiding raggedly away in the shelter of the dyke-backs.

In addition to his anxiety about his nephew, the

heart of the old minister was heavy within him. He was on the point of losing one of his oldest friends. The Great House of Kirkpatrick Maxwell was to be sold to the highest bidder. There were notices, from which his eyes turned instinctively away, scattered here and there along the interminable walls—real walls of stone and lime, not mere dykes, but sound masonry such as would have piled up an infinity of houses. At the head of every 'bill' two lions rampant ramped blackly, because in the office of the Cairn Edward Advertiser the national lion with very thick legs and a blurred head was used for every announcement which touched upon the law, from a royal proclamation to a Burns dinner or a farm sale about term-time.

The minister loved the long over-arching woods in which the paths lost and found themselves again.

He had longed for the hearty welcome which awaited him at the Great House. He had looked forward to the cosy chair by the fireside in which he had talked and drowsed twice a week after dinner with 'Auld Leddy Maxwell.' Often these two fell silent by mere dint of talking about the same things—the grandchildren of the House of Maxwell, Francis and Frances, otherwise Frank and Fanny, the children of the Auld Leddy's only son, whose taste for the turf and Monte Carlo was that day culminating in the sale of the estate. Ah, the fact was there, but did not bear speaking about. The lands had been in the hands of the Maxwells ever since that enterprising brood came shouldering into Galloway—along with the Bruces, the Wallaces, and other outlanders—some little time before the signing of the Ragman's Roll, when Edward Longshanks was trying to adapt his overlordship to a country that has never owned

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any overlord except John Knox.

The Maxwells of Maxwellton had always stuck fast to the Kirk of Scotland as by law established. Ill-paid and inconsequent Episcopalian missionaries might come and go. Other denominations might, when it seemed good to them, hold meetings in freely lent schoolhouses within the parish bounds. But Septimus Laird ruled alone. He had been installed under a shower of clods in the good old times of patronage, but had long since fought his way into the hearts of his people by the quiet loveliness of his life and the certainty of his gentleness in counsel and reproof.

Even the few Cameronian stalwarts dwelling in the parish would sometimes step over and 'give him a hearing.' And what that means in Galloway can only be known by those who have been brought up there upon the 'pure milk of the Covenant word' and in the bosom of a sect so exclusive that it speaks of itself humbly and currently as 'The Chosen.'

Till now there had been but two powers in the parish, the 'Auld Leddy' and the minister, and after this day the Doctor must reign alone.

So Dr. Laird's heart was heavy. He was conscious of the notices of sale even without looking and when they were out of sight. To avoid the plastered insults on the main gateway he turned up a lane with a door at the head of it. Getting off his pony his shaking hand explored his pockets for the key, which many years had worn and polished in his pocket. The lock turned easily and the minister with a deep sigh found himself within the policies. It might be for the last time. It was impossible to hope that the new owner of all Maxwellton and Orraland would be content with the simple Presbyterian

service of the parish kirk.

Never more would he, Septimus Laird, urge Glenkens along that avenue to visit his parishioners. Doubtless they would be Episcopalians, perhaps even Catholics. The old metrical psalms in the rhythm of Francis Roos would be unknown to them. He would baptize no more of the children born of the Great House. No more would he teach them their Catechism—a Catechism worth the learning. No more would the child's moral instruction begin sonorously with the information that 'Man's Chief End is to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever.' The unfortunate must woodenly declare themselves to be merely 'N. or M. as the case might be.' Infant lips in Maxwellton nurseries would never again follow the rolling harmony which declares that 'God is a spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable.' Not again would he help the Seniors of that Great House over the stern granitic boulders of Effectual Calling, by suggested words and murmured explanations.

Episcopalians at the least—perhaps Catholics! And Septimus Laird saw the old chapel within the grounds whither he made a fortnightly pilgrimage to preach the pure Presbyterian Word to masters and servants alike (as for generations his predecessors had done before him), turned into a confessional or reeking with incense.

The brave old man could hardly keep back his tears.

And there before him, on the steps of the mansion was a little covey of people—the 'Auld Leddy' moving restlessly about as if already dispossessed, the children clinging to her dress and squabbling who should have the most of her attention. Behind, a servant or two grown grey in the service of the

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house, showed up rather more pale and anxious than the Lady Maxwell herself. For they had been well treated, even by rough-riding, card-playing Sir Andrew, whose attempts to break the bank at Monte Carlo had brought about the present severance of old ties—of which the lion-crowned sale posters on the lodge gates were the outward and visible symbols.

Alertly enough the minister waved his hand and the dowager Lady of Maxwellton responded bravely. She had not eaten any lunch that day, because of the fear that was upon her. Accordingly Frank and Fanny had profited thereby, taking extraordinary liberties as to helping themselves and kicking each other under the table in a manner which, on ordinary occasions, would have brought about their prompt dismissal upstairs in disgrace. But they had been told nothing, and except that discipline was somehow inexplicably relaxed they knew nothing. Of all which things, like healthy little animals, they took the fullest advantage.

Now, however, they became a little awed. The silent servants in fear for their places—their grandmother, like Sister Anne in the story, looking nervously up the avenue for the telegram which somehow meant so much to everyone, even the unwonted solemnity on the face of the minister, and the fact, ascertained by inspection, that he had no 'goodies' in his tail-pockets, quieted both Francis and Frances into an unwonted sobriety.

'Have you any news?' the Auld Leddy called out as he dismounted. 'If it is sold in lots, I have some hopes of keeping Torr House and the Torr Woods. But I should have looked to that matter sooner. Andrew should never have been allowed to play

ducks and drakes with that—it was my dowry. Ah, I see that you have no news.'

The minister shook his head sadly.

In a hurried voice the old lady explained.

'You see, Doctor, 'tis no use my hoping to keep the Great House or the park. But there are half-a-dozen of my friends who could each have taken a portion. Some day a Maxwell might reunite them. Meanwhile we had arranged not to bid against each other. Each would have had what he wanted, and for me there would have been Torr House and the woods behind. But Quentain Montgomery of Inch promised to bring the news, and he has not come. I have a presentiment that we Maxwells have lost our last hold on the old place.'

The children clutched their grandmother tighter, and little Fanny with a woman's sense of tears imminent (though she could not see them in her grandmother's eyes), whispered 'Don't cry, gran dear. Frank shall fight for you, and I—will dress my own dolls!'

Then at that moment, far down the avenue there appeared a dot, which in a minute or two elongated itself into a mark of exclamation—in fact, it was Paul Wester, journalist, riding a borrowed bicycle with his head bowed well-nigh to the handle bar.

He saw his uncle, Doctor Septimus Laird, and waved a buff envelope.

'It is sold,' he cried triumphantly, 'and well sold—I have just had a wire from the office. Johnstone sent it. The estate brought nearly twice the upset price!'

He was beaming all over, thinking himself the bearer of good news. But the old lady sat herself down on the worn steps which led to the great door

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and, heedless of the servants, heedless of all, she wept her fill, the children clinging helplessly about her.

‘Poor lambs,’ she sobbed, ‘so this is the end of an old song—Maxwells ye are and for the matter of that twice born Maxwells. But from this hour ye are no more Maxwells of Maxwellton!’

Even the good minister knew not what to say. The sorrow was beyond words.

But as they sat thus, desolate on the chill steps, a bright star rose eastward away above the trees.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE WRATH OF JOHNSTONE

'Paul Wester, journalist!' Thus it was that his uncle referred to him—a little irony in his tone. For, think of it, the lad might have been a minister of the Word. He might have followed any recognized profession, and Dr. Septimus still possessed (he thought) enough of academic credit to be of assistance to him on his way.

But a journalist! Not that he disdained the glory of type. Dr. Septimus had himself from time to time corrected the imperfect knowledge of some leader-writer on subjects touching Ecclesiastical procedure, canon law, and such like. But curiously enough, after the second letter, the editor of the Thistle Crown, his favourite daily paper, had always inserted the wholly unnecessary (and almost insulting) phrase, 'This correspondence is now closed.'

Perhaps on this account, the minister kept even in old age a sharp tooth against the fourth estate. Yet Paul it was who brought the first news of the sale of Maxwellton to the lady of these ancient domains.

It was small wonder that she sat down on the top step of the high Vanbrugh double staircase and wept bitterly.

Whither should she betake herself? Where could she bring up the children—Maxwells of Maxwellton no more? She knew that most of the purchase price must go to pay her son's debts. But Paul Wester had

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brought no news as to the exact price, nor yet as to the name of the buyer.

She took the disinherited heir by the hand.

'Yonder, Francis,' she said, making the little boy turn his head, 'see the Torr woods. Your great-great-grandfather rode through them on his way to Bothwell Brig. And down there among the oaks is Torr Dower House where he hid in a tree when the blue flag of the Covenant was put down! I had hoped to keep that, for you and your sister!'

'I shall work and buy it back!' said the boy, stamping his foot with childish determination. Paul Wester turned and looked at him with a wistful sort of pity. He had begun to understand how hard it is to earn money for yourself when you have had what you want for the asking all your life.

Then he, too, looked at the fields and over the fields at the woods. There were no swallows yet. In the desolation of the land, brown earth and grey sod alternating with frostbitten pasture and unturned furrow, a multitude of crows (with of course a magpie or two in their train), pulled and pecked sadly, waiting for the belated ploughshare and the opening of the earth. It was hard for them also to win their daily bread. Mostly they were aged or damaged, leaden-winged, bristly as to beak, and denuded as to scalp— otherwise they would have been down at the sandy delta of the Auchen Water, fighting for their daily portion. But there on the tidal flats victory is achieved with beak-stroke and pinion-beat, and many of them had already lost one eye. They knew well what would happen if, in an unequal fray, they were to endanger the other.

From above there came homelier sounds. In a narrow window looking upon the great Vanbrugh

porch, two pigeons were playing at 'King of the Castle,' coo-rooing and hustling each other schoolboy-wise till the smaller, more active and more determined, thrust down his comrade from the place of pride.

Only on the horizon all about, the purple woods, dusted with snow (a slight shower from the east) watched motionless and austere the tragedy of events.

Outside the great house they waited, blank and hopeless, for further news. Paul especially grew uneasy. His restless temper did not bear well the atmosphere of strain. He wished he were in the orchard with Zipporah Katti, or if that were impossible, taking a dive into the deep water which, for some unknown reason, lurks and sulks about Castle Point and the Boreland Heughs over by Portowarren. But he did not see how, with decency, he could get away. After all he was there to help. He could, however, ride again to Cairn Edward and wire Johnstone at the office. Johnstone would certainly swear, but he might tell him, if he prepaid the reply, what they all wanted to know—the name of the purchaser of Maxwellton.

He communicated his desire to his uncle, who gave permission with a nod, keeping his eyes still on the sobbing old woman who had been his friend and parochial helper any time these thirty years

Paul Wester went down the avenue with his handle bars lowered and the cyclist's racing stoop to his shoulders. He knew that he must get in his wire quickly if he were to catch his man before he cleared out of the office.

He smiled as he thought of Johnstone's temper. Not that that mattered greatly, for Johnstone was a

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wild Annandaler of the Carlyle strain—who, in conversation at least, did not mean the half of what he said.

Paul scribbled out the message as he stood at the counter of the new post office in Cairn Edward, talking to the pretty junior clerk as he did so. She had reddish hair, very different from Zipporah, and was proud of having passed her 'qualifying exam' — the details of which ordeal she exposed to Paul, who saw her for the first time. She took his 'wire' with a pleasant smile! Paul had nice eyes!

'Johnstone, Thistle, Edinburgh. 'Was Maxwellton Estate sold entire? Who is purchaser? Wester. Reply Paid.'

And then he went across the road to try to persuade Jim Paterson (of the Apothecaries' Hall) to trust him with a certain very deadly poison used for photographic purposes. In the city he could have bought it by the pound from the dealers, but down in the country they are more careful.

There was a good deal of signing and formality before he got what he wanted—even though Jim and he had celebrated many national festivals together, by manufacturing fireworks and setting them off up the chimney of his uncle's house.

Still he got the stuff which turns negatives to the loveliest sepia, and on his return to the post office the message from Johnstone was waiting for him. He did not even stop to read it, but bestrode his bicycle and took down the shoreward road like a hunted hare.

He would let his uncle have the first glimpse. Besides, compared with the delights of a certain corner of the orchard, what mattered the sale of a great estate about which many anxieties and hopes

gathered. Only the old lady and his uncle were really sorry—at least for long. He understood that. For one thing, Francis and he could have been very happy, as they were the day before, behind the coach-house with a small rook rifle and an old box for a target, while his sister had gathered flowers on the slopes behind

But all were alike eager now, and it was the Lady of Maxwellton herself who came down the wide steps and met him at the foot. His uncle kept on one side a little behind, and the butler was on the other, both watchful of her.

She held out her hands with a kind of pitiful gesture.

But when it came to opening the buff envelope her hands trembled so that she had to give the message to his uncle, who in his turn had come away without his glasses.

So after all it was Paul Wester who read out the telegram.

‘Wester, Restante, Cairn Edward.

‘Name of purchaser not divulged at sale. Have seen lawyer since. Mademoiselle Catherine Palafox, Cancale, France. End up. Johnstone.’

The three last words meant that Johnstone had had enough of Paul Wester for that day.

All were astonished—Paul thinking in a dazed way about how mad Johnstone must be.

‘A Frenchwoman!’ said the ex-lady of Maxwell-ton in a despairing tone.

‘A Papist!’ groaned the Doctor.

But Paul clapped his hands and danced before them like one mad.

‘I know,’ he cried, waving the greyish-pink sheet. ‘It is her grandfather who has bought the estate! It is

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our own Zipporah Katti!’

And indeed all there present—lady, uncle, and servants—thought Paul Wester crazy. But they soon found there was method in his madness.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

CARRIAGE WHEELS ON THE GRAVEL

And all the while, wondering why Paul was so late, conjuring vague terrors of journeying, or solacing herself with the idea of sudden enterprises of work which might have detained him, Zipporah Katti sat with her white seam and heaped multitudinous work-basket by the window overlooking the orchard wall and the naked fruit-trees, watching a certain bend of the Manse avenue round which Paul must appear.

In the kitchen Barbara was busy with her work. Already she was setting out in order the 'farles' of northern oat-cake, thin and crisp but not hard, with a bloom on them that comes from being rubbed among the meal on the bakeboard, then after a deft flick of sweeping goose-wing, nothing is left save a fine powder like that on the cheek of beauty at a ball.

The two women were content—each after her fashion. Zipporah divided her attention between the open window and the astonishing volume of Michelet's France which describes the September massacres.

But one had an ear for tinkle of Paul's cycle bell, and the other for the slowing clitter-clatter of the shod feet of the little horse.

Both were fated to be disappointed. What they heard was quite other—first something on the road towards Cairn Edward, that fell dully on the ear like the rumble of distant thunder, but caused Barbara

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to look up hastily as the sound ceased.

'What can Carrier Gavin want with us this day? We have ordered nothing from the town.'

But the route-trained ear of Zipporah Katti interpreted more truly.

'It is a carriage,' she said, 'and Paul is with it. He has got off at the avenue-end to open the white gate.'

But before either of the women had time to change their positions, they heard the feet of horses splashing among the thick-strewn gravel at the Manse front door, and the heavy grind of wheels which are not touching solid earth. Then the snick of the brake.

'My lady!' exclaimed Barbara in affright, 'and me with my hands like this, and an old apron on me. Run, child! You at least are snod. Open the door to them!'

And so it happened that the new owner of Maxwell-ton, all unsuspecting, opened the door to the old. On the seat facing my lady and the minister sat the two children, Francis and Frances, making what they could in the way of secret fun out of a tedious journey —though circumspectly, for they were not a little awed by the countenance of their grandmother. They kept grave faces while under the rug they nipped and scuffled. Such consideration was the index of their sorrow. They respected the feelings of others. They knew that their grandmother was too busy with other matters to reprove them, and as to the minister, in many and various repetitions of the Catechism 'for those of weaker capacity,' they had learned to a hair's-breadth the range of his short-sighted vision.

Remained only Paul Wester. But then he rode a bicycle and therefore could be trusted. All children

instinctively trust those who drive the twinkling wheel. Such do not tell tales, in school or out of it.

Zipporah Katti, a tall slender figure in roughish Spanish silk, the dim gold colour of rain-blanchèd barley-fields, stood a little uncertainly, holding the door to let the great lady pass.

But Lady Maxwell stayed to regard her with eyes that for the first time seemed unkindly. She took in the girl's bearing, innocently proud, her dusky beauty, the fleece of hair that swept stormily about her head in blue-black swirls to the knot low in her neck.

'So,' she said, clenching her hands as something rose in her throat as if to choke her, 'you are the supplanter.'

'I beg your pardon!' said Zipporah Katti, with convent politeness, thinking that she had misheard.

'My lady,' the minister put in, gently, 'pray remember the promise you made if I should bring you to see my girl.'

His voice strengthened with the pronoun possessive and there was gratitude not only in the girl's heart but in Paul's. Lady Maxwell checked herself.

'I thought,' she said, 'that this was some poor girl brought hither to be bred up on your charity. It seems you have been harbouring rich angels unawares, Doctor! But I do think you might have let me into the secret!'

The Doctor had begun to deny all knowledge of Zipporah Katti's fortune, when another figure, taller and more majestic, appeared at the end of the kitchen passage, and with her first words showed herself fully abreast of the situations, and indeed of all possible situations.

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'Your ladyship is misinformed,' enunciated Barbara, keeping the centre of the stage and towering above them all, her voice calm and strong, even dominating; 'let me tell you, if you do not know, that Zipporah Katti Palafox is the legitimate heiress of one of the oldest families in Spain—and in time she will succeed to the estate of her grandfather, who is one of the richest men in Brittany.'

'Is Cancale in Brittany?' interrupted Lady Maxwell bitterly, the quiver of anger not yet gone out of her voice.

'Yes, Cancale is in Brittany—certainly!' said Barbara, 'and what of it, my lady?'

'Only that this girl is at this moment owner of the estates of Maxwells of Maxwellton—of Orraland, Chapelfield, Torr, and the hills as far as Ben Tudor—lands and heritages, mansions and dower-houses.'

'I presume,' said Barbara, dryly, 'that your lawyers have not given all these away for nothing. If Zipporah's grandfather has bought the estates (as he is well able to do), fear not but that the money shall be paid. You cannot expect both to have the money to pay your son's debts—and also keep the estates!'

It was not often that any one ventured to speak thus squarely and face to face with the Lady of Maxwellton. But with Zipporah Katti to protect, Barbara Simpson would not have feared even the Angel with the Raven Wing—He whom all Galloway has heard passing by in the twilight, and wondered, awe-stricken, where he was going to alight—on whose roof-tree, shadowing whose bed, prophesying whose open grave.

'So you, Barbara Simpson, are of those who think

to uproot all old ties with foreign money-bags?’

‘I do not advertise an article for sale, pocket good guineas paid on the nail, and then expect to keep the article fairly sold!’

‘You are brutal, Barbara,’ said the Doctor, ‘go to your kitchen!’

‘If I go to the kitchen now, I shall take Zipporah Katti with me, and it will be the last time you will be troubled with either of us. Perhaps it will be better for all—especially for these little ones (she pointed to Frank and Fanny standing open-mouthed gazing up at her) if I do not go. Neither this maid nor I are kitchen maids!’

‘But you have supplanted the poor darlings,’ cried the old lady, clutching the children to her side, ‘you and your runagates!’

Barbara smiled gently this time. Who, if not she, could understand the feeling of the dispossessed? However, she had but one chicken to defend, the daughter of her daughter, and not for all the Maxwells that lived, from Rob the Fisherman at his nets in the bay to the Lord-Lieutenant himself, should she yield one inch of the rights which were Zipporah’s.

There was something so threatening and uncompromising about the attitude of old Barbara that even the minister found himself astonished out of measure.

‘Barbara, you forget yourself,’ he murmured, but without conviction.

‘On the contrary, Doctor, I remember myself—I have been somewhat too long in beginning, that is all!’

But the little brown hand of Zipporah fluttered down upon Barbara’s arm. Then came the other,

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anxiously clasping the first, and compelled her to look down.

'Babby,' she whispered, 'don't be angry. No one would wrong me. I can take care of myself. But what does the lady say about me—I do not understand?'

'No more do I—exactly,' said the old woman, greatly softened by the sound of the girl's voice and the clasp of her delicate hands, 'but I have my own thoughts. I can guess. There is but one Lazun Palafox, and I know that whatever fortune he has, he will give away in his lifetime, that there be no disputes after his death. I suppose this is a part.'

'A part!' cried the old lady, all at once fierce; 'it is our all and the heritage of these young ones there.'

'Give God thanks, then,' said Barbara, 'for the money is safe.'

'You tell me!' demanded Zipporah, turning suddenly upon Paul Wester, who was standing apart, looking gloomily into the rosy light of a gloaming that turned to flaming saffron the early blossoms of the gorse hedge overtopping the Manse wall.

Then somewhat shamefacedly Paul expounded the telegram which he had received from his friend Johnstone at the office of the Thistle Crown.

'It is not possible,' she said, when she had heard all. 'It must mean someone else! It really must!'

'There is no mistake,' said Barbara, as if ready to turn her anger upon the girl, 'yours is the only right. Besides, Lazun has promised. He would do right by you, the child of his old age.'

'Then she is,' Lady Maxwell began, but Barbara cut her short.

'This young lady is of a pedigree more ancient and as unstained as your own, my lady!'

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'I do not yet understand,' said Zipporah Katti wistfully, 'and oh, I hope it is not true!'

'Nor do I fully,' said Barbara, 'but we shall hear before long: be sure. My service to you, my lady. I shall keep this maid safe. She shall be as my own child, and if you desire any keepsake from the old lands of Maxwell...'

But this time it was the old lady whose indignation broke out.

'I would not accept a blade of grass, or room to lie down in the burying-place of our fathers!'

'Possibly!' Barbara answered dryly, 'not for yourself—that I do not expect. But you may change your mind when you have a little while to think over the needs of these little ones.'

And so saying she marched Zipporah Katti before her, out of the little Manse hall, on one side of which hung the minister's plaids and inverness cloaks, and on the other was a stand for the bicycle of Paul Wester which partially stopped the fairway.

Paul would have been glad to follow. He felt himself suddenly out of the picture. Yet it seemed to him that he would be no happier down in the kitchen, where he had been accustomed to sit so long and often on the corner of the table while Babby baked her diurnal supply of household bread.

He scented the good smell of the oat-cakes, but somehow he was sad because Johnstone's telegram of the afternoon had removed the new owner of Maxwellton to an enormous distance from a certain amber-complexioned, raven-haired girl he had companioned in the Dulse Cave.

CHAPTER TWENTY

THE UNCONSCIOUS LOVER

Paul Wester was a lover, at least unconsciously and in quaint boyish fashion. Yet so far as his work was concerned, he was frankly a man. Johnstone had cursed him the day before, but he took it all back when Paul, anxious for the good name of Zipporah Katti, sent a paragraph over the wires describing her as 'the heiress of that famous whaling commodore, who in these latter days has lived retired in his snug anchorage above the cliffs of Cancale, where he contents himself with surveying the comings and goings of his numerous 'Bank Fleet.'

Then Paul went on to enumerate the vessels that for Zipporah Palafox faced the Roaring Forties, or, going west by north rendezvoused at St. Pierre and Miquelon, and (in the days before the treaty) spread miles of drying cod along the waste French Shore of Newfoundland. These were the great days of 'the traffic,' but doubtless the present purchase of the Maxwellton and Orraland properties was due to the rich harvests of these stormy seas.

Paul's prose was a little bookish and literary (which in newspaper offices is the reddest of cardinal sins), but Johnstone saw that it was duly sub-edited down to the customary plain-song aridity which a daily journal expects (and even demands) from the younger members of its staff. However, Paul had the facts, and these he forwarded after consultations with Barbara and the new proprietrix

of Maxwellton and Orraland.

If it was written that Zipporah Katti must awake to find herself famous, Paul Wester did not mean that country-side stories of the Last Smuggler of Solway should be revived against Lazun's heiress. So, at newspaper rates, he sent his 'story' over the wires. If truth would help her, he must, at least, know the truth—if anything on the hither side of plain lying were requisite for her defence, that too he would see to himself. Besides which, he would get a 'scoop,' even if of a mild description.

He did not in the least grudge the night ride to Cairn Edward. He knew that he would still be in time for the first edition of the Thistle Crown. Only he must awake his friend the station telegraphist, and by using the name and fame of his paper, get his wire through. In this he succeeded, by way of the railway wires to Carlisle, and thence to that huge building where they neither slumber nor sleep, by day nor yet by night—especially not by night.

It was a strange holiday for Paul Wester. The juniors of the Thistle Crown were not encouraged to ask for many such. They were told when they could go and when they must return. But Paul, hardy, country-bred, broken to the hills and finding pleasure in tramping them in snow and frost, rain or fair, summer and winter, cared little for the season of the year.

But now he did it of set purpose—to avoid Barbara, still more to avoid Zipporah. Barbara, oppressed with her thoughts, and laying out like a careful surveyor the future of her granddaughter, gave little heed to the young man's moods.

But Zipporah Katti eyed him wistfully as he strode away over the hard surface of the hillside,

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from which the stiffness of the winter frosts had not yet wholly departed. She would gladly have gone also, as in the old days, and to this end made several attempts, but either she was called back by the voice of old Babby, anxious as to some fitting on—the Cairn Edward dressmaker having become almost a fixture in the house—or Paul would allege some tale or article to be written, as a reason why he must shut himself up or tramp the moorland alone in search of ideas. So Zipporah would watch him wistfully out of sight. Would the old times of the Dulse Cave, barefooted and tangle-tressed, never come back? Then he would have done anything she asked of him, but now—had she grown old or ugly? Or was there, in the great city where he passed his working time . . . Another?

She even made timid advances, and when she found herself repulsed—not harshly, for of that Paul Wester was incapable—but rather evaded with a deftness which caused her to wonder, Zipporah Katti, as they say in the cricket reports, ‘retired hurt.’ She went upstairs to get a handkerchief and shed into its folds almost the first tears she ever remembered to have felt wet upon her cheek, except of course those caused by girlish angers.

At last, as Paul continued to misbehave himself more and worse, she laid the case before Barbara, who at this time went about with her mouth so full of pins that only a kind controlling Providence prevented some of them from finding their way into the minister’s supper.

‘Mercy on us,’ Barbara cried, ‘what for are ye heeding the lad? Let him come to himself by himself, and then he will be at your tail like herd Sandy’s collie. He will be sulking because Lazun has bought

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the lands for you. When he has more sense he will maybe change his mind. But at his age sense is scarce and dear-bought. Let the lad be, I tell ye. It will do him no harm to tire his legs scouring the hills. I should not wonder if it would not run to poetry! I found some very unchristian looking writing under his pillow the other morning.'

And indeed it did 'run to poetry,' even as Barbara said, but of the harmless sort. Paul chose the 'dull mechanic exercise' of Englishing, after a free fashion of his own, some of the wonderful rustic ballads of a certain Paul Fort. He did not succeed very well, but at least in the search for words his mind was kept busy, and his soul had little time to brood upon his grievances. The following, which was not the worst, may give an idea of Paul Wester's output about this time.

'Dead—she is dead—to girlish laughter and love-making.

They laid her in the sod, in the sod at the break of day.

Sleeping alone they left her—all alone in the day-breaking.

Shallow the grave—but the sky above fathomless and grey.

Heartlessly they left her, the morn breaking bright and gay.

Carelessly they chaunted, 'We all must pass that way!

Come away! She is dead. Ours the laughter and love-making!

Ours the mirth that rings through the long June hay-making!'

So to the fields singing they went—as they sang every day.'

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Paul pleased himself with the far-off innocence of such imitations. He cherished the vague melancholy of the younger French poets as if it had been a discovery of his own. The sentiment suited his mood, for as he chaunted his rhythmical prose, he told himself that for him too there was an end of laughter and lovemaking.

The reason did not sound so poetical. Still, by dint of repetition, it afforded him certain agreeable twinges of nobility. He would have married Zipporah Katti willingly. Yes, he could have supported her gladly on the wages of a newspaper 'junior,' but no—he was certain that he could never marry the mistress of the Maxwellton estates. The thing was clearly impossible—ignoble indeed even to think about. And so he coned his little booklets, and added line to line with an easier heart. He thought he had settled the question—not knowing that, like Dr. Arnold, the lover of twenty-one wakes every morning to find every question an open one.

His uncle was a great comfort to him, especially after Barbara and Zipporah Katti had gone to Edinburgh to settle matters with the lawyers. The two men, old and young, were left alone in the wide echoing Manse with only Grace Easton, a willing village helper of ripe years, whom Babby had selected to care for meals and beds and such general 'redding up' as was possible during her own absence from the Manse. From floor to floor the understudy crept, a bowed, black-clad, self-effacing figure, always as silent as a snail on a wall.

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

THE RETURN OF YOUTH

The unaccustomed vacuity of the Maxwellton Manse drew uncle and nephew together with a closeness they had never known before. The old man even forsook his study. So that every day one could see him walking in the orchard and along the quiet country roads, his thin hand, palm downwards, resting on the younger's shoulder, or farther afield, they might be surprised stepping it gaily with linked arms, like comrades of the same promotion.

For this Paul curtailed his tramps up the sides of the awakening hills, and the Doctor, old bits of knowledge stirring within him, got out from dusty presses notebooks of forty years ago, and read the words which told how he too had wandered, unsettled and heart-troubled, seeking flowers for a herbarium which he had meant to present to a local museum.

But the museum had long become the manege of a cycle agency, and that in turn had lately been swept away to provide for the needs of extra 'siding' accommodation at Cairn Edward Station. So the Doctor, divesting himself of his clerical coat, tramped determinedly up to the garret and there directed the researches of Paul among the debris of papers, till he emerged with the very herbarium of the Doctor's youth. Outside it was of inconceivable dustiness, but having been well cased in stout pasteboard, the leaves of good old handmade paper were little damaged —the flowers, save for their

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faded colour, not at all.

'Ah!' cried the Doctor, as he came to the Grass of Parnassus. 'See, Paul, this knocks fifty years off my life. I found it one August day just where the backwater of Grennoch runs past the Duchrae into the Dee, on the little island above the bridge. Someone, a friend, was waiting for me on the bank while I waded out to the island. See the date is there—August the 25th, three o'clock of the afternoon! See, Paul, see!'

And Paul saw—perhaps a little more than the old man had intended. But Paul was in the mood to judge others by himself, and he waited with interest for what the faded double sheets might tell him of his uncle's past.

The Doctor forgot his nephew. He was altogether absorbed in the faded portraiture of what had once been living flowers, the blues paled to white, the rich moist reds grown brown, only certain bold dry yellows still standing out in gold unchangeable.

'That is a Creeping Gentian which Mill and I found one day in 1861, as we paused to rest on the height of the Hospitalet Col, where we could see down into the Valley of Andorra. When we flung ourselves down to breathe, the little gentian, bluer than the sky then, though pale grey now, was looking straight into our faces.'

'Mill,' said Paul Wester, 'what Mill?'

'John Stuart Mill, of course,' his uncle answered simply. 'I am not old enough to remember the father.'

'Lord,' cried Paul, forgetting himself, 'John Stuart Mill! And the Valley of Andorra! It is as if one were walking with the Gods on Mount Olympus!'

'No,' said his uncle, who, intent on his collection,

had not attended to Paul's words, 'it was in '62 that Mill went to Olympus. I have some leaves of laurel and chestnut, he sent me from there!'

Now among young Journalists the day of John Stuart Mill is past, or rather has not yet returned. But Paul resolved to read for himself more about this much wandering thinker, whom up to that moment he had chiefly known as the man whose housemaid had burned the manuscript of Carlyle's first volume of the French Revolution.

For a long time these and other old matters fermented in the learned head of Septimus Laird, D.D., and from out of the garret of the years there issued a new man. He threw open his clerical coat as if he would bare a youthful breast to the wind. He told with pride how he had rowed in a great race—the 'lights' against the 'heavies'—on Cairn Edward loch, the stakes ten pounds a side!

'I was a 'lightweight' in those days, Paul, though you would not think it to look as the 'study-chair man' I am now. Then I had curly hair and a waist—like—like you, my boy!'

They were now out on the open face of the hill. It was a warm day for May in Scotland, and the sun full on their backs loosened the tucks and kinks in the old man's muscles.

'I feel as if I could do it all over,' he said, and Paul, quick to take advantage of the situation, pulled out his lately acquired city cigarette case (yet unseen in the Manse), and before his uncle had time to grow old again, he found himself smoking with relish one of his nephew's cigarettes!

Then the minister of Kirkpatrick-Maxwellton cast his eye broad and far over his parish.

He sighed, as he took in the vivid landscape,

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purple-brown and palest green. 'A fair thing to see, Paul,' he began, 'the springing crops and the woods yonder, which (so they say) are to be our little Zipporah's. But forty years ago it was fairer still. The village, perhaps, has not altered much, but the parish has lost well-nigh a half of its population.

'How? I will tell you, Paul. They have gone, like you, to the cities, or farther still—across the seas. The farms have grown fewer as they grew larger. The land that once sufficed for ten families, now holds of humankind a couple of herds with their dogs.

'In my father's house—it was one of these—every son and daughter, every bairn that could toddle had a part in providing the daily bread.

'William, my brother, was early at the plough, and your mother, the youngest lass, hardly loosed from my step-mother's apron-strings, took the goose-flock to pasture on the green handbreadths hid up yonder among the heather.'

'And you, uncle?'

The old man gave a little laugh, thin and reminiscent.

'Ah, Paul,' he said, laying his hand gently on the lad's arm, 'you would need to have lived in old-world Scotland to understand that. I was the 'predestined.' I must 'wag my head in a pulpit' if the others went on dry bread for it. Not for any virtue in me or lack of it in the others (John would have made a better minister than I), only I was Septimus, the seventh. There were enough now of field workers at the Lairds' farm to sustain one college drone!'

'But you are learned, uncle—you were surely more clever in your youth than the others?'

'Any of the rest would have done the same. In Scotland it was just lack of opportunity that made

the difference. All could not go—no, nor even two — one only! So they did this great thing for me— for me who have done so little for them—save perhaps a little for your mother, and something more in these latter days for you, boy Paul. Yet not what I ought—far less than I ought. I have been wrapped up in my books, selfishly absorbed in writings which few will read and hardly any appreciate. But in the years that are left, God helping me, I may do better. I am old and you are young, but I think there is still a friendship possible between us—that is, if you will. On my side, I shall strive never to weary you, and when you go off to those of your age, I shall understand.'

'Tell me everything,' said Paul, delicate enough to begin the proffered friendship in the right way. 'I want to know all about how it was when you were as young as I. I have been sent to school and taught. I have come home for holidays and have had money spent on me. But I have never earned a penny till now. Most fellows nowadays are like me. Tell me—I do not understand about trying so hard to get a college education. At school I read lots, but learned just what I had to, and not a word more. There is a change somewhere. I know fellows in business who have had something of that keenness from the start—but it was to make money fast. What has gone wrong with us in Scotland, uncle? Why is it different?'

'A large question, lad,' said Dr. Septimus; 'mostly there is a generation or two behind boys brought up as you have been. I and my peers started from the plough-tail. What you are compelled to learn, you think nothing of—you grumble at, even! But when the hunger of learning is on a whole countryside—

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when for you the choice lies between the work of a farm-labourer and tapping the well-springs of knowledge for yourself with none to help, a kind of fury springs up in you. We of my time worked in the sweat of our brows all the summer for scanty wages, that we might live the five brief months of the winter college session, delving elbow-deep in knowledge, nosing into the marvels of the college library, following our instructors with rapid pencils and critical brains, debating among ourselves on abstruse matters, feverishly sitting examinations as feverishly prepared for—every lad of sixteen already a man because he was fighting for his future with his own hand—and a man is never a man till he does that!’

‘Yes,’ said Paul Wester slowly, ‘I am finding out that—though’ (he added) ‘it is a different kind of knowledge I am after!’

‘You are of the new generation, lad,’ said the elder man gently, ‘but if ‘experience teaches,’ you are indeed getting learning!’

‘You are forgetting the last word of your proverb, uncle,’ said Paul quickly. The old man laughed and patted him on the shoulder, not ill-pleased.

‘I fancy we are all a good deal that way some time or another—the earlier the better, perhaps. A young man who cannot be a fool upon occasion is too frostbitten for this warm world of men—and women.’

Septimus Laird paused a goodly moment before adding that last word. As soon as it was spoken he seemed to repent.

‘No,’ he went on, as if to himself, ‘it is not yet time for us to speak of that. Instead, I will tell you of my first school. It will amuse you, being so different from your own. You were brought up rather to

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despise board schools. Well, listen. These board schools are palaces, admirably staffed, excellently taught, with airy class-rooms and all the rest.

Then there were no palaces, no special classrooms, nothing but learning, limited and severe. But at least I was happy. The matter fell out well enough with me. It was a gay and hearty life at the school of Shilling Hill. The master, old Joseph Carnochan, was a 'far-out friend' of my father's—which means merely a kinship to be counted by female experts of the highest order—but a connection to be held sacred all the same.

The school convened itself 'but' the master's own house—that is, in the kitchen. The 'ben' or inner room was sacred. It was where the master kept his books, his parochial and kirk session registers, and incidentally, where he slept. Also, it had a boarded floor.

The kitchen schoolroom was spacious of its kind. Blue-stone flags worn smooth by many feet surrounded an immense fireplace, where pots swung and bubbled all day long. Generally there were three of these. In the largest, meant for pigs and piglings, were many kinds of chopped vegetables, turnips cut into solid squares and many whole potatoes. These last were highly popular, and when the master dealt out Latin to his favourite pupils with his back turned, a three-pronged fork of iron, even a stray harrow tooth, became a precious possession. One urchin lifted the lid with his cap so that it would descend again without noise. The fork or harrow tooth was jabbed into the steam two or three times, and the spoil divided.'

Here the minister chuckled, reminiscent and unrepentant.

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'No,' he continued, as if he anticipated Paul's objection, 'it was not exactly stealing, or at least we did not think so. You see, every bairn, male and female after their kind, had to bring a couple of peats for that fire. We did not mind the peats. It was the carrying of them without breaking which we resented. These were carefully stacked in the corner, and with the sticks which the seniors were compelled to cut at the dominie's hag-clog, they kept the three pots boiling—the pig-pot, the hen-pot, and the special 'goblet' in which simmered the dinner of the Master and those favoured pupils who ate with him, sons mostly of large farmers living at a distance.

The rest of us had over our left shoulder a little leathern satchel made by the village shoemaker, where we conserved our provender—scones, oat-cake, a piece of hard skim-milk cheese, and most likely some crumbled remains of the raided potatoes. Sometimes we drank from a tin jar of milk, churned sour in transit. And when that was not enough, at the foot of the playground a spout of water ran clear off the hill. To the stone spout was chained a tin cup, but it was seldom used. We preferred the primeval drinking vessel of our palms, joined and hollowed. Here the tongues of 'tale-pyets,' or tellers of tales, were scraped ungently with a piece of broken slate, and thereafter washed. Here fights took place, and many stalwart virtues were inculcated well out of sight of the master.

But there was nothing dull even about the hours spent in school. To us small toddlers there arrived little trouble, unless we made too great a noise, and even then Joseph Carnochan was lenient with us. A flick with the taws to teach us to walk straight in the

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way, a few tears and then—through the blessed back door would arrive an invasion—sometimes ducks waddling and quacking in Indian file, or a brood of woolly chicks peeping and pecking. Best of all it was when half-a-dozen piglings, tired of rooting about among the courtyard straw and enticed by fragrant steam of their own particular stew, entered tail in air and became immediately entangled among our bare brown legs. I remember still the moist sniffing of their snouts, as they blew among the wilderness of freckled ankles beneath the writing desk. Sometimes a girl, suddenly tickled, would whisk her petticoat and cry ‘Ouch!’ Whereat everyone in the school would feel happy—including the dominie, who scarcely troubled to hide his smile as he rattled the invaders out with the pointer, and closed the door upon them. But the next boy taking his turn as ‘pot-stoker,’ would leave it open again on his way back from the peatstack, and so the invasions from without continued gayer and ever more gay.’

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

SPYING OUT THE LAND

These days were of infinite service to Paul Wester. Indeed he had always kept his uncle a little at a distance as shy lads are apt to treat a senior in authority, whose habits and pursuits are out of sympathy with their own. Now they understood each other better, though (also as usual) it was the younger who was the slower to confide.

Nevertheless the minister understood many things without needing to be told. In particular he grasped the change which had come over Paul since the news of the ownership of the Maxwellton estates. Septimus Laird resolved that Paul should have something to distract his attention till Babby and Zipporah were again safe in the Manse of Kirkpatrick-Maxwellton.

He should journey to London—perhaps to Paris. More, he, Septimus Laird, Doctor of Divinity, should go with him. Moreover, that they might not be ‘kenspeckle,’ he sent secret directions to his George Street tailor, to make him a travelling suit ‘of sober hue and serious cut, not made after the clerical fashion, but rather in the mode of the day, with such differences as his sense of propriety might suggest.’

It was with these garments in his travelling bag, and Paul in high spirits, sitting in the opposite corner of the third-class carriage, that the ex-Moderator of the General Assembly of the Kirk slid out of Dumfries station on his way to St. Pancras.

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There was yet a fortnight before the return of Babby and Zipporah. The village caretaker was in sole charge of the Manse and of Glenkens. But the little horse was now in security. For though no doubt 'floats' of dutiable articles, previously carefully waterproofed, were still being sunk along the northern shores of Solway, the fear of Lazun had set a seal upon the Manse, upon the dwellers therein and thereabout, even to Glenkens, now wearing shaggy about the fetlocks and greying round the muzzle.

It was wondrous to see the Doctor in Paris, sitting out on the boulevards and trying hard to smoke his first Henry Clay cigar, which had been recommended to him as 'tabac de luxe par excellence.'

'Oh, if my elders were only to see me, they would have me up before the Presbytery,' said the brave Doctor, lighting his cigar for the tenth time. 'Certainly, my lassie (to a casual visitor), 'sit ye down and have a drink. The water in the glass bottle is fine and cool, better than ours at the Orraland. We are somewhat too near the sea there.'

And the Doctor continued to explain to Paul the misdeeds of the Leaguers, the great day of the Barricades, and how 'that loon' Henry of Navarre thought it worthwhile to take the Mass, with Paris thrown in as a surprise packet.

Meanwhile the girl with the plumes sat glooming, till as neither elder nor younger paid her any attention, she rose and with a disdainful shrug of her shoulders, and a muttered 'Mufle,' moved away, Paul watching her curiously out of the corner of his eye and marvelling at the strangeness of things, so that he lost the final remarks of his uncle in defence

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of the moral character of the Roi 'Vert Galant,' whose reputation Dr. Septimus traced to the malignity of Catholic historians.

Paul read French newspapers assiduously. They were so different from his own—at once more readable and less reliable. They started 'booms' one day, and attacked the boomer the next. It was enough that the great morning paper *Le Midi* should praise a man for his disinterestedness, to cause its equally great rival *Le Jour* (which had attained to fortune by the peculiar nature of its small advertisements) to denounce the same man as a thief and a robber, besides hinting tenebrously that his father, his mother, and several wives had died sudden and quite unnatural deaths while dining in his company. There were also papers, such as the *Faits Divers*, all advertising the largest circulations on the globe, which contained nothing but glorification of police news—generally from the point of view of the apache, the nervi, the gandou, who had accomplished these sanguinary marvels—with photographs of the hero in his early infancy, in the black suit with white favours in which he accomplished his first communion, followed by all the details of his career down to the time when he left his spring-handled knife in the back of a prosperous, worthy, inoffensive, and therefore uninteresting citizen going home a little late from business.

These papers also made great fortunes, and from them Paul, who had occasionally to handle facts somewhat of a similar nature, found out what to avoid—and rose with a better idea of the Thistle Crown than ever before. He found out what sub-editors were for.

But in a week he could see that his uncle was visibly wearying in Paris. Not even his daily visits to the great National Library, where Paul employed his school French (like the Duke of Wellington) 'with courage' in the task of finding the old scholar the books he wanted, really consoled the ex-Moderator. During these seances, Paul, interested in the evolution of the Parisian apache and in youthful French criminology generally, made up his mind that it was not so much Trauppmann and Avenain, Barre, Libiez, but the imaginary heroes of the modern 'burglary romance' which had been the cause of the present epidemic of continental crime. At each page in the later reports, the names of Nick Carter, Arsene Lupin, and others 'made in England' cropped up in the examination, of the French juges d'instruction, and in the evidence and confessions of the young criminals themselves. They went they said, to steal, but they remained to kill. Indeed no more caustic line could have been spoken than that of the leader of a band to a follower who appeared to be robbing him of sanguinary glory.

'He an assassin! Il se vante! He is only a boaster—he has not the pluck to kill!'

But Paul was more than astonished when, one gay morning, instead of making out his usual list of wants for the Bibliotheque Nationale, his uncle said at breakfast, 'Go upstairs, Paul lad, and pack your bag. We are going to Cancale!'

Paul remained a moment dumb with amazement. He was standing near the window to make out a name in small type upon the plan of the city.

Cancale? Cancale meant to him but one thing—that wondrous Lazun Palafox whose name controlled fierce and desperate men who stuck at no crime.

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The Howe of the Red Haven rose before him. He saw again through the glimmering atmosphere of noon, the dagger-flash, the broad 'bannock-faced' man suddenly stricken—the changed heavens, the stained and sinister earth. It had been his first glimpse of the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

And Lazun it was who had punished the crime. Barbara, his ancient friend and oracle, had found it natural that he should do so. Better than the slow justice of the law—surer, more terrible was the word of Lazun Palafox. Moreover, was it not he who, by a word of his mouth, had acquired all the lands of Maxwellton and Orraland, and so had for ever made Zipporah Katti impossible for Paul?

She would be a great lady. She would, he felt sure, go to some exclusive school, or be put under the charge of some lady of rank. Finally she would marry someone of her own position.

Work? Yes, he could do that. But then, he might work till he fell by the way—never could he hope to have anything to offer her—and never would he consent to be only the husband of a rich woman. Indeed Paul was undergoing a crisis of that acute and exceedingly self-conscious youthful nobility, which, like measles, is so little likely to trouble a man in later life.

But, once that the turmoil of the crowded platforms of St. Lazare was left behind, Paul watched eagerly the defile of trim stations. The train was an express for St. Malo, and stopped but seldom. Notwithstanding the speed, his eye never tired of the harmonious lines of poplars, the white strips of road, carelessly flung, like a whip-lash flicked, athwart the various squares of culture, each green as a separate garden.

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Once when the train slackened he was near enough to read on the white pent of a carrier's wagon the words, Paul Ouessant, and with the peculiar vacant curiosity of railway travellers, he amused himself with the similarity of name. The carrier's destination designed itself beneath in broad white letters on a darker blue band:—

'BARENTON.'

This set Paul to wondering vaguely if Zipporah Katti had ever been in Barenton, and whether she had ever seen the white tilt of his quasi-namesake's wagon. He remembered that it was somewhere in this neighbourhood that Lazun had sent her to a convent school. Accordingly he looked out eagerly for possible buildings—generally, however, fixing upon prisons and hospitals, little guessing in what modesty of retirement the good sisters are now compelled to pursue their work.

Towards four o'clock they were turned out at a little wayside station not far from Avranches, and from thence, across a foreground of green. Paul got his first sight of the great bay of Cancale topped by the fantastic fairy gothic castellation of Mont St. Michel.

And then at last Cancale itself, Paul's land of promise. It disappointed him a little, for he had fancied it a far greater port. From the distance the ships struck him as small, while the landscape about, gravely smiling, fresh, charming, found its only grandeur in the noble prospect of the bay, the famous Rocher in the foreground (like Arthur's Seat all done in rugged stone), a blue-green sea fretting it, and in the distance, purple against a pale green sky, the ramparts of Mont St. Michel.

But when at last, after long waiting and some

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trundling, Paul saw the crowded port of La Houle, and the granitic sides of the Grouin, he cried out with joy. The ship-deserted Solway seemed to him suddenly vague and lonely.

They found a quiet inn on the outskirts of the town, which bore the name (to Paul well-known) of 'The Golden Flagon.'

Here, leaving his uncle to his first care, that of arranging his travelling library—on which they had invariably to pay excess charges—Paul hastened downstairs to spy out the land of Lazun Palafox

CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

THE EYE OF THE MASTER

From the cliff above shone out trimly the houses of the burghers of Cancale. Beyond them Paul climbed higher up on the slopes, little winding paths tracking away everywhere from about his feet. It was silent, but the air blew fresh and salt from the sea.

Far beneath he could see the tide on the ebb. Paul did not understand all that was going on, but he knew that a multitude of little craft, each with three men (or two men and a boy) on board, were racing in from the banks where they had been dredging. They did not seem to land their 'take,' however. Instead, they stopped the boat near the shore at points chosen apparently at hazard, and—to Paul's astonishment—cast their fishing overboard. Then they made full tilt for the port. Their work was done.

As the tide ebbed faster squares and oblongs fenced in with what from the cliffs looked like basket-work, with branches of bushes at the corners, began to show themselves. As soon as the water was sufficiently low, a swarm of children and old women descended upon these enclosures, and were immediately hard at work. Some had baskets on their backs. Others, picking their way carefully, planted something on the soft ooze much as Paul Wester had dibbled beans in his uncle's garden at Kirkpatrick-Maxwellton.

Not for a while did it strike him that he was looking at the famous and ancient oyster-culture of

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Cancalle—the most renowned in the world.

The fishermen had mostly gone to their homes. A few of the younger lingered among the huddled houses of the lower village, drinking the 'vert,' and playing noisy games of dominoes. But along the beach with hands behind his back, doing no work but apparently surveying everything, a tall old man moved lightly and easily. Paul could see his white hair glisten in the sun under the broad peak of the blue yachting cap he wore, but seen from a distance he looked young and agile.

'That must surely be Lazun Palafox,' said Paul, and ran hastily down the steep path from the falaise. But before he had reached the beach, from which the oyster-beds extended themselves in interminable rows, each fenced and regulated like a well-tended garden, the tall man had disappeared.

Paul could see all round the vast curve of Cancalle beach to the very snout of the 'Grouin.' His man was not there, so he turned hastily towards the port. La Houle was thick with craft—big Newfoundlanders refitting, the boats of the oyster fleet left each in its own place to be ready for the next outgoing tide.

Paul kept a bright look-out for a swift ship, called the Golden Flagon, of whose exploits he had heard tell all his life along Solway and the outer Clyde estuary. But the boats were either 'three-masters' for the bank trade or mere fishing-boats. There was much stir and commotion everywhere, but they worked without the noise and laughter habitual to sailors in from long cruises. The hammermen tapped lustily and regularly. The planing and fitting did not cease at the shipwrights' benches on the quay. Never had Paul Wester seen anything so well-ordered.

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But he had not far to look nor long to wait for the reason.

The tall man with the white hair, slightly stooped at the shoulders, came along with his hands behind him. He had on his head a dark blue naval cap such as might be worn by a merchant captain on a good ship. Otherwise he was dressed in plain but fine sea-cloth, well fitting, and worn with a youthful ease and lissomness about the waist. There was nothing remarkable about the man, save that he wore a pair of old-fashioned shoes with buckles of unpolished silver.

But he looked at every man and thing with keen, bold, blue eyes that bored like augers, and made every 'slacker' of all that outfit shiver in his skin. Paul understood at once that here was the eye of the master. After the old man had passed the stroke fell easier, attention wandered, the ship's carpenter had difficulty with the edge of his tool. They did not stop working but they worked differently.

As the tall old man passed on, stepping slowly westwards, the light of the sun in his face, he glanced just once at Paul Wester, but apparently without giving him any particular attention. Though, strangely enough, Paul himself had a feeling that he had been seen, considered, and classed, all in that one swift side-glance. But the old man passed along the quay, walking slowly and easily with a certain swing to his gait, and now and then flinging a word to a foreman or stopping to reprimand sternly some slovenly worker.

Paul stood still and watched him recede. He scarcely heard the turmoil of the workman near at hand. He had no eyes save for that solitary figure of power. That was the man—it could be no other—

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who had sent Raif Palafox on his long journey, when he came back with the blood of Cumbrian Roaring Anthony on his hands. And indeed he was worth looking at.

He spoke to no man except in the way of command. None answered him back, but took the reproof and was silent. If the workman had to reply to a direct question, he stood up and saluted before speaking in a way which meant much from these stubborn Breto-Normans.

Lazun—without a doubt! It could be no other. And as he came back towards him, Paul restrained a strong, and to him quite incomprehensible, desire to salute this autocrat even as the men did.

But this time the tall figure swerved in its march. He turned at right angles towards the spot on the rope-littered quay where Paul stood. He stopped before him and quite close.

'You come from Scotland,' said the old man, fixing him with the chill of his masterful blue eyes, clear with long years of gazing into vast sea spaces; 'what may be your name, and what are you seeking here?'

Paul was a free man, on a free soil, and such words from another might have found him indignant. But nothing of the kind passed through his mind.

'My name is Paul Wester,' he said, 'I...'

The old man suddenly threw back his head and stared hard at the young man before him.

'Paul Wester!' he repeated, slowly, 'and your father's name?'

'Paul Wester, also,' said Paul.

'He was married to—to the sister of one Dr. Laird, minister of Kirkpatrick-Maxwellton in Galloway.'

'Yes,' said Paul, 'I was brought up by my uncle.'

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‘And what are you doing at Cancale?’

‘I have come to visit you, Lazun Palafox—or at least my uncle has. We were wearied of Paris.’

‘I see you know me,’ said the old man, ‘but that is easy. There is but one Lazun about Cancale, and doubtless you asked some of the fishermen.’

‘I have spoken to no one except yourself, sir,’ said Paul with firm but quiet respect, ‘but I have heard of you ever since I can remember—tales and tales, not one of which I have forgotten. I should have known you, had I met you in Paris itself!’

‘They were untrue tales you heard, be sure!’ said Lazun, smiling a little grimly. ‘I know the kind of stories they tell of me in your country.’

‘They were true, every one,’ said Paul Wester, quickly indignant, ‘Barbara Simpson does not tell lies.’

‘Ah, Barbara Simpson!’ Lazun’s eyes glittered.

‘Yes, of course. I had forgotten. Aye, Barbara — Barbara Simpson speaks the truth. But was it on her account that you came so far to see me?’

‘Not at all,’ said Paul; ‘Barbara is in Edinburgh with—Zipporah Katti, who also is my friend. So being alone we grew weary of the Manse, my uncle and I, and he proposed that I should take a trip with him. But...’

‘I see—you have left him behind? He sent you to find me?’

‘No, sir,’ said Paul, ‘he is up yonder at the inn sorting out his travelling library, and he does not even know that I came out to seek you.’

A strange expression passed over the face of the old man.

‘Few come to Cancale to seek me for my own sake. Let us go and call upon your uncle. He is the

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man of all men whom I respect. I know him. I have proved him—forty years of good living without once swerving from the path! That is no common thing. Not many who are called saints could claim as much. A marvellous man, young sir, is Septimus Laird.'

'Thank you, sir,' said Paul, moved by such praise from such a one, 'my uncle, the Doctor, is indeed the very man you say.'

And so to the inn they went forthwith and together, the entire beach marvelling behind them as it watched.

CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

TWO INTERVIEWS

The Doctor looked up, surprised at Paul's entrance with a companion. He was still bending over bags and wrappings, disentangling odd volumes and completing sets already ranged over most of the available space of mantelpiece and table. This occupation, much of the pleasure of a journey to the Doctor, and the thought that his favourites were safely under his hand, was as good as a dinner to him.

'This is Lazun Palafox,' said Paul, feeling that all titles were vain between such men, 'and this, sir, is my uncle.'

The slender, gentle figure of the old scholar glowed with a gracious content. Lazun overtopped him by a head, and his features, hewn as in hard whinstone, were bent down upon the minister, weather-beaten and masterful like the Breton promontories on whose edge they had found him.

But there was no yielding in the eyes of the minister of Kirkpatrick-Maxwellton. He would now find the answer to many things that had been troubling him.

'I am Lazun,' said the giant, standing erect, the width of his shoulders propping the lintels of the inn chamber door. With that he held out his hand. The Doctor laid his fine nervous white fingers within that grip, and winced not though the stress of Lazun's greeting almost brought the tears to his eyes.

'I owe you more than you know. Doctor

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Septimus,' Lazun began. 'You have cared for and your roof has sheltered those very dear to me.'

'You did not leave her to me very long,' said the Doctor, carefully separating his numbed fingers and putting them to nurse in his side pocket. 'No sooner had our lass come back to us from school, than you endow her with all the troubles and responsibilities of wealth.'

'I am in hopes that you will help her with these, as you helped her when she was only a wandering gipsy girl.'

Lazun Palafox smiled as he spoke, but there was a tremulousness in his voice which came near to betraying real emotion.

'You must give a great part of the credit to my housekeeper and friend Barbara,' said the minister. 'It is more than likely you may have heard of her.'

'I have even had the honour of knowing her,' said Lazun quietly. 'I know how noble a woman you have had in your house for forty years.'

'Oh,' said the Doctor, more easily; 'you know that, do you? Yes, Barbara and I get on very well. When we differ it is generally about cleaning the study, or, of late years, as to her treatment of this nephew of mine. She was inclined to spoil him, but now, as it seems to me, his nose is wholly out of joint! That is why I am trying my hand.'

'Ah, my girl,' said Lazun, 'and pray how do Barbara and she get on?'

'They are in Edinburgh together,' the Doctor tapped his snuffbox jocosely; 'but, while they were at home, they were hardly out of one another's sight.'

'You could not have given me greater pleasure than by the news,' said Lazun, 'but you are my guests. I will tell the landlord to send up your things

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to my house. I cannot have you living in an inn when you have honoured me by coming to Cancale.'

'But the landlord?' the Doctor objected; 'we had arranged with him for a week. Will he not object?'

Lazun gazed a moment at the gentle old man as if he had a difficulty in understanding. Then he laughed softly.

'We will settle with the landlord,' he said, and turned toward the stair-head.

'Patron,' he called in his strong penetrating voice, and at the sound all the bustle of the 'Golden Flagon' ceased. An awed landlord appeared beneath, twisting his white cap between his fingers.

'These gentlemen are to stay with me at Gobelet,' he said; 'send up their things at once!'

'But be careful of the books,' added the Doctor anxiously.

'They shall have every care,' said Lazun, smiling; 'don't be afraid. The man is an old boatswain of mine whom I put in this house to keep him out of mischief.'

'You appear to act somewhat after the manner of the Roman Centurion, here!' said the Doctor, as they went along the sands, where everybody who met them saluted deferentially.

'Just as in the parish of Kirkpatrick-Maxwellton, there is little dissent in Cancale,' the Master of that town looked about as he spoke. 'But you must not mistake,' he added, 'I only live here. My real business lies over yonder at St. Malo.'

A windbreak of pines to shelter Gobelet from the rough Atlantic, the bend of a cliff, rough with gorse and blackthorn, and then, hidden from all but the ships out on the bay, they came upon a wonderful house all of one storey, but meandering here and

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there like a game of double dominoes. It was the home of Lazun nestling under the shadow of cool wide verandahs.

To the left was a headland with a flagstaff from which the stormy grey-green of the incoming main Atlantic could be glimpsed, always wind-roughened and glaucous. The courts and open spaces behind surrounded with red-tiled 'hangars' could only be seen from the cliffs above. But these had other entrances and no part of them was visible from the broad drive which led up from the St. Malo road.

The whole was almost as quiet as the Manse of Kirkpatrick-Maxwellton on a Sunday morning. The broad Bay of Cancale basked in the sun. Ships went and came. During the oyster season the daily race of boats to the fishing grounds could be watched. But of all that turmoil not a sound came up to creeper-covered, rose-bowered Gobelet, where it was Lazun Palafox's pleasure to be quiet.

Within the house abode the same stillness. A large low hall with many windows on three sides gave glimpses across to Granville and out to Mont St. Michel. But of Cancale itself, save for the ruddy Rocher and the tides lazily fretting it, nothing could be seen. Lazun had shut his dwelling-place very carefully away.

The service of the house seemed to be perfectly done. Yet no trained domestics appeared in waiting anywhere.

A slip of a girl crossed the hall, going silently in the direction of the inner apartments. She took no notice of the strangers, and Paul would not have looked at her particularly, save for the fact that about her neck she wore a curious oriental gold coin with a square hole in it, with which (or something

like it) he had been familiar in his youth. He had played with one just the same in Barbara Simpson's workbox.

The girl kept her head down and was passing out when Lazun called her. 'Come here, Eza,' he said, 'this is the minister of a Galloway parish—a man whom I honour above all men. Let his wishes be as my own. I put him into your hands, Eza Palafox, and here is his nephew Paul. He is a young man and can fend for himself. But let him have a room near his uncle that he may be of use to him.'

The girl bowed with the same respect which Paul Wester had noticed in all the people of Cancale when they found themselves face to face with Lazun.

'And you will be careful with the books?' said the Doctor.

The girl curtsied in the ancient fashion and answered in a low clear voice, 'They are already in their places in the White Room. Would the gentleman care to see?'

Lazun said nothing, but there was a faint glow of pleasure on his face.

'Impossible,' said the Doctor, 'we have walked directly here. There has not been time.'

But already the girl had opened the door of a room, panelled in white wood. It resembled the cabin of an admiral's flagship, but it was almost octagonal in shape, with windows that looked every way. Pictures of the sea and the rocky shore were framed in red climbing roses and gay canary-coloured creepers.

On the mantelshelves stood the minister's books in the order in which he had left them. Paper of different sizes, pens, ink and blotting-pads were ranged on a table beside a comfortable arm-chair,

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and —marvel of marvels, a revolving bookcase held the latest edition of Clmmbers's Encydropcedia bound in brown leather.

This fairly took the Doctor's breath away.

'Paul—Paul Wester,' he exclaimed excitedly; 'do you see that, Paul? Why, man, don't stand like a gowk—it's Chambers's!'

Lazun's dark eyes flashed with something like pleasure, but Eza Palafox stood with her fingers knitted before her.

'We are not quite barbarians here,' said Lazun, smiling and impassible; 'there is even a library of a kind, though I fear most of the books are French or Spanish, and date from the eighteenth century.'

'Let us go there immediately!' cried the Doctor with sudden enthusiasm; 'though I cannot speak these languages with any fluency, nor, indeed, so as to enable the natives to understand me (I admit it, Paul), I can read them with understanding and profit to myself.'

'One moment,' said Lazun, turning to the girl Eza; 'where have you put our young friend?'

The girl opened a door in the corner of the Doctor's room, and showed what was no more than a dressing-room with a camp bed. Paul's kit lay on the top of a chest of drawers, unopened, but with the straps loosened.

'And now for the library!' exclaimed the Doctor after a brief glance, and with the same quietly satisfied smile Lazun led the way.

Paul and the girl were left alone in the big be-flowered many-windowed cabin.

'Come on the balcony,' said Eza, 'the lights will be coming out now and that is something worth seeing.'

They went forth together through the open French

window. The verandah was spacious, and as the girl had said, they could see the lights kindling late in the summer night round forty miles of bay and polder.

'Yonder is the promenade at Granville,' she said, pointing; 'and far away is St. Malo. You can only see the reflection on the sky—pulsing like the Northern Lights!'

'How did you learn English so perfectly?' Paul asked, for the girl's air of superiority made him curious.

'In the same way that your Zipporah Katti learned it,' was the girl's unexpected reply, uttered with a certain fire.

'Ah,' said Paul quietly; 'but she is not my Zipporah Katti!'

'She soon will be, then,' the girl answered, with her eyes peering into Paul's face. 'I know—we all know what you and your uncle have come to Cancalle for.'

'I do not understand,' said Paul, giving back glance for glance.

'No,' said the girl Eza ironically; 'of course not to ask for Zipporah Katti in marriage?'

'I never dreamed of such a thing?' exclaimed Paul indignantly.

'Then your uncle has dreamed it for you,' she answered, tossing her head; 'that was why he was so keen about the library. He is asking now—and he imagines that because he has the name of a holy man...'

'He is the best man in the world!' Paul interrupted, suddenly and rather unaccountably angry with this girl who had been all silence and obedience in the presence of Lazun, but who now

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attacked his uncle and Zipporah without any reason.

'A good man,' Eza meditated, leaning her elbows on the wooden verandah rail in a way that made Paul think of Zipporah on the stone balcony of the Dulse Cave. 'Yes—I have been at Orraland—and I know. Still...'

'Been at Orraland ! You!' Paul was astonished out of his politeness; 'what were you doing there?'

'I was there on Lazun's business,' said the girl; 'and if you want to know what that was . . . you can ask him. He is in the library. At any rate I was not there with the fortune-telling Lees, like somebody else who has grown very important of late.'

'If you are a true Palafox,' retorted Paul, 'I warrant you had your time to serve with the tribes just like Zipporah Katti!'

The arrow quivered in the centre, though Paul had drawn his bow at the merest venture; Eza Palafox turned the subject abruptly.

'Why are you called Paul Wester?'

'Because that is my name,' Paul answered sharply; 'and the name of my father before me.'

'Have you ever seen your father?'

'My father is dead!' said Paul Wester very gravely.

The girl turned her face towards him in the growing dusk.

'You think so?' she said. 'Well, you and your heiress may expect quite a remarkable resurrection of fathers one of these days!'

Sounds of heavy footsteps invaded the far end of the verandah. The girl set a cautionary finger to her lip.

'You are enough of a man not to say anything of this to Lazun Palafox,' she whispered. 'I speak more

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for your good than you know of. Now, not a word! Promise!’

‘Of course I promise!’ said Paul. ‘I am no tell-tale!’

With a curiously dubious smile the girl faded from his side. He was alone when the two old men, arm in arm, came out upon the dusky verandah.

‘What, alone!’ said Lazun; ‘where is Eza? I thought I heard voices?’

‘We talked a while,’ said Paul, ‘and then she went away. She had something to attend to.’

The master of Gobelet regarded the young man attentively. Lazun appeared to be on the point of asking a question, but he forebore—probably because he supposed that he could get at the truth in an easier and more hospitable manner.

‘I suppose she has been instructing you as to our illuminations?’

‘Yes,’ said Paul. ‘I can make out Redon, St. Malo, Granville and even Mont Saint Michel!’

‘But I suppose little Eza Palafox did not tell you that out yonder, by the snout of the Grouin, are the riding lights of the Golden Flagon, just arrived, a ship of which you may have heard?’

In the library of Gobelet, an ancient room with thick walls, part of the chateau which had formed the nucleus of Lazun’s erections, the conversation had taken quite another turn.

After the first enthusiasms of the book lover had been a little appeased, Lazun pushed a chair under shaded electric light bulbs, clustered at the right hand of the fireplace. For both had reached that age when men talk easiest about a grate even when no fire is lit therein. The warmth of former hearth-fires stirs old hearts and loosens careful tongues like good wine.

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'I am a man not ungrateful. Doctor,' said Lazun Palafox; 'only I am secretive by nature and very slow to speech. I know you, sir, for what you are, and for this reason, I have trusted you with the care of the two things most sacred to me in the world.'

'What I did for the girl was nothing,' said the Doctor. 'I have a good income, and if I had not looked after Zipporah Katti, I—should only have spent the money in more books—like these!'

'I am not speaking alone of the girl,' the master of the house continued; 'you have also been kind to my wife—aye, kinder than I, her husband, have been!'

The Doctor looked up amazed, and drew his brows together as if to quarry in the debris of his past good deeds. Then he shook his head and smiled gently.

'You are mistaken about me,' he said. 'I have never set eyes on your wife.'

'Mistaken about you I cannot be,' said Lazun; 'seeing that for forty years my wife has been in your house and not in mine.'

'Your wife!' cried the Doctor; 'surely you do not speak of Barbara Simpson? I understood, though I have never spoken of the matter to her, that she had not long been married when her husband was lost at sea!'

'Aye,' said Lazun bitterly; 'but it was in the sea of folly!'

The Doctor merely sat and stared with his head bent forward, waiting for further clearness.

'Yes,' said Lazun, his eyes watching the dark insurgence of Mont Saint Michel against a pale incoming sea; 'Barbara Simpson is my wife. I lost her through folly now bitterly repented of. Yet I do not believe that it could have been otherwise. For I

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was Lazun Palafox and could not be another man.'

'But,' he went on after a pause, 'I have been often on the Solway coast. And there, I have seen you, and seen Barbara my wife—though only once have I spoken with her—because it was necessary for the good of our grandchild.'

'Our grandchild!' exclaimed the minister. 'Barbara had a child?'

'A daughter,' said Lazun calmly; 'and also a granddaughter—one Zipporah Katti Palafox. It is of her that I would speak now.'

CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE

GOBELET

Paul woke the next morning to the sough of salt winds rustling among high trees, and crackling with dry laughter among laurels and rhododendrons. He could almost have fancied himself at the Manse. He could hear his uncle tramping about his room, and for a moment he thought of Babby and Zipporah Katti busy somewhere below his window.

And then he remembered little Eza—strange, inexplicable, disquieting little Eza—interesting little Eza, nevertheless—perhaps because of these very qualities. He slid out of bed and was soon splashing in the shallow bath, which (had he known it) was the greatest of all the marvels in this half-tropical, half-English house set by Lazun Palafox underneath the eaves of the collines of Cancale.

He was glad now that he had come. The mere effect of distance made Zipporah Katti and her wealth a more possible object of meditation. He tried to puzzle out what was the relationship of little Eza and Zipporah Katti. They were both Palafoxes. Both claimed descent from Lazun. But Eza was clearly jealous of Zipporah, while Zipporah had never so much as mentioned the girl's name. Therefore Zipporah must have something which the small jealous person lacked.

The estates?—Lazun to all appearance had enough for all.

Beauty?—So far as he could see by the gloaming and the stars, little Eza had also her share of that.

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She might be naturally jealous—born ‘in the green’ as emperors in the purple. At any rate Paul would be sure to find out. When he had dressed he looked in upon his uncle. That good man was busy with a book in a comfortable window seat.

‘Good morning, sir,’ said Paul, ‘have you seen any breakfast coming along?’

‘I give little heed to the creature comforts,’ said his uncle; ‘indeed I fear I had forgotten myself in a wonderfully spiritual chapter of Augustine. But you are not yet old enough to care about the City of God.’

‘I have read the Confessions,’ said Paul; ‘I liked the part about his mother.’

‘That is very well, but of the earth earthy,’ said the Doctor. ‘Oh, such crises are necessary to be passed through, I doubt not, but -there are things in the life of every man that—the less said about the better!’

‘Every man has a right to confess his own iniquities,’ said Paul; ‘it was because Byron insisted on confessing other people’s that they burned his diary!’

‘Byron,’ said the Doctor, ‘I have had no time in my life to peruse the recent vernacular poets, but I have read the accounts of his grandfather’s voyages. They are very informative.’

‘Did they say anything about breakfast, uncle? Even shipwrecked mariners are generally allowed that!’

A rap fell on the door, and the voice of Lazun asked if he might come in. He was regarded with hope by Paul, but it appeared as if he had only paused a moment for the purpose of getting news of the night which the Doctor had passed under his

roof.

'Comfortable? Oh, most comfortable and very well off, thanks to you,' said the minister. 'I spent all my time till well after the midnight hour in reading the books I brought from your precious library, and I have been busy since the early hour at which I awoke—the light at this season being particularly favourable for such studies; I have therefore enjoyed much wonderful communion with the wise while this young lad was still asleep. But that comes of his age!'

'Breakfast is waiting in the hall,' said Lazun, 'we mostly take our meals there for convenience of service. Something is always ready on the sideboard at all hours. But now, being honoured by your presence, I have provided what may remind you of Orraland!'

On Lazun's table they found porridge made of rough-ground Galloway meal. Each plate was flanked by a silver tankard of cool cream, and to Paul's joy, a row of dishes kept hot by a double bottom of hot water intimated possibilities of fish or bacon and eggs.

'Beats Paris, sir!' said Paul as he sat down hastily almost before his uncle's blessing reached the port of 'Amen.'

A faint smile flickered on Lazun's face. He excused himself from partaking with them on the ground that he had breakfasted early—in fact before going over to St. Malo. But he appeared pleased by the vigour of Paul's attack upon the good things which had come from so far. The Doctor asked how in Brittany Lazun could manage to obtain such characteristic Galloway dainties as oatmeal ('surely from Gelston,' remarked the connoisseur looking up

from his porridge) and cured mutton-ham.

‘Good!’ assented Lazun with the appreciation of one who has tried his best vintage upon one of the elect, ‘it comes from Gelston Mill indeed, and it is not every man, even in Galloway, who would know as much. As for the mutton-ham, I have, as you know, long given up direct traffic with those parts. But there is still an aftermath of coming and going, of truck and barter, among the younger men who for their own purposes visit the Clyde and Solway every year. Then they are sure to come across some of the old-time folk who have not forgotten Lazun Palafox.’

As soon as the meal was over Paul escaped. At that time he was not greatly interested in the reminiscences of his seniors—not at least with such a bewitching mystery as little Eza in the neighbourhood. He had no idea, he told himself, of forgetting Zipporah Katti. There was no one like Zipporah. There never could be—never would be. His heart, unhappily for himself, was fixed on that point—unhappily, because in view of her recent great fortune, Zipporah had been removed out of his sphere.

But there remained his scarce begun, altogether unsatisfactory, acquaintance with little Eza, who had been so humble and silent before Lazun, and so much the contrary with himself. Paul, spurred by remembrance of her abuse of Zipporah and her scarcely veiled contempt for himself, went forth determined to find her. But he was not prepared for the extraordinary complexity of Gobelet—that is, of the hinterland of Lazun’s Cancale dwelling.

The front was simple enough—green lawns and paths of shifting shade leading to points of outlook on the cliff, neatly railed in, kiosked, and furnished

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with chairs of cane and iron. Nothing there that Paul could find but silence and Seabreeze—a retired mariner's paradise. But when he had ventured out on the St. Malo road he came upon great wagons which were being tugged and traced up the slope, to the accompaniment of cracking whips and swearing carters.

Paul was of some service to one man, a broad apple-cheeked Norman, in the way of blocking opportunely a wheel with a large stone at a dangerous corner, and with him he continued till they came to the great gates of a vast court. Here was a porter-lodge, a mastiff chained in a barrel, a wide yard between the opening doors, and in fact, all the appointments of those pares a fourrages, or reserves of hay and straw, to be seen everywhere in France where there are regiments of cavalry or artillery.

But though the gatekeeper admitted the Norman carter and his horses readily enough, he came near to shutting the door in Paul's face with a curse, while the mastiff stood rattling his chain and gurgling imprecations deep in his throat. But from one of the white-painted doors came a young man trowsered in white ducks who touched a ship's officer's cap of the same kind as that worn by Lazun. He was tall, good-looking, and with a belted waist that made him seem slim as a girl. He looked merely amiable to Paul, but a girl would have seen at a glance that his dark eyes were full of magic.

He uttered a brief word of explanation to the yard guardians, who retired, dog and man growling in chorus, to their several dens in kennel and elongated sentry-box.

'You are staying with the Chief,' said the young

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man smiling; 'I am Leon, Eza's brother, she told me about you last night.'

Somehow Paul was secretly relieved to hear of the relationship, and answered that the young lady had been good enough to show him where some of the night lights indicated famous neighbouring towns and lighthouses.

'Eza probably got them all wrong,' said the lad with brotherly frankness, 'but I hear she was spitting at Zipporah Palafox like a little cat. I told her what I thought of her. Girls are always like that—either with their arms about each other's necks or with all their claws out for battle.'

'What is the matter between these two?' Paul inquired; 'I never heard Zipporah Katti say a word about . . . your sister.'

The young man laughed and turned on Paul with a quiet, lithe grace reminiscent of Eza Palafox.

'Don't you see?' he said, 'that is just the reason. The Chief has always made more of Zipporah Katti than of any others of his people. If I were a girl, I dare say I might . . . have shown my claws also. She certainly has had the pickings.'

'When I met her she was travelling with an encampment of gipsies who were selling horses at a fair!'

'Yes, I know,' the young man answered, 'the Lees—they are the best of the lot. I had my share of that work first. But I took care to be no success at it—I wanted to be put to the sea. But I hope you mentioned nothing to Lazun Palafox about what Eza said to you.'

'Of course not—do I look as if I would?' Paul flushed with anger. The young sailor took his arm familiarly. 'I never supposed it for a moment,' he

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said, 'but at the same time I have to reassure my sister. The Chief does not give more than one chance to those who talk too much. Anything else he can forgive.'

'I suppose you belong to the Golden Flagon, the ship that arrived last night?'

The young man gazed at Paul intently, but did not answer directly.

'What do you know of the Golden Flagon?' he said at last.

'Of this present one, only that Lazun Palafox told me last night of her arrival.'

'Oh, did he—I should not have expected that. He must have some confidence in . . . your uncle—the old man is your uncle, isn't he?'

Paul nodded.

'And your name is Paul Wester?'

'Certainly!'

Leon, the young sailor of the Golden Flagon, looked across the busy yard towards a sort of counting-house with a tall flagstaff and a businesslike weighing-machine in front. Two men were coming out of the white-painted door. One, tall and grey-headed, with a moustache still blond and long, carried a sheaf of papers in his hand. His companion was obviously a Spaniard of the south, such as may be seen any day upon the quays of Valencia or Cadiz—small, wiry, with the peculiar oily glitter of the eye which makes at once the charm and the danger of men of Romany blood—such a man as made up the rank and file of the little, lithe infantry, smoked and tanned like tobacco leaf, which overran Europe in the great days of the Emperor and Philip the Second.

The young man had evidently been watching the

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door. For as soon as it opened he swung round, and taking Paul with him they went to meet the newcomers. They were now talking eagerly together, and papers were withdrawn and returned to the portfolio held by the tall, blond man as if they had not sufficiently discussed some matter which had been occupying them indoors.

‘I tell you,’ exclaimed the little sun-dried man, speaking French with an accent markedly meridional, ‘I for one have had enough of this. There must be some clear understanding about what is to happen . . . after.’

‘The Old Man will keep it all in his hands as long as he lives,’ said the tall man with the papers calmly. ‘You can go and argue with him if you like, but at present I have no fancy for having my throat cut.’

The pairs were now within earshot of each other, and still Leon Palafox led Paul forward. The elder two looked up with a something of annoyance. The man with the papers acknowledged the salute of young Leon Palafox with the indifference which comes of long usage. The little dark man took no notice at all, but passed on his way without a glance at the two young men.

‘Captain,’ said Leon Palafox, standing at attention before his superior officer, ‘permit me to introduce to you Mr. Paul Wester, who is staying at Gobelet with his uncle.’

The tall blond man compressed his lips. The roll of papers was perhaps clutched a trifle more tightly in his fine nervous fingers, but he answered readily enough—

‘Ah, yes—from Scotland, I think. Forgive me if I am wrong. I too have visited Galloway in my time,

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when business called me northwards more often than it does now. I have also heard of your uncle. Dr. Laird of Maxwellton. No one can be long in Galloway without doing that.'

He smiled at Paul, as he watched him, and there was something scrutinizing in that gaze, of the full intensity of which Paul was not at the moment aware.

'You are studying for the Church, I presume?' he went on without taking his eyes off the young man's face.

'No, sir,' Paul replied courteously, 'I am taking up journalism—in Edinburgh.'

'On the Thistle Crown?'

'Yes,' said Paul, and then with a jerk of pride at the name heard so far from home, 'I am only beginning, you know!'

'Your age would not allow of more,' said the tall man; 'I am the captain of the steamer out yonder. She is a fast boat, the last of a long line of Golden Flagons which have traded from this port—and in some degree made its fame. Perhaps you would care to come aboard one of these days and look her over. Better not put off too long though. For the patron over yonder' (he turned his head in the direction of Lazun's verandahed house) 'does not keep us long gadding about on shore!'

The Captain of the Golden Flagon nodded a brief farewell to Paul, and went on to rejoin the broad-shouldered, tobacco-coloured little man who stood in the shadow of the porter-lodge deep in conference with the sullen-faced guardian of the yard. Leon Palafox seemed in high spirits after the interview.

'Took to you from the first,' he said; 'the Captain does not take to everybody, and to tell you the truth,

when I made up to him, I was quaking in my shoes.’

Paul had no time to ask him why. A new phenomenon occupied his attention.

Across the court came Eza, all in white, simple and fresh as a splash of sea foam. Her red-gold hair (the surprising beauty of which Paul had not seen the night before) was crowned by one of the cheap garden hats of coarse straw to be got anywhere in France for ten sous. She was even more wonderful than Paul had imagined—not in Zipporah Katti’s dark boyish style (which, Paul told himself, he admired exclusively)—but with a curious piquancy nevertheless—the irritating attraction so dangerous to a young man, of a pretty girl who frankly despises him and makes no secret of her contempt.

In such case there always comes to a young man of spirit, the hope that contempt may only cloak a real attraction. And in spite of Zipporah Katti, Paul knew no reason why he should stand ill in the eyes of Little Eza. He had no idea of making love to her—of course not. But his feelings were definitely hurt. He had not been accustomed to be so treated either in Edinburgh or Galloway. And especially not in Galloway.

Brother and sister kissed one another on both cheeks—a proceeding which still seemed strange to the young Scot. For in his country the display of affection among relations is in inverse ratio to nearness of blood and real kindliness.

One may welcome a distant cousin, permit a certain warmth to show itself in the case of an uncle or aunt, but between brothers and sisters a certain austere rudeness is the height of correctness, and any signs of amity, much less affection, between husband and wife, are held to be positively indecent,

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and a reason for asking to see the parties' marriage lines.

'What have you two been up to?—Little good, I will warrant,' Eza Palafox tossed her weighty hair to show the red lights and tawny shadows upon it. She lifted one hand, sown with golden freckles on a creamy ground, to the level of her brow, and looked at her brother and Paul from beneath it.

'Beware of him, good young man from Scotland. He will surely lead you into mischief!' she said.

'I have just introduced him to the captain of the Golden Flagon,' said Leon, with smiling coolness, 'and they took to one another from the first. The old boy invited him aboard—what do you think of that?'

The colour was suddenly struck out of the girl's face. Her hands came down from behind her neck where she had netted them nonchalantly as a protection from the sun. She laid one on Paul's arm.

'He must not go. Leon, I hate you!' she cried, and then turning to Paul she added, 'You will not go? Promise me that you will not go—at least, not without Lazun ... or me!'

'I fear I promised, or at least that the Captain of the Golden Flagon understood that I would come on board. But I should be honoured indeed, if you would accompany me—your brother would be there.'

'Nothing of the sort,' said Leon gaily, 'I have enough to do with the old hooker when at sea. I spend no time aboard her these days. My sister can take care of you, since she has taken the charge out of my hands!'

Whereupon Leon saluted with the quick wilfulness he had shown to the yard-keeper and whistled himself away down the St. Malo road. The girl looked after him and smiled.

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'Somebody has been treading on little brother's corns,' she said softly; 'little brother is annoyed. I like that!'

'Do you love her very much?' demanded this astonishing girl as Paul and she left the yard and its guardian Cerberus behind. The road glared blindingly before them, blazing white in the sun of midsummer.

'Eh?' ejaculated Paul, scarcely believing his ears.

As she passed out the girl had plucked a large cabbage leaf from Cerberus's private garden, and now held it up to shade her head from the sun. From underneath this green parasol she regarded Paul without permitting him to know it.

'I said, do you love her very much?' she repeated.

'Love who?' faltered Paul to gain time.

Little Eza's laugh trilled out clear and thin as that of a cicada singing its song among the July leaves.

'That is not worthy of you,' she said. 'If you love a girl, say so. If you only want her for her money — well, we shall know what to think.'

'You mean Zipporah Katti?'

'Who else?' again the laugh rang like falling silver coins, 'did you think I was speaking for myself?'

'I did not think anything at all,' said Paul lamely. He was no expert practitioner at this game of words. Little Eza had the upper hand every time. More, she knew it, and forthwith proceeded to play with Paul, with the mercilessness usual to her sex when equipped with such knowledge.

They had now turned into the Gobelet orchards, and Eza Palafox was using her cabbage-leaf sunshade as a combined fan and fly-flap. She allowed it to play about Paul's face, tapping here, and encircling him there, all in sport of course, at

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least in appearance, but startling him with a revelation of the scent of her hair and shoulders as she looked up at him, mocking and provocative both at once.

Still Paul did not answer. He had a stubborn aversion to speaking his mind. He found it still more difficult to lie. His Galloway shamefacedness had not yet worn off him (as it did afterwards with extreme completeness).

'I have nothing to do with Zipporah Katti,' he said at length, 'nor have you.'

'Oh, haven't I?' Little Eza answered, sitting down on a tree trunk and indicating to Paul Wester a place beside her. 'Do you think Zipporah Katti as pretty as I am?'

'I do!' said Paul valiantly. But he found himself quite unable to add, as he felt he ought to—the words, 'She is much prettier.'

That is the disadvantage of distance in such matters. Paul's love for the girl of the Dulse Cavern had by no means wandered or lessened. Only he was face to face with Little Eza.

But a boy is always a boy—and for that matter, a man is a man.

It is difficult to tell a pretty girl that another whom she dislikes is prettier than herself. Especially when after flouting you, she has received you into sudden favour, interested herself in your welfare, protected you from danger, and is now fanning you with a look in her velvet eyes which does not bear dwelling upon too long.

Looking down Paul Wester saw a vision of clear and wonderful eyes, like those of Eza's brother Leon (but affecting him quite differently), a red mouth with moist full lips, a rather pale face, the whole

framed in an aureole of golden-ruddy hair. He knew that there was a little clucking pulse that came and went in the girl's throat as if she were swallowing down her emotion—emotion of which he was somehow the cause— while under the fine lace of the dainty dress, feelings apparently still more poignant rose and fell. All this, wholly intentional on Eza's part, caused Paul to thrill so that quick pulses beat lightly at his temples and his very fingers and toes crisped themselves like the claws of a cat expertly caressed.

There was certainly no unfaithfulness to the girl of the Cave in the words which, in all truth and sincerity, presently found themselves somehow issuing out of Paul Wester's lips.

'I never dreamed of seeing any one so beautiful as you!' he said. A glitter of triumph lit up in Little Eza's eyes. She shook her head, and then, with a wise smile she said: 'Ah, I see! You have told the same to Zipporah Katti—and other girls as well.'

'No,' said Paul, a little sadly, as if the confession were being wrung from him, 'it is true. I speak the truth. I have never seen anyone so beautiful as you. I did not mean to tell you. I am a fool to say it. I love Zipporah Katti, but I cannot help it. You are the fairest thing man ever saw in the world.'

And for the moment he was right. The thing, so far as he was concerned was true, though he should have kept the knowledge to himself. Paul did not know when to hold his tongue. It is always the girl a man sees at the theatre, or crossing his path in the street, or standing far above him on a balcony to which he cannot climb, whom in his heart he counts the fairest and most desirable—never the plain everyday wife or sweetheart. At least the exceptions

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are so few as to be proof of the rule. Yet this does not preclude affection, nor companionship, nor future fidelity. It is only the 'might-have-been' chapter in every man's life, which, when on his pillow he listens to the inwardnesses of the night, returns to his wakeful spirit again and again. He wonders what would have happened if— if! And in vain he strives to turn the page which ends with that irrevocable IF.

But Paul did not know that a man generally ends by seeing beauty in the woman who treats him as if she possessed it. A woman uses the prerogatives of beauty. She sets herself to be attractive to one man, and (so far as that man is concerned) she becomes so. That is why the offhand, 'hail-fellow-well-Jack' girl hangs on the stays, while others, with fewer advantages of beauty or wealth, ask her to be their second bridesmaid.

Zipporah Katti had swung her legs and cuffed Paul into submission. Little Eza had set herself to be only beautiful in his eyes, and lo! she was.

But Paul was so inconceivably verdant that when Eza said to him, tauntingly: 'You dare not say that to Zipporah Katti!' he answered: 'I not only dare, but I will, the first time I get the chance. I love her more—but you are more beautiful than she is!'

Then Little Eza clapped her hands and cried: 'I am so glad. I would give all I possess to see her face when you tell her. But meantime here is something to keep you from forgetting.'

And before Paul Wester knew what the mischievous fay of Gobelet orchards had in store for him, twin red lips, soft, warm and moist were upon his.

'Oh!' cried Paul starting like one who has been

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unexpectedly doused with ice-cold water. Little Eza Palafox's laughter tinkled in a silver shower.

'I see,' she said, 'I wager that you will not forget now. Zipporah Katti never kissed you like that!'

'She never kissed me at all!' said Paul indignantly.

'Well, I have,' said Eza calmly, 'and you can tell her if you like—and how you like it!'

Paul had an inspiration. He noted the tone in which Little Eza spoke.

'Why, what has she done to you that you should hate her so?'

'Done—nothing! Only she has everything done for her, while I have to do everything for myself—by which you profited just now, my friend.'

She nestled against him, rubbing a soft cheek against his shoulder.

'If I were you, I should ask my uncle to take me away. I am a dangerous companion for innocent little boys. Please go away!'

Paul was duly indignant, as had been intended.

'I do not need my uncle,' he said, with perhaps more than the necessary emphasis, 'to tell me how to conduct myself!'

He regretted the speech the moment after. For Little Eza instantly replied: 'He would tell you to conduct yourself differently and elsewhere if you did! But you can keep the whole story for Zipporah Katti. That will be better—and certainly braver!'

Paul was seated with his back against the trunk of a still growing tree, and as the log on which the two sat was of short dimension though extremely thick, Eza gradually slid down towards him. This happened partly because of the slope of the log and partly because of that action of gravitation which draws the lesser to the greater—chiefly, however,

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because she wanted to. Little Eza was soon seated more upon Paul's knees than upon the hard butt of the fallen tree,

'Why do you look at me as if I would bite?' demanded that enterprising young person from under her eyelashes.

I did not know—I was not aware, 'Paul began uncomfortably. 'And ti-ti-ti and ta-ta-ta!' interrupted Eza irreverently.

'Tell me' (she said 'Dis, Paul,' in the delicious French fashion) 'if you had not known that Zipporah first, you would have loved me best?— Dis, Paul, dis?'

'I don't know,' said Paul hoarsely, flattening himself against the apple-tree at his back, 'but what is the use? I did know her first.'

Little Eza suddenly thrust soft arms about his neck with a kind of childish impulsiveness. She clasped her hands behind his head, which she pulled downward in order that he should be compelled to look full into her upturned eyes.

'Oh, you dear,' she said, 'I don't mind a bit having to do all the love-making to you. I should have liked you anyway. I did like you last night. I suppose it is being a gipsy that makes me a born poacher. I only care for game caught in other folk's preserves. And I care about you twenty times more because you belong to Zipporah Katti. I will fairly love that girl out of your heart! See if I don't!'

Now Paul belonged to the older generation of lovers who still believe in constancy, and such things as oaths exchanged over running water. He thought 'The Gardener's Daughter' the most beautiful love poem in the world—that, and parts of 'Maud.' Which is to say that he was exceedingly

simple, natural, and fitted for a girl like little Eza to play pranks upon.

Still there was a point beyond which he could not go. Little Eza could bewilder him. She could cause certain chords of his nature to vibrate as the proud and solitary nature of Zipporah Katti could never have imagined herself doing.

For Mistress Eza was a young person of experience, besides being a charmer born of a line of natural charmers. She was on her own ground on the bosky collines of the Gobelet orchards, and what with petting, laughter and tears she kept Paul beside her till the moment arrived for which she had been excitedly waiting.

Of course Paul ought to have got up and gone away directly, but if such was for the moment his intention, Eza, with the quickness of intuition natural to such pretty experimental philosophers, forestalled him.

She stopped rubbing the tips of her fingers down his cheeks. Then she sat farther off and began to laugh softly as if to herself. Her eyes, bright and mischievous, glanced sidelong at Paul.

'Why, we must behave,' she said. 'I believe if anyone had seen us they would have taken us for a couple of fools lovemaking. Instead we are only good friends, are we not? Brother and sister, like Leon and I—and I will dance at your wedding with Zipporah Katti. But you must not tell her I made you say I was nice-looking. You only did it to please me, I know.'

'No,' said Paul, with a loyal melancholy. 'I thought it and I think it. You are beautiful, but I love Zipporah Katti. It came to me when I first saw her!'

'You poor dear!' cried Eza impulsively, her ready

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arms about his neck, and her lips on his cheek warm with tender comfort. She held him thus, till, as she had anticipated, the white door which led from her uncle's private garden parlour was opened, and Lazun and Dr. Laird came out behind them.

Of the twain, only Little Eza had heard the click of the latch, and the tread of the two men upon the soft, leaf-strewn sward of the orchard. But the sound made her nestle the closer to Paul Wester, and lay her cheek against his. Her golden curls fell in spray about his face. She raised her voice and sang the praises of Zipporah Katti with her lips very near to his ear, so that to both of the old men who had stepped out of the pleasant shadowy room where Lazun's ancestral books were bestowed, it appeared that Eza was sitting upon Paul Wester's knee who was kissing her. So indeed she intended it should seem.

'Now, young man,' the loud authoritative voice of Lazun broke on Paul's ear, 'would you make love to my entire family? It is out of sight, out of mind with you, evidently. That, I fear, runs in the blood. What did I tell you, Dr. Laird?'

'Paul, what is this?' said his uncle 'Pray explain yourself, sir—you have every need, considering all I have done for you!'

Paul was on his feet, pale and desperate, as he faced his Judges, for not a word rose to his lips. He could not tell the truth. He could not accuse Eza, nor yet recount his own weakness. He had a premonition that to do so would have made him look more ridiculous than ever, at least in Lazun's eyes, and contemptible in those of his uncle. Therefore he stood altogether silent.

As for Little Eza, she had vacated her place with a

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quick bound as soon as Lazun's voice was heard, and was now crouched at the other end of the log, sobbing with tearless eyes into a dry handkerchief, and laughing within herself to think what Zipporah Katti would say.

Lazun Palafox watched Dr. Laird with keen ironic eyes.

'I suppose,' he said, 'that in the circumstances, you will agree that what we have been saying to each other about certain young people had better be considered as unsaid. I do not blame the instability of youthful blood. But, much as I admire the adventurous readiness of this young hero, I think that it will be better not to arrange anything till he has made up his mind. He cannot marry the rather extensive Palafox family in the persons of its more agreeable and youthful female members.'

Dr. Septimus Laird stood mournful and reproachful.

'It is as I feared,' he said, 'in spite of my best teaching and example, in spite of all I have done for him from his childhood up—warning him to beware of women (according to the word of Solomon the Wise as written in those wondrous early chapters of the Book of Proverbs which is called by his name). The blood of his father is still strong within him. If he had done as I advised him, he would have kept himself wholly from the snares of women—as St. Paul—as I myself.'

'Oh,' said Lazun with a sudden flickering smile, 'I should not ask so much. There are few Saints of that sort among bold young men, and fewer still with your own devotion and self-sacrifice. Don't expect too much, Doctor.'

'But Paul—Paul, my lad—my lad,' the good man

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mourned, 'in whom I had put my hopes! I am rightly served thus to build upon earthly foundations. This is a lesson to me—a sore lesson!'

'Take courage,' said Lazun, 'there is no great harm. I prefer a bold fellow to a milksop any day. But these two girls are my care, and we will e'en say no more about it, till the young man has a little more control of his temperament. Now, Eza, come this way with me! Don't be too hard on him, Doctor!'

And Eza followed, still sobbing into her perfectly dry handkerchief.

CHAPTER TWENTY SEVEN

THE NEW REGIME

While Paul and his uncle were still upon their adventurous and unfortunate travels, to Paris and Cancale, the time came for Zipporah Katti and Barbara Simpson to return to the Manse. A visit had to be paid as soon as they got back, the very thought of which preyed upon the mind of Zipporah.

She must go to the Great House of Maxwellton and speak with the lady thereof—who though no more the rightful owner was still ‘My Lady’ to all the countryside.

The firm of Edinburgh lawyers employed by Lazun had explained the position very clearly. She must not give way to any feelings of compassion. It was necessary that they should insist upon her full rights, and obtain immediate possession. Indeed they had so arranged with the Kirkpatrick Maxwell trustees. If anything came in the way, she (Zipporah Katti) had only to write to them. The firm of McMath, Math & McMath were always at her service. The revenue from the estates would make a very considerable sum—the figures of which would be forwarded when the farm-steadings (too long left to themselves) should be repaired. These moneys should be amply sufficient for her installation. But if at any time (say on the occasion of her marriage) she should be in need of an additional sum, they would be most happy to negotiate the advance. An unencumbered Scottish estate was a thing so rare as to be almost a bar to its possessor being received in county society. There was a vulgarity about it!

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It was clearly understood (at least by her lawyers) that Zipporah Katti was at once to set up a fitting establishment in the Great House of Maxwellton. But to this the little gipsy, whose home had been mostly upon wheels, to whom the gable chamber at the Manse had represented a paradise of rest, was opposed with a bitter dislike of the unknown and undesired.

However she must go and call upon the Lady of Maxwellton. So much was a necessity. Nor could it be put off, for there were rumours of the Lady of Maxwellton taking a small house in Cairn Edward town—which thing moved the neighbourhood as if she had intimated her intention of taking in washing!

The long walls of the park which Zipporah could not yet believe to be hers, appeared higher and bleaker than ever. She followed it rood after rood, mile after mile along the dusty highway. The corn was standing yellow in the fields, undulating in long solemn waves to the distant dyke where the deep metallic green of turnips began. Snug farm-towns stretched out in lines of barns and byres, the houses set well back among tufts of high trees. Yonder was the village, hers too, almost every house of it, and away up by the Cairns of Tudor and Airie all that rolling waste of purple heather was hers.

Zipporah Katti did not yet take it in. Her mind was all upon what she would find to say to the haughty old lady who despised her as an intruder.

Barbara was anxious to accompany her, but Zipporah held her position.

'You have said all you need say, Barbara,' she argued, 'I am not a baby. I have seen much of the world and my four years at St. Bees have made me a

perfect lion!’

‘You would aye be the better of me,’ said Barbara, ‘I misdoubt sorely. Ye will let yourself be imposed upon. Better have let young Mr. McMath do it for you.’

‘No,’ said Zipporah Katti, ‘I know what it is to be turned out of a camp on the roadside by an officious policeman, and these Maxwells of Kirkpatrick and Orraland have been there for four hundred years. I will go myself.’

‘Mind, then,’ said Barbara, ‘that you do not anger the lawyers.’

The unspoken malediction as to all lawyers which formed itself in Zipporah’s mind, was certainly unworthy, both in form and spirit, of a young lady who had had the benefit of four years at St. Bees.

‘And then,’ Babby continued, driving the nails into her argument, ‘you will mind what Lazun Palafox has done for you. You have no right to play ducks and drakes with his money.’

‘No,’ sighed Zipporah. ‘I suppose I must remember that. Still he gave it to me to do as I liked with. He is no Indian giver—to take back with his left hand what he has given with his right. Besides I never asked him, and I do not know why he did it!’

‘Well, I know,’ said Barbara, ‘and for that reason you must do nothing that will spoil Lazun’s gift.’

Zipporah Katti paused a while before the white gates of the main lodge. Something of the old fear came upon her. Over there lay the coverts out of which she had helped Raif Palafox and young Hugo Lee with their backloads of plundered fur and feather. Coppice and covert were now her own, and if Raif came this way again, he and Hugo Lee, with perhaps Oliver Rutherford and some of the Smiths,

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might come poaching as before. Then the gamekeepers would arrive, guns go off—and what to think of her position Zipporah Katti did not know.

But the greater need expels the lesser, the immediate the farther off, and again the girl was thinking of what she would say when she found herself in the presence of Lady Maxwell.

The lodge-keeper had come out in answer to the clanging of the rusty bell. She had been at her washing and was rather annoyed at being called away.

‘Well, what is it?’ she cried, rather rudely, wiping soapy hands on her apron. She saw before her only a tall young woman, dressed somewhat unconventionally, who carried an ash plant under one arm, while in the other hand swung a small black leather satchel. Mrs. Kelly promptly set Zipporah down as an ‘artist’—one of the people who pestered her as to ‘good points of view,’ and sometimes did not bring back the key of the boathouse till she went in search of it—in fact, one of a clan who made her life a burden to her in the tourist season.

‘This is not the day for admittance to the grounds,’ she snapped, eager to be gone.

‘I think it is!’ said Zipporah, smiling, ‘at least it is going to be.’

On the spot she resolved to have no more locked gates, if, indeed, it were ever her fate to be the possessor of all this.

‘Have you a permit from the factor?’ said Mrs. Kelly, somewhat astonished at the young person’s persistence. Mrs. Kelly prided herself on her eye and its power over intrusives of all kinds.

‘No,’ said Zipporah Katti, ‘I am going to call on

Lady Maxwell.'

'Name, please!' said Mrs. Kelly sharply.

Zipporah thought of giving her one of the cards which she had had printed in Edinburgh (at Barbara's instance), but instead she only said simply—

'I am Miss Palafox, from the Manse!'

'Lord sake!' cried the alarmed gate-keeper, 'you are never herself—and you walking in the stour o' the road! Oh, it's shamed of myself that I am, indeed and indeed. And whatever will Patrick, my man, be saying to me. I might have been losing him his place, and all. But I hope, miss, if I may make so bold, that you will not let anything I would be saying count against Patrick. He is as good and steady a man as ever was, and respectful—oh, for respect, he was born in County Antrim and trained by the young master—my Lord Hill that is this very day.'

The gate was wide open by this time and Zipporah passed through with a smile and a wave of her hand to Mrs. Kelly.

'Oh miss, say ye will not keep it up against Patrick—as good a boy and as bould an Orangeman as ever came out of County Antrim—I shall not go comfortable to my bairn's washing if you don't say it, miss! Me to be a hindrance to Patrick Kelly in his way of life!'

'Of course not,' said Zipporah, 'you only did your duty. I have been so little in the parish for some years. How were you to know me?'

'Indeed no,' said Mrs. Patrick Kelly, 'by me soul, no more than I would know the Pope of Rome if I met him in my porridge! You walking like a gip—like a quite ordinary person on the highroad, and them telling that you are so rich and all!'

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The front of the house with its heavy Dutch style, the long rows of mullioned windows, severely moulded, the double stone staircase up to the main hall, where 'men might march on ten abreast, nor be pressed,' the wide green lawns and vistas of woodland—all served to awe Zipporah Katti. She thought of her little room at the Manse, of the sheltered corner of the orchard where she had so often talked with Paul Wester.

'Oh, if I could only have had something small and quiet like that! But all this—it crushes me.'

She felt less than ever inclined to face the titled presence within. Then she wished she had put on one of her best dresses as Barbara had advised. She might, she told herself, have been an upper servant in quest of a place. But she thought of her captaincy of the St. Bees cricket eleven and resolved that she would at least do honour to that election. The memory had more power to help her at that moment than all the blood of all the Palafoxes, and all the wealth of Lazun, chief of the name.

But so soon as Zipporah Katti had been announced and received, she was glad at once that she had taken her own advice in preference to that of Barbara. Lady Maxwell, in a black cloth dress, severely modelled, stood waiting to receive her. No servant's dress could have been plainer. She belonged to that solidly booted, far-striding, determined race of old Scottish dames, so well-born that there is no need for them ever to give a heed to the matter, and so well known to the neighbourhood that the robes of a coronation would add nothing to their dignity.

A handsome young married woman from London, whose husband was something vague (but rich) in

the city, found herself quite wrongfully suspected on account of the dresses in which she came to afternoon teas—pale blue and Honiton lace, worn with a windblown swing which Lady Maxwell and her working committee considered to be quite uncalled for and unladylike. What specially urged them to this decision was, at least on the part of the younger ladies, an unconfirmed but lurking suspicion that their own menfolk thought quite differently of the matter.

In Galloway the Maxwells of Maxwellton were the cousins of everybody who was anybody. For ages they had intermarried, for the most part, with more distant branches of their own family, and now, forming a kingdom within a kingdom, opposed a steadfast bulwark of ancient rank to the rising tide of wealth and fashion which at that moment was setting towards the shores of Solway.

So long as Sir Andrew had lived, his mother had objected nothing to his expenditures. He was the head of the house and might do as he liked with his own. But since his death, she was dowager no more. She became again the active clever housewife and financier, determined to do the best that was possible for young Sir Francis and his sister Fanny.

Her breakdown on the day when the news of the sale had come, was natural to such a woman, but she had recovered promptly, and set herself to make the best of all things to the last available penny. Now she stood on the hearthrug, her gold eyeglasses firmly set on a rigorous and authoritative nose, her white hair slightly moved by the wind of many open casements, and her pale lips so firmly compressed as hardly to leave visible more than the shadowy indication of a mouth,

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'Miss Palafox,' said the Lady Maxwell grimly, 'you are welcome to your own house.'

The focus of the glasses was not working well just at that moment, so the old lady spoke hardly and a little bitterly, as was natural in one so recently dispossessed. But gradually Zipporah's slim upstanding figure came into the range of the old lady's glasses. There was something curiously lithe and direct about the girl, a 'distinctly well-bredness' as she would have said—and then the dress, so simple, so becoming met her old-fashioned views. She might (almost) have been one of 'themselves.'

'Bless me,' thought the old lady, mollifying greatly as she took in Zipporah Katti, 'she reminds me of my niece Catherine Mary—where can she have got that manner?'

It was a harder thing than she had anticipated for Zipporah Katti to speak what was in her mind. Her ideas were in a worse whirl than ever. Since she came within the influence of the ancestral memories of the Kirkpatrick Maxwells, so long settled in this place, every rusted sword and suit of graven armour in hall or on wall telling of some great deed done by a Maxwell of that ilk—Zipporah's soul had wavered within her.

'Lady Maxwell,' she began at last, steadying her voice to the St. Bees pitch (which is exceedingly even and characteristic), 'my grandfather's lawyers have settled most things with yours, but there are others which can only be spoken of between us.'

'I fail to understand,' said the old lady, freezing instantly because she feared that something unworthy of the Kirkpatrick Maxwell traditions might be proposed to her.

'That is my excuse for coming here,' said

Zipporah, simply.

'You need no excuse,' formulated the old lady sharply, 'of course there are measurements, new furnishings, schemes of colour, renovating...'

She spoke in a high, clear tone, but nevertheless there was a tremor in her voice.

'No, no,' said Zipporah, quickly, 'that is just what I would wish to avoid. It is hard to explain—hard to say what I have to say unless you will help me.'

She paused and the eyes of the old lady softened in spite of herself. 'Well, what is it you would like to say to me?' she said in more level tones. And motioning Zipporah Katti to a seat, she dropped into one herself.

Over her head, shrined in a glass case like that in which keen sportsmen put the prize fish they have killed, hung the attainted coronet of that Maxwell who was riding to Bothwell Brig when the 'Banner of Blue' went down in blood.

The sight caught Zipporah Katti's breath. Who was she to alter and dethrone all these things, removing the candlestick out of its place, disturbing thus the march of the solemn centuries.

'My grandfather, Lazun Palafox,' she began bravely, 'once of Zaragoza, now of Cancale and St. Malo, has bought these properties for me—first, I think, because he thought that he would be settling me in life. He did his duty, for I am his granddaughter and sole legal heir. But he made the arrangements without consulting me, or the good minister with whom, by his consent, I had lived for four years. I could not help all this. The properties were for sale and he bought and paid for them. But Lazun Palafox is mistaken—I do not want to leave the Manse. I do not want to disturb (she took a

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quick glance all round the great drawing-room) all this!

'Nonsense,' cried the old lady vigorously, 'you must. You are, I hear, of the best blood of Spain. Lazun Palafox himself, if he had not been a wanderer all his life, might have claimed some rank—what was it? in his own country.'

'A Marquis,' said Zipporah, easily, 'the title is really his, but at the Revolution of 1835 they made one of the younger branches heir to the title and Grandee of Spain besides.'

The old lady lifted her eyes to the attainted coronet and then with a sudden change of subject she inquired, 'Where were you at school?'

'At St. Bees,' Zipporah Katti answered, her face clearing at the memory of the long Cumbrian sands and the distant coasts of Galloway wavering uncertainly in the noonday heat.

'I thought you spoke like my niece Catherine Mary,' said the Lady of Maxwellton, smiling for the first time, 'but she must have gone before your time?'

'Kate Maxwell?' said Zipporah, becoming again captain of the St. Bees First Eleven, 'oh yes, she kept wickets in the two last summer terms when I captained the team—very good she was, though a great nuisance sometimes when one had to see that she wore her mask all the time.'

The ice was broken now and the old lady looked at Zipporah Katti with quite other eyes.

'Well, tell me what you came to say to me, my dear!' she added the last two words almost without thought. Perhaps she regarded the new-comer as in some degree Catherine Mary's friend, but this slight lapse of memory marked the greatness of the change

in her.

'I thought you might help me—or at any rate, advise me.'

'Certainly—that is, if I can,' said Lady Maxwell. And then she added, 'Better tell me all about it. Then we shall see!'

'Well, I will,' said Zipporah—and forthwith the dam burst.

'Oh, I don't want this house—I should not know what to do with it. Will you please look after it for me—just as it is? If not for me, or for yourself—do for the sake of the children. I have seen them driving by in their little governess cart—and it makes me feel such a brute! Besides (she hurried on), I am thinking of the Doctor. He would never be happy without you to come over and talk parish affairs with. He loves to trundle about and look after his poor—who have been yours also for more years than I know about. Please don't make me feel a horrid intruder. Nobody wants me here, and everybody wants you.

It will be so much better for the children. Sir Francis will have his position when he comes home from school and the little girl will marry the better from the old house.'

My Lady shook her head though with a certain tenderness in her eyes.

'You will want to marry yourself one of these days, and then, your husband will find no fault with Maxwellton and Orraland!'

Zipporah Katti choked suddenly as she tried to speak. But presently the tears ran down her cheeks, made big and slow by the endeavour to keep them back.

'Oh,' she said, 'if you only knew—if I only could

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tell you!

My Lady moved nearer to the girl and, drawing in a chair, laid her hand on Zipporah's heaving shoulder. It felt astonishingly young to the fine old withered hand.

'Once I was like that. I needed advice,' said the old lady softly, 'I had no one to advise me. But if I can...'

The old lady did not finish her sentence, though her caressing hand spoke to her. Zipporah Katti took courage.

'There is some one I care about,' she said, with that curious avoidance of affectionate words girls use when much in earnest, 'someone I like . . . very much. Yes, he is—nice. But he is poor. He writes for his living ... on a paper. I like him to do that. But he does not come near me any more. He is proud and will not . . . think about me ... all because of these old estates.'

'He is a rarity, then,' said the old lady, smiling indulgently, 'can you not tell me his name—just for myself? Don't be afraid. There is nobody else on this floor. The children are out with their ponies.'

'It is Paul Wester, the minister's nephew,' said Zipporah, flushing hotly, 'he cares for me, I know. And I care about him. But what we hoped for is all over. Look at this.'

And she drew from her pocket a letter which she had not shown even to Barbara.

It was signed with the name of Lazun Palafox, and intimated briefly that by the mianimous decision of Dr. Laird and himself, and according to the desire of Paul Wester, a position had been found for the young man in the office of a leading London daily. Consequently he would not return to the North in

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the meantime. Paul Wester had, further, passed his word that he would not in any way correspond with Zip-porah Katti. Upon this the elders had insisted.

The old lady read the letter over twice.

‘He writes well—I mean the English of the letter. But be sure that there is something else.’

‘Oh, yes, this property—there can be nothing else. I wish I had never seen it.’

‘Um-m,’ said Lady Maxwell, ‘perhaps. Still if I were you, I should do nothing in a hurry. You are young. So is Paul Wester. It seems only the other day that he used to sit on my knee when he rode over on the same grey pony as his uncle.’

Zipporah Katti looked at the knee.

‘While his uncle talked,’ continued Lady Maxwell, ‘he used to play hide and seek under the table and behind the curtains.’

She patted her lips with the thin wide sheet of foreign post, to hide a smile, watching the direction of Zipporah’s eyes.

‘They are putting a wholesome obstacle in the way of you two,’ she said, slowly, as if meditating, ‘but that may not be at all a bad thing. Marriage, when everything goes on greased cog-wheels before, usually jumps the rails after. Husband and wife stick the closer when fresh worries have got to be worried out together all the time.’

‘Then you will help us by keeping this house,’ said Zipporah Katti; ‘the lawyers will be furious—that will be one comfort. I know that if I set up in this great house with nothing to do, I shall lose Paul. In the meantime I want to go on staying at the Manse and helping Barbara—till Paul comes back.’

‘It all needs consideration,’ said the old lady. ‘I do not see how we could stay on here—not without

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paying a rent!’

‘Well,’ said the girl, ‘I have thought of that! You offered for the Torr Dower House, the woods and the farms—pay me what you like—fifty—a hundred a year.’

‘Nonsense, girl, it is worth a couple of thousands.’

‘Yes,’ sighed Zipporah Katti, ‘more than that to me—to be rid of.’

‘You are a very foolish girl,’ said Lady Maxwell, ‘and I should have soundly scolded any daughter of mine who proposed to do such an absurd thing.’

‘It would be such a comfort to know it off my hands,’ mourned the girl, ‘I wish you would say ‘Yes.’ I should go away so happy.’

The old lady meditated.

‘Of course,’ she said, ‘in many ways it would be a great advantage. We have remained on here for a good many months. If it could be arranged on terms which a Maxwell could accept—I do not say but that.’

Zipporah Katti surprised the old lady by throwing her arms impulsively about her neck.

‘Then it shall be,’ she said, ‘it is arranged—on any terms you will accept—so long as I can go back to the Manse and—’ she was about to say ‘and wait,’ but she altered it to ‘help Barbara.’

‘Bless my soul, girl, you quite startled me,’ said Lady Maxwell, giving her a pat on the cheek, ‘sit down and compose yourself. I cannot but admit that you are a warm-hearted girl, and there are few who with considerable, if not unlimited, means so early at their disposal, would do likewise.’

‘What could I do in a great place like this?’ said Zipporah. ‘It would be like living alone under a mountain. I should be afraid that it would fall in and

crush me.'

'Well,' said the old lady, taking the girl's hand, 'perhaps you plan better than you think. When the children are married and out in the world, and I gone to Another—you can come here with your...'

The shrewd kindly old eyes saw the red mounting to Zipporah's brow and stopped in time.

'It is well to know of a harbour of refuge,' she said, 'and I am grateful for the one you offer me where I may finish my days in peace. But if we stay you must come and see me often.'

'Indeed I will,' said Zipporah, rising, 'now I shall whistle all the way home—you have made me so glad.'

'I am not sure that your grandfather will be quite so pleased,' said the old lady smiling. 'Remember we are always ready to make room for you.'

'Oh, he will not care. It is the lawyers I am thinking of, and that young Mr. McMath. But I know how to settle him. He shall draw up the agreement.'

Lady Maxwell took down a garden hat from the plumeless spike of a helmet in the hall—where the panoplies of ancient warriors of her name did not disdain to serve as additional hat racks.

A white-bearded gardener was nervously twiddling, with quite uncalled-for pains, among some plants set out in the shadow of the great Vanbrugh porch.

'John,' said the old lady, 'this is Miss Palafox of Kirkpatrick and Orraland,' (she meant to say of Maxwellton also, but the courage failed her).

'At your service, mem!' said John quaveringly.

'She is a very kind young lady'

'Varra like our Miss Katrin,' said old John, the immemorial gardener of Maxwellton, who had seen

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two generations grow up.

‘Now, John, if all comes about as Miss Palafox has been proposing to me, ye will keep your old place under your old mistress—which is just as well, for no other body would put up with your ‘thrawness!’

‘Here—at the Big Hoose—just as it was before. The young leddy doesna mean to bide here hersel?’

‘She does not mean to turn us out just yet, John. She has made other arrangements for herself. Now are you pleased?’

‘Lord, how rich she maun be,’ murmured John, ‘to buy all Orraland and Kirkpatrick from sea to hill-tap—and a’ just for fun. It’s clean wicked.’

Lady Maxwell touched Zipporah on the arm to intimate that John Torrance’s tongue was privileged.

‘At any rate you should be grateful, John,’ she said, ‘that no fine young scientific gardener is to have your old cottage by the Ivy Well.’

‘I would have burnt it doon first,’ said John, his voice full of wrath—‘sec-entific, indeed. Hear to ye, my leddy. It’s you that should ken better. Was not I, John Torrance, brought up along wi’ the Tamsons of Dalkeith and Drumlanerick? And I wad like to see the ‘sec-entific’ gardener that kens ae hundredth part o’ what is in ane of their wee fingers.’

My lady and Zipporah were moving off when John called after them in his familiar Scots way, ‘Oh, my leddy, hae I leeberty to warn the country?’

‘Aye, John,’ said his mistress, secretly as pleased as himself, ‘ye can tell the country—ye would do it whether ye had permission or not.’

‘Davert, that I would!’ cried John, dropping his tool on the path, and making off in haste. ‘Lord-sake, whatna bizz there will be!’

CHAPTER TWENTY EIGHT

THE LION AND THE LAMB LIE DOWN

The Manse of Kirkpatrick-Maxwellton slept its afternoon sleep—not merely forty winks, nor a nap over a dull book, nor a siesta in a comfortable arm-chair, but a good honest evendown sleep. All Orraland had swathed itself in a coverlet of heat haze, above which one could just discern the still cirrus clouds through which the sun rather filtered than shone in the ordinary way. It was, in fact, a very typical Solway shore day in early autumn. Distant objects wavered and melted as you looked, like a planet seen through a high-power telescope. Noises proceeding from clucking hens and lambs in quest of mothers carried far. Up on the hills grouse-cocks called their decimated families together, and from over ridges of purple, infinitely distant, arrived the faint toc-toc of guns, an aerial sound, telling that the shooters were busy and the pulse of August beating its full.

Save for these tell-tale shots it might have been a Sabbath morn. But in that case Dr. Laird and his friend, a tall, greyheaded man, would not have been getting out of a hired Cairn Edward wagonette at the 'Green Gate,' or lesser and longer avenue to the Manse—once indeed the stable drive. For in the absence of any steed other than old Glenkens with his occasional 'tub-cart,' the minister used the Green Walk chiefly as an adjunct to his study. Here

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for hours together he strode up and down the soft grass-grown turf, the tall trees sheltering him, and his fine white hands behind his back, carefully tucked under the tails of his black coat. Here he pondered his sermons and on those thoughts of a man which are deeper than any sermons he can ever preach. Nearer the village there was a short formal entrance strewn with sea-pebbles taken from the shore down the Tower way. But today the Doctor had stopped the driver of the fly at his well-beloved green gate instead of the formal white, looking upon the neat carriage-sweep to the front door.

The Doctor was again arrayed in his finest clericals. He wore a snowy neckcloth with which special care had been taken by the London laundress he had discovered for Paul. He looked modestly luminous, smilingly happy, and set his feet with undisguised satisfaction upon the grass border of Green Walk.

His companion was tall, erect, iron-grey, carrying a stern visage slightly upward-flung in the direction of the tree-tops. In a word—Lazun Palafox. He wore a suit of dark cloth, of a good make, nothing old-fashioned about it except the old-seadog cut of the reefer jacket, which set off his still robust and muscular figure.

‘Hey, Jamie,’ said the minister to the driver, who in good Orraland fashion was plumping the baggage down by the dykeside, ‘what’s that you are doing? Take all those things round to the stable.’

Then he turned to Lazun and said with a chuckle: ‘We shall come in upon them and see how they are behaving themselves.’

Lazun was looking about him curiously. His brow was slightly wrinkled as if he could not understand.

He found something strange about his surroundings.

'We seem to be entering the glebe by the wrong side,' he said at last. 'The Manse gate opened almost directly upon the road in my time.'

'And it does so still,' said the gratified minister; 'your time must have been before my time, in that case. For I made this walk and had this gate put up in the first year of my coming to the parish. And that is by no means yesterday.'

Lazun laid his hand gently on the Doctor's shoulder and stayed him from going further,

'I will tell you something,' he said, 'perhaps I ought to have told you before. Once I thought to live all my life in Orraland. Yes, in this very village. There is a house, almost your nearest neighbour—you can see its twisted chimney tops from where we stand—a house I built to live in—built with my own hands.'

'What,' gasped the Doctor, 'you are never the man they call Captain Bunker whom I have heard about ever since I came to the parish?'

The old man bowed.

'The same,' he said, 'if the gentlemen of His Majesty's Preventive Service had been less officious Captain Bunker might have been your quiet parishioner—and in that case neither Lazun Palafox nor his ship the Golden Flagon would ever have been heard of on this coast.'

'Then 'The Hill' is yours?' the Doctor questioned, 'your property! And what of Findlater?'

'Findlater,' said Lazun carelessly, 'was only my caretaker. The house itself has long been Barbara's, though my 'writers' in Edinburgh have looked after it for me.'

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'You are a wonderful man,' said the minister, 'you dower one of the women of my household with an estate, and make of the other the owner of the house I have looked out upon when I was shaving any time these four decades.'

'Ah no,' said Lazun with a sigh, 'there you are wrong. Captain Bunker built that house for Barbara Simpson, and if ever she wants to enter it, it is ready for her.'

The minister sighed this time.

I had made some small but not insufficient provision for Barbara myself, in case of my death. But in this, as in everything, I seem to have been forestalled. Well, there will be the more for that bad boy Paul!

'Which reminds me,' said Lazun dryly, as if the subject did not please him, 'that the sooner we are at the Manse, the more chance we have of getting to the door before the driver.'

The Doctor started, and laying his hand on Lazun's arm, he drew him with a certain boyish haste towards the house.

The sound of voices, or rather the rise and fall of one strenuous voice, came to them at the final turn of the Green Walk.

'That is Barbara!' said the Doctor, at which Lazun nodded silently.

The window of the pantry opened at the end of the yew-hedge, and through this the voice came in spurts and jerks—now loud and strong, and anon, falling to an unintelligible murmur, from which, nevertheless, certain emphatic words stood out clearly enunciated. Barbara was busy at her work and was going between the kitchen and the pantry as need took her, talking all the while.

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‘A sin and a shame,’ she was saying, ‘you to be here peeling potatoes like a kitchen wench, and lauchin’ in my verra face, when I do my duty by reprovin’ ye! It makes my blood run cauld to think what your—what Lazun Palafox will say when he kens.’

‘Dear Babby,’ it was a young voice this time, ‘please don’t get your nice white cap-strings all awry, and make yourself hot about what I have settled for myself. I have written to Lazun, as I have told you fifty times. And besides, I am quite sure he would prefer this beautiful and attractive heiress of his under old Babby’s care than lonely and unprotected in the biggest house in the land.’

‘And to leave the Maxwells to lord it.’

‘Lady it,’ interrupted Zipporah with a laugh.

‘To lord it in the house that is yours, as if it were not yours every stone of it and the money—Lazun’s money—paid!’

‘Let me talk to Lazun Palafox,’ they heard Zipporah again, her clear full tones reaching them punctuated by the cool splash of the peeled potato dropped into the water of the ‘byne’ at her feet. ‘Lazun has more than one very fine house of his own, but I never heard of him staying very long in any of them.’

The two old men, behind the last flanking tower of the yew-hedge where the Green Walk terminated, looked at each other with amused smiles. They shook their heads, and then Lazun said: ‘I have only the usual fate of listeners. If I hear no ill of myself here is one of my family setting me at naught, and more than intimating that she can twist me round her little finger. Well, we shall see.’

In half a minute more the two stood within the

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kitchen itself. At sight of them Barbara let drop the dish she had been carrying, and the pieces flecked the floor in a bombshell spurt of blue and white. She stood breathing deeply, her hand pressed to her side as if something hurt there, her eyes going from one to the other of the two men. She was wondering how much they had told each other, and if her quiet retreat in the Manse of Kirkpatrick-Maxwellton was imperilled by that telling.

Zipporah Katti was thinking much the same thing, but she acted differently. She sprang up, the potato-peeling apron falling away from her, and in another moment she had her arms round Lazun's neck.

'Oh, I am so glad you have come,' she cried, and then low in his ear she added, 'don't tell Babby even if you are cross with me. Scold me by yourself afterwards.'

A faint smile flicked about the corners of Lazun's grim mouth, but a kiss on the girl's crisp hair as he bent from his Viking height, told her that so far at least her request had been favourably received. Then with Zipporah Katti still clinging to his arm, he shook hands with Barbara, eye meeting eye in the light of day, friendly, affectionate—no more. Barbara understood that all the old differences had, like good wine long in cave, deposited their acids and refined into the placid sunshine of an unselfish old age.

Yes, Lazun Palafox, who in the strong days of his youth had taken what his hand found of adventure and pleasure, was now thinking and caring for others. And the thing seemed a great miracle to her.

It was a greater marvel still, because 'things seen are mightier than things heard,' and because the breaking of a forty-years' habit appears more

wonderful than the vastest spiritual change. Simply to see Dr. Septimus Laird, her master, laying his hand gently and almost caressingly upon the arm of her husband.

She wondered if he knew—and how much. That arm on which he leaned had fought the officers of the law. That man had wandered the world, venturing and adventuring everywhere. He had been wounded in the Mexican War, had seen the gallant Emperor-puppet Maximilian shot because a lead-coloured man in Paris had heard a sound as of a myriad of boys-in-blue all ‘marching through Georgia.’ He had been outlawed for gun-running to half the rebel chiefs of two continents, yet had come out of all with his head high, his courage calm and cool, his fame established, a master of men, money and affairs.

But nothing of all this appeared so marvellous to Barbara Simpson, as to see the Doctor, gentle and kindly, his hand lifted to pat the giant’s sleeve. She wondered what Lazun’s heart held at that moment.

But it was immediately clear that they could not talk where they were. Barbara could express no more surprise than the splintered blue of the ‘willow pattern’ had expressed for her. She regained her self-respect in the only way possible to such a woman.

She bade them all go elsewhere. Since they had come without giving notice, there would be dinner to provide—and for men—that was a different thing from dinner for two solitary women-folk.

‘I think there is a basket somewhere,’ said the Doctor, glancing at Lazun Palafox. ‘Where is that slug Jamie Nay? Has he not brought up the things yet?’

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But at that moment certain shuffling sounds in the court betrayed the arrival of 'that slug Jamie Nay.'

'Never mind the portmanteaux,' said the Doctor, rubbing his hands, 'Jamie can carry them upstairs. But there is some marketing here for you, Barbara!'

'Save us,' cried Babby, as she opened the basket—a lid of wicker fastened with a hook— 'a leg of mutton, kidneys, a lobster, sardines, fruit, and game, half-a-dozen grouse! Lordsake, what are we to do wi' a' that proveesion? And wine!'

She stood up after roughly enumerating the treasures, still holding the lid of the basket by a tag tied to the wicker.

'Doctor,' she said, 'it was never you that thought of this. You would have brought half-a-dozen on us with as little warning, and nothing to be had in all Orraland except eggs and bacon ham!'

'And excellently good, too,' said the Doctor. 'I am sure this gentleman here would rub his hands at one of your Orraland teas, with bacon crisp and skirling from the pan, fresh eggs, and plenty of oat-cake, scones, and jam of your own making.'

'Indeed that would I!' interrupted Lazun cheerfully.

'But he would insist, for your happiness and your anxiety for the honour of the Manse, on having that hamper packed, in spite of all I could say.'

Barbara looked at Lazun half gratefully, half snappishly. She was glad, but the housekeeper within her felt somehow disgraced that she should be caught thus unprepared.

'You might surely have spent a penny stamp on letting us know you were coming!' she said, with a toss of her chin, 'but being men, of course, you

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never thought of it!’

‘On the contrary,’ the Doctor beamed as he returned tit for tat, ‘we thought very specially about it. But we decided not to, for fear we should find the birds flown and the nest empty.’

CHAPTER TWENTY NINE

SMUGGLING BROUGHT UP TO DATE

The screw-steamer Golden Flagon had a little business on the verges of Solway. She had brought a considerable cargo of primeurs, which are early potatoes, fresh vegetables, cantelopes, melons, plums, peaches, apricots, greengages, consigned from France to the north midland markets. These must be brought by sea in properly constructed fast ships, and few things floated between the Grouin of Cancale and Pladda Light to which the Golden Flagon could not show a clean pair of heels.

Moreover the crates on her deck were purposely so arranged as to give her a perfectly regular and mercantile look. Her engines were masked so that their horse-power would not betray the marvellous speed which could be developed when the chief engineer winked at his second-in-command.

The Golden Flagon called at the Isle of Man first, for the sake of the summer visitors. Then she dropped in upon several cross-country route ports, such as Fleetwood, Ulverston and Barrow, to catch the markets of Lancashire and Yorkshire. But the little trip into the broad blue tumble of the Solway was in the minds of all. The rest was mere 'shop-window' — facade, as the Captain expressed it to his supercargo.

For the visit to the Clyde (mainly the West Arran and Cantyre side where little shipping comes, and southward to the Solway where none comes at all) depended upon the phases of the moon. Then

during the nights of darkness the winch of the Golden Flagon could be heard, chirring like a cricket as it swing the material for certain neat little rafts overboard. Twenty feet by fifteen they measured, two tiers of casks in each, bound together in a mattress framework with buoyant air chambers, and larger half empty barrels at either end. Their weight was carefully considered, as well as the ease with which they could be brought to the surface by some providential but carefully instructed fishing smack or small yacht. Two men, or three at most, must do the raising, re-stowing, breaking up of the raft, and in general making everything snug—no floating rubbish, not a spar nor a cork buoy! When the sinkers were once got up, the raft would rise to the surface and before daylight the sea would be empty again. The Golden Flagon had passed that way. In the darkness of the night she had laid to a while. Then the next night the Florence III or the Cheer-Ho would pause a little longer at the same spot, because a couple of lanterns on the shore and the wink of a far-off lighthouse are not easy guides to a sunken raft of twenty feet by fifteen.

But what connection could there be between the Golden Flagon of Cancale and a yacht flying the colours of a well-known racing squadron?

Perhaps Captain Paul Wester Sr. and his supercargo Lupo Palafox might have told, had they not been men who above all things valued a close mouth. Sometimes they even went the length of closing it for ever, but this was exceptional, and only when the mouth talked foolishly and threatened much.

Fishing boats, too, made curious trawl at different points along the coast in the wake of the Golden

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Flagon of Cancale. There were many eyes following her and her cargo of innocent Brittany butter and Potevin primeurs. Aged telescopes watched her dodging among the upper Cumberland ports, and when at last she returned to shelter behind the faint blue of St. Bees Head, the long brass 'Dollands' shut up with a snap, and grizzle-bearded, retired captains of coasters, from the Mull to Portowarren, passed the word to their juniors to be ready at such and such carefully indicated points, on the chance that 'Captain Bunker' might have something for them.

Then Captain John Clark took counsel with Captain Willie Grieve somewhat after this fashion: 'This is not like the old days, Willie—the stuff all in small parcels, and nobody getting much good of anything—that is, except 'Captain Bunker.' No men with arms in their hands guarding the landing, resisting the very preventives and keeping them in respect, as Lazun did, at the musket's point. Why all is done now as quiet as a Sunday School picnic!'

'Well, Captain Jone Clark,' said Willie, who being younger, set less store in the traditions, 'you see, Captain Jone, sir, the times are changed, if not the nature of mortal man. For 'tis the nature of sinful man to smuggle—if so be he can. Now there's women—they're worse—my daughter Mary, for instance, as good a Christian lass as a father ever spoke well of behind her back and miscalled to her face. But if it were only a bit o' lace or a squirtful of scented water, she would lie about it like a ship's boy and smuggle it just for the pleasure of bein' again the law. Now if it were what's out yonder, or will be before the sun rises tomorrow morning, it would be something to tempt a man. Yes, surely, so it would!'

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'Aye, aye, it may be as you tell,' said Captain John, sending out smoke in short impatient puffs, 'but think of a hundred pack-beasts all jingling with steel-chains and barrel-furniture and an armed man at every bridle-rein—that was something like smuggling!'

'Maybe, maybe,' Captain Willie nodded his head wisely, 'but you see since I got snug ashore I don't hold with all that noise and bluster. It had its day, a good and long one, and there are tales of its prime that the folk keep harking back upon. But I'm all for the way that 'tis done this day—a quiet loaded sea, a raft well buoyed, time somewhere along about midnight—nothing to see all next day but the sun shining down on the rush and tumble of the tides, indigo-blue, or berry-brown, as the case may be. Then, the next night the eggs all out of the basket, safe ashore waiting distribution, in this cellar or that, and all done as neat and slick as spinning a new shilling. What do you say to that Captain Jone?'

'I say naught, Willie, but then I sailed with Lazun Palafox in his youth and mine, so you will not convince me that the times are what they were for coastwise sailor men.'

'I dare say not Captain Jone, sir. I'm a poorer man than you by a deal, but then you lost three fingers by the slash of a cutlass, and that French bullet you got at Quiberon, landing Sheffield cutlery and Birmingham guns, ties you by the leg. So I would not say that, taking all by all, I am not as well off as you. Captain Jone, sir!'

'The old times was best,' reaffirmed Captain John Clark doggedly, 'we were not all coal-heavers in them days.'

'No,' said Willie, firing up, 'not did we lie up for six

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months at a time in Kirkcudbright Gaol!

The elder sailor rose to his feet and lifted his staff, very polished as to the square crutch handle, quaveringly over his head.

'If it were not for your age and infirmities, William Grieve, I would break thy head—sure, aye, an' that I would!'

'Age and infermity, you wizened old wistiti monkey (beggin' your pardon Captain Jone, sir), but if you were ten years younger and gave me such talk out of your toothless old head, I would take you honestly by the seacloth of your every day second-best breeches and heave you over the scaur!'

The two old men stood confronting each other, Captain John's staff trembling in the air, and Captain Willie in the position of a painted prize-fighter, Heenan or Sayers, on the outside of a booth at a fair. They were very terrible to look upon, till you came near enough to see the tremulousness of their limbs. So when a voice cried behind them, 'You ought to be ashamed of yourselves, you two old men!' they dropped their arms to their sides and turned with astonished faces towards their mentor.

Zipporah Katti had surprised them as she walked along the smooth sward of the cliff, coming as noiselessly as drifting mist, and now she advanced menacing them alternately with her finger.

'You, Captain John, and you, Captain Willie, for shame! Is that the way you showed an example on the Good Intent—and the Rose of Colvend? A pair of your own cabin-boys could not have behaved worse. And now, tell me what is it all about?'

'Age and infermities'—and one thing led on to another! Well, ashamed you shall be if I hear any more of this. The Doctor shall know. He is home

now, and if I hear a word of any quarrel, I shall get him to preach on the sin of quarrelling, and name you two as examples!’

‘Nay, Miss Zipporah Katti,’ (it was Captain Willie who was readiest of reply), ‘that you would never do—such old friends as we be—you and me and Captain Jone there. But don’t tell the Doctor, for he might tell our wives, and that would never suit

‘Aye, aye—’tis an unruly evil surely—the Good Book says so!’ Captain Willie added. ‘That is to say—a woman’s tongue—speaking for myself, that is, and no offence intended to present company. My wife Mally’s fro’ Grange, and the women are born unruly in them parts.’

‘So they be,’ said Captain Jone, ‘aye, aye, God help any man that weds out of his own country and kin. After a spell or two ashore between voyages he will never be able to speak his own tongue reasonable again. But, missie, do you see what’s out yonder?’

‘I see a little steamer just turning St. Bees,’ said Zipporah Katti, her hand palm-downward held level with her brows.

‘You have honest eyes,’ said Captain Willie. ‘Yon be the Golden Flagon of Cancale town. Mayhap you have heard of her?’

‘I have heard of Golden Flagons all my life—half-a-score of them. Which one is that?’

‘I sailed on one of them near to sixty years ago,’ said Captain Jone, ‘took and sold for prize-money she was. The Merle Royal, sloop of war, it were that took her a league off the Point of Ayr. My brother was on board of her, fighting against us. He got a guinea and sixpence, but he lost me my twentieth share and got me six months in Lancaster Gaol—the

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first time since I was weaned that ever I had had a spare hour to myself. Yet I liked it none the better for that. I missed the sea and—but there, she's gone—the Golden Flagon the tide's full and the moon dark. I would I were on board of her. Just one more turn before I went to give account!

'Hear him,' said Willie, nodding like a toy mandarin, with a Punchinello chin done in wizened potato skin, 'and him so near his end that he can hardly draw on his pipe.'

'Weeliam Grieve!' Captain Jone rose totteringly to his feet again, 'stop that tongue o' thine or I'll surely stop thy pipe—respectful as I wish to show myself in the company of this young lady.'

Zipporah Katti was thinking deeply, so she did not reprove these peppery old men of the sea. She only motioned them to sit down, with a single imperious gesture of her hand. But they continued to glare at each other with wagging heads and angry tappings of staves on the little worn patch in front of the bench on which they sat every day from dawn to dark, mealtimes alone excepted, quarrelsome but inseparable.

The Golden Flagon out beyond St. Bees (she thought) and Lazun Palafox down there at the Manse! What connection could there be between these two facts?

The distance, beyond the blue and silver of the Solway shore, took on pearly tints. St. Bees lay a dream of pale turquoise on a ground of creamy rose. The Isle of Man was lost in a curious iridescent haze, and the nearer peninsula of Galloway grew strangely clear and distinct. As the twilight fell

slowly, all things began to look honey-coloured, as though seen through smoky amber sliced fine. The sea was changing more quickly than artist could paint or writer find colour words to describe. Soon the sun set behind the Mull and the high clouds in the zenith flashed suddenly into curdled flame. Then the glory ebbed as a cistern empties itself from the bottom, and the final swirl of that tide-race lay in the startling clearness with which the great Cumbrian headland, now turned to deepest sapphire, stretched out into a saffron magnificence of sea and sky, from which all trace of dividing horizon line had been blotted out.

It was the last effort. Night came down equalizing and blurring, till only the sea was dark and solitary. Far above the stars shone, showing themselves cautiously one after the other, like timid things emboldened by the quiet, and from village and farmhouse pinpoints of fire pricked the dark line of the shore.

Then after an hour as these grew restless and began to move into 'ben' rooms and up into attics, till presently, of Orraland and the countryside behind was left only a filmy uniformity of shore and wood and mountain. At last all was still, except, very far off (but listened for by many), the beat of a steamer's engines somewhere to the south.

Zipporah Katti heard it too. Her gable window was open and with one bare arm she pushed aside the red 'tropaeoleum' creeper so that she might hear the better. She knew that Lazun Palafox slept with his window open, and she felt sure that he also must be listening.

Zipporah felt herself growing more and more curious. She was anxious without exactly knowing

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why. Certainly no fear for Lazun crossed her mind. He could always take care of himself. But there was Paul. Had he really remained in London? Or was his sudden disappearance out of her life connected with this visit of the Golden Flagon to the Orraland coast?

Zipporah dressed hastily, threw a cloak across her shoulders and slid out. She was light, and the slant of the iron pipe which ran into the water barrel had been her friend for years. She ran down the green slopes to the burnside and made no more than three or four bounds from stone to stone over the ford. She could cross them as easily as if they had been the steps which led down to old Barbara's kitchen. Then, circling the village, she crossed the road above the dark-windowed school-house and struck up across the smooth cliff turf in the direction of the Cave.

How long it was since she had been there, yet how good and familiar everything seemed. She startled a bullock as she leaped a stile, but a score of cows chewed the cud placidly without turning to look at her when she threaded her way among them. Sheep browsed, shuffled, and coughed. Rabbits scuttled, their white plumes jigging merrily across the dull bluish grey which was the underfoot grass, and from the sea towards Isle Rathan came a distant disputing of sea-birds uneasy on their resting ledges or disturbed by unwonted intruders.

Slowly Zipporah became conscious of many other sounds. For a Solway night is filled with noises, faint mostly, but every one distinct and full of meaning to trained ears like those of Zipporah.

She could follow the progress of the vessel which was now not many miles distant. The engines were going very slowly—dead slow, indeed—a stop—then she backed—the rattle and snort of a steam crane and a yet longer silence. Then the engines began again nearer at hand. The ship was quite close now, going up with the flood toward White Horse Bay or Portowarren. Zipporah Katti strained her eyes, but could see nothing—something a little darker perhaps that moved in the greyness, but not a light anywhere. The Golden Flagon (the Captains were right in their guess, for it was she) was navigating in total darkness. There must have been wonderful pilots aboard, for she seemed to be heading straight for the deadly sands of Barnhourie.

Now Zipporah Katti had a long time to wait. For the faint sounds from the sea grew fainter as the Golden Flagon headed up the firth. Then they came not at all. But she knew that the Golden Flagon could not afford to be caught by the turn of the tide and that her stay farther up would of necessity be short.

After an hour's silence, the steamer was again quite close to her. She made no attempt to enter Orraland Bay, but came to anchor almost immediately opposite the cave entrance.

Zipporah Katti understood clearly that something more than a mere landing of cargo must be on foot. She waited on the very edge of the cliff, quite near the ladder by which Barbara had descended, and with her back towards the little rocky dell upon which the back door of the Dulse Cave opened out. She lay motionless in a rough whin-brake, and when she put aside the bushes with her hands to see the better, she never felt the prickles.

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Zipporah was sure that there must be something baleful under all this, and she held herself ready to retreat at once to the Manse in order to put Lazun on his guard. Twice she heard the sound of oars. Twice holding by a tough furze stem she leaned over the verge till she could see the soft phosphorescent glimmer where a waveless, windless tide pushed itself softly against the long curve of the cliffs, foamed into white folds of lace and sank again noiselessly.

Men were coming ashore. Even now they might have landed. Perhaps they were climbing the ladder—perhaps already behind her, stealthily making their way up to the Manse where the Doctor and Barbara and Lazun lay asleep.

A wild unreasoning terror suddenly took Zipporah Katti by the throat. She rose to her feet, turned and sped up the gorge, stumbling among the boulders and tangled heather. She must get home. She did not care what they would think of her. She must warn those in the Manse of this nocturnal terror which was approaching.

But in the roughest part of the boulder-strewn dell, just before she began to ascend the steep brae, from whose summit she would see the village and the little white gate of the Doctor's avenue, two shadows rose one on either side of her as she ran. She fell forward over a man's foot into the arms of another. Something soft was thrust into her mouth so that her cry for help was shut within her. Zipporah felt herself being borne seawards in strong arms, and then as she began to descend, a kind of milky blue unconsciousness swallowed her up.

CHAPTER THIRTY

THE KIDNAPPING OF ZIPPORAH KATTI

Zipporah Katti came to herself in a warm dusk. Her head was aching a little and something uneasy informed her that she was by no means in her small brass bedstead with the shy red blooms of the *tropaeolum* peeping in at the window. A rounded brass-bound porthole, white panels, an occasional swish of sea, the smart smack of a wave quite close to her ear told her that she was on ship-board.

Zipporah knew that she had been carried off—kidnapped. She lay still and thought, but her mind could not provide any explanation, even inadequate, of what had befallen her. It could not be with Lazun's consent. Yet why was he at that moment at the Manse with the Doctor? Above all how would such men dare do such a thing in Lazun's own vessel?

She lay meditating and conjecturing without moving, but with her eyes open. She could hear the sound of men trampling the deck above and an occasional whistle or word of command. Sometimes as she lay still, half dreamily listening, she heard or seemed to hear the brush and rustle of skirts outside her door, and once quite clearly two people conferred in whispers in a neighbouring cabin.

Zipporah Katti was not greatly frightened. Her early adventurous life had taught her to accept fortune good or bad as it turned up. In her little world Lazun's protection had always been powerful—omnipotent indeed. And she saw no

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reason why it should not be so also on his own ship. Who then would or could harm her here? But what would they be thinking at the Manse—Barbara and the good Doctor? They would find her bed untouched, and traces of her escalade. They would be sure she had run off to marry Paul Wester. Whereat for the first time she smiled and was a little glad.

The white panelled door of the state-room opened. A girl looked in, made sure that Zipporah was awake, smiled and said, 'Can I come in?'

'Come all the way,' said Zipporah, staring at her.

'I am Eza, your cousin, half-quarter sister, or something of the kind. I put you to bed. I am going to help you to get up.'

'Thank you,' said Zipporah Katti, with much promptitude, 'I can do that for myself.'

'Oh, it isn't so easy as you think.' Little Eza began calmly to turn a stocking inside out. 'Now give me your foot. There—I hope we shall have good times.'

'Why am I here at all?' Zipporah demanded.

'That is what I am all achy inside with trying to find out—I thought you would tell me when you woke!'

'I know nothing about it,' said Zipporah, 'all I am sure of is that somebody will pay dearly when Lazun Palafox hears of it.'

'You are quite sure?' said Eza provokingly. 'Sometimes Lazun does not tell all his thoughts.'

'He is...' but Zipporah checked herself. She was going to say that Lazun was at the Manse of Orraland with the Doctor. But she was not yet at all sure of this pretty sprite Eza who had suddenly appeared from nowhere to be so kind and serviceable.

'Yes?' said Eza, looking up.

'I mean,' said Zipporah, 'he has done so much for me that I cannot believe he has anything to do with this business.'

'No?' A faint surprise floated into the voice, but its owner went on busily brushing a skirt. 'Perhaps you were fond of somebody he did not want you to be fond of. I have got into disgrace with Lazun several—oh, many times because of that. He has all sorts of ideas. . . . So have I.'

Zipporah flushed as she thought of Paul Wester in London, but Little Eza demurely kept her head down and, a very model of discretion, went on with her brushing. But Zipporah rejected the suggestion. She was sufficiently separated from Paul Wester, as it was. Why should carrying her off on the Golden Flagon make any difference?

But she felt that a little confidence—not too much, but a little as ground bait, might draw from Eza what she wanted to know.

'I was down on the shore last night,' she said, 'no, indeed, not to meet anybody . . . there was nobody to meet. I was all alone listening and watching.'

'Ah, yes, near that Cave they were all talking about on board. We lost our Captain last night, and the supercargo has taken command. Leon, my brother, would not tell me why, but I can guess. There was a quarrel among them, and the supercargo's party won. The Captain was either killed or carried on shore. I don't know exactly what the idea was, but at any rate they found you among the rocks at the cave mouth—yes, up on the hill, where they were watching for some one else. And they took you for a spy.'

'Then they did not know who I was when they

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caught me?’

Eza hesitated and after a rapid glance out at the door of the little state-room, she approached her lips to Zipporah’s ear, and whispered, ‘Yes, one. I think Lupo Palafox knew.’

‘And who is Lupo Palafox?’

Eza’s lips stole nearer till the words were breathed rather than spoken into Zipporah Katti’s ear—

‘The new captain—your father!’

‘My father!’

‘Hus-s-sh!’

Yes, your father, but speak low and I will tell you what I know. It is not much. They don’t give away secrets to girls among the Palafoxes. Lazun gave Lupo the Basque his eldest daughter—his rightful daughter, you know she was your mother. That’s why he has given you all those estates and money. But there are many very angry. And Lupo Palafox is the angriest of all. ‘Let those who helped him to gather, help him to spend,’ he says.

‘And indeed the whole tribe was angry, though of course no one dared to say so to the Chief while he was in France. But I suppose they thought that he would not be able to defend himself so well away off in Scotland. So whatever Lupo Palafox had determined to do, the Captain would have nothing to say to, so he and Lupo quarrelled. Lupo could not fight him single-handed, but he won over most of the crew—they belonged to his tribe anyway, Spaniards from the Basque shore, a dangerous lot.’

‘And what was your captain’s name—the one who was true to Lazun?’

‘Oh, I don’t know that he was true to Lazun. He was more an enemy to Lupo Palafox. His name was

Paul Wester!’

Zipporah made an indistinct noise betokening utmost astonishment.

‘Paul Wester—yes, exactly,’ Eza murmured, ‘you know the name?’

‘Why,’ said Zipporah, ‘his son was my friend, my brother. He is in London now. They would not let him come back!’

‘They? Who?’ Eza was smiling covertly down at the matting on the cabin floor. She wondered what Zipporah would say if she told her that Paul had accepted friendship and brotherly relation from her also.

‘Lazun and the Doctor—Paul’s uncle,’ said Zipporah, a little reluctantly.

‘Ah!’ thought Little Eza. But she said nothing aloud. It was enough for her to appreciate the part she had played in that decision.

Zipporah was not long in dressing, and then Little Eza invited her to come into her cabin, for the two were side by side.

‘These belong to Lazun when he is on board the Golden Flagon,’ she said. ‘My brother Leon turned out of his in order that you might be beside me.’

‘That was kind of him,’ said Zipporah without enthusiasm. All the same she accompanied Eza readily enough into her cabin, which she found small but faultlessly arranged.

‘Leon has been here,’ cried Eza, clapping her hands, ‘he is a dear, kind brother . . . really my brother, you know. Not the kind Paul Wester is to you. And he is a perfect fad about his clothes and his lockers and all that is his—or mine, which comes to the same thing. I am fearfully careless, but Leon is different. He is clever too, and if he likes he can

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help us a lot. He can find out anything, and is a favourite with . . . the supercargo. Shall I call him?’

Leon tripped down, turning the narrow companion way with a lissom grace that had something almost girlish about it. But his radiant face, his blond curls (frimousse he would have called it) escaping from his gold-braided cap, the joyous lightness of his bearing, and his confident manner with women, were not without their effect even upon Zipporah Katti.

‘My brother Leon,’ Eza made the presentation, ‘this is Zipporah Katti.’

Leon took Zipporah’s hand and swept the wrist with his tiny pale gold moustache. It tickled and if Paul Wester had done that, Zipporah would inevitably have boxed his ears. But somehow she was not even annoyed. There was something exotic and foreign about Leon, something which put him outside all ordinary rules. The girl felt it at once, and without the least fear abandoned herself to its charm. Leon was not a man to fall in love with, at least not as Zipporah would love when her time came—even if there had been no Paul Wester. But—she had never seen any one in the least like this brother of Eza’s before, and she wondered mightily what he would say and do.

Zipporah watched him with fascinated expectant eyes. He kissed his sister. Then he spun round to her and complimented her on her excellent appearance after a night of adventure.

‘Anyone so pretty as you must expect such things,’ he said, and made another little bow. Then spinning again he opened the door of the cabin in which Zipporah had awakened. He swept off his cap and waved them forward with a gallant gesture.

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'The bower of the princess!' he said, 'pity I had to replace the flowers which ought to have been there, by Lazun's signalling flags. Not but what the bunting is gay enough!'

In the short time the girls had spent together in the adjacent cabin, the young man had managed to put the state-room into the most perfect order. The panels were bright with multi-coloured ensigns, starred and barred. A little silver-backed toilet set was contained in a mahogany barred rack. In a leather case strapped to the toilet table they found soaps, perfumes, and even a powder puff.

Little Eza clapped her hands with appreciative glee.

'Now you will be looked after,' she cried, 'you have even Leon's Beauty Bag, and he will lose his dear rose-leaf complexion. What are you going to do, Leon? The girls won't love you any more.'

The young man flushed a little.

'I was born like that,' he said, putting a bold face on the matter. 'I have loved fitted dressing-bags all my life. There is a gold one in a shop at the corner of Piccadilly Circus, which I go and worship every day when I am in London. But I can get along with this because I can afford no better.'

He produced from his pockets a piece of soap in a vulcanite cover, a toothbrush, a safety razor, and a pocket comb.

'Well done, little brother,' said Eza patting his head, 'I did not think you had it in you! But now you must tell us all about this. Why is Captain Wester not on board and...'

'Skipper's business,' said the young man with an instantaneous change of manner— 'new skipper. I know nothing about that. He will tell you what he

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thinks it is good for little girls to know.'
And with this they had to be content.

CHAPTER THIRTY ONE

FATHER AND DAUGHTER

The girls went on deck, and found the deck of the Golden Flagon orderly, clean, and windswept. Already they had passed out of the North Channel and were just beginning to encounter the large green lift of the main Atlantic.

It was ten of the morning, and the mountains of Donegal were no more than a blue mist to the east, when a summons came for Zipporah Katti. She was to go to the Captain's cabin immediately, and Leon, who had suddenly lost a great deal of his assurance, was to conduct her. Eza rose from the hatch on which she had been sitting, as if to accompany Zipporah. But her brother stopped her with an imperative: 'You, sis, stay where you are!'

The two went aft together and as Leon stood aside to let the girl pass he murmured: 'Whatever you do, keep your temper and say as little as possible, however bitterly he may talk. He can be a perfect devil sometimes!'

The little, dusky, sun-dried man who was writing at a table in the Captain's cabin of the Golden Flagon looked up, and nodded curtly enough.

'Sit down,' he ordered. 'I shall be ready for you in a moment. You, Leon Palafox, go to your duty.'

He bent his head again upon his writing and Zipporah Katti watched him keenly. She felt no spark of daughterly affection for this stranger. He might be her father or he might be a nigger cook. Zipporah Katti would not have given one of the

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Doctor's white hairs or a glance from Barbara's kind eye to save the man from hanging. She felt somehow vaguely degraded, merely to know herself connected with him. All the same the deep gold rings that dangled from his ears and twinkled as he moved his pen over the paper, somehow fascinated her. He wrote on and on interminably. Zipporah raised her eyes and looked at her surroundings. It was a comfortable cabin, with books, pipes, nautical instruments, and in a corner a violin—obviously the abiding place of a man of taste. Zipporah felt sure that this oily-eyed, fierce little gipsy mariner of the South was never responsible for that collection of poets in the corner. They had the look of having been used, and a volume of the old dumpy brown four-volume edition of *The Ring and the Book*, lay open at the passage describing the flight of Pompilia and the priest from the San Clemente Gate at Arezzo.

Zipporah yearned, as she looked at this man who had the double authority of parentage and capture over her, for some such deliverer—if it could be Paul Wester so much the better—for she knew by instinct that the man before her would show no mercy.

At last the letter was finished. The little man scrawled the address on an envelope, but he did not fold the written sheet, keeping it close by his hand as if for reference. Then leaning back in his chair he ran his fingers through his short thick hair and took in every item of the dress and appearance of Zipporah Katti.

'So,' he said, 'this is what Lazun has made of a daughter of the Palafoxes of Pampeluna.'

'Stand up,' he ordered suddenly in his 'bridge' voice.

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Zipporah flushed suddenly. An angry refusal rose to her lips, but she remembered Leon's warning in time. She rose obediently to her full height and stood looking down at the little man in the writing chair, crouching and staring at her with the eyes of a wild cat on the branch of a forest tree.

'Yes, you are of the blood,' he said, 'but of your mother's people, curse them!'

He continued to look at her without telling her to sit, but Zipporah calmly reseated herself and waited for him to speak.

'I suppose you know I am your father?' he said, after he had perused her at length.

'I am so informed,' said the girl, 'it is not long since I first heard of your existence.'

'So the sight of me does not arouse much filial affection in you,' his lip lifted and he showed his white teeth as he spoke. 'You feel no desire to fall on my neck or cast yourself on my protection?'

'No, sir,' said Zipporah Katti with the utmost directness.

'Ungrateful daughter!' said the ex-supercargo, 'after all the trouble I have had in bringing you up, too!'

'I was informed that you sold me to Lazun absolutely, for a sum of money. Is that true?'

'Absolutely,' said Lupo Palafox, 'and what is more, my lady, I shall sell you over again to Lazun for a much greater sum of money before I let you out of my hands. I feel that the claims of nature have been too long overlooked.'

'But this is Lazun's ship. You are here in charge for him?'

'Not so, dear heiress, the gentleman who was in charge of the Golden Flagon has been called on

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shore, where doubtless he is at this moment trying to clear himself in the eyes of his employer. But he was a mere hireling. Now I am taking care of the Golden Flagon for myself and for the whole family of the Spanish Palafoxes, whom Lazun has disinherited in your favour.'

'Would it not have been better to say this to Lazun himself instead of to a girl?'

'Without doubt,' said Lupo, setting his brown chin squarely on his hand, 'but then the interview which had been arranged with Lazun Palafox fell through. Our messenger probably saved his skin by giving us away. At any rate, it was not Lazun who came to the trap door in the dell, but you. I never knew how truly blood was thicker than water till you fell into my arms and I had just time to catch my boatswain's arm. He had a knife in his hand and it is quite possible that some accident might have happened if I had not been there. You owe your life to your father, my girl, even if you do not show him all the obedient duty required by your faith.'

'Well,' said Zipporah, quite quietly, 'what are your plans with me now that you have me?'

'There,' cried the Basque, sending forth one of those laughs of his people which now ring like clarions, and now bark like dogs, there spoke the Palafox— prompt and practical— 'What to do with you?' Ah, that is a little hard to say. It depends on yourself—a little. But chiefly it depends on what view you and I, my dear daughter, can induce Lazun to take of a certain little business. Let me explain. You have told me that you are conscious of no particular affection for me, your father. You said it delicately, but you will pardon an old sea-wolf by name and nature, for putting the matter a little

more plainly. I hate Lazun. I hated your mother, and I don't exactly feel so tenderly towards you that I would let you stand in my way for a moment.'

'Thank you,' said Zipporah Katti.

'Yes, I was sure you would appreciate frankness,' grinned the little Basque gipsy. 'The fact is, there is another side to the question from any that has been presented to you. Lazun is so great, not because he has raised and enriched himself, but because he is the chief of a clan. Up to the moment when I took over the Golden Flagon, he has been obeyed blindly.'

'But he will have you arrested at the first port you coal at,' suggested Zipporah. Lupo looked at her and shook his head in a reproachful manner.

'You are either no real gipsy or the good seed has been winnowed out of you. When did one gipsy have the law on another? Certainly not the chief of the Palafoxes. He has prided himself on being his own justicer. Well, let him find a way now. He is not the man to bring the records of the Golden Flagon into a court of law. Even our little trip on this occasion along the Clyde and Solway shores would make such interesting reading to the gentlemen of Her Majesty's Excise that hundreds of people would sleep but ill in their beds at the first breath of it, and some scores would hasten to quit the realm by out-of-the-way ports. The ship is mine and I can easily use her papers in any port outside the United Kingdom. Here I have his heiress, the apple of his eye, safe on board. So before Lazun gets her back, he shall securely settle the succession to the chiefship, and satisfy me on the score of money. He shall buy you dear, for I have been kept long waiting, and now the account is closed. It must be paid in full. And if he will not buy you at my price—

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well, I know another who will!

'What—who? What do you mean?' Zipporah Katti was on her feet pale and angry.

'Sit down, little lady,' the supercargo smiled, 'remember we are business people. We have mutually renounced the little sentimentalities of family connection. It is a pity I cannot marry you myself. But I don't know the terms of Lazun's deed of gift, and I can trust no other man. So I must deal with the matter on my own responsibility. I shall give Lazun the first offer. If he accepts my terms and pays down the cash, I shall honestly send you back. But I have informed him in this letter that if he hesitates too long, I know of a charming local sultan down Morocco way with a long purse and a cultivated taste for gipsy girls. I sent him two from Granada once, but you are a pearl. You have, I understand, all the European accomplishments for which they pay red gold down there.'

Even as he was speaking Zipporah Katti's hand was stealing down below her knee. She gripped the handle of the knife she always carried and flung herself at her father. But he was far too quick. Indeed he had never taken his eyes off hers while he was speaking. The fingers of his left hand grasped her uplifted wrist, and he knocked up the knife with a smart blow delivered at the base of the thumb. It fell to the floor, from which he picked the weapon up and tossed it carelessly into a locker.

'Not pretty,' he said, 'not pretty at all—a young lady brought up by a pastor to attempt parricide!'

He set her down and stood over her with his hand behind his back, shaking his head and murmuring as if to a naughty child, 'Not pretty—no, not pretty at all!'

It was nearly half-past eight by the clock before the disappearance of Zipporah Katti was noticed in the Manse of Kirkpatrick-Maxwellton. Barbara had risen early as usual, and her household duties had occupied her no longer in spite of the presence of the stranger in her best bedroom. She was a famous housewife, for as the minister said, her Martha qualities were much more developed than her Mary ones.

But her experience in rearing Paul had taught her to have careful thought for laggard young sleepyheads. She considered it a good thing that youth should have time to recoup itself for its prodigality of energies and emotions she herself had long left behind.

So it was not till she had attended to the wants of all the Manse fowls and prepared the breakfast, that she took time to go upstairs 'to waken that lassie.'

But the chamber was empty, the bed unslept in, and the window open. Looking down into the pansy bed, which made a crescent-shaped border about the water-barrel, Barbara saw the print of Zipporah's feet where she had alighted. She began to tremble and her thoughts went instantly to Paul Wester. Was it possible that Zipporah had taken the decision of the two seniors to separate them so much to heart as to get out of the window and fly to London to find Paul?

But Barbara had lived. She had still the heart which acknowledges love's possibilities in her breast. She therefore put no bounds to what Zipporah might have been tempted to do. She remembered what she would once have done herself

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when she was of Zipporah's years—nay, more, what she had actually done.

'How will I tell them?' she murmured to herself, as for the tenth time she polished her glasses and re-surveyed the garden and the bend of white road which led to the village and over the Auchen Water by the little hump-backed bridge.

'He is that fond of her,' she said aloud, 'fonder than ever he was of me. 'Deed, both of them are—though I gave my youth to the one—my prime and my age to the service of the other.'

She was thinking of the two men below, doubtless chatting pleasantly and awaiting nothing more serious than a summons to breakfast.

'Gang ye must, Barbara,' she said to herself, 'and the sooner the better.'

She went downstairs hurriedly, and in a moment found herself in the presence of the two men. They were standing close together looking out at the green lawn and the breakfasting birds—thrushes and blackbirds questing for worms under the shade of the rhododendron bushes,

'I have been to seek Zipporah,' she said, standing on the threshold with the door-edge in her hand. 'She is no in her bedroom. She has luppen (leaped) from the sill on to the water-cistern and then down among the pansies. It is an old trick of hers.'

The Doctor laughed easily.

'She will be off to the woods for a morning walk or maybe up on the heather among the dew. See that she puts on dry stockings when she comes back. Come along, sir, don't let us wait breakfast for such a graceless runagate!'

But the anxiety on Barbara's white face contradicted this simple explanation.

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'The bed has not been slept on!' she added with the tear-trouble in her voice.

'Not slept in! Do you mean to tell me, Barbara Simpson?'

There was no more thought of breakfast. With native determination Lazun vaulted the window and was outside in a moment, bidding Barbara to 'come and show him where the tracks were.'

The minister followed in a daze, making little gestures with his hands. He asked questions, but there was no one to answer them. Lazun and Barbara talked rapidly together, and often in a language that he failed to understand. This he did not wonder at, for as he allowed, his head was 'somewhat moidered.'

Lazun fixed his keen sailorly eyes on the footsteps of the girl. They were clear enough across the lawn and their direction was plainly towards the ford. Lazun strode across the stepping-stones, and then returning partway, assisted Barbara, still a little dazed by the discovery of the empty bedroom and the untouched sheets— 'for all the world like a dead bairn's cot.'

A momentary fault on the farther side delayed them. Many footsteps of mowers had passed that way in the early morning, and village children had been back and forth to the adjoining farm for milk.

But presently Lazun found a track leading straight up towards the 'heughs.' He pointed it out to Barbara and asked, 'What's up there?'

'That will come out near the Dulse Cave,' she answered; 'Guid grant that the lassie has not taken it into her head to try the ladder.'

'Nonsense,' said Lazun, 'she could not go down the ladder. The tide would be near the full when

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these tracks were made.'

They found the place where she had crossed the stile and leaped upon the smooth turf of the high 'links.' Here Lazun quested about like a retriever, till he found the nest in the whin-bush where the girl had lain watching. He pointed it out to Barbara.

'She stayed here a long while—an hour or more. She has been looking over the cliff-edge too. There is the whin-root she gripped. See, there is a speck of blood on it.'

'Oh, wae's me!' cried Barbara, and threw up her hands. She was so eager to look that but for Lazun's restraining grasp she might have gone over the cliff.

'Be quiet—she only pricked herself, but she might easily have done worse. She has sent a piece of the turf down. She must have been watching something very carefully below there.'

'God grant the bairn is not in the weary water!' said Barbara, whom fear for her treasure had unnerved.

'No,' said Lazun, 'she has crept backwards. You can see how she has dug her toes into the grass. But... which way did she go after that? Up the dell is the direction of the land entrance to the cave. What could she be doing there?'

'Haste ye—haste ye!' said Barbara, pushing him. He laid his hand on her shoulder to calm her a little.

'Yes, we will go—but not too fast. Keep your eyes about. We may find something to guide us by the way.'

In spite of this good advice, Lazun strode on, however, with astonishing speed, his head forward and all his tall body shortened and bent earthward by the concentrated attention he was giving to every possible indication. Suddenly he stopped,

straightened himself, and opening up the rough heather roots first on one side and then on the other, he pointed out a spot to Barbara.

‘She was surprised here,’ he said, speaking calmly and even coldly, ‘a man stood there and the other opposite him. Hallo, here is a knife,’ —(he picked up something that shone from among the heather). ‘I ought to know that knife. Let me see—but that can wait—the knife is clean. Now they are taking her in the direction of the cave mouth. Let us go there.’

He thrust the knife into an inside pocket with the careless certainty of a man used to handling such things. He pushed forward, following the trail. Barbara came panting behind.

Presently they were among the great boulders in the narrow of the gorge. Yonder it was—the land entrance of the Dulse Cave. But there was some one there before them. A tall man, grey-haired and bareheaded, was sitting on a stone, gazing sadly out to sea.

CHAPTER THIRTY TWO

THE MUTINY ON THE 'GOLDEN FLAGON'

'You, Paul Wester, what have you done with my ship?'

The voice of Lazun was terrible to hear, breaking the silence of that desolate place, where ordinarily only the peewits cried and the black-faced sheep came to nibble at the fresh grass under lee of the big grey-blue rocks.

The tall man who had been sitting on a boulder, rose and gravely saluted. They were almost close to him now, Lazun leading.

'Where is she—my lass—where is Zipporah Katti?'

The tall man looked from one to the other in bewilderment.

'I do not know anything about . . . Miss Palafox (his voice was that of a cultivated man); but I can tell you about the ship, sir. The crew mutinied, seized me asleep in my cabin, put me ashore, and sailed away.'

The wrath which came up on the face of Lazun Palafox seemed to alter his whole character. Yet he did not break into denunciation. He did not even flush. His customary hale tan became an ashen-grey—his mouth a straight and almost invisible line. His eyes seemed to sink in his head, from which the pupils gleamed with flickerings of dull flame. Barbara fell back and even Captain Paul Wester, though he stood his ground, was manifestly daunted.

'And you—captain of this ship and my

representative—you saw nothing of all this before it was done. Where were your eyes?’

‘I saw nothing, sir. There was nothing to see.’

The finely shaped hand went up to his brow in involuntary salute.

‘The men worked well and willingly to the last moment. We had completed delivery of our stuff, when I gave the order to turn about and go down with the first ebb. Then after a glance round I went below. I lay down and fell asleep, as has always been my custom. We had to be very careful, sir, as to placing the rafts, and I stayed up to watch the putting on of the sinkers. For the yachts, and especially the fishing-smacks, don’t seem able nowadays to find anything. One would need to put a flagged buoy to pilot them to the place.’

‘Well,’ said Lazun, impatiently, ‘tell me of the mutiny.’

‘Oh, it had been all arranged long before. Yet there must have been good men on board,’ the Captain answered, ‘but they had them all accounted for when they came to take me. I had been thirty hours on duty, but for all that I should not have been so stupid unless they had hocused my drink. I remember asking the cook for a cup of coffee just before turning in. That sent me over in a minute. They had been waiting for that, and had me trussed and ready to put in a boat before I awoke. They anchored the Golden Flagon out yonder on the line of the lighthouse on Isle Rathan, and rowed me ashore. When they left me, one of the men loitered a little behind the others and gave a cut with his knife to my ropes.’

‘Lie still till they are gone,’ he said, and ran after them. He was taking big risks for his life. I could

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hear them challenging him as to what he had been lagging behind for. He made some excuse or another, but some one sang out, 'Playing booty, more like!'

'You know that man's name?' said Lazun. 'You recognized him?'

'Certainly, it was Raif Palafox—the fellow who...'

'That will do—and the name of the chief mutineer?'

'My supercargo, Lupo the Basque. He was captaining the ship when I was hoisted up!'

Lazun thought deeply, so profoundly that all traces of life left his face and he seemed to be only a block of stone rudely carved from one of the boulders of the dell.

'Were young Leon and his sister on board?' he jerked the question suddenly at Captain Wester.

'Yes, sir, but they were kept below. I did not see either on deck.'

'So!' said Lazun. 'Well, friend Lupo and his gang will find that the arm of Lazun is longer than they think.'

After another pause for consideration he asked Captain Wester if he had been at all confidential with his supercargo.

'No,' said the tall man, 'I hardly spoke to him except on affairs of service. He showed me where the parcels were to be sunk. I conned the ship, laid her to, got out the goods and planted them according to his orders. Apart from that, Lupo Palafox was no friend of mine. But they knew what I did not (he said this with a certain tone of reproach), that you were somewhere on this coast.'

'How are you sure of that?' Lazun demanded, turning upon him an eye like a gimlet.

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'Because,' said Captain Wester, 'Lupo the Basque said to me as I went over the side, trussed as I tell you, 'Be thankful, Wester, that we have not yet had the pleasure of settling accounts with your master, or you would have gone down in blue water with two fifty-sixes at your feet, instead of being only comfortably packed ashore to find him for yourself!'

Lazun took the knife he had picked up from his pocket.

'Do you know that?' he asked, holding it blade out on the palm of his hand, but keeping his eyes on Captain Wester's.

The Captain took it, looked once at it, and said, 'That is a Canary Island knife which the boatswain Felix Lannion picked up at Isle Grande on our last voyage.'

'Um-m!' Lazun's jaws shut with a snap. 'Felix Lannion—and Lupo, my good cousin! He thinks himself chief already and Lannion second in command. I see they came here to trap me in the Cave, and found his daughter instead.'

'His daughter!' cried Captain Wester. 'I did not know he was married.'

'Yes,' said Lazun. 'I have the honour to be his father-in-law. He missed me because I was safe at the Manse, the last place he would be likely to look for me. But he has captured my granddaughter Zipporah, and will doubtless try to bargain—with her as a hostage.'

Neither of the men had thought of Barbara, who as they talked had stood wonderfully still, cast back forty years into her old experience, for Lazun's womenfolk are trained to keep silence when men do business together. But now she broke out.

'You took the first from me, Lazun Palafox. I

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obeyed and was silent. But this one is more precious, more my own. I have watched her grow. You must find her for me. For this I cannot forgive—if any harm comes to her through the murderer of my daughter.’

Lazun turned to her with a marvellous light on his face, a calm, almost beatific assurance of success, which was very communicative.

‘Wait a little—trust me,’ he said, ‘I shall find her, or take such a vengeance as shall make to tingle the ears of those who hear!’

‘Find her—find her—bring her back to me. Nothing but that—let the rest go.’

‘I shall find her—be assured, Barbara. But I shall also punish the guilty. Now go back to the Manse, and say what you can to the good Doctor. I have some pressing business to talk over with this, gentleman.’

Barbara went submissively, the ancient habit of obedience asserting itself.

‘Eh, sirs, wae is me—speak to the Doctor,’ she muttered as she padded over the short green sward tufted with scabious and sea rocket, ‘‘tis easy said. But it will break his heart to ken the bit lass in such trouble.’

And she studied, forgetting her own grief, how to soften the news for her master.

Lazun watched her over the ridge. She turned to look back, and Lazun, who caught the glance and gesture, knew well that it was not to look once more on him who had been her husband, but with some faint hope that Zipporah Katti might somehow have returned.

Then he turned to Captain Wester.

‘We must have a good deal of talk together—you

and I. Perhaps we had better go down to the inn yonder. I am known there. They will let you have a room, and I will send you over some of my kit. We are about the same build and it is not the first time we have shared together.'

Captain Wester sighed with a deep relief. Lazun's words intimated quite clearly that his chief did not hold him responsible. They had worked so long and so well, in all manner of projects, had broken wholesale the revenue laws of so many countries, that he would have grieved, more perhaps than for anything on earth, to lose the confidence of Lazun Palafox.

'Thank you,' he answered, 'it will be as well to go to the inn. I respect the Doctor very greatly, but I cannot flatter myself that I should be anyways a welcome visitor at the Manse.'

Lazun smiled a little grimly, watching Captain Wester the while.

'Yet you and I seem to have unloaded a good deal of our matrimonial responsibilities upon his good and godly shoulders—your boy and my girl—it is a good deal to ask of a man who has never married.'

Presently they were at the 'Maxwell Arms,' where an excellent host ministered to the ex-captain of the steamer Golden Flagon of Caneale. As the breakfast was cleared away, Lazun set himself to discuss plans for the capture of the runaway. The old chieftain had the more imagination, and in grasp of possibilities and readiness of device was far ahead of Captain Wester. But the Captain had all the coal and sailing capacities of the ship at his finger-ends—the possibility of her entering into certain ports and the reasons which would compel her to give a wide berth to others,

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'I listened,' he said in answer to an inquiry, 'when they got the anchor up after they had taken in the boat they had sent ashore with me, and I am sure they went due west through the North Channel, and not south along the English coast—yet that is the direct route to France.'

'They would not go to France in any case,' said Lazun— 'it is somewhere farther afield than that they are bound for.'

'Well, he dare not try his own country—he has got too many blood feuds there and the Civil Guards would give some good gold for the pelt of Lupo the Wolf.'

'Portugal or the Islands then?' questioned Lazun, after a pause.

The ex-captain shook his head. He was lighting a cigarette with the languid carefulness which characterized his manner in repose.

'Not Portugal—nor yet the Canaries—too much Elder, Dempster & Co. there nowadays, tourists at ten guineas a trip littering the sea front and half-a-dozen squiffs of Portugee douaniers showing them how to smuggle, or, behind their palms, offering to take them up to 'von nice house in von quiet street vere you will be please!' No, not any of these Islands—except perhaps the Cape Verdes—or—by Jove, now I think of it, Lupo speaks Arabic like a son of the Prophet—there is trouble, big trouble on the Morocco coast. Some tidy harbours also, wliich he knows better than any man alive. He has not served time at Ceuta with the Spaniards for nothing, and I should not wonder if he took that way. He used to talk a good deal of old Hamid, a rich but rather uneasy Sultan down there—who is either up to the neck in rebellion, or else pope and king and

everything over some thousands of square miles in the South. Lupo had some concessions there, so he said, waiting for the time when the country was settled enough to work them. Yes, this Sultan of his gave them to him. What for? Well, I could not be quite sure, but I should imagine it had something to do with the supply of ladies for his hareem.'

Lazun asked a question.

'No, not Circassians—not really. Though I have little doubt that was what Lupo sold them as—mostly Kabyles run across the French frontier into the Tripolitaine. Some of them are taught in the French schools, too, and have dresses from Algiers.'

'And how long could he go on without coal in the Golden Flagon?'

'Oh, he would not use much,' said the ex-captain reflectively. 'He could go half round the world with what's in his bunkers—that is, if he was not pressed.'

'Ah,' said Lazun, 'but then he will be pressed—and hard.'

'In that case a week will see him out, sir,' said Captain Wester, 'but you must remember, ever since Rojdestzvensky came down this coast from Vigo, the Spaniards of Cadiz and the southerly ports have learned the art of coaling at sea, and there are always some of them hanging off the coast northward of Cape Juby willing and wishful to sell coal (at a price) to ships with excellent reasons of their own for giving Gibraltar the go-by. Some big navies without coaling ports use them too, and find them mighty convenient.'

'I see,' said Lazun, 'thank you. I think that is all I need at present. I shall have to dispatch you immediately to take over a new command, so while I

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go to do some little telegraphing, you had better get to bed and lay in a little store of sleep. We shall need all we can get during the next few days!

But in the afternoon Lazun was completely edified as to the intentions of his rival, son-in-law, and self-appointed heir-presumptive.

A letter was left at the Manse door by a lad as long, lean, and willowy as a fishing rod (so Barbara Simpson described him). He had been running, and as soon as he had thrust the letter into her hand he ran again.

'He went like smoke,' she said with a fine explicative gesture, 'I thought my gentleman would take the little road to the green gate, but never a bit. My lad ran like an adder in grass straight for the main road. No opening of gates for him. He went over the dyke like a circus-jumper, and though I followed on to the end of the avenue, there was neither hilt nor hair of him to be seen when I got there.'

Lazun made no remark. He went to his room, and there with the door locked, he read and re-read the letter which called for his surrender. Then he went out and sent a few more ciphered telegrams, to the dismay of the postmaster, who had not yet finished the first batch and had never had such a descent of unknown words and foreign languages since the quiet Orraland post-office was strung to the end of a wire.

The mutineer's manifesto and ultimatum ran thus:

To Lazun Palafox—Wheresoever He May Be Found.

I, Lupo Palafox of Zaragoza, born noble, representing all of that family and name who adhere

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to me, desire you Lazun Palafox of Cancale and other, to take heed to the words which follow. They are not vain words. The cup is full and you shall drink it.

Long we have borne because you were the elder and had the power. Many things we passed over. But now, you must render an exact account. We are neither your servants nor your bond-men. We are your brothers and your equals. The wealth you have heaped up ('Ha, I thought so—now we come to it! 'muttered Lazun grimly between his clenched teeth) is not yours but held in trust for the tribe. I am the next heir and I claim that it should not be alienated. You have recently sent a great sum to a foreign country to buy an estate for that one of all your kinsfolk whom you have chosen exclusively to prefer. This is a great wrong, and I am the better able to denounce it since the favoured one is my own daughter.

I have, therefore, in agreement with the Spanish part of our folk, taken means to compel you to refund to us what is ours. I have set your hiring captain on shore, and with all the crew who by blood are interested in the matter of our heritage, I have taken due possession of the Golden Flagon and mean to employ her as circumstances may direct. Chance put the girl, your favourite Zipporah Katti, into my hands, and she shall be our hostage till you do us justice.

'Accordingly we demand an immediate and equitable division of all your possessions. We will allow you to keep one tenth share for yourself, which is liberal indeed. Or, since we have no means of touching that which you have bought in Scotland, we will allow that estate and castle to be yours.

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'But Gobelet, with all its businesses, and all the properties and interests at St. Malo, Cancale, St. Servan, Vigo, Cadiz, Gibraltar, and elsewhere out of Britain, are to be mine, to be administered by me in the name and for the profit of the entire family.

'Raphael Suarez, Calle Sta. Anna 34, Barcelona, will undertake all the negotiations, and meet whatever faithful man you will permit to represent you, that the necessary discretion may be carefully guarded and conditions observed.

'Lupo Palafox.'

Lazun considered all this without astonishment. He rubbed his chin meditatively with his forefinger. There was even the flicker of a smile in the deep lines about his mouth—grim humour mingled with a certain appreciation of the fellow's audacity.

'Lupo,' he murmured, 'poor Lupo—since when have you learned to phrase a letter like that? Like eight out of ten of your people, you would have-trouble in writing your will, and even that would need an affidavit. But this smells the village lawyer a mile off. Who is the Catalan Jew who is taking a hand? He is either very ignorant or a man of remarkable courage. I would give something to-look Mr. Raphael Suarez of the Calle Santa Anna between the eyes. I must drop in at number 34 one of these days—but not alone. By no means alone.'

Then he went back over the letter in order to taste, as a good critic does style, some of the felicities of the ultimatum of Lupo.

'Um-m-m!' grunted Lazun through his nose. 'So I am to 'drink the cup,' am I? Aye, and with it you under the table, Lupo, my friend. You will kindly permit me 'to keep the estate' —most thoughtful—generous, too.

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‘Gobelet, with all its businesses—St. Malo, Cancale, and so forth—um-m-m— are to be mine—to be administered by me —Lupo, my good simple Lupo— for the profit of the whole family —Lupo’s family would be rapidly enriched after a few months of his care. Sanctissima Trinidad, what is this?’

He picked up the envelope which had been crushed in the pocket of Barbara’s long ‘fishing-rod’ messenger, and pulled from it a long strip of thin paper— obviously the edge of a torn newspaper. There were some words on it roughly done in ink, in staggery script.

‘Here we have the real Lupo,’ he said, ‘writ with mine own hand!’

‘You have three weeks to make settlement — if not will sell girl Zipporah to good advantage — several purchasers offering — you must outbid them.’

The grey look came back to Lazun’s face.

‘God’s blood,’ he swore in French, though he seldom used an oath in any language, ‘you have said it, Lupo. I will outbid you. But you shall pay the price—for the threat merely—because you have said this thing—even without intention as a bluff, making of yourself a Judas who would sell his own blood to the infidel!’

Then Lazun folded both the papers in his hand and put them back into the envelope. His mind was turning over the words of Captain Wester about his treacherous supercargo’s knowledge of Morocco.

‘And yet,’ he murmured, ‘one must be careful. The rascal knows a Sultan of sorts. He is familiar with the Atlantic ports—and after all who knows? He went out by the North Channel with a week’s coal on board.’

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He pondered for five minutes on this, frowning the while, and then strode away across to the Manse to make his adieus.

'In any case,' he concluded, 'the sooner Wester and I are at Barcelona the better it will be for all concerned. It is something that Little Eza is on the Golden Flagon, and I think I can be sure of her flitter-mouse of a brother, who has yet more in him than he lets appear. But Raif Palafox is the pick of all. He has a chance now that he might have waited years for—and well he knows it.'

'Besides,' he chuckled, as he stood outside the creeper-hung porch of the Manse, 'he is in the forecastle among the men, and will, I wager, conspire all round Lupo and his lawyer Jew. And when it comes to fisticuffs I would rather that Raif Palafox's knife were behind Lupo's shoulder-blades than mine!'

CHAPTER THIRTY THREE

ON BOARD THE 'NEPTUNE'

Lazun and Captain Wester talked together in a first-class compartment of a carriage which a mighty P.L.M. engine was hurrying southward. With them was a young man seated in the corner opposite, who spoke rarely, but who seemed immensely interested in their conversation. Paul Wester the Elder had found Paul the Younger.

The thing was Lazun's idea.

'It is a mean thing that he should stay in London in penitence for what, after all, you or I would have tossed over our shoulders, and thought no more of. Let him come along and help. Zipporah will think the more of him, and I shall see that Little Eza lets him alone this time. Such skirmishes form a lad, and we may have some serious work to do before we touch civilization again.'

'No further news, sir?' Captain Wester ventured to ask as Lazun relapsed into consideration of a batch of telegrams and letters which had been handed to him on the platform of the Gare de Lyon.

Lazun glanced at one of his flimsy blue oblongs.

'A vessel answering to her description heading south under full steam was sighted twenty miles west of Cape Trafalgar supposed to be a large new destroyer or old type of third-class cruiser, supposed by an idiot,' commented Lazun scornfully, 'as if the Golden Flagon had either the hnes or the colour of these black iron pots.'

'Colour can be changed, though perhaps not quite

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so rapidly as all that,' said the Captain, 'and what will we have to catch her, sir?'

'Our own Neptune and Trident from St. Malo will be at Marseilles, I stopped them by a wire to Malta.'

Captain Wester shook his head a little sadly.

'They have no chance against the Golden Flagon, sir,' he said, 'she has the heels of anything we can put on her trail.'

'Yes,' said Lazun, 'when handled by you! But—I would not trust Lupo with a felucca if I could help it.'

A quick flush rose to the Captain's face. These were almost the first words of praise he had ever heard from his owner's lips, and besides they were spoken to a younger man by the most famous adventurous seaman of a past age.

Also his son Paul was there, before whom, though he did not admit it to himself, the Captain felt vaguely unquiet and ashamed. Somehow that last circumstance gave to Lazun's praise a peculiarly heady flavour.

'Thank you, Chief,' he said, 'I am glad you have confidence in me.'

'I have, specially in your seamanship,' Lazun continued, 'and you have served me faithfully and disinterestedly. But there is that girl to be got back.'

'And the ship,' said the Captain.

'The girl is our first thought—our only one indeed—except vengeance. For I can build a better ship than the Golden Flagon.'

'A bigger, certainly—a better, never!' her late Captain was speaking almost reverently.

Lazun nodded back. He could appreciate professional enthusiasm, and he liked a Captain of his to admire his ship.

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‘Well,’ he went on, ‘we will save everything if we can, ship and all. But the girl must be our first thought. I am sure our young friend here will agree.’

He turned to Paul the Younger, who, as a young man ought, had sat silent, awed by the wonderful conversation of his elders. He felt himself infinitely small and futile, which at his age is no ill state of mind once in a way. He had done nothing but write a little, and these men spoke of great deeds and wild adventure as part of the day’s work. It had taken him some time to realize that the tall man with the grey at the temples and the big blond moustache was really his father. This was not the dangerous adventurer of the good Doctor’s counsels, whose blood was always referred to as ‘running in his veins’ each time he misbehaved or had come in late for family worship at the Manse—which last was a crime heinous indeed.

To Paul Wester his father looked kindly, gentle, and approachable, even a little shy and reserved. But he liked him instinctively.

Lazun continued to turn over his papers with a rustling sound. ‘We have a solid chance of running her down if she tries any long distance records—to South America, say, or round the Cape. I know a little protected state somewhere in Europe—I name no names at present—but the rulers of that country are under very considerable obligations to me, and I ventured to remind its President of my claims upon him. The government could not risk all I asked, but they would gladly do what they could. They possess a few ancient ships of little account in any trouble, though good enough for police work. But recently I had my eye upon a smart little destroyer just delivered to them by an English shipbuilding yard,

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having been built to order. But ever since the English crew (which has made record speed at trials or in bringing her out) turned her over and went home, the native crew which replaced them has done nothing but sit and look at the engines. If they polished some brass work, it is about all they dare do. Not an ounce of steam has been raised on her. So, as they had not yet put her into their navy, I asked this enterprising government to lend her to me, and I sent enough men from St. Malo to bring her out. She will complete her crew from the Neptune a little west of Gibraltar—and you Captain Wester, are to command her. She has one big 4-7 gun which will be useful if we have any long distance work, and half-a-dozen 3-inchers, besides Maxims—all quite neat and modern.'

'I hope I shall not be compelled to fire at the Golden Flagon,' said Captain Wester, a little ruefully.

'I hope not,' Lazun agreed, 'it shall be our last chance if we do. But such long bowls are rather excellent when it comes to sending a polite message to heaven to.'

'What is her speed?' the Captain demanded with sudden interest.

'She is rated at 24 knots, but from what I saw of the trials, and heard from the builders, I think we can get 27 out of her. The builders' crew drove her through at a trifle under 31, and could have got more, only they were afraid of scaring the protected state commissioners quite to death.'

'If I get an engineer I can work with Captain...'

Wester was beginning when the old Chief cut him short with his customary brusqueness.

'I have seen to that—old 'Clydeside' Whyte from

the Neptune, or O'Halloran— 'Orange' Halloran from Belfast. You can take your choice. He is coming on the Trident.'

'Then I will take 'Clydeside',' said Captain Wester promptly. 'I could do with O'Halloran too, but one would not serve under the other.'

'They would if I told them, at least the Orangeman would.'

'At any rate I am likely to be obliged to take risks enough, and old Whyte will steady everybody. Besides he has served in the navy and understands destroyers.'

The Rapide du Midi' was now rattling down the breakneck descent which leads by multiplied tunnels through the Cote d'Or into Dijon. They had charming idyllic glimpses of the beginnings of vintage in the brief open intervals before the engine, with a toot and a snort, carried the roaring 'Rapide' into darkness again.

Lazun in his corner brooded over his plans, and made notes on the backs of telegrams. After a while they came quite suddenly out of a tunnel, and amid much grinding of wheels found themselves in Dijon Station. Captain Wester rose and crossed to sit beside his son. He began talking, pointing out people and places of interest, in a tone of pleasant familiarity and comradeship without the least reference to their relationship, and for this Paul was grateful to him.

'Yonder is the station-master,' said Captain Wester, 'the fat man in the full-skirted blue frock-coat, and gold-banded cap. These he wears at this train because it carries only first-class passengers, mostly English, and he is a stout patriot. He will go back into his little den and put on an old inky dust-

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coat till the up-train comes along tomorrow morning.

That old man at the coffee-stall has made a fortune by selling cafe-au-lait at a franc a cup—as well indeed he might. In a year or two he and the gorgeous station-master will take their ‘retraits’ together, and cultivate cabbages for the rest of their lives in small patches of garden set side by side—and the coffee-pedlar will be the richer man.’

‘One would not think it to see them now,’ said Paul, ‘the station-master looks as autocratic and solitary as an admiral on the quarter-deck, while the other only perspires and takes in the silver!’

After Lyons Captain Wester took his son in to dinner on the dining car. He chatted in a familiar fashion with the fat rubicund old waiter who booked the seats. They had a rear corner place and by a little arrangement a table to themselves. It was pleasant in the evening coolness to look down on the broad smooth stretches of the Rhone lying below them. It looked calm and still as a lake, yet Paul remembered that it ‘leaps like a tiger on the sea.’ It was good also to sip the wine of his father’s choice and submit to the witchery of his tongue.

For Paul Wester the Elder had never used more of his quality of personal seductiveness in wooing any woman, than he now exerted for the conquest of his son.

At first Paul had not much to say. But he melted in spite of himself. He remembered that Barbara had always had a weakness for his father and never joined in the anathemas of Doctor Septimus. But then Barbara frankly avowed that she liked handsome men. And Paul thought, as he looked at his father, how handsome he must have been in his

youth. His eyes were not yet opened to see that never had he been so handsome as at present, with his fine intellectual head, his exquisite manners, and quiet air of melancholy.

Vainly Paul Wester recalled the Doctor's warnings, as to the dangers of turning out a man like his father. They had been forcible, but not precise. And now it was the vagueness of what he had been told which weighed with him.

Paul had hoped that some day he might have a chance to become a war-correspondent. The memories of O'Donovan and Archibald Forbes were strong upon him. But already he was conscious—as all newspaper men of his time—that the days of special correspondents were numbered. Henceforward instead of clustering on the firing line they would be kept at base and told such things as were good for them to hear.

When Lazun and Captain Wester carried Paul off from the office of the Aurora in Fleet Street, the world flushed suddenly bright for the young man. He seemed to have been merely dreaming before, and now he had wakened to the heat of an engagement—mutiny, pursuit, adventure, all crowded upon him—and two strong calm men were by his side to whom such things arrived with greater regularity than their meals.

Quicksilver ran in young Paul's veins as his father, with the side of the table for the Moroccan coast, knives for reefs and watches for ships, demonstrated the probable position of the Golden Flagon, and showed how the Neptune, the Trident and the destroyer-cruiser of the venal protected state would close in upon her if the plans which Lazun had formed chanced to work out.

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But of course they would—they must.

Were they not Lazun's plans? And was not the man who should carry them out before him, calm-eyed, delicate-handed, covering implacable resolution with his curious air of pensive carelessness? In fact was he not his own father. Captain Paul Wester, the most trusted agent and most faithful lieutenant of Lazun Palafox?

Through the marvellous Babel of Marseilles, Vieux Port, Paul walked as through fairyland. The clatter and clang of crane and wagon, the bright costumes of all manner of eastern and oriental peoples excited him. He did not grow calm until he found himself on board of a fine new steamer, the Neptune, and presently against a pleasant push of sea wind passing out into the quiet blue of the Mediterranean from eastern Joliette where the big liners lie.

He saw his father on the bridge and to Paul's eye he appeared wholly transfigured. He seemed taller in his uniform, more commanding, and when he moved his finger, something happened immediately. Paul had never been on a vessel bigger than a channel packet, and though he knew how to sail a fishing boat on the Solway (and no contemptible sailing that is, either), the life on board a vessel so large, so well found and swift appealed to him like a revelation of the innate subordination of man.

Lazun himself behaved like a passenger on board. He saluted Captain Wester with deference when he spoke to him, and he never did so without first inquiring through an officer if it would be convenient. Of course, every one knew who he was,

and the reverence that surrounded him was expressed in the eagerness of the sailors to do their duty when Lazun's eyes came their way—keen, shining eyes which somehow appeared to rove hither and thither over the ship and all on board, with the sudden partial illumination of a searchlight.

They had their last glimpse of the barbarically striped new cathedral. The tall spire of 'Our Lady of Grace' sank in the waters. The rocky chateau of Provence stretched away barrenly towards the foothills of the Cevennes, till they met them on the wonderful rifted table-land of Saint William in the Desert. Then the steamer set her bows in the direction of the Straits of Gibraltar—keeping, however, well to the African side, while on her port beam another vessel followed a couple of sea miles astern. She was the Trident, a sister ship belonging to Lazun, stopped like the Neptune at Malta and now following the chase in her turn.

Most things that passed on the ship were, naturally, beyond Paul's ken. But his practised reporter's attention kept up a quiet survey and stored away multitudes of things for future use. Still he had much time to himself, till he found an old armourer with whom he spent it. Here, hour after hour, he learned the secrets of the armourer's art, so far as they could be picked up on the Neptune. 'For (here the good man-at-arms lowered his voice), I'm not saying a word against the ship, Mr. Paul. She's a fine ship and we have a paragon of a captain—I will say it, there's none like him—all the more because he is your father, sir. But for all that the boat is scandalously ill-found in my department. Fancy, Mr. Paul, I can only 'brown' the metal of a gun or revolver. There's no little retort on board for

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putting on the 'blue' till it blushes sweet as the bloom on a grape. And all that I get from the Chief when I happen to mention it, is only just 'So, Adams, and will the gun shoot any the worse for that?'

'He doesn't understand the pride of an armourer. Of course, it will shoot the same, brown or blue, but then brown is common, only used for cavalrymen's carbines and such. And every man ought to have a pride in his work, or his job is mere navy work, not worth the having. Then the men I get down to help me sometimes are fools—honest tarry Jacks— well enough on deck, but at my work they have hands of sausages and heads of turnips. Now, Mr. Paul, if you was to set your mind to it, I could teach you more than any man on the ship knows of arms except myself. Besides I will set up a sheet of iron for a target at which you can practise with saloon caps— I will make a marksman of you, lad—aye, and I will show you how to fight with the knife, and how to meet one o' them Moorish fanatics if your revolver jams—all things of great use to you if so be we are going to the place the ship's crew thinks of.'

'And where may that be?' Paul asked curiously, for he wanted to know what was the impression on board the Neptune herself as to the objective of their trip.

'Well, reely, Mr. Paul, none o' them know, no more'n me. Nobody on board knows anything excepting the old man and your dad—and even he may not be told the why of our going there. But o' course, the men can guess. Gun-running is what this ship, and most others of Lazun's, was built for. And guns they've run wherever there has been a war or a mutiny of troops, or two kings or two presidents

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(and that's a deal worse) resolved to worry each other till only one king or one president is left.

'So some of them thinks that this here trip is for the benefit of the Sultan of Morocco to help him fight the Pretender. And some say for the Pretender against the Sultan, so that one of them can go under, and the survivor so left fight the French peaceably with what's over after the battle. They let on that we will surely be met by a big ugly cargo-boat outside Gibraltar, and that there will be many cases to take aboard, and fresh coal, and all as black as my hat, and everybody except your father swearing awful. The Captain is a pretty shot with any weapon and keeps all he has like jewels—as well as I could myself. But he will say nothing when we are transshipping. He will have his meals taken to him in the cabin and the owner will most likely be there with him, and a sentry posted at the door till all is cleaned up again above stairs. For decks ain't his hobby, as it were, except when they don't please him. And when they don't he calls the first officer and says in that kind of simmering Bessemer steel way of his, 'Mr, Fox, let me suggest that your decks are not precisely like the reputation of Cfesar's wife!'

'Now, it's curious. You would think that nothing, because it's not a manly way of speaking. But it starts off our Mr. Fox as red and rusty as his name, and he goes right down, and shows the double rows of his clenched teeth to the second and third mates, and he says to them, 'What do you think you are here for—to get your ties straight? The skipper has been telling me that our decks are as dirty as sin?' And the second and third mates, they drives it unsweetened to the boatswain and the other lower deck bosses—sometimes including even Chips and

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me. But what they say is, 'The Skipper has sworn to disrate the whole of you. He says that the boat's no better than a cattle-pen, and if it is not improved he will put the whole crew of you ashore and have the boat whitewashed and disinfected.' Then the boatswain and them others, when their turn comes, they says hundreds of words only used on shipboard, and in church, to the A.B.'s and ordinary seamen. They call them such names that there's nothing left except to abuse the ship's boys till they are ready to jump overboard. So it's passed on, getting stronger and stronger every time, till it's so thick that every word can stand alone. And yet all that your daddy said, Mr. Paul, was just that these here planks were not like the reputation of Caesar's wife—which must have meant something to our Mr. Fox though it don't to the like of us.

'Ah,' the old armourer concluded, 'a man to be proud of is your father—though he maybe don't condescend overly much to them he is sailing with. And right he is, sir. But then most of our fellows have been with him here and there over the world.

They can tell how he brought the whole landing party safe through the Government troops encamped outside Greytown, which is on the Mosquito coast, and a devil of a hole we were in, sir, that day. Aye, even them that hasn't been with Captain Wester there and elsewhere, knows all about it, and there is not one among 'em but would follow him into purgatory itself—aye, or even hotter places.'

They slipped out of the Straits by night, and when the sun rose the Rock of Tarik was only a blue blur of water-colour on a pearl-grey sky. Paul was disappointed, but then to his left hand was Africa.

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He looked long at it, wondering what new thing would come out of it for him. He knew that Zipporah Katti was aboard the mutinied ship, but neither Lazun nor his father had told him more of the danger which threatened her.

He thought constantly of her, and it was with a sudden jerk of hope that he realized that Lazun did not intend them to be very long separated. If not, why would he have brought him away from his work in London to aid in the search? He knew that Eza Palafox and her brother were also on the Golden Flagon, but the two seniors had not allowed him to imagine that Zipporah Katti was in worse plight than they.

That day was long and dull. No attempt was made at speed. Near the corner of the Riff country the African coast was left behind, and the Neptune and Trident steamed out to sea, loafing casually along and waiting for the night. Paul noticed that the crew looked much more numerous than before. Many sailors, stokers, and engineers, none of whom he had seen before, roosted about in wait below.

He questioned the old armourer. But he only bade him expect no questions to be answered on board Lazun's ships.

'Those who can answer them are up yonder, and the rest (if us have too good berths to risk them by meddling with what does not concern us. If there are more men on board than are needed to work the ship, you may be sure that there's a job coming along which will find them all employment, and probably in a devil of a hurry too!'

With this meagre information, Paul was obliged to be content.

He remembered the talk he had heard on the

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train, however, and he resolved that he would not go below that night. Nobody interfered with him in any way. He took his meals with the first officer and the two mates, who, naturally enough, were a little inclined to be silent before the son of the captain. But his pressman's knowledge of general events, which seemed to them extraordinary, and the frankness of his manners finally decided them to trust him. Newspaper-land was quite as wonderful an unknown world to them as the sea was to him, and the constant marvel of how a paper gets filled day after day—a point which remains something of a mystery to pressmen themselves—moved them to ever recurring wonder.

He explained the various services, the wonderful subdivision of labour, the editorials, the locals, the daily calls, the sporting, markets and book-notices, and the other world of the advertisements. But after he had spent much breath upon them they came back to the old question: 'Yes, but how can all these things happen every day—enough to fill a paper?'

They could not see that their own world was infinitely more varied and adventurous. It was always the same thing, the officers declared. The senior of them, Fynes, was a Scot from Argyllshire; Haddock, the second mate, a hot-headed, powerfully built son of Bristol Port, while the third mate, Le Breton, hailed from the Channel Islands.

But of their work they spoke nothing, save of the details of watches and the routine of the ship. They never told of their adventures, or of the dangers they had encountered, though Paul knew that they had just returned from delivering a cargo of Maxims and Leblers to the revolted sheiks of Southern Arabia, without permission either of Aden or of the Turkish

Government. Presently these weapons would begin to speak for themselves, but there would be no question of Lazun or of the Neptune —still less of these three men and the old engineer 'Clydeside' Whyte, who generally dined hastily in scraps and mouthfuls in his engine-room, but occasionally and always unexpectedly would assert his right to a place at the officers' table by coming and taking a meal with them to show he was as good as anybody else.

And so between the mates and the armourer's workshop the slow afternoon hours crept by. The sun went down in a flurry of scarlet clouds, wind-frayed at the edges, flocculent, and splashed to the zenith by the incoming breeze. Presently Venus burned like an electric torch over their bows.

Paul watched the ship all dark about him. He felt curiously muffled, though the stars looked in upon him with myriad pin-pricks of fire. Others were watching too. His father was on the bridge, and all along the bulwarks unseen men huddled in every point of vantage, whispering low to each other.

The uneasiness of instant expectancy was on the Neptune.

The Trident was signalling her position a little farther west. Scarcely half a mile separated the vessels. They kept this position and waited.

About a quarter of an hour before midnight, a rocket sprang up to the north and burst green against a sky of blue-black ink. The Trident answered with a white flare, and then quite silently, into the space of darkly heaving sea between the two ships, a moving bulk, long and sinister, thrust itself. It was the destroyer-cruiser built by the English firm for the small protected state which was being civil to

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Lazun Palafox at the risk of very considerable diplomatic complications.

Lazun himself was nowhere to be seen. But it was likely that he had slipped aboard the Trident. For it was to that ship and not to the Neptune that the black shadow first turned. Paul could see her four funnels as she rounded away from them. They cast a ruddy light up on the sky which pulsed Borealis-like.

There ensued a time of waiting that appeared interminable to the young man. He wished much that he dared to approach his father, but he had a wholesome fear—not of Captain Wester personally, but of offending by any incorrectness the ship's commander.

Presently, however, he found himself by the side of 'Clydeside' Whyte. The old engineer had come up clad in a double reefer jacket, and now stood looking gloomily over at the new-comer. He had-ordered a boy from below to 'lay doon the dunnage at my fit, and stand by.' He had also called the same young gentleman 'a peeferin' snipe' for quite unknown reasons.

He was in fact, ripe to grumble, and Paul, who had become a friend of his as a kindred Scot and one interested in machinery, was quite a relief to him.

'Clydeside,' the old man growled (for at such times he did his cursing quietly), 'it's 'Clydeside' here and 'Clydeside' there! What for should they tak' me from my engines that I have suckled, as it were, frae their birth, and set me on a soul-racking destroyer when I thought I was quit of the whole breed years ago! And most like, the dago-dons will have the very harrigals shaken out o' them by this time— James Brown's

finest make as they are. But that's Lazun all over—he's a fine maister, for a man of siccan mixed breed, with but little of Scots consistency in his blood, I'm doubtin'. Och, there's few like him—and doubtless it's a fine poetical thing this stravagin' and adventurin' in destroyers that don't belong to ye. It's the kind of thing that a man feels himself parteeklarly fit for, coming hame from a Burns dinner. But I'm getting ower auld, and besides I hae a bit siller laid by. It's a wild life the sea as I have lived it. But there's some siller in it for them that kens how to tak' care o't.

There's few of such—aye, lad, desperate few. I'm no great on the preachin', young man, but I'll no deny that in my het youth—like yoursel', dootless—I, even auld 'Clydeside,' has lookit on the wine when it was red—(though it's a wersh beverage and I'm a patriot even in my drink), and also I hae lookit on a woman when she was bonny. But noo, it's time for me to be drawing in my horns. I maun be settling in a bit hoosie, near a village for company, near the sea because I wad perish else, and above a' under a fine, ripe, experienced auldish minister—ken ye ony sic?'

'I do,' said Paul, 'my uncle Doctor Laird has been minister of just such a parish these forty years.'

'A parish minister,' said Clydeside. 'Weel I was raised Cameronian in Glasgow, and gaed to Renfield Street to William Symington when I was an apprentice. Faith, I think it was his talk about the auld martyrs and them fechtin' Clavers and Lag that sent me to this kind o' wark. There's an awful heap o' the Auld Testament in Lazun's methods. You read about Samson, and you'll agree. But where awa' is this parish o' yours?'

'Kirkpatrick-Maxwellton, in Galloway,' said Paul,

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‘and the village is Orraland.’

‘Then I ken her,’ said Clydeside, ‘that is to say, I have mony a time seen the reek o’ the houses when I ran up a minute when the Golden Flagon was busy layin’ her nest-eggs. Oh, aye, I dare say it’s a fine spot, but do ye think it likely that your uncle would be for makin’ me an elder?’

‘That I don’t know,’ said Paul carefully, ‘he has as many as he wants at present, but one can’t always tell.’

‘What kind o’ a man is your uncle?’

‘There is nobody like him—simple as the poorest body on the road, yet he was once Moderator of the General Assembly. But I can tell you he is not to be trifled with.’

‘He would deal faithfully with the like of me, ye think—a sinner but not a hardened sinner?’

‘I am sure he would,’ said Paul, ‘he has often so dealt with me.’

‘Aweel,’ said Clydeside, ‘I’ll e’en think about it. I might maybe do worse. A fine parish, a clean bit cottage, a shepherd that deals faithfully, and does not water the pure milk of the Word. That’s about what a battered auld sinner o’ the Scots persuasion wants in his latter days. Lord, what’s yon?’

He interrupted the sketched arrangements he had been making for the peace of his future life, to return to the troubled one he was leading.

‘See ye that?’ he whispered, catching Paul by the arm. ‘Yonder go the dagos, and instead of sitting by my ain window-cheek in Orraland, with the roses and marrowfats lookin’ in at the window and the hens playin’ ‘Crake-crake’ at the door, while I contemplate my latter end, with my palm on the open Bible like the auld man in the picture—here’s

me, puir auld 'Clydeside,' that will have to turn in and set to rights yon engine-room that has been harried and driven to shivereens by thae dagos (no, I'm nane fit to be an elder yet!) And it will take me a week to get the place even decently habitable or the least music into the machinery. May the Lord preserve me from the sin of profane sweerin'—but I'm dootfu'—not o' His power but of ma capacity. Sweerin's a foolish thing in the abstract and a greater sin when one has come to the time of hoar hairs, like me. But, faith, lad, it's a fact that my business can hardly get on without it—such a tribe of thewless, bloodless, bakers'-bread eaters as they give a chief engineer nowadays—anywhere that is, except in the Navy, where (at least on a destroyer) a man has to fill his clothes and look his job—as I will allow. Ah, here they come. I may get to my supplications, for assuredly the Recording Angel up yonder is dippin' his pen in the ink!

When Paul's father had passed over the command to the first officer of the Neptune, he saw to it that the additional members of the crew who had cumbered the lower decks went in their order into the boats prepared for them. 'Clydeside' Whyte exhorted his engineers and firemen, hoarsely but with a vim which showed that he had resolved to have some reason for demanding faithful dealing from whatsoever minister he should decide to sit under.

Paul had been summoned into his father's boat, but even then he was not able to speak to him. His place was indicated between a young Malta-man and Le Breton, the third mate, from the Channel Islands. Captain Wester sat alone in the stern sheets, unmoved and melancholy as ever.

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Paul wondered whether, ever again, he would see in his father's eyes that look of understanding and kindness he had surprised as they sat together over their coffee in the Rhone Valley 'Rapide,' hurrying southward from Lyons.

Presently he too stood on the deck of the destroyer. Lazun was already there with half of the crew. Of the men who had brought the boat from her national service, there was not a trace. The Trident had taken them back to their unstable little Republic, there to prepare for yet other revolutions, and doubtless also to afford opportunities for the future commerce of gun-smuggling and ammunition-running directed by Lazun.

Paul found a little berth in which he curled himself snugly. He was weary with the fatigues of the last thirty hours, and his eyes were soon sealed. He only remained awake long enough to feel the grip and tremor as 'Clydeside' started his engines, and then he woke no more till the sun was high in the sky and the destroyer Anonyma, showing unjustifiable English colours, was heading south through a brisk blue run of sea.

CHAPTER THIRTY FOUR

A HOT BURST SOUTHWARD

‘Yonder’s Souk,’ said Le Breton at Paul’s elbow, ‘or rather yonder’s where Souk ought to be. There’s a harbour of sorts, but there was not a man in our old company who could take a ship in, except that sacruced so-and-so of a Basque, Lupo. Maybe that’s why we are here on this war canoe with a whole pincushion of guns stuck all over us, and that Long Tom of a 4-7 turning her nose to the sky like an elephant going to trumpet. If there are any members of the opposition in Souk who refuse to take our cargo, or to get out when Lazun Palafox says so—I expect Lazun has fetched along this long, mysterious stranger with raking funnels, and that little pop-gun to persuade them.’

The next moment he was summoned to the bridge, where Paul saw him take the marine glass from the Captain’s hand and look far and long to the south.

The Captain nodded as Le Breton reported something, and the next instant he ordered the course to be changed. Then with a great turn to the west, the destroyer soon left the Neptune and the distant coast of Souk far behind them.

‘Snakes,’ said one of the men standing near Paul, ‘what has started the Captain off at such a peg and why has he left the Neptune all standing?’

‘Doing sheep-dog very likely,’ said another, ‘there’s a craft between us and the shore that we want to drive right up against the Neptune. That’s

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the way they do on the hills. I was brought up to it. I mind a sheep-dog that I had.'

'Shut up, Sim,' said his companion, 'this ain't sheep that we are drivin'—not by a long chalk.—Hearken, Sim—there's your sheep saying Baa!'

There was a rumble of heavy guns back in the haze, and at the first sound the destroyer came sharply about and went full speed towards the African coast.

'That's the Neptune. I know the crack of the port three-inch; I ought to, for I have often worked it.'

'Wish we had stayed on her, don't you, Sim?'

'Oh, we will have our share of the fun in a while.'

And sure enough hardly had the destroyer begun to patrol back and forth as if to bar the passage to the south, when out of the haze a vessel came flying.

The Captain lifted his hand, and the big gun spoke with a noise that made the ship tremble. The shell passed right over the coming ship and spurted white in the sea.

'Lord, if it ain't the Golden Flagon,' said Sim the shepherd, 'what in the seven seas are ye firing at her for?'

'I wager the Spaniards that were aboard have taken her, and gone off on their own. We may be doing your shepherding after all.'

'More like there has been mutiny and bloody murder,' said Sim. 'I never liked the Flagon since they got that new crew on her. Too much family ark about her for me—the non-dagos were sure to get their throats cut sooner or later by the ear-ringed pirates and their cursed supercargo, Lupo.'

'That means a wolf, Simmy,' said his mate informatively. 'It's a wolf chase we're on, that's what it is. Lazun and the Cap are going to take him in a

trap.'

'Hope he has not got a den, then,' said Sim the shepherd.

'That's just what we are here for. We will make him go into Souk whether he likes it or not. And when once there we will play at long bowls with him.'

'She can't get away?'

'No, but he can go into that harbour—past those reefs—they say he is the only man who can, with a ship the size of the Flagon.'

'Lazun would know well enough what he would make for. Watch him by the side of Roberts, our gunner, and his team. The old fox—he does not mean to spoil his own ship if he can help it. See how he is directing Roberts to fire first to one side and then to the other.'

'Plung — plung! That's the Neptune keeping her end up to tell him the earth's stopped to the north. To Souk he has come and into Souk he must go—and a lot of good may it do him!'

Sim the shepherd caught his comrade by the arm and pointed eagerly to the racing ship. She had been making straight for the reefs as if ready to go ashore, but with a sudden shifting of the helm, she swung her bows outward to the south and stretched along the coast southward.

'The Flagon thinks she has the heels of us,' said Jolly A.B. as he followed the Shepherd's finger. 'And in fact she can keep closer inshore than we can do, for she draws less water and that oily scoundrel Lupo Palafox knows the coast better even than the Admiralty chart fellows.'

'Only he hasn't old 'Clydeside' in their engine-room, and O'Halloran is off with the dago-dons in

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the Trident. We shall soon see who scores. There we go! They say in the engine-room that this craft we are on can do thirty-two or thirty-three knots, though of course the dons never got within a third of those figures.'

'Whoop—now old 'Clydeside' is giving her the steam. He will make her go if he opens out her plates.'

'This can't last,' said Paul, as his teeth chattered, not with fright, but because he had not grown accustomed to the movement. It seemed to be disarticulating him. The men looked at him as if sizing him up.

'It will last as long as old Whytie has an ounce of steam, and you can bet he'll get the ultimate half-knot of speed out of it. The Flagon is a fast boat, and she has the short course on us, but she was never built for track-racing hke this here model yacht.'

'It's a picture—that's what it is,' said Sim the shepherd, 'coursing hares ain't in it. Watch the Captain. It is his turn now. Le Breton is steering to his orders. He keeps the glass to his eyes as if it were friz there. But you can't ever see his lips move. No, he's not one to give his tongue much work, though he can lift hide when he does, as I know. Even Lazun will not speak to him now.'

Paul watched his father, and then he looked at the flying boat inshore.

'No time to pop at her now—though that's what the Americans did to Cervera when he came out of Santiago. He was stretching along the coast like that, and they whacking at him as he went. I tell you, matey, she's gaining on us!'

'Only looks that way, Sim,' said Jolly A.B. consolingly. 'Keep your eye on the Cap. He's laying a

wider berth as if he meant to let her out, but be quite sure he has a trick up his sleeve. Lupo the Basque and all his greasy jabberers can't faize him. Ain't he a beauty? See him dust that fleck of soot off his coat. Cool—I should say so. When he's dead he won't be noticeably cooler.'

'I wonder what his game is, though,' murmured the Shepherd anxiously, 'of course he has one. But hang me if I see it, and I would be easier if I knew.'

'No, Sim—course you can't see. This is not working collies on a moor, lad. You bet there's a man behind that jacket. They say even Lazun's a bit afraid of him.'

'Well, who's crossing him?' growled Sim, 'but I wish he would tell old 'Clydeside' to hurry up a bit—or make young Le Breton hold her a point or two nearer to the land. She'll slip between our jaws yet. The Flagon's as fast a little ship as floats.'

'A little ship,' says you, and right you are. But she was not built and engined for destroyers' work. We shall overhaul her as soon as the Captain shakes out the tucker he has on the speed. He's only letting her believe she's getting away.'

'Wish he'd hurry, then,' said the Shepherd anxiously, 'I can feel my hair turning grey.'

It was wonderful to see the two swift vessels running almost parallel, though the destroyer was keeping much farther out than at first, and in consequence the distance between the ships was growing wider. There was no doubt about it—the Golden Flagon was doing justice to her reputation, and others than Sim were anxious.

Lazun kept his hands behind his back in the attitude in which Paul had first seen him on the beach at Cancale. But his face was pale and he

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watched the Golden Flagon with his lips pressed close together and his eyes deep withdrawn, but narrow and bright, each like the point of a gimlet.

Then his face would turn slowly to the figure of his Captain immovable on the bridge.

He fidgeted, and once or twice appeared to be on the point of making a suggestion. But he thought better of it, and relapsed into his watch of the escaping ship.

So hour by hour the vessels tore on, till at last when every one was weary, very far ahead a dim low line of the tawny yellow hue of a lion's upper mane began to stretch farther and farther out into the indigo of the ocean.

'There now, he is letting her have it at last,' said Jolly A.B., as he watched the Captain bend over his communications with the engine-room. 'I should not like to be the man who would cross old 'Clydeside' down there at this tick of time.'

'Whoosh!' said a wave, and something green and all bubbly white passed coolly over them, too fast to let them know that it was really a wave. A heavy salt dew began to fall, and the white could be seen rising in twin pillars under the forefoot. The destroyer was not rising to the waves any longer. She was smacking clean through them.

'What's yon, Sim, think you—land or sand?'

'Sand—and right in front of the Flagon,' said the Shepherd. 'I don't know these parts, but I can see enough to make sure that the Flagon will have to keep farther out.'

'Could it be Cape Juby?' said Paul, who knew his atlas.

The sailors looked at him with increased respect.

'Cape Juby—indeed that's the very name of it. I

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was once there with a fool of a Frenchman, Jacques Lebaudy—Lor', what a yarn that would make! He was clean crazy, a millionaire, but as close-fisted as—my mother-in-law. But he founded an empire, and hoisted a flag and called himself the Emperor Jacques I.'

'See here. Jolly A.B., is this a time to lie? I put it to you. It might bring bad luck.'

'It's all true, Sim—true as that you are a fool. And he sent letters and ambassadors to the great powers to get them to acknowledge him, and then the Spaniards came and cleared the blighter off—it being Spanish territory, or claimed as such.'

'Claimed or not, I'll wager that Lupo—he's a Spaniard too—wishes it were not just where it is—no harbours there—only sand—and us.'

'Hello!' the exclamation came from both men at once. 'We're turning in shore. Are we going to butt into Cape Juby?' demanded the Shepherd.

'Cape Booby? that's you!' Jolly A.B. shook him by the arm. 'Why, man, don't you see? Oh, beautiful — beautiful! The Captain knew and Lupo didn't, just how far the Cape ran out. So he kept wide till he sighted it. Then—he forged ahead with all the pace that old Whytie could give him. He passed the Flagon, as of course he would, running thirty knots half-under-water like that. That bit began when the showers began to cool us off. Shepherd. And now when he has forged ahead a bit— bit —he slides in right in front of her and— there you are!'

'Boom —there's old Cotton Wool saying, 'Halt, my son, right wheel, by your left'—or words to that effect.'

The 4-7 had spoken and the shell, striking straight ahead of the oncoming ship, was not long in

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producing its effect.

'Stand ready to go about!' said Jolly A.B., shading his eyes with his hands.

'Left wheel, done as neat as a squad o' marines,' said the Shepherd; 'now she turns inshore, and we will drive her as good and faithful as it was ever done on a moor o' sheep.'

'She's a lady—she don't like followers—can't abide them!' jested Jolly A. B. 'Now it will be all lounging along—careful and gentle till Lazun has got her where he wants her. For the Neptune will be waiting with old man Fox as nervous as a cat on a branch, and Fyne and Haddock perched as high as they can get on the mast, looking out for us.'

'About we go and away after her—keeping well outside and per previous instructions,' continued Jolly. 'Now let us lay ourselves to sleep and they can put old Cotton-Wool-in-your-Ears to by-by. He won't be wanted till tomorrow.'

The northward chase was not such a palpitating strain on the nerves as the fierce break for liberty which Lupo had made southward only to be stopped by Cape Juby. Captain Wester left Le Breton on the bridge, and when he came down Lazun shook hands with him before the whole ship's company. Then the two men went to the Captain's cabin.

'Oooff!' said everybody, sending the breath out of their chests with relief as the pair disappeared. 'Next number, please!'

Roberts the gunner, who had served in the navy and was Fox's nephew, was 'much made of.'

'Hard work, wasn't it?' said Jolly A.B.

'Not at all,' the gunner said with careless ease affected on such occasions, 'she's a lovely weapon, and the rangefinder is tip-top. But what gave me the

shivers was the Chief standing over a fellow like that—makes a man all tremolo stop. I'm still as tingly as a fiddle-string. If only he would keep away!'

'Why didn't you tell him?' suggested Jolly A.B., grinning. 'Say old man, stand a bit off—you fidget me!' Something like that. Just easy as you are talking to us.'

And the lower deck laughed at the breadth of the jest. But Roberts took no notice. He knew that he had acquitted himself well, though he had not been shaken hands with. But then neither had Captain Wester up to that day, and Roberts was young and cocksure.

Nothing in all the day's work astonished Paul more than the ease with which all on the destroyer took the affair so soon as the real business was done. Short of a complete breakdown of the engines, nothing could now save the Golden Flagon. She was in a trap and knew it. Lupo also must have seen that he was being driven towards the entrance of Souk harbour of set intent and purpose. Indeed otherwise he had only the choice between surrender and blowing up the ship—either of which he could as easily do inside the port as out.

Never after that did the Golden Flagon look like having a chance of breaking through. The destroyer sauntered along, keeping wide of any stray shots and ready to cut off any rush. But by the time that the harbour of Souk appeared in the distance, there was the Neptune keeping watch and ward. So Lupo had to curb his pride and take the course which had been pointed out to him with such care.

Paul watched in mixed hope and fear. He knew that Zipporah was on board along with these lawless men of whom even the crew of the destroyer

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expressed horror, and they were certainly no lambs. Little Eza was also there and her brother Leon. In addition Lazun had mentioned Raif Palafox as being a special safeguard, but what Paul had seen in the dell behind Red Haven effectually kept him from agreeing.

Still—no doubt Lazun understood all the circumstances far better than he could do.

Presently Lazun and his father came out again and this time they went on the bridge together. Le Breton came down, apparently very much delighted with the events of the morning.

‘He’s a wonder, that pater of yours. He held on our course to the very last minute—till I fairly gasped. I thought they would slip by. But he kept saying, ‘Lead her on—give her another couple of miles—that won’t hurt.’ And then, he put about and cut in as neat as a geometrical drawing—base of a triangle and all that sort of thing.’

The signal was given ‘Dead Slow,’ and then— she stopped.

Before them lay Souk. And with Le Breton’s glasses Paul could see the Golden Flagon already threading her way among the reefs, and almost imagined that he could make out the little wizened man he had seen in the courtyard of Gobelet, standing on the bridge and conning her.

The Golden Flagon had safely negotiated the passages into the anchorage of Souk, and now lay motionless upon the burning water which reflected her masts against background of terra-cotta and saffron-coloured rocks behind.

Outside like baffled dogs the two ships which had

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shepherded her into this white-hot fold lay still panting with the chase.

Lazun was in close conference with Captain Wester, doubtless as to the next move. Both were invisible. So Paul, idly gazing shoreward and watching the Golden Flagon, gave himself up to thoughts of Zipporah Katti and the chances of her rescue. It seemed to him that there would now be a certain and immediate capture, and that he might again see that tall girl who had so long been his little friend of the Dulse Cave. The desert was behind and Paul had always pictured it, on the strength of some childish picture-books, as a kind of bowling-green of sand, with hers and there neat little norias or Biblical water-wheel with many buckets. He now adopted this picture unconsciously, and it seemed that all deserts must be flat, camel-dotted, and provided with those neat wells.

Just as all ideas of missions were visualized for him by a tall man in a tall hat with a tiny white book in his hand, sitting on a camp-stool, and teaching a very round and indifferent black baby under a palm-tree.

To him enter 'Clydeside' Whyte, cleansed and grave. He began speaking as he came.

'And about that eldership!' he said, 'ye think that your uncle would not pester a man like me about it for some time?'

Paul was aching to ask questions, many questions, as to knots and speed. He also wished to see the engines, and he wanted the old engineer's opinion on the chances of making the capture.

He hinted at these requirements, but 'Clydeside' cut him short.

'Oh, I just did my job and James Brown's engines

did theirs. The speed—a trifle over thirty-one, maybe more during the bit burst at the last. But these are but gauds and frivolities—leading to sinful compliances and language unbecoming of an elder—though frequently necessary to a chief engineer afflicted with a tribe o’ half-witlings just barely clear of complete imbecility.’

And dismissing the subject he added, ‘But as I was sayin’, a man that has followed the sea in the engine-room and been obleeged to express his mind not only wi’ his tongue but with the limbs God has given him—that man has a great deal of leeway to make up. He must have time to cool off, as it were, and after such bursts as the engine-room listened to this day (I am speakin’, sir, of my modest efforts to cheer and stimulate yon pack o’ potterin’ slowbellies) it takes a good while for the heat to die out o’ you, even after the fire’s drawn.’

‘Orraland would do your job,’ Paul promised, for he had grown to like the ‘Old Ironclad,’ as the men called him, ‘and I am sure that my uncle would take you in hand.’

‘He is faithful in rebuke, then?’ he asked anxiously, ‘ye see I think ye said that there are twa public-hooses in the village, and I never was a man to be unsocial—na, I always hated secret drinking.’

‘My uncle, Dr. Laird,’ Paul advised him, ‘is not a man to go roaring up and down his parish. But he knows every inch of it. He has baptized every man, woman and child in it under the age of forty years. He has made most marriages, and he spoils the resulting children with sweets out of his coat-tail pocket. If the folk of Orraland and the parish generally have any misdeeds to do, they carry them out of the parish. For if the minister hears of the

thing, he may rebuke them once, twice, and perhaps in extreme cases thrice—but after that he will preach a rouser of a sermon that will make the whole congregation look about to see whose ears and neck are turning to beetroot. Then the parish is in a buzz for days, and all the old wives come to their doors as the unfortunate goes by.’

Paul had coloured a little to impress ‘Clydeside,’ for indeed the Doctor had only done this once—when Jock Malcolm had come home with a jar of whisky from the harvest, turned his children out of doors with their mother, and refused to let them in till he had finished. ‘A memorable and glorious Sabbath day’ had followed, but during the week the Doctor weakened the effect by seeking out Jock, reinstating him in society by walking the length of the village arm-in-arm with him, and setting him in the garden of the Manse to dig Barbara’s potatoes.

‘Aye, man,’ said ‘Clydeside,’ much impressed, ‘that’s the sort for me. Slow to anger—but a regular Bay-of-Bengal-er when he gets started! Now there’s me—I always blew a gale right from the start, and no man could call me slow to anger even now, when my natural force is sore abated. But do you think that the minister would consider it if I told him the sort of special temptations I had had in this dog’s life—the sloths, loblollies, and converted steerage stewards that I have had to work with—would that make him a bit easier with me, think you?’

‘Never a bit,’ affirmed Paul accommodatingly since he seemed to wish for it, ‘he would give it to you so much the worse. For he would say that it was you that chose the kind of life that suited you to lead, and not the life that led you. ‘Clydeside’ (he whispered), ‘if you want to go to your long home with

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soft words and easy walking—never you set a foot in Orraland. You will not be able to call your soul your own.’

‘Clydeside’ stood up jerkily and rubbed his hands as if he would pull the knotted fingers out by the roots.

‘Oh, it’s grand,’ he murmured, smacking his lips as if to relish the words— ‘not call my soul my own— I don’t want to, man! Walk in the fear of God and of the minister all the days of your life’— just the thing! The verra article! Man, it’s fine to think on it.’

‘You’ll have to attend the Wednesday’s prayer-meeting every week at seven,’ Paul hazarded.

‘Clydeside’ looked a little scared.

‘And if I don’t?’ he said.

‘Then ye will have the Doctor knocking at your door before ye are up the next morning to know whether you are ill or backslidden. And you need not to think to palm off lies on him, for he will have been round the village before that to learn where you got it. Whereupon he will execute whoever has aided and abetted, and then with all his broadside charged, he will come in, bar the door and wrestle with you till you want to go down and throw yourself in the Solway—only he will prove to you that it is better to suffer and have time for repentance, little as the saving of such a worthless soul can matter even to yourself!’

To see ‘Clydeside’s’ face in the hot glare of the African sun, glorified by the thought that there were faithful dealers yet left in his native land, was to be taken back to Orraland, its cool trees and breezy bay. Paul saw the green wind-tossed glimmer of the Maxwellton tree-tops and the bossy purple of the

bens and cairns behind.

'Oh, man,' said the old engineer, 'I'll resign as soon as I touch a civilized country. Do ye ken of any decent house to be had in the village? I would take it—aye even buy it to make sure, if I could send a wire to the post-master this very moment.'

'Go slow,' Paul counselled cunningly, 'better go down there and look round a little. You may not like it after all. The Doctor's discipline may be too strict after your years of freedom.'

'It just couldna',' he cried, bringing down his great rough hand with a masterly clack upon the burning plates, 'not though he fairly took me doon in the Auld Man and set me up in the New. It's what I want, that.'

Paul felt that he must convey some of this extreme desire for faithful ministration to the Doctor, or his uncle might fall short of the expectations he had aroused. So he interjected a word at this point.

'Of course,' he said, 'I speak rather feelingly, for he will not permit me to go near the village—me, his only living relative and heir.'

'Ah,' he said, squinting up at Paul with a quaint look, 'he has been dressin' you down too for your good. Capital! Told you to go and be—ahem, just that—till you knew how to behave yourself in his parish. Now what was the matter—out with it, young man?'

Paul looked at the flaky deck and stirred a foot discreetly about.

'Was it ... a bit matter of a lass?' 'Clydeside' demanded.

Paul was silent and let him think what he might.

'Ye have nothing to say, laddie—then I take it, 'tis

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for that very job ye are here. But he will forgive ye, surely?’

‘Maybe someday,’ said Paul, shaking his head dubiously. ‘Then there is my father—the Captain—he durst not go across to the Manse when he comes to Orraland. And they say he takes to the woods whenever he sees the minister coming, though he be half-a-mile away!’

‘Say nae mair,’ cried ‘Clydeside,’ wringing the young man by both hands, ‘Orraland’s the place for me. If your uncle can fear the Captain, the devil himself has but a poor chance in Orraland.’

CHAPTER THIRTY FIVE

THE NIGHT ATTACK

About an hour before sunset Captain Wester sent Paul word that he was to hold himself in readiness to come with the boats in the night attack which had been decided. He was to go at once to the armourer and be fitted out—a couple of navy revolvers would be sufficient.

‘And of my best you shall have,’ Old Man Adams promised joyfully, ‘and not with no old navy scrap either, but with them new Herbesthal Belgians with as many eight-cartridge extra magazines as you like, all ready to be shoved in. I’ll show you the trick.’

And he set Paul opposite the bullet-headed target he called his ‘bonhomme,’ which represented with early-art roughness the upper part of a man’s body. Paul learned quickly. He had the natural gift of firearms, so much so that the armourer soon adopted him as a kind of unofficial assistant, saying: ‘Do what you can with what they bring you. Show them how to oil and clean, and pass anything you don’t understand on to me.’

Paul was glad to consume the time in any sort of employment, and when his father came in to see how the armourer was getting on, he found Paul with his coat off, grease and powder-stains to the eyes, busy with the mechanism of a magazine rifle which had its feeding spring broken.

Captain Wester smiled but said nothing. He nodded to Paul, however, and was certainly not displeased to discover that his son could be trusted

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to find work for himself. For, though he had held himself severely aloof since he took command, he had been at some pains to ascertain with whom Paul made friends and how he spent his time.

He approved of letting a boy 'find himself,' and he liked the choice of Le Breton, of the armourer, and specially of old 'Clydeside' as companions. In Paul's confidences with Sim the shepherd and Jolly A.B. the experienced eye of the leader of men discerned more than a reporter's instinctive choice of good material. His son had chosen to consort with the safest and steadiest portion of the expedition.

As it grew darker the excitement on the two attacking ships increased. Lazun himself had gone on board the Neptune and would lead the supporting part of the equipment—the Captain would direct the whole.

'And you'll see, he won't direct it from the tail, as they say the fellows on land do—generals and so forth,' it was Able Seaman Jolly who was speaking. 'If your pa isn't first man over the side it will be because he is dead.'

By the care of that parent of whose courage and tenacity the men had such an opinion, Paul found himself in the boat over which the engineer was to rule. The old fellow was furious.

'Yesterday I should not have cared one tinker's blessing,' he confided to Paul. 'And the reason? Well, I had not heard about your uncle then. I thought that the stiffness had gone out of the old breed of ministers. One more chance to get myself killed would not have made any difference. But now I want to sit under your uncle and let him get to work on reforming me. It's a long job that, lad—for the engine-room grime has gritted into me through and

through, and your uncle is nowadays a young man. He might be failing one of these days, not to speak of me being no chicken myself.'

To console him Paul informed 'Clydeside' that the general object of this expedition was not so much to retake the Golden Flagon and punish the rebels, as to save the girl who was the apple of Dr. Laird's eye, and had been brought up by him almost from childhood. She had been seized instead of Lazun, and was now on the ship in Souk harbour.

'That ship yonder?' old 'Clydeside' repeated incredulously.

'The same,' said Paul. 'No, I'm not 'pulling your leg' as you call it—better not talk slang to my uncle, or he will remind you of the pit from which you were digged. 'Slang and swearing—younger and elder brother,' he says, 'and the devil is the father of them both.'

'And he will not let up on me, that have heard little else for five-and-thirty years?'

'Neither on one nor the other. He will tell you, as he has told me, either to cleanse your tongue or to hold it. And then as like as not he will put you out for polluting his study.'

'Not by violence?' said the engineer, startled.

'God forbid—he calls that a poor fleshly weapon—but he will speak to you slow and solemn, pointing his finger at the door till you wish he would take his foot to you. And you go out with the feeling that to crawl the distance on your belly would be the proper way to leave the presence—'Physical force' — Lord, man, ye'll be asking for it the first time you get my uncle's tongue on you!'

'Glory!' cried the engineer so suddenly that some of the crew turned to look at him, 'but I'd give half I

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have laid by to be clean out of this mess, and home to let your uncle get in his fine work.'

'Clydeside' thought awhile, and then as if troubled with a scruple, he said—

'Suppose we get this . . . young lady . . . back, and the minister is glad, he would not be the man to let me off any the easier because I did a bit to help her out here in this filthy Morocco?'

'Not at all—don't you worry—nothing that you have done or can do will matter one docken leaf. He will go for the root of the matter at once—which is, that you are as bad a lump of clay as ever came out of the hands of the potter—as you are—you know you are!'

'Well,' said 'Clydeside' with sudden unexpected wrath, 'suppose I am, what's that to you? You are not your uncle. Keep your mind on that girl and what sent you out here. There's enough clay in your own carcass to keep you from worrying about mine!'

'All right,' said Paul, 'no offence. I was only telling you for your good. Besides, if he is inclined to be grateful, we can always tell him that you turned tail before the fight.'

The engineer cast a murky eye upon him, and his face grew grim again.

'That's the way little boys get their heads broken,' he said in a very different voice. 'Keep on mindin', sonny, that my Old Man is not cast out yet. Dinna you be getting it into your head, laddie, that there's no kick left in the old mule just because he is thinking of going to grass. Undeceive yourself—captain's son or minister's nephew, d'ye think I don't know the sound of cheek when I hear it?'

Paul threw himself instantly upon the mercy of the court. He had been led away by the enthusiasm

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of the moment. He had been trying to meet 'Clydeside's' objections.

'See, laddie,' said the old man with grave sententiousness, 'there's a heap of things that ye can say of old Whyte and never tell a lie. There are more that they do say which are not true, but are just faceable enough to sound as if they might be. But 'running' away from trouble is not one of them. Who would you get to believe you? Not your uncle after he had seen me once. For he is a plain dealer and a knowledgeable man. He will know full well that once a fighter is always a fighter, and that the best fighter for the Lord is the man who has fought staunchly for the devil. But a dish-clout is always a dish-clout, wet or dry! Mind that!'

Paul Wester, who had been letting his tongue run away with him, begged pardon again, and with such earnestness that the old engineer reached out his hand with the words; 'There, laddie, say no more about it. Keep as close to me as you can in the boats, and I will see that Sim and Jolly are at hand to elbow you out of mischief. Lower away there! You engine-room fellows, you had better come with me. If you don't fight harder than you work, the Lord have mercy on you, for I winna!'

At last the boats got away in the darkness, the Captain's leading. A slim, swarthy Arab lad who was reported to have sailed with the rebel supercargo was in the bows. Captain Wester had placed O'Halloran—Orange O'Halloran from County Tyrone—a man who stuck at nothing, by the fellow's side to persuade him. O'Halloran first strapped himself wrist to wrist with the Arab and informed the youth

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that if he did his best nothing would befall him. But if he attempted to escape he would certainly get hurt, while if he called out or made any signal by way of treachery, his time on earth would not be long. He should go to Allah and his Prophet by a singularly direct route. And as a sort of single ticket to the houris, Orange cocked his Smith & Wesson and set the cold rim against the nape of the young man's neck.

Noiselessly the boats stole towards the shore, in single file following Captain Wester. It was real forlorn hope service. The reefs were dangerous and numerous, the night dark, and only the phosphorescent glow of the sea dimly revealed the perils which strewed their path.

The greatest danger, however, was in the chance that the Golden Flagon might have her guns all ready trained on the narrow opening by which the intricate passage-way opened out on the little lagoon inside that served for the harbour of Souk. If all the boats got out in silence, then the attack would gain a great point. But on the other hand, there was always a possibility that the enemy might destroy them one by one as they were coming out of the channel.

'Clydeside' was in command of the third boat—the Captain being first, Le Breton second, and then came the engineer, who was busy under his breath disquahfying for any immediate promotion to the office of elder in the kirk of Orraland.

He followed, however, and presently they were in among the sharp edges of the reefs which glanced at them every little while, a ghastly white under the feeble light of stars, like the teeth of some shark turning on his back to bite.

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The rest of the way was done in deep silence. The final double turn at the exit into the lagoon-like port of Souk was hushed and filled with an intolerable sense of strain. When would the guns speak? They would be standing ready, doubtless, on the Flagon to blow the whole expedition out of the water. The men took pains with their oars. A splash, the grating of a boat-hook fending off the rocks might bring a tempest of bullets.

But one boat passed out and turned to the right without the expected outburst of flame—then Le Breton disappeared and it was their turn. Paul saw the hull of the Golden Flagon a quarter of a mile off. They had hitherto seen only her spars owing to the height of the intervening ledges.

Presently the whole expedition was spread widely out and a large part of the danger had passed. Lazun's boats from the Neptune went round by the other side to cut off access to the land. The Captain advanced straight across the narrow strip of still water. The Golden Flagon lay at her moorings, not a light showing, fires extinct, as still and silent as if she had not moved for a hundred years.

'I dinna like the look o' this. It's no naitural,' whispered 'Clydeside.' 'If they had been going to fecht, there would have been powder burnt before now. And if not, depend on it there is a trap. What kind I cannot say, possibly connected with the powder magazine and a foot or two of slow-match.

'But there—we will soon ken! Up with you there!' For already the Captain was slinging grappling hooks and soon the deck of the Golden Flagon was swarming with men. Paul was hauled up, he never knew exactly how.

There was not a man of the mutineers to be found

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on board. The Captain had gone straight to the powder magazine, and found it empty, swept and garnished. Not a cartridge or an ounce of powder. Lanterns were soon dancing and the ship was thoroughly examined.

It was clear that all had been ready for abandoning her. In the cabins the remains of careful packing were evident. Paul picked up and put in his pocket a little lace handkerchief that had belonged to Zipporah Katti. He remembered the way she had of tucking it into her belt. So it was obvious that she had been here and that not so long ago.

But Paul had little time for sentiment. Captain Wester made his report to Lazun Palafox, and then leaving a guard on board the Flagon, he ordered the men to tumble back into the boats.

Pursuit might be quite useless, but still neither Lazun nor his acting commander were men to stop before they got as near as they could to the end of the passage, and found out all there was to know.

Before them they saw a beach of a pale bluish whiteness, dotted with black shapes like seals drawn up on the sand and shingle. The expedition was advancing pretty much abreast now, and, having no fear of any attack from the ship the men were making the water fly with their oars.

'Boats ahead!' cried the Captain, standing suddenly erect, 'get to shore, men, and cut them off!'

The men splashed waist deep in the sea and were soon among the beached boats. They were empty. Their oars and equipment, however, were intact, and indeed, admirably arranged.

Lazun went the rounds with a lantern. He examined and considered everything. Then with his chin dropped on the knuckles of his left hand, he

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delivered his verdict: 'Lupo Palafox has not destroyed the property of the family. He has respected it, and this shall be remembered to him for righteousness. He shall die an easier death!'

Captain Wester arranged his men and gave them their orders. He sent Paul with 'Clydeside,' his stokers and engine-room men, to the southern flank, where the sand-dunes were highest and the strip of foreshore most narrow and difficult. They were to climb straight up and advance, reporting to him by messenger anything they might run across. They were to take prisoners any one they found, Moor, Arab, or European, but they were not to fire first.

Finally Paul, as a landsman and a good shot, was to lead under the guidance of 'Clydeside's' experience. This last message filled the young man with extraordinary elation. Tears rose to his eyes. At last, his father was giving him his chance. He flung himself at the sandhills, where his comparative lightness and his practice since infancy as a cliff-climbing boy, gave him a great advantage over sailor-men. He laboured to bring up his followers, and in particular, he almost hauled up 'Clydeside,' who as he expressed it, was 'all of a lather o' sweat!' For 'Clydeside' used the plainest words and never, even when his engines were red-hot, broke into a 'perspiration.'

At last they neared the top and found the dry mealy run of the loose sand change into more solid footing. Sand it still remained, but sand skinned over with the fibrous roots of 'alfa' grass and bound down with creepers and wild esparto. The hooked spikes of the false cactus, called the Fico del Moro, pricked the men's legs and made them swear.

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Whereat 'Clydeside' reproved them, in words which made their attempts sound like the innocent babble of infants at their play, and announced punishments dire and awful as soon as he 'got them below again.'

As they went forward it soon appeared that they were crowning the heights at a higher level than the rest of the men, and were also much farther advanced. The Captain and Le Breton were keeping along the valley of Souk, which opened out from the narrow bottle-neck leading back to the harbour, into a wide plain closed in by a range of very abrupt and craggy mountains to the east, seen in silhouette against an auroral sky of pink and primrose.

'But where is Souk?' Paul kept saying to himself. 'I cannot see the town, or fortress, or anything that is Souk?'

The dawn was coming up fast now. The little band of engineers and stokers had attained to the highest point of the ridge they had been crossing, when they observed something of the nature of mist or steam rising into the air before them. As he climbed, Paul had been watching a cairn on a point to the right. He ran scrambling forward, and from thence as the sun rose and cast his shadow over the burnt-out 'alfa' grass and the labouring climbers, he saw beneath him—a town still on fire, the roofs fallen in and lazily smoking, white walls smoke-blackened, and a little open market-place all suspect with ugly irregular patches and black heaps that looked like fallen men.

With a cry to 'Clydeside' to push on, he sped along the top of the ridge which led down into the valley to carry the news to his father. The town of Souk had been taken and sacked.

Lazun's part of the expedition was lagging a little behind. The men drafted from the Trident were, doubtless, less accustomed to desperate enterprises than the band which Captain Wester had picked for himself. He halted and sent word to his chief. Lazun promptly crossed over to the Neptune's company, since its leader could not leave his position to come to him.

The two seniors consulted together, Paul standing by and answering when they desired further details of what he had seen.

'A poor little town,' he said, 'but with something like a fort at the corner. . . . Yes, that is destroyed, too—so far, at least, as I could see! The black things I took to be bodies. They lay thickest there, by the fort. No, sir, no flag was flying, but there had been a flagstaff stuck in the cairn up there, and there were signalling things about—a semaphore and bits of white cloth.'

Lazun looked anxious at once.

'They have been surveying,' he said, 'the people in the fort. Who could have been there?— They might be French or German, or even some Spanish up from Cape Juby, though that is not likely. However, come on. Wester, we shall soon see.'

'Take on your men, sir,' said his father to Paul, in words that were of a kind of holy anointing oil of coronation to the young man.

Paul saluted in close imitation of Le Breton, and went off without a word.

No shot assailed them as they advanced, and Paul was soon treading the sodded glacis of the little fort. The dead bodies of men much despoiled and almost destitute of clothing, lay about in all manner of

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strange attitudes. Yet even in death they retained the unmistakable air of trained and civilized men.

Paul turned one body over, that farthest from the covered way leading to the fort. He had a broken sword in his right hand, which he held stiffly in front of him, the blade lying on the sand as if he had fallen in the very act of making a last charge. His left arm was bent under him out of sight. But as the body swung heavily over, the arm rose stark and awkward like the sail of a windmill, and from the wrist dangled the bloody shred of a tricolor—red, white, and blue.

CHAPTER THIRTY SIX

THE SACK OF SOUK

The expedition came to an amazed halt while Captain Wester waited for Lazun to come up. Then with Paul showing the way, they passed into the little low fort. It had, Captain Wester said, been a post of about twenty men. There were many such scattered along the south of Morocco holding lines of communication, or guarding the trade routes leading to the immense French territory to the south which stretches without a break to Lake Tchad. But he had never heard of one getting so far north as this.

The fact, however, was evident enough, but how and when had the havoc been wrought? Most of the men had been killed about their field guns, though apparently they had not been able to use them. The ammunition was found intact and the guns, with 'Creosot-Schneider' stencilled in red upon them, had not even been stripped of their white jackets. The surprise had therefore been complete—they had simply been rushed.

The Frenchmen were engineers of the 1st Colonial, but the officer with the tricolor had belonged to the 5th battalion Foreign Legion. The dead had been killed, for the most part, by bullet wounds in front inflicted by quite modern weapons. But here and there, chiefly in corners, soldiers had been surrounded and worried to death with knives.

It was difficult to explain this difference, and the two leaders looked at each other blankly.

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‘Come on,’ said Lazun at last, ‘perhaps it will come clearer in there.’ The town of Souk had been a small but (considering the country) well equipped settlement. The amount of space given to camel caravans and the innumerable norias testified to abundance of trade and also to the careful culture of the valley land. Traces of irrigation were everywhere.

‘Coast Moors, at least—Berbers, perhaps also a few Jews—yes, look at that old man with the beard. Israelite is written on his face.’

‘There are no women, and I have only seen one cliild—a boy with a spear head gripped with both hands. What does that mean?’

‘Sir,’ said the Captain, ‘I think I see a way to get at the truth more quickly. There is that young Arab who was with me in the boat. He has sailed this coast with Lupo Palafox, and, of our whole expedition, he is the only man who has ever set foot in this place before. He will be able to tell us whether this has been Lupo’s work or if the place had been wiped out before.’

‘Certainly, have him up,’ said Lazun, ‘though it may be more difficult to make him speak.’

‘I think not,’ said the Captain softly, ‘I found him very amenable in the boat. O’Halloran was beside him helping him to remember the way through the reefs.’

‘Well,’ said Lazun, ‘if necessary we can have in O’Halloran again.’

‘I do not think it will be necessary,’ said Captain Wester. ‘The lad is the son of a pure-blood Arab—an Arab of Arabia. The marauders of this part of the country wiped out his father’s caravan—we sold him guns for the Bournu rebels, you remember. His son was then a child travelling with the caravan, and

was kept as a slave somewhere about here for years. Then he escaped to the coast. He came to me through the English consul in Mogador, who wanted him expatriated. He should know the trade mark of every rascal gang in this hinterland, when it comes to burning and slaying. He can tell us what they are here for.'

Lazun nodded and the three men waited in the gate of the town. A painful odour of burning sickened their nostrils. Le Breton had organized a little bodyguard of good shots, who with loaded rifles stood at attention ten paces or so to the rear. A surprise rush was always possible, and nothing was more likely than that in the plundered town some knot of desperate men might have been overlooked, who were now anxious to win Paradise by slaying one of this new band of white infidels.

Soon Yusef came, slim, well-featured, his dark eyes steady, and, with the high-bred impatient womanish mouth which his people conceal so early when, like the tarriers at Jericho, 'their beards are grown.'

Lazun addressed him in trader's Arabic, the lingua franca of the North African seaboard. But Yusef answered at once in good English. He had, he said, very good will to serve the chiefs. Yes, he knew all the tribes.

Did the sheiks of the English warship give him permission to look?

He examined the French dead first, bending over them but not touching any of them. He kept his hands clasped behind him.

'All these,' he said, 'come from the South, very far South, Kanim, Boumu, perhaps the river of Toumbuk where my father went and I also, though I

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was then too young to remember.'

And one by one he ticked off the Frenchmen in the interior of the fort, whether dead by their pieces or trapped in corners.

'Du Genie—as you say, R'yal Ingeneers. But all from the South! So?'

To one dusky-skinned man in a uniform of dark green which had not been stripped off like the others, he gave no salutation of respect.

'Him Haussa!' he said, and passed from the man as if he had been a dead dog. For the black Haussa levies of the French Congo are not exactly popular with the Arab traders of the North. But he paused longer at the body of the officer with the colours round his arm.

'He from the North—Algeria, I think. But I heard that the stranger's 'mehalla,' of whom was this man, had come into the lands of the Sultan of the North to help him against Hamid and the Beni M'Tir. This man is from Mekines. He had come with a message—that message was to tell the French from the South that they were soon to meet with their friends from the North. Yes!' He smiled like a confident child at Lazun and Captain Wester.

'How do you know that?' said Lazun.

The Arab smiled subtly. It was easy to him.

'They had made an arrangement, Chief,' he said quietly, 'otherwise they would not have been here on the lands of Hamid. There is a little army of men like him marching from the North to war against Hamid, Sultan of the South. Yes, I have said.'

They went on into the town, and there the young Arab's expression changed entirely. He passed from one heap to the other with the same curious action of putting his hands behind his back. But when he

desired to turn any of the bodies over, he beckoned a negro cook who had followed him like a dog, and bade him do it.

For a long time Yusef gave no sign of his feelings, and the two chiefs let him be, knowing that he was reading like a book what was wholly hidden from them.

Only twice did the serenity of his disdain give way.

In a dark corner of one of the inner rooms he stooped over something formless. He straightened himself suddenly and with a superb wave of his hand indicated the man at his feet.

It was the body of one of the Basque sailors who had served on the Golden Flagon. The characteristic gold rings had been torn from the ears, and there were other things beside.

'Woman's work!' said the Arab briefly, and turned away.

They passed in silence through the market place, but at the farther gate he examined the tracks with great care, getting down on his knees and smelling the warm dust. He rose, dusted himself and walked three paces out of the eastern gate of Souk.

Then his eyes seemed to fix themselves in their sockets at something he saw. Yet it was only a man in a costume not unlike his own, who was leaning against the massive worn stones of the outer wall. He was, when Lazun and his companion caught sight of him, pulling himself painfully into a sitting posture by the aid of a tethering ring sunk in the stone.

In a moment, quicker than any eye could follow, indeed, Yusef had drawn his knife, sprung upon the wounded man, and laboured him with blows each

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one more deadly than the other. The hand at the ring relaxed, clawed in the air as if seeking Yusef's throat, and dropped powerless.

Then the man rolled his eyes upward, started slightly at sight of his aggressor and died.

Still Yusef struck and struck in a sort of blind rage, till he was pulled off and held at the muzzle of the Captain's revolver.

'Oh,' he cried, 'I cannot ever be sure that he knew me. I should first have told him who I was, and why he was going to die. Fool! Fool!'

And in spite of the pointed revolver, he spurned the body with his foot, till it slowly collapsed into the ditch. Then he wept aloud, calling in English upon his father to forgive his haste, and upon the Prophet of Allah in his own tongue.

When Yusef had recovered from this torrent of wailing, he was not for some time able to make any explanation of his conduct. The fact that he had slain an enemy without giving him time to recognize his slayer, preyed exclusively upon his mind. But when he looked again, the agony on the dead man's face gave him hope that even this boon might not have been withheld from him by Allah. The man's lips had writhed themselves into a fierce snarl which revealed the white teeth clenched as if biting hard, his eyes were fixed in a white stare, and even in death seemed to single out the Arab.

Seeing this, Yusef smiled and soon became cheerful and communicative. He even excused himself in a quiet well-bred way as for an involuntary breach of etiquette.

'I sorry not find him when by myself— when — I would have him properly arranged. Too late now. But now I tell you all about this.'

Lazun and Captain Wester waited, not hurrying him in the least, and Le Breton thoughtfully moved his men a little out of earshot of the conference, but bade them keep their arms ready.

‘My Chiefs,’ Yusef began in a gentle voice of the high-caste Arab of Oman, ‘you are English. They are a great people on my father’s coast, and against them I have nothing. But yonder man was my father’s murderer—a slave-trader, of the hareem. He kills men to take the women. He killed my father, and took my mother and me. Her he slew, and me he enslaved. He is a base-born Arab of Africa, a dog of Tripoli, a dung-carrier and the son of a sweeper. I have defiled his mouth. He called himself a Moslem for money, saying many prayers, but I have made him to die a death viler than the death of the Nasrani (pardon, great Chiefs, he was mine enemy). I have slain him with a dog’s death. Pah, let him lie till the vultures come. Behold, already they are croaking on the gates! ‘

‘But the taking of the city—who did that?’ said the Captain, who knew that the Arab was as discursive and as liable as an Irishman to lose himself in side issues. ‘Tell us that—and quickly. For we must pursue—there is haste. We must go forward.’

‘Forward!’ said the young Arab, contemptuously, ‘can you sail on sand or fly through the air?’

‘Tell us what you have seen written there,’ said Lazun, ‘we cannot read the tale as you can. For we are not of the soil.’

Yusef was pacified. His pride also began to take sides in the game. He kept one hand in front of him palm upwards, and demonstrated into it with the forefinger of the other after the manner of the Arabs of Hadramaut.

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'Upon the name of the Prophet, I will speak the truth. It is an oath. Thus it happened. There was an agreement. The men from the ship we pursued, Senor Don Lupo being the leader, came hither to meet the 'mehalla' of El Hamid, who is the Sultan's brother and calls himself Sultan of the South, though he is a dog, the son of a female dog. Now with this 'mehalla' of Hamid there came that carrion. He was a pander and a hareem-feeder for Hamid—who is a Solyman only so far as concerns his belly, having a head nothing better than a rotten gourd.

'Well, with this woman-hunter there came, doubtless, others of his tribe—one brother in especial with whom I desire greatly to converse. They slew the Kadi of Souk, a poor sheik, a man with the heart of a Jew trader but a wholly harmless man. I saw him lie back there in the Street of the Slipper-makers with his tongue slit into ribbons, because (as they would doubtless affirm) he had spoken many lies to Hamid his master. Also he was rich, which makes Hamid easily observe treason in any man's heart.'

Yusef saw the growing uneasiness on the faces of the two tall white men listening to him.

'I will hasten. As I say, Hamid's men and these Tripoli Arab dogs came hither on their errands—meaning to meet with the men from the ship. It had been a business provided for. But what they had not foreseen was that they should find this little matter.'

He pointed to the French fort.

'Hamid has seen many of these,' he went on. 'They have driven him from the southern markets, and since he quarrelled with them he has been obliged to get to the South through the lands claimed by the Spaniards. They are naught, the

Spaniards. They cling like limpets to the coast. You have seen them in Melilla and Ceuta. They rule no farther than their guns will range, and even so far—only when the sun shines. But with the people of the three-coloured flag it is not so. They are brave, though often rash and foolish, seemingly uncertain of their minds. But they keep on, and when one is killed another comes along with more of these soldiers—the Genie men first, then the green uniforms from the South, and last and worst of all, the 'I Forestieri!' (Yusef meant the Foreign Legion).

'No, Hamid's men did not like that. They had fought with the 'I Forestieri' before, and many of them were dead and more needed the hakeem. But the Arabs of Tripoli bade them wait till the tallow-coloured Spanish men came with the good rifles from the ship, and then it would be easily done, all in one rush, like the whirl of a sand-storm, with its pipe spinning in a thunder-storm.

'So it happened. We chased the ship of Lupo in. He landed many men as soon as he came up. We could not see, because of the deep Ghor that runs down to the landing-place. It is likely (but this I do not know for certain), that at the first the Frenchmen, who are not distrustful of men white like themselves, admitted some of Lupo's men to the fort. And then, at night, when all were landed and the caravan ready to start, the gate of the fort was opened, and the sailor white men rushed in, with some of the 'mehalla' with them. Ye saw those who had died under the knives, fighting in corners. And the town was burnt and the Souk men slain, while the rifles were dealing with the fort. The Frenchmen died bravely. They have their honour. Now, gather them up and burn them. There is plenty of wood,

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and they deserve not the vulture!

He bowed and was retiring, when Lazun spoke again.

‘Can you follow the trail?’ he said. ‘Could you find Lupo and his caravan?’

‘I could find them, but how shall ye follow? Where are your horses and camels?’

‘Good,’ said Lazun, disregarding the question, ‘think well if there is any way to help us to do this thing. There is a great reward—given without counting.’

‘How much?’ said the wary Arab, in whom the fondness for money increases according to the purity of his blood.

‘A thousand pounds,’ said Lazun quickly.

‘How much is that in duros? I shall reckon it better thus.’

‘Five thousand duros—twenty-five thousand francs!’ said Lazun.

‘Make it fifty thousand, if I succeed in all that you desire.’

‘Fifty be it,’ said Lazun, who was in no mood for bargaining.

‘Then I shall need to go over to these mountains,’ pointing to the foot-ranges of the Southern Atlas. ‘Oh, not far—one night’s march. I have one of my kin there—a rich man, whom my father loved not greatly, but who may, for a share of the money, help us on our way. The horse hire, and that of the dromedaries, besides the drivers’ wages, are not to be counted in the fifty thousand francs?’

‘Certainly not,’ said Lazun, ‘is this a time to chaffer? But note, there are two maids with that caravan, taken from my ship. They have been stolen. They are dear to me. So in addition to the fifty

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thousand there is also ten thousand for saving the life of one and thirty thousand for that of the other, when each is delivered safe into my hand.'

'And how shall we know which is she of the thirty thousand, and for whom there is but ten thousand to be paid?'

'That you shall know only when I pay. Save ye both of them!'

Yusef, a smile of confident cupidity on his fine dark face, bowed again and retired. He had made a good bargain.

Then Lazun ordered the bodies of the French officers and soldiers to be placed on a pile of wood. There was abundance on the shore as dry as tinder. Captain Wester took a Prayer Book printed on India paper, small as a vest diary, out of his purse and read as much of the Burial Service as is used at sea. The ship's company stood at attention with bowed heads.

Presently the smoke of their burning mounted up. Captain Westei's last act had been to untwist the torn battle-flag from the officer's wrist. Underneath he found a leathern belt containing a gold watch which had marvellously escaped plunder. A girl's photograph, the head only, was within the case at the back with the single pitiful word *Reviens!* written across it. And that was all.

Captain Wester placed these in his breast-pocket and dismissed the matter. He had other things to think about. First, the party to accompany the Arab Yusef had to be chosen. The duty was one so serious that Captain Wester asked for volunteers. He explained the danger, but said that the greater the difficulty the greater the honour. Only young and vigorous men could be accepted.

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Nor was he displeased when his son stepped out the first of a score of volunteers. Le Breton was there also, with Sim the Shepherd and his friend Jolly. 'Clydeside' looked most unhappy.

'Lord, it's an awfu' thing to be auld,' he groaned, 'never did I think of considering my legs!'

But Captain Wester assured him that he could not spare him in any case. He had other work for 'Clydeside.' He must go and get a working crew on the destroyer, take her to find the Trident fifty miles north of Teneriffe, get her taken over by her own government crew, and bring back the Trident to Souk as soon as might be with a fresh supply of coal.

'Clydeside' pleaded that O'Halloran should go instead, but Captain Wester was firm. O'Halloran had the legs of the Scot, and in any case his place was on the destroyer.

Finally, the ten who were to accompany Yusef were chosen. Arms and forty rounds of ammunition were served to each man. Le Breton and Paul had a hundred cartridges each for their Herbesthal revolvers, but Adams the armourer slipped a dozen loaded detachable reservoirs into Paul's pockets.

'If ye are very pressed, there's nothing like it,' he said. 'Mr. Le Breton has his pocket sextant to carry, but take you the cartridge-carriers, plenty to eat also. I recommend meat biscuits if you do not suffer from indigestion.'

CHAPTER THIRTY SEVEN

THE CONVERSION OF ABD' AMARA

While Paul and Le Breton were climbing the dusty foothills of the Southern Atlas, led by the Arab Yusef in search of his more or less predatory uncle, a well-ordered, admirably equipped caravan was leisurely holding its way westward. It had come by the eastern oasis route, once a great and flourishing one, but which the encroachment of French territory, for ever hemming in Morocco more and more closely, has rendered a debatable land, full of razzias, forage-cuttings and cattle-drivings wherever there are any cattle to drive.

Our well-appointed caravan came all the way from Twat, a French post on the recently pacified French hinterland, very far to the south of Algeria. Twat is an oasis and, already linked up by 'wireless,' it now only awaits the practicable flying machine to become a sort of desert Venice. At present Twat is not sure of anything, not even of its own orthography. For it is variously spelled, Tvat, Toouat, Tiwaat, and even T'va,t.

Now it is curious—so curious as to be unbelievable except for the universal attestation of experience—that whenever a region on the face of the earth becomes a danger zone, precisely similar convoys of adventurous Englishmen or Americans start off towards it, as if drawn by some sympathetic chord in their natures.

Of course international rascals, broken officers, doubtful financiers—all the fraternity of things

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vulturine—flock thither also. But not of them do I speak. Rich and well-considered men, young for the most part, equip these expeditions, and on various pretexts (or often on none at all) set themselves tranquilly to run their heads into danger in order to ‘see what is going on.’

Expeditions of this kind were frequent during the time of the Mahdi. Most of them came to a bad end, but the news, when filtered through desert channels to the fitting-out place, did not in the least deter the next team who were busily buying camels there. They could only ‘try their luck,’ they said.

Of course when by chance the adventurer does get through, he has a marvellously interesting story to tell. And we may be grateful, for without this instinct we should miss most that is interesting and delightful in Arthur Young’s *Travels in France* during the Great Revolution. Who else could have told us, like the Suffolk farmer, what rural France was like about the time of the early Terror? With Stephens and Catherwood we see the break up of the almost forgotten Federation of Central America. Several unknown Englishmen saw the deadly guerrilla warfare of the first and second Carlist Wars, and one at least escaped to write of it in a book which is priceless to the writer of romance. Finally, one of many, Hudson, in a delightful and too much forgotten book, tells with much youthful picturesque imagination the strife of the Blancos and Colorados in Uruguay, the Purple Land which England Lost.’

The adventurers on the present occasion were unhampered by any purpose except that of going where they had no right to go, and coming as near to getting themselves killed as possible. As in all

such cases, they had with difficulty escaped from the authorities. Their own consuls, from the august Consul-General at Algiers down to the last vague representative of Britannic Majesty at El Golea, had tried to turn them back with prayers and imprecations, and had at last been compelled to let them depart with a warning that they went wholly at their own proper risks and perils, 'plus the information that if they got into trouble—or rather when they got into trouble—not a finger would be lifted to help them out. Further it was premised, that having so carefully made their beds, they were at perfect liberty to lie on them with their throats cut—which was the lightest thing they could reasonably expect to happen to them.

But they laughed and held on—as the consuls expected. For they had had many such sets of particularly-to-be-condemned fools through their hands before. Indeed they rather liked them, treated them well, and if they had any womenkind, these cried over the young men whom their husbands, brothers, and fathers wickedly allowed to go to their deaths.

Whereat the consuls shrugged their shoulders, disengaged their responsibility, and waited quite as anxiously as any one else for the news that filtered from the various Red Belts into which their particular fools had disappeared.

Our Twat-ers were two in number, but they had a goodly array of followers. For general protection, as well as for guides, horses, camels, and local provisioning, they depended on a considerate chief of the Western Beni Abbas, a famous man on the Debatable Land. His name was Muhammed AH, but he was universally known at El Hatovi, which merely

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means in Beni Abbas-land, the Big 'Un.

The more intimate direction, cookery department, home secretaryship and the gift of tongues were in the hands of Daniel, a Syrian Christian by birth, but an expert and green-turbaned Hadji of the strictest observance when in Moslem lands. He was a coward—or at least he represented himself as one. For no real coward would have allowed himself to go where Daniel went and do the things which Daniel did. On Sundays and Saints' days he served dinner in dress clothes with all the distinction of an English butler. Furthermore he spoke the truth, mainly—only it was a different form of the truth suitable to each man according to his skin, religion and preferences.

The leaders were two young men of about the same age, Grant and Amisfield. Amisfield had been Grant's tutor during his minority, and had successfully restored his ward to the jurisdiction of the Courts of Chancery after many long wanderings from Novaya Zemlya to the China Ports. Now they were friends and allies, though owing to gifts of temper and the habit of years Sir Ian Grant, Baronet, was ready enough to give way to the judgment of Stephen Amisfield.

They called each other 'Steve' and 'Ian,' but Grant frequently forgot himself and said 'sir,' a habit for which Amisfield thundered at him.

'We will have to be a bit more strict,' said Grant, 'or at least I will. One of these devils of camel-drivers grinned at me today when I told him to load up. I don't know what he said, exactly, but he looked wicked.'

'I know the fellow—old Camera Legs again, I suppose,' said Amisfield, stretching his tawny sunburnt length, and knocking the ashes out of his

pipe. The fact is that the truck—plates, cameras, ammunition and book-box—are the least bit solid, and no camel-driver quite yearns for them. Besides, there's the tent, an unwieldy business though not heavy. I don't mean the big one—that goes with the advance drove. But the spare one to stick up if anything happens before we get to our proper camping-ground, that is what they grumble about.'

'I don't believe it's only that,' said Ian Grant; 'there's a general all-overish uneasiness—thunder in the air. These Beni Abbas devils are always looking out to the West. Old 'Big Fellow' says it is a caravan. But what would a caravan be doing down this route? Trading—not much! Well, what do you think?'

'The Life Guards Black are all right,' said Amisfield, looking over at a dozen men seated, each with a rifle and a rag, round one of the cooking fires.

'Yes, I think so—they are so far from home that they have got to be. If we got cut up, so would they. We are all in one basket and they know it.'

'Good,' Amisfield begun filling his pipe again, desisted, and put the tobacco back into the little tin-lined box he carried in his breast-pocket.

'Smoking is bad before breakfast,' he remarked aloud in regretful accents.

'Another won't hurt you!' said Ian Grant, who sat on the sand watching him. It was still very early morning and the sun had not yet looked over the horizon to the east.

Amisfield sprang to his feet and stood looking down at Ian Grant, whose round head, covered with thick curls, spoke the Celt. He was sitting cross-legged trying to do conjurer's tricks with stones, but he always dropped them at the critical point.

'Get up, you lazy devil,' said Amisfield, 'come on

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and let's have another tub.'

'Thanks, Daniel washed the dishes in it last night, I believe!'

'Nonsense—come on. It's clean enough. We have only used it four times and it looks quite clean if you pour fast.'

Ian Grant grumbled but turned a somersault on to his feet.

'All right then—I'll toss you for first go.'

The young men went into their tent to clothe themselves in all that remained (and only the barely essential did remain) of two pairs of battered bathing drawers. They did their ablutions before the people, and they had observed that nothing put the camp in a better temper than their manoeuvres on such occasions. They chose a place where the sand was hard. They spread a carpet, for were they not sheiks of no mean degree. A collapsible rubber tub was brought out and planked down. Then came a waterskin to which the 'rose' part of a garden watering-can had been attached simply but efficiently by Amisfield.

'Heads,' said Ian Grant.

'Heads she is—luck again!' growled his friend.

And he prepared to operate. The camp stilled and the watching became intent. The curtain was about to rise. So was the sun. And as the first drops sprayed out of the battered green 'rose,' they were instantly stricken to diamond spray by the first rays of the sun. For a moment every inch-high desert ripple and wind-wreath held a shadow, blue as that on snow, and the figures of the two young men stretched away westward in the direction of the sea.

As the lukewarm dribble touched his bare skin, Grant sprang with a straight bound into the air,

hitting his head on the rose and upsetting his friend off the cube-sugar packing case on which he was standing in order to siphon at more ease.

'You idiot, why didn't you tell me you were going to monkey?' cried Amisfield, as the camp rocked with laughter. When he rose to his feet he found that Grant was balancing himself on his hands with his soles in the air.

'Go on,' said a voice from below, 'can't stop like this long, the b-bub-bub-blessed stuff is running into my mouth. It tastes of hair oil. Why will you use it?'

Without answering Amisfield watered him feet upwards, and then the athlete, always keeping within the tub, presented all manner of angles and rhomboidal surfaces to the 'rose,' till every drop had been poured over him.

'Your turn, I'll souse you!' said Grant, who, glistening all over, was getting up on the cube-sugar case.

'Now, then, Ian, no larks—at least none that will spill the water—better dirty water than none.'

'OOOFF-F! That's good,' he sucked in his breath as he felt the cool swish of the water on his head and shoulders.

'I say, let's filter it through sand,' suggested Grant looking at the doubtful mixture in the india-rubber tub.

'No fear, put it back just as it was in the old 'bota.' D'ye hear me? I'd rather be dirty than gritty any day of the week.'

They did not trouble to dry themselves. They were dry in the first minute, and perhaps the quick evaporation did them more good than anything else. Then, without speaking, Amisfield went and brought

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out two pairs of boxing-gloves, to the back of each of which he had carefully adjusted a 'clowning clack' to make the blows resound. They were good enough blows, but the sound was the main thing in the circumstances.

The camp drew near and even Daniel, busy with the breakfast, could hardly refrain from leaving his red charcoal embers.

They sparred carefully for a while, and the circle closed in. The Imperial Guard (called the Life Guards Black), Soudanese who had served in British regiments, stray Haussas and Zouave deserters—fighters by choice as well as by race, loomed up behind, for they were very tall men. They leaned on their rifles and grinned at the strange Sahibs.

Spat! Spat—Nip and tuck! The first rounds were fairly equal, till suddenly Grant, who danced all round the brawnier Amisfield, miscalculated, slipped forward, received a resounding body blow from Amisfield and went down.

'Hah!' grunted the crowd with the sound that a butcher makes when he brings down his poleaxe.

But Grant was up and at it again in a minute. He dodged about, backwards and forwards, till with a swift punch from beneath he got in a tap on the nose.

A few drops fell on the clean skin of the ex-tutor, and the crowd applauded to the echo. It was their favourite stroke. Nothing pleased them so much, and they began to encourage the combatants with all manner of uncouth noises, probably the same as had been heard in the arenas of Carthaginian Rome from just such men as these.

The woman's 'Loo-loo — Lulah — Loooo-oolah' was heard from the rear, though no women of any

colour were supposed to be in the camp. The crowd thrilled to this special encouragement, only granted to gladiators, or to those who come home in triumph from the bloody field.

The two men were at it ding-dong now, and the shouts redoubled.

The crowd cheered at each formidable clack, and leaped in the air as the marks of the blows showed up beautifully on the bare white skins. Bets were exchanged quite freely, the odds being indicated by held-up fingers.

'Who's the favourite?' gasped Grant as he danced about waiting for a look in.

'You are today!' said Amisfield, 'two to one offered and taken!'

'Better let the favourite win this morning then!'

'Right!' grunted Amisfield, and with that his opponent came at him livelier than ever.

Amisfield guarded high, and in a moment—pit a pat, he got it double-barrelled, one on the shoulder and the other on the chin, and so went down. Grant counted ten over him in a solemn manner.

'Bing—Bang—Bo!' cried a grinning Sambo, imitating as well as he could the noise of the reenforced gloves.

The two combatants shook hands with the gravest politeness and each carried in his own gloves, the victor taking the lead.

'We shall have no more trouble today,' said Ian Grant, when the tent drop fell. 'We have put the whole caravan in a good humour.'

'Don't be too sure,' said Amisfield, 'I had my eyes about me while you were strutting into the tent like a crowing bantam. There, by the book and camera pack was that beastly driver—Abd' Amara, one of

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S'neissa's men—squat like a toad by his camel and not a single article had he touched. I fear I shall have to deal with him myself.'

'Oh, let me!' cried Grant, who was polishing himself from head to foot with a stiff-bristled nail brush. 'It's my day. I'm popular this morning—and I might fetch him.'

'He didn't see you,' said his friend, 'and besides you would get monkeying. No, stay where you are, Ian, and look at the armoury. Put the cartridge belts handy and give a touch of grease—just a touch—to the Mauser clips so that they will slide easy into the magazine.'

Amisfield strode out, a tall, brown-headed, brown-skinned, brown-clad Northerner of that Viking blood and Viking name which are scattered so thick and close on both sides of the Cheviot border. He made a bee-line towards the unloaded baggage camel with the owner of which he had already had some considerable friction.

The man possessed one of the best and strongest of the camels, and as the beast could easily carry the heaviest, though not the most cumbrous, of the single loads, Amisfield had set it apart for the work of waiting behind for their personal traps, stopping over the noon halt, and continuing with them till sunset. This meant that the man's camel, though a fast animal, must remain with the main body all day, a thing by no means to the liking of the camel's master.

It was the habit of the caravan, so long as the chief of the Beni Abbas could be in a way responsible for the safety of the country, to send on Daniel with the tents and kitchen equipage to choose and set up the camp for the night, and have

the dinner ready for the travellers on their arrival.

The post of 'kitchen kettle carrier' was much sought after. For not only the whole march for the day was got over in one spell and at a comparatively early hour, but men and camels were set free to gossip and drowse. In addition to which, for those who were civil to Daniel, many much considered trifles happened along for the picking up.

But both Amisfield and Grant had decided that it was better to keep such a sulky dog as Abdul Amara under their eyes. For Abdul had shown himself not only chronically discontent, but, in the quiet by the watch-fires, during those interminable confabulations which the Arabs hold with each other, he preached nothing less than actual revolt and bloody murder.

As he went Amisfield remembered that the man was dangerous, but he said to himself that after all he was a real man of the desert and no coast rat. So he argued that deep down somewhere he must possess some sort of rudimentary soul—pluck he would have as a matter of course.

So he mustered not only his coinage but his small store of Arabic—not the college sort he had learned under the Rabbi of Ellon (may his spirit commune with those of Isaiah and that of the man who wrote Ecclesiasticus), but the rough camp sort spoken on the edge of the Great Thirst from Egypt even to Cape Verde. He began at once.

'What dost thou, O camel-driver, with thy load. Be speedy. Load up there!'

And he pointed to the boxes of books and photographic materials.

The driver stood up and scowled fiercely. The men of the camp went on with their packing, dragging at

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their ropes to get the proper 'cinch.' But all the same they kept an ear and an eye for the doings of Abd' Amara and the Brown One.

'Get to Eblis, Infidel thrice-accursed!' said the driver, grinning fiercely.

Out shot Amisfield's left with the weight of the body behind it. The blow took the man straight on the mouth and he went over like a bag of wet grain, as the connoisseurs who were looking on were not slow in remarking.

Up came Amara again. With both arms wide and his fingers clawing he made to seize Amisfield by the hair. But a right hand met his chest like a kicking stallion's heel and down he went again, stiff this time as a falling log.

Yet such was the stubborn quality in the man that the next moment he had drawn a knife from somewhere under his camel-driver's dress, and crooking his knees outward he half crouched, half squatted on his hams, ready for a spring.

Amisfield never took his eyes off him, but kept advancing with equal steps towards the squat figure fingering the glittering knife.

'I hate to do it,' he said to himself, 'but with a fellow like that—ah, he is going to throw the knife! I must stop that!'

His foot shot out in the full savate. The knife rose twirling in the air, and Abd' Amara collapsed writhing, his head striking the ground first.

'Hah!' cried the camp joyfully. But none went to his rescue. He was a man without a chief, so the Beni Abbas and their sheik looked on as at a good show for which they had obtained front places free of charge.

Then Amisfield, first assuring himself by a rapid

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search that Abdul had no more steel toothpicks upon his person, lifted his head upon his knees. Grant came from the tent with a cordial of considerable strength, and the sting of the raw spirit on his palate caused Abd' Amara to open his eyes.

'All Eblis is running down your throat, my friend,' said Amisfield. 'You see what it is to disobey orders in this camp. Now get up and load your beast.'

Abd' Amara was on his feet, and in a minute he had the big book-box on one side and balanced by the other with the 'A. H. Baird' developing case and the plates. He danced about and shouted not ungleefully, singing the praises of the fighting sheik. He was perhaps a little drunk. Arabs are very abstemious and very little affects them. At any rate he was no longer the surly dog he had been. He did his work well, and in the evening after dinner, when the men were about the camp-fires and the two explorers were smoking a last pipe in the cool of the desert night, Daniel glided into them, and with great secrecy and a most mysterious air he beckoned them to follow. They passed stealthily behind the cookhouse into the big sleeping tent, and from the tent flap nearest to the fire they could hear and see the comedy which was being enacted there.

All the camp was clustered in a wide circle. Besides the usual members of the expedition, several others, apparently well known to the Sons of Abbas, were present. To them, Abd' Amara was relating his adventure. The men in the tent could not hear his words, but in a whisper Daniel translated.

Even when he did not, Abdul's gestures were the perfection of mimicry.

Thus was I—the black dog being heavy on my

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back. For my sins I cursed the Big Brown Sheik. 'Go to Ebhs, Giawr!' I bade him.'

'That was very evil,' said the chief of the Beni Abbas sententiously. 'It was to curse the salt you ate. Mark, O men, the penalty.'

And then Abd' Amara took up the tale, nothing abashed, but most cheerfully grinning.

'And the Fighter stood in front of me and said, 'Load!' But I was devil-possessed and only bade him try to make me. And lo, as though a blue slab out of the heavens had fallen on my head, I fell on the sand. Also it thundered!'

And Amara parodied the loud 'smack' he had received, smiting his breast with the open palm and falling straight back on the ground.

Then he parodied the second assault, the knife and the straight drive in the chest.

'Regard, oh, regard—with your eyes. Here is the very mark still, and here under the lip to the left there's a dog's tooth missing. Here also is the tooth, I picked it up from the sand. It has not been cleansed. Take care, ye that touch, lest it be cleansed. It must remain bloody. Let it be an heirloom. No, it is not a vendetta. Why? Because the blood was not shed with steel. Thou foolish black 'nigger,' thou art surely woolly also within thine head. Do not the young sheiks fight every day, sometimes till they be all red? Is there a vendetta between them because of this? No, they shake hands and go in to eat and drink. I have learned a lesson. Also all Eblis ran down my throat, so that I was on fire within. But it was a good Eblis—oh, very good. I became light within me and of a frolicksome spirit ever after, and I begged the chief to pardon . . . and to give me a little, ever so little, more of Eblis to

drink. But he would not. Only laughing and bidding me to my work. Oh, very strong and wonderful is the fighting without any blood feud to settle. I have learned the secret from the Fighting Sheik. Will any venture with me?' And Abd' Amara put himself into what he considered a posture of defence.

No one took up the defiance, but all that night there was much coming and going, and deep in the heart of the night Amisfield awoke, and, hearing a noise, he looked out. Not that there was anything remarkable in a camp noise. Arabs are always moving about at night—sleepers sitting up to scratch, or lighting a pipe at the fire. They draw three whiffs and lie down again. But this was what Amisfield saw when he peeped from the edge of the tent door after midnight— Abd' Amara still busy, retelling his tale for the twentieth time to new listeners. 'Thus did he— smack —and so down fell I!'

And then came the dull thud of the falling of Abd' Amara's body in the dew-damp desert sand.

Such is the tale of the conversion of Abdul Amara, the chiefless man who from that moment vowed himself of the clan of his conqueror and became on the spot Abd' Amara ben Amfili—that is to say of the tribe of Amisfield.

CHAPTER THIRTY EIGHT

ON THE FACE OF THE DESERT

Next morning very early, a little after the Phantom Dawn but before the time of the reddening of the East, Amisfield was out on the face of the desert. The camp was now at its stillest and the night cool and quiet. He had slept indifferently and now sleep had quite departed from him. So he went out to see if all the sentinels were awake also.

His eyes were still dark with sleep, so he easily saw the dusky rim of the desert ascending from him every way. He seemed to be in the bottom of a bowl. Of course it was not so, because he knew the sand to be flat, though accidented. But it seemed as he turned from the camp that he was ascending a long slope towards the lip of the world.

He went towards the south till he was almost out of sight of the tents. Then he sat down on a stone and listened. He may have dozed. At any rate certain it is that he must have closed his eyes. For when he opened them again he saw—what he first took to be an hallucination—the figures of two girls clad in simple European clothing, standing within a few yards of him. One was taller than the other and she was supporting her companion, who appeared to be crying.

Stephen Amisfield rose suddenly to his feet, and at sight of his dark figure the weeping woman uttered a piercing scream and fell back into the arms of the other.

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'Lay her on the ground!' said Amisfield in English, without thinking where he was, and with his instinct for taking matters in his own hands. 'Give her to me,' he added, 'and run to the camp for some sal volatile. Grant has it.'

As the girl did not answer, Amisfield suddenly remembered that it was rather futile to expect a woman in the middle of the desert to understand English. So he tried manfully to reconstruct his recommendation in his best coast Arabic. But the translation of sal volatile stumped him.

He became conscious that the taller girl had deposited her companion on the sand with her head resting on a rock. Her hand was now stretched out. He could see the fine line it made with her shoulder, shapely neck, and sinall head. He became conscious at the same time that the dark object which she seemed to be handing him was really a revolver with its muzzle pointing directly at his breast.

'Stop, or I will shoot!' said the figure, in an English voice which at any other time would have struck Amisfield as fresh and pleasant.

'Of course I'll stop,' he answered, 'but don't fire. I am not going to hurt anybody. Tell me who you are and——'

'Who are you and what are you doing here?' the voice demanded sharply. Amisfield was surprised and a little hurt to observe that the revolver was still maintained in position.

'Who am I? Stephen Amisfield, once of Bordershire, lately of London, and presently travelling with my friend Ian Grant—a man whose Celtic name will not deceive you into thinking him Irish.'

The pistol dropped a little, perhaps involuntarily.

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'Oh, if I could only believe you?' The words came with a deep gasp like a man's sob.

'I should advise you,' said Stephen, 'to keep your pistol covering me till you are perfectly sure that you can. I should, in your place. But there is your friend coming to, and it is getting light enough to see. Now, look here, I shall sit down on this rock with my back to you. I shall toss a bundle of papers in my pockets. Can you catch with one hand? I happen to have my passports and all that, in a case given me by the Consul General in Algiers. And may God have mercy on your soul,' he said when he handed them over. 'If I had a black cap I should put it on.'

The papers were tossed and deftly caught.

'Oh, well held! Now read these things and see if I am to be trusted. There is a description of my friend Ian Grant, too. He is a baronet but quite respectable. I made him so. I was his tutor.'

'I am sure it is all right,' said Zipporah Katti, 'you must forgive us. But we have been, and still are, in terrible danger—and I have my friend to think of.'

'Drop a little fine sand down the back of her neck—or, better still, a few of these pebbles—the ones damp with dew—counter-irritant—I have worked it with Grant often. It makes him quite spummy. He wants to slay me. But he gets up directly—I do it mostly when he is in bed. I suppose a faint is much the same.'

'There now, darling,' he heard a voice say behind him, 'you feel better now. This gentleman is one of a caravan in the neighbourhood. He is English and so is his friend.'

'Celtic fringe,' corrected Amisfield. 'I'm mostly Norse—or was a thousand years ago. My friend is Highland. But have a look at the papers.'

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'We trust you—take us into your camp!'

'Then I can turn round—you are really fully satisfied and the pistol put away?'

'Certainly.'

Amisfield wheeled sharply about and found himself face to face with two girls, one tall and dark who held herself erect. He recognized the arm at the end of which he had seen the black chunk of the revolver. The second, with her hands clasped about the arm of her taller friend, was fair and very foot-weary. Her face was pale. There were half-moon shadows under her eyes, partly of fatigue and partly owing to the shadow cast, in the slant sunshine of the morning, by the longest and darkest lashes Amisfield had ever seen.

'I don't like that type of girl,' Amisfield said to himself, emphatically, but not with any real strength of conviction. The lashes trembled as if they had heard their own condemnation. Amisfield noticed that there were the tiniest beads of wetness stringing out along the upturned ends. Then they lifted like a veil, and Stephen Amisfield saw that the blue eyes beneath were wet too.

Whereupon he revised his position as rapidly as a politician after an unfavourable general election, and decided promptly, 'Well, I don't like the type, but this girl is different.'

Then he said to himself, 'I wonder what Grant will think of this—but it doesn't matter. At any rate it will be worth gold to see his face during the introductions.'

Amisfield had a very convincing way with girls, and on this somewhat extraordinary occasion he asked no questions, accepted the presence of Eza and Zipporah Katti on the Trans-Atlantean desert as

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the most natural thing in the world. He had an old college cap on his head, a thing marvellously reassuring in itself—and he walked beside Zipporah and Eza as if he had been escorting them down Piccadilly.

The Arabs of the Beni Abbas paused to stare, but they had too good manners to show surprise. Besides all this concerned only their chief. The soldier sentries merely saluted as the three came into the camp.

As she walked Zipporah Katti was busy measuring the strength of the caravan, and she realized at once that one of the two men must be very rich. She had a presentiment that it must be the unseen Grant. Amisfield, her present conductor, had not that look. But then neither had she. At any rate it did not matter. What really mattered was the strength of the caravan, and what the two Englishmen would say when she told them her story.

They might not want—and the thing was natural—to mix themselves up in her difficulties. Eza and she would be followed—so much was certain. They had escaped without taking even Leon into their confidence. They had known nothing about how to conceal their tracks. Zipporah had steered as nearly north-west as she could, because she knew that she would find Europeans and English, French, or Spanish vessels at the northerly Atlantic ports. Raif Palafox had told her so. Both on board the Flagon and on the march he had showed an eagerness to make the position as easy as possible for her. But she could not trust him. Eza and she had stolen away in desperate haste, because they had heard that the Sultan el Hamid

was coming from the south to meet them, being drawn by the report of the marvellous beauty of the two white maids Lupo Palafox was bringing him.

This story she told presently to Grant and Amisfield, in the tent where an entirely civilized breakfast had been served for them. The young men listened with intense eagerness, only glancing across at each other occasionally. Little Eza lay on the divan of pillows, nestling contentedly, and the men thought her very fair. Zipporah (they felt) was much more kin to themselves. She planned and led. She had initiative. She suggested and questioned. She was browned with the sun and there were lines of resolution and courageous acceptance of facts about her mouth. She looked you straight in the eyes as a man would have done. But Little Eza lay there all roseleaf blush and wet pearly eyelash. She looked from one to the other, as if to plead with them separately not to give her up. They saw the little swallowing motion of her white throat, the anxious check of soft breathing, the rise and fall of the silken scarf she had worn on tier head for a veil. They felt she was a woman to be protected. They were not so sure about Zipporah Katti.

‘Well,’ said Zipporah Katti when she had finished, ‘what are we to do?’

The two men had been chiefly employed in looking at Eza, but the conclusion of the tale of the wicked mutineer captain astonished them. They had, of course, heard of the traffic in white girls. No one can cross the Atlas-Biskra way or by Ouargla without hearing much talk of that. But they had believed it to be confined to women marketable in their own lands—girls from Khabylia and imports from Asia Minor brought in by Sidra and Tripoli.

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But girls of their own race and speech, educated girls—ladies! The mere thought was enough to set the men's blood tingling.

What would they do—why of course—fight.

Zipporah posed them with the single question: 'Could they trust their Arab Sheik and the tribe that chief led?'

Yes, the two young men thought so. They had had some pretty close calls on the way from Twat, and Sidi Muhammed ben Abbas had behaved very decently. They were on the borders of his own country still, though the fear of the French had made most of the Beni Abbas take to the hills. Still

'And the drilled men she had seen as she came into the camp? Could they trust them?'

'Absolutely,' said Amisfield, with much assurance this time. 'They will be fighting for their own lives. Their rifles were worth more than their weight in duros, and if the caravan broke they would be massacred to a man.'

'You had better have in your chief,' suggested Zipporah; 'we can see what he recommends. Does he speak any English?'

'I'm afraid not,' Amisfield admitted; 'he can understand French a little, but I fear we shall need to call in Daniel as an interpreter—which is a pity, for he will be sure to make the most of all difficulties. What a fool I was not to learn more Arabic of the colloquial sort. Daniel, I fear, is a necessity.'

'I used to be able to speak Arab,' said Little Eza softly from the divan, 'I lived as a child at Constantine and Tangier. I don't believe that I have quite forgotten. At least I understood perfectly well what the men said in the 'mehalla' over there.'

'Yes,' corroborated Zipporah Katti, 'if it had not been for Eza we would not have known many things which even Raif Palafox was in the dark about.'

'Mehalla,' said Amisfield who had been thinking, 'were there so many as all that— 'mehalla' means an army corps, does it not, or something like that?'

'I don't know,' said Zipporah, 'that was what they called it, but I don't think there were more than a thousand people in all. And of these many were women and children—poor creatures, they wailed till the men silenced them with blows.'

'If you have to speak to our old Sidi Muhammed ben Abbas, don't call it a 'mehalla.' The very word would set them pointing for the hills, which would leave us mighty short-handed.'

Accordingly they dispatched Daniel. He had been hovering about the door sulkily, ever since Amisfield had hurled a camp-stool at a round boss which out-hned itself on the side of the tent nearest the cookhouse—to carry their compliments to the Sheik Muhammed and request him to come to the tent so that the white chiefs might ask his invaluable advice.

'Shall we veil our faces?' said Eza a little dolefully.

'No,' said Amisfield, 'he is a clean-run Bedu, and the Beduin do not veil the faces of their women like the Moroccans.'

'Besides,' said Zipporah, smihng, 'it would be a little late, seeing that we walked through the camp at daybreak with our faces bare.'

'I am so glad,' said Little Eza, 'I believe I could talk Arab more easily to him that way—I mean persuade him.'

'Well, first,' said Amisfield, 'let us see what we mean to tell him. You were carried off by a few

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mutineers from a ship at Souk. The leader of the rascals was going to sell you both in the south. But, though you are poor girls, you have very rich and powerful friends, who are now marching to recapture you with a great force. The Sheik el Islam is with them. The Sheik el Islam is your brother-in-law.'

'What—of both of us?' said Zipporah.

'Certainly, you are sisters—it will be safer—more comprehensive. The Sheik el Islam is the biggest religious card in Africa; I saw him once in Tangier up near where the deposed Sultan now lives, and the beggars congregate about the gate like flies.'

Eza nodded. 'Anything else?' she said.

'I think not—except to impress him with the idea that there will be a great reward when he gets you either into the hands of your friends, or to one of the ports where there is a foreign war vessel—Mogador and Agadir are the nearest, I believe. But, mind, your friends will certainly be at Souk by this time. Oh—and don't, as you value your life, mention the word 'mehalla.'

The presentations were effected by Amisfield. Sidi Muhammed was a tall dark man about forty, with a full beard and piercing black eyes. He salaamed in the quiet manner of his tribe, and accepted the presence of women in the tent of his masters without any sign of surprise—though he would not have been human had he not marvelled how it was that Brown Fighter had strolled out into the night and brought the pair back with him to the camp.

He did start, however, when Eza sitting up with her veil slightly shadowing her face, though not concealing it, began to speak to him in his own tongue. He fastened his eyes upon her and nodded

slightly now and then as she told her tale.

The three—Zipporah, Grant, and Amisfield—understood little of what Little Eza was saying, but they heard the name ‘Souk,’ the title ‘Sheik el Islam,’ and occasionally the word ‘cannon,’ which last puzzled them very much. But at last Eza came to the anxious part. Evidently she was asking the chief what would be their best course.

The sheik looked at the ground and made no answer. Eza kept at him fluently, but he sat apparently unconvinced, slowly shaking his head without answering. Then suddenly Eza threw back her veil, stood erect, and with quivering lip and denunciatory finger, fired what sounded a desolating anathema at him.

‘Easy—go easy,’ whispered Amisfield, ‘don’t drive him into a corner.’

But the little lady took no notice. She gave Sidi Muhammed another volley and only ceased when he became satisfactory.

‘It is willed. I will help,’ he said. ‘But we must go at once and with speed to a certain place I know of.’

‘Remind him about the reward,’ said Amisfield.

And then the sheik astonished them. He spoke in fair English to Amisfield, ‘Time enough to talk of the reward if at the last we are left alive.’

Then he went off to give orders, and the men congratulated Eza, who took the matter smilingly.

‘What were you sticking down his throat near the end?’ Grant asked; ‘you made him squirm—I was watching him.’

‘Telling him that if he failed now, the Sheik el Islam would curse him for a Persian heretic, and take his green turban from his head! But that, if he helped us, my sister, who was the holy man’s only

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wife, would speak to her husband and make him standard-bearer of the Green Flag of Islam in the next jehad —that is, Holy War.’

CHAPTER THIRTY NINE

FORT EZA

Arabs do not entrench. They sometimes build 'zaribas' with the great prickly thorn of the desert and cactus set like sword-blades. But even so, the thing is chiefly useful as a protection for the animals of the caravan, and to keep the camels from breaking. But the Sidi of the Beni Abbas was no common sheik. He had seen campaigning almost to the Lake itself—which is Lake Tchad. He had some notion of what two Englishmen might want for defence purposes, and though he had not the least idea of staying within himself with his horsemen, he fully intended to render as faithful service as he could without endangering his tribal authority. Also, and especially, he meant if possible to get the promised reward.

He had always found that Grant and Amisfield faithfully performed their word. He had eaten salt with them. He had heard of the power of the Sheik el Islam, a kind of Moslem Peter-of-the-Keys. So, for these varied spiritual, secular and financial reasons he was resolved to play as fair as he could—which is, all things considered, a good deal from an Arab of Southern Algeria.

The 'place of strength' he led them to was on the first spur of one of the outworks of the Atlas. Behind it the cliffs rose clear. The little flat-topped clump of rock lay out like a shut hand laid back upwards on a table, and the sands of the desert lashed about it like a sea. A couple of hundred feet high with only

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one practicable path for camels, the place had been used as a fort more than once by the French, when they were engaged in flanking Morocco to the south and so carrying their empire westward to the Atlantic.

The defences they had built were not extensive. They consisted of rude rifle-pits, breastworked with stone and bullet proof, set along both sides of the winding path which led to the summit. But there was a good wall and gate where that path debouched upon the plateau. There a little grazing could be had. A spring of water descended the cliff and was caught in a carefully concreted basin. Beneath, the desert spread like a brown ocean.

The young men were delighted, and at once set about placing their men and finding positions for every one. Their first care was for the girls—or rather for Eza. For Zipporah intimated very plainly that she could shoot as well as anybody, and that she meant to mount guard and fight with the rest.

For Eza, therefore, they found a sheltered place quite close to the cliff. It was a kind of rifle-pit, well out of reach of the stray bullets ricocheting from the 'sangars.'

They unloaded and made the camels lie down behind the wall, with their drivers beside them. They were the camels of the Beni Abbas, and the sheik demanded a signed agreement that he should be wholly indemnified for any damage done them in the course of the fighting. If not, it would take the heart out of the men. Grant gave the necessary assurance, at the same time pointing out that if the Sultan Hamid's people had found his camels, he would never have received a farthing and got his throat cut into the bargain.

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Then as soon as possible Sheik Sidi Muhammed went his way down, and presently from the rocky fort, newly christened Fort Eza by mutual consent (of the men), they could see his horsemen stretching out to the left in order to escape from the neighbourhood of a dust-cloud which was approaching them from the south. Soon the white burnouses of the Sultan's cavalry could be made out, and his green-and-black standard with many streamers was carried by a splendid cavalier on a white horse. The slow marching crew of the Golden Flagon showed many gaps in their ranks since they left Souk. Still there remained quite forty of them, and it was evident to Amisfield that his camel-drivers, with one or two exceptions, were wholly useless for fighting.

'We number twenty-five all told, Miss Palafox,' said Amisfield; 'I beg your pardon—twenty-six, rather! You Grant, take the 'sangars' with eighteen of the best shots. Miss Zipporah and I will keep our sergeant with us to encourage the fag end of our defence. I have armed five or six of the best Soudanese porters. I think they will fight, but I must keep an eye on them. The sergeant and I will stay behind to see that they don't take a pot at you fellows down in the 'sangars' by mistake!'

'By Jove, yes,' said Grant; 'that would be discouraging.'

'I'll make it all right. The sergeant, Miss Zipporah, and I have magazine Mausers with plenty of extra clips all nicely greased. So off you go and don't worry.'

'Shall we fire first?' Grant asked at the top of the path.

'Certainly! We have no time to do the Fontenoy

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business—very noble and all that, but this is stark business. We have, (he was going to say ‘women to protect’ but changed his phrase as he glanced at Zipporah Katti) to hold on here till that thief-o’-the-world Sidi brings back help. I hope your great Mr. Lazun will hurry. He has plenty of ships and influence, but he will find it the devil and all to fit out a caravan even as big as this in an empty port and a burned town. Sidi has friends near here, and on the whole he is our best hope. I rather felt about him giving his bridle-reins a shake and riding off all so easy and comfortable. But his ramping cavalry would have eaten us up. Goodness, look there, is there to be any end of them? They have cavalry and infantry—white at that, the infernal renegades— I’d put a bullet into any one of the turncoats with pleasure. But I don’t see much provender. They mean to finish it quick—make a short job—and that is the best for us. They’ve got a small field gun too, as neat a little toy as ever you saw. It is packed on a truck. Most unpleasant, that, but we can’t help it. The splinters will come off the cliff. I must go and see that Miss Eza is all right.’

And he went, leaving Zipporah and the ex-Zouave sergeant to see to the placing of the new levies. The Darfur porters were dibbled out between the regular drilled men, and as these had Mausers, the fire of the single-barrelled rifles belonging to the porters and camel-drivers would be superintended and in a manner also directed.

As the ‘mehalla’ came on, the horsemen opened out in a fan, and the late crew of the Golden Flagon began to skirmish forward. There was no waste of time in searching. The trail of the camels and horses was unmistakable. The girls had previously been

traced to their meeting-place with Amisfield in the morning. The feet of a man were seen accompanying them back to the deserted big camp where the fires still smouldered. And from that point the road was as plain as a turnpike.

The first signs of the impending attack came from some impatient men on the flank of Lupo's advance. About a dozen sprang at the road with a cheer. They had hated the desert march, in which they had often 'laired' to the knees in the loose sand. But here they were on clean hard ground at last, and every Spaniard of the North is a past master of hill climbing.

But at that moment Grant gave an order to the men in the lower pair of 'sangars.' These rude breastworks of overlapping rocks piled together, had been set like the wings of a broad arrow, and their fire converged directly upon the narrow stone steps on which the men had set their feet. The clear crisp bark of the Mausers spoke out, and the cliff joyously sent back the sound. The other 'sangars' took up the firing, and the little assaulting party melted away.

'Hold—steady there,' cried Grant, speaking in French, because the soldiers understood commands in that language; 'don't waste a cartridge! We may need them all yet! When they come again we must let them get higher up. They have not yet tasted what Amisfield has waiting for them on the top.'

The Spaniards fell back reluctantly, taking advantage of every bit of cover—which, however, was not much. For the height of the little spur of rock gave a beautiful clear drop to the Mauser bullets, and more than one man rolled over behind his stone, smitten from above as he lay.

'Now we are going to get it!' cried Grant; 'look out,

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Amisfield!' And the tiny shells came spat-spatting against the breastworks. Grant followed the example of the men, who had seen more of this sort of work than he had. They laid down at once with the butts of their rifles covering their heads, and all their accoutrements arranged along their backs.

'I don't believe this can keep on,' thought Grant: 'they have only sailors down there and these pompoms are delicate mechanisms. At least so the gunner fellows tell me.'

But he rose quickly as he heard the crackle of Amisfield's fire from the plateau above, and glancing over, was just in time to catch a glimpse of full thirty of the mutineers bounding up the path towards him. He shouted, and the men rose smartly to their feet. The shell fire was still continuing, and out on the plain the rest of the crew were making rifle practice. From all round came a great noise of shooting. Those of the 'mehalla' who had been armed with guns were letting them off. They could not be said to be aiming, but the bullets whizzed through the air like bees swarming, and in the 'sangar' immediately above, one of the men turned round upon himself with a groan and dropped.

The main assailants were within fifty yards, led by a big man holding a revolver in his left hand and a long Spanish knife in the other.

'Now, shoot fast,' cried Grant in English. But just then the men understood any language.

They pulled at the trigger of their Mausers as fast as they could. The big man fell. Many of the others went down, but still the rest came on. Grant's Mauser needed recharging, and there was no time to slip in the loaded carrier.

But from the 'sangar' above the butt of a rifle was

thrust into his hands. The wounded soldier had recharged his own gun and handed it to Grant.

'Thanks!' cried Grant, sliding the muzzle between the stones. 'I'll — crack — not — crack — forget that!'

So the big charge failed. The sailors turned and fled as they had come, dropping all the way, for from overhead on the roof-garden of Fort Eza, Amisfield, the sergeant, and Zipporah Katti, were now saying their little say.

After this drastic discouragement there was a long truce. The mutineers drew off and consulted. The circling horsemen tried to find another way up. Amisfield shouted down to Grant behind his breastwork that they had been prowling all about, and that he had managed to empty a saddle or two.

It was now four o'clock in the afternoon, and sundown was only two hours off. They had a short time of quiet, and Amisfield ventured down to the 'sangars' with his little armament of surgeons' instruments, together with the necessary hnt and bandages. He dressed the three wounded men. Two of them were only slightly touched, but the third man had a bullet through his shoulder, which for the moment could not be extracted.

'We will take him up as soon as the sun sets. They will likely have at us again in the night, and that will be a serious business. Meanwhile, I daresay you can manage to send up five at a time to feed. The ladies have everything ready.'

'I will come last batch,' said Grant; 'these fellows down here are not too far away to have another try at us.'

'Not just now,' Amisfield answered; 'they have the night before them. For my part I wish to God that either Blucher would come or night stay away.'

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But in spite of all Fort Eza was quiet during the hours of darkness. Of course no one slept, unless it was some of the camel-men who had not been entrusted with a weapon. They were well fed, and there was water for their beasts. They would not have their throats cut—at least there was no greater risks of that than they ran every day of their lives.

Grant mourned that he had not Amisfield's luck of being able to go every hour or oftener to see that Little Eza was in want of nothing, while above Amisfield mourned because the inconsiderate Zipporah had taken that task upon herself. It was clear that she did not appreciate Eza as he did.

Above, the stars sparkled, and down in the plain were many fires, red and sullen one moment, and then as more of the scrub and thorn was thrown upon them, blazing up suddenly. Two long three-quarter circles of them there were, pitting the face of the greyness, affording illuminated glimpses of white-clad forms going this way and that, of picketed horses, and (in front of a black tent, long and low) of a flag which drooped from a staff. Before this a group of men sat about a fire which they kept clear and played a noisy game. Their occasional bickerings could easily be heard up on the plateau.

But in the centre of the 'mehalla' was a space black and unlighted, without camp-fire or tent.

'Jack ashore is tired, or mourning his dead,' said Amisfield to Zipporah.

'I am not so sure,' Zipporah Katti answered. 'I know Lupo the Wolf. He has not done with me yet, I am convinced.'

The night dragged on interminably, till as the day grew bright to the east, it became clear that the mutineer crew of the Golden Flagon had marched

off.

'What,' cried Amisfield, 'have they given up already? We must have dosed them yesterday to some purpose!'

But at that moment Amisfield had news of the Flagon's crew and of its captain. Zipporah had been a true prophet. Grant was handing out sandwiches to his men when a shell dropped right between him and the man he was serving—and the next he knew the whole place seemed to be full of exploding firecrackers. Grant got his men out, but as some of them were wounded he was obliged to leave two behind, making them as comfortable as he could. One big Haussa had been struck in the spine and was already dead.

'Whatever has happened?' gasped Grant, as he stood breathless beside Amisfield in the half shelter of the inner French wall. They were compelled to crouch on the outer side of it. The shells smacked and burst a few feet off, but on the opposite face—that nearest to the precipice.

'They have climbed the ridge from behind and crowned the cliff,' he answered.

'If Lupo has enough men left to assault in front—which I do not believe, we are—well—there will be nothing for it but to shake hands and get rid of all except the last cartridge.'

'You understand?' said Grant very gravely, looking at the girl beside him.

'Yes,' said Zipporah Katti, 'I shall keep two. I shall attend to Eza also.'

The men glanced at one another queerly. Then with a common impulse they lifted their hats. They would have kissed Zipporah's hand if they had belonged to any other civilized nation. But the public

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expression of emotion is difficult to the folk of the larger Britannic Island.

'Hm-m,' said Amisfield, after a pause, as the shells ceased coughing and spluttering about them; 'take it all round, I should say we are pretty close-hauled. They have got the gun up there during the night with trace-ropes, but they don't need to keep the whole team on top. We shall see them down well within an hour, and—there will be quite a flurry then.'

'What we have to do is to build a little shelter at that corner—to the left nearest the cliff,' said Zipporah, pointing to the place. 'I don't believe they can get the shells to burst there. The rock behind is too perpendicular and they dare not take their gun any nearer the edge. It must be very slippery up even where they are. Yonder's a fellow who will be over if he does not mind.'

'Good,' said Amisfield readily. 'I believe you are right. We shall go and make it. Grant, carry something to drink to your hospital cases down there, and tell them I'll be down during the first lull to do what I can for them.'

The refuge they managed to construct was a poor place. There was no time for much, but at least the men could lie where the shells could not touch them. Moreover they could aim from shelter, poking their guns between the stones. With the pick of the good shots concentrated there, the path could still be commanded, though the 'sangars' might not be saved. Finally, after consultation, as it became evident that the lower 'sangars' could not be guaranteed, it was soon necessary to get out the wounded from them. It was a tough job—but, fortunately, it was got over without provoking a

repetition of the pom-pomming from the top of the chff.

‘Yonder they are just as I foretold,’ said Amisfield, after the job was done; ‘they will be at us soon. We had better get into our places.’

‘Take your lunches with you,’ cried Zipporah, handing out provisions and placing several camel-drivers’ pails full of good water on a convenient flat stone. ‘Take each a flaskful, pocket your sandwiches, and be off to eat them in the refuge.’

‘And the name of it,’ said Amisfield, is Bastion Zipporah Katti.’

‘Well, call it Bastion Z—and go there!’ said the bastion’s god-parent, without any acknowledgment of the honour.

However, they were not immediately attacked. The heat down on the face of the sand must have been exhausting. On the kopje itself there was still some breath of air, which blew along the cliff wall and spouted out of the side gullies.

It was not till four o’clock that the enemy made a move. In the camp of the Spaniards they could see a figure well defined, and in front of him the men standing quietly to attention.

‘Good disciplinarian, that Captain Lupo,’ said Grant; ‘first buccaneer of my acquaintance who could keep his men steady. And he doesn’t seem to lead them either when it comes to the fighting ‘

‘He will this time,’ said Zipporah quietly.

‘Ah, well, please tell me what the gentleman looks like—thanks! I hope to pay my respects to him. It would be a pleasure.’

Zipporah judged it useless to inform Grant and Amisfield that Lupo was her father. It involved too much explanation when events were moving so

rapidly.

Then quite suddenly. Grant with his eye to the telescope, reported—

‘They are coming on—all except two or three who are left to communicate with the gunners above. They have a flag-signal station up there working on some prearranged system.’

‘Now don’t fire till the fellows pass that polished black rock below the ‘sangars’ where they have to turn sharply to get at us. Let me show you which one!’ And Amisfield threw a well-aimed sighting shot. ‘A hundred and fifty yards, I should say! And a nice distance. We shall stop them again if we are careful. We must, you know!’

The final attack had already commenced. The shell fire was distracting the watchers up on the plateau, and sending them scurrying to the lee side of the old French defences, in spite of the fact that the ‘mehalla’ started ball practice upon them as often as they showed themselves. On the scarp of Fort Eza all knew that the critical moment had arrived. No one really dared do more than hope for victory. In the little redoubt they waited with their muscles tense and eyes laid along the sights of their rifles.

What could be keeping them? Was there some other trick—some trap, perhaps? In Bastion Z, every muzzle was laid for that black rock at the corner which the assailants had to pass. There they would ‘get it warm’ before they had time to throw themselves right and left into the ‘sangars’ just above. If they took these, it would be only a question of time. But the rock remained a mere shining black target. No men came between their rifles and its polished surface.

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A sound of shouting came from above. High on the verge of the cliff flags flapped and dipped. It meant something, but in Bastion Z they could not see what. They were too close in to the chff.

'I think,' said Zipporah Katti, her calm voice breaking the strain, 'those men up there with the gun can see something the others don't yet know about. They are trying to attract their attention.'

Amisfield, unable to wait longer, ran to the edge in full range of the shells and looked over. What he saw was wonderful.

The 'mehalla' of the Sultan was in full flight to the south as hard as their Arabs could gallop. A cloud of new horsemen, apparently sprung from nowhere, came sweeping round the lower foothills from the direction of the main chain to the west. Evidently they had debouched unexpectedly from some valley of the western hills.

More than a hundred men had already dismounted, and were advancing in skirmishing order towards the foot of the path to Fort Eza. The mutineers had no horses on which to flee, and stood clustered together, uncertain what to do.

'Come here,' cried Amisfield, waving furiously to those in the refuge; 'oh, come on, it's great, I tell you! And, I say, bring the Union Jack and we will hang it out. Where's that Kanim spear? It will make a first-class flagstaff.'

Then as no one but Grant and Zipporah showed signs of moving from cover, he shouted, 'Never mind the pom-pom. The fellows up there have something else to think about just now. They won't fire—at least not at us.'

And indeed, the perky little nose was no longer in evidence on the cliff edge above them.

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An advanced guard of rescuers, about half-a-dozen in number, rode their horses right to the foot of the ascent, dismounted, and came bounding up. The men in Bastion Z got ready to fire. But Zipporah Katti, snatching Grant's binocular, flushed suddenly red.

'They are friends—don't shoot!' she cried. 'Eza, Eza, come here and order them not to shoot. It's Paul—Paul Wester—Paul that I told you about! I was sure he would come.'

And, lest any one should yet make a mistake, she went the tour of the fort knocking up all the gun-muzzles, so that when she got back most of the welcomes were already said, and Eza was clinging fondly to Paul Wester. For she had already kissed him several times—to see how Amisfield and Grant would stand it. She had also kissed his father and Lazun.

So when Zipporah Katti came forward, she merely held out her hand to Paul and said: 'Thank you for coming—I was sure you would!'

Down below, the face of the desert swam in plain tragedy. The dead lay thick along the line of pursuit. The surviving mutineers were being handcuffed for transport to the ships in Souk harbour. Only sixteen of them were on their feet. They found Lupo the Wolf with a knife hafted in his back. He had been leading the attack, as Zipporah Katti had expected, but somehow he and Raif Palafox found themselves too far ahead, and so... But the matter did not need to be explained to Paul Wester the Younger, who remembered the dingle at the back of the Red Haven. Paul and his father drew Lupo's body into a

'sangar' and stood side by side covering it till his daughter had passed by.

Raif Palafox went to his place in the loyal ship's company of the Neptune in spite of the growls of 'Clydeside,' and his tenfold strengthened resolve to be done with playing shipmate to such a scoundrel. But Lazun nodded to Raif as he passed, and all the ship's crew knew what to think of that.

The whole caravan, with the two young men, Grant and Amisfield, went back to Souk, where it was broken up, and all claims duly satisfied with usury thereto.

But the most interesting disputed claim of all still stands open, and would take to recount its settlement (if the gods will) another Odyssey of the present dimensions at least. For it was a great and wonderful competition and the lady had marvellous difficulty in making up her mind. Indeed, had the law allowed the thing anywhere else than in Tibet, Eza might have taken both Ian Grant and Stephen Amisfield to husband. But in the end she was compelled to choose. And the thing which compelled her so to do was perhaps the most curious of sublunary mishaps. Little Eza did not want the least in the world to choose, but she had to. The moon and the stars compelled her—which is a mystery.

And as for Zipporah Katti and Paul Wester, Lazun said that Paul might have Zipporah when he could keep her for a year on his own proper salary. Paul answered that he liked that plan very well, but that he must have Zipporah in order to try the experiment fairly. Lazun smiled, and after brief necessary delays the Doctor himself married them. 'Clydeside' got his first public dressing-down from his minister on the Sunday following, for drinking

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over-well and most under-wisely in honour of the wedding.

Whereat 'Clydeside' merely remarked, 'Och man, but yon was graund!' And started immediately for the vestry, to thank Dr. Septimus Laird for his faithfulness. But he stepped back when he saw the Doctor, for the first time in his life, shaking hands with his brother-in-law, Captain Wester, while Barbara with wet eyes stood holding Paul by one hand and Zipporah by the other.

A pace to the rear he saw Lazun with his hands behind his back, gravely smiling, but still self-contained and inscrutable as when we saw him pacing the beach at Cancale.

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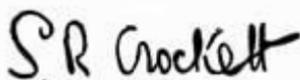
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www.srcrockett.weebly.com and The Galloway Raiders YouTube channel at www.youtube.com

'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 that reads "S. R. Crockett". The letters are cursive and slightly slanted to the right.

