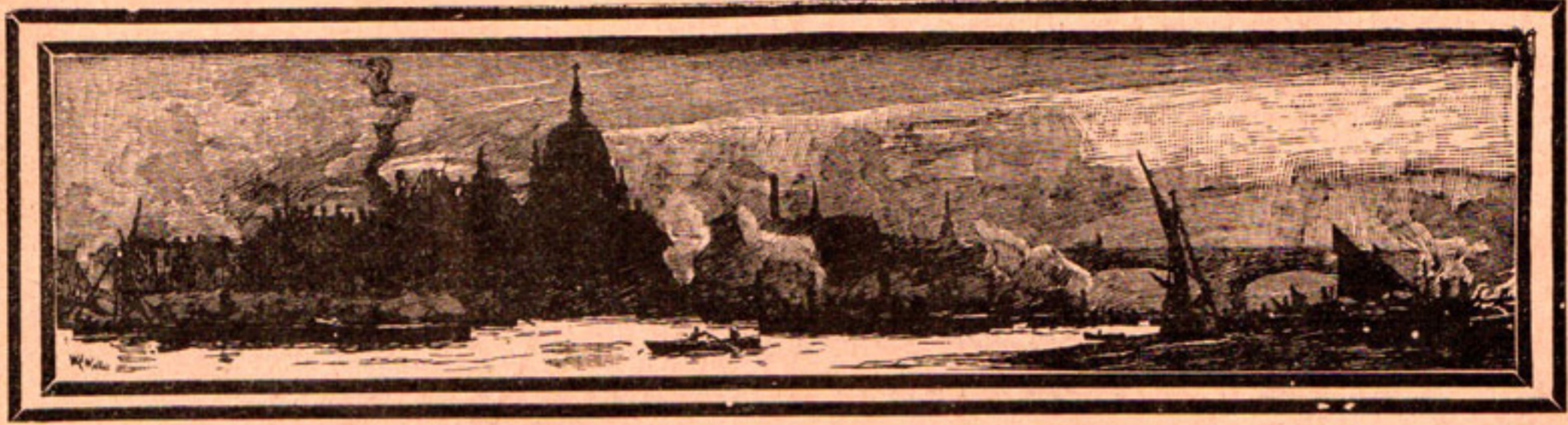
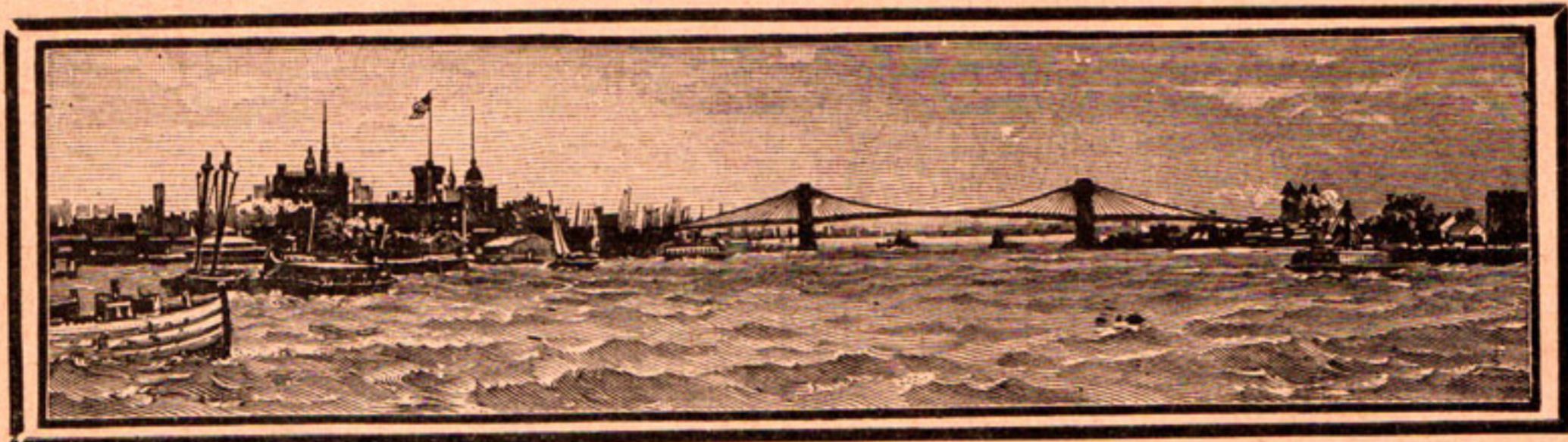


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Illustration for "The Castle of Content"

"SMALL HEED HAD WE OF THE FLEET, SWEET HOURS"

HARPER'S MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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The Castle of Content

BY JAMES BRANCH CABELL



“AND so,” she ended, “you may seize the revenues of Allonby with unwashed hands, cousin.”

“Why have you done this?” I cried. I was half frightened by the sudden whirl of Dame Fortune’s wheel.

“Dear cousin in motley,” grinned the beldame, “’twas for hatred of Tom Allonby and all his accursed race that I have kept the secret thus long. Now comes a braver revenge: and I wreak my vengeance on all the spawn of Allonby—ah, how entirely!—by setting you at their head. Will you jest for them in counsel, good cousin?—reward your henchmen with a merry quip?—lead them to battle with a bawdy song?—ugh! ugh!” Her voice crackled like burning timber, and sputtered in groans that would have been fanged curses had breath not failed her: for my aunt Elinor had a nimble tongue, whetted, as rumor had it, by the attendance of divers Sabbats, and the chaunting of such songs as honest men may not hear and live, however highly succubi and leprichaunes commend them.

I squinted down at one green leg, scratched the crimson fellow to it with my bauble, and could not deny that her argument was just.

“’Twas a strange tale she had ended, speaking swiftly lest the worms grow impatient and Charon weigh anchor ere she had done: and the proofs of the tale’s

verity, set forth in a fair clerkly handwriting, rustled in my hand—scratches of a long-rotted pen that transferred me to the right side of the blanket, and transformed the motley of a fool into the ermine of a peer.

All Devon knew that I was son to Tom Allonby, who had been Marquis of Falmouth at his uncle’s death, had he not first broken his neck in a fox-hunt; but Dan Gabriel, come post-haste from heaven, had scarce convinced the village idiot that Holy Church had smiled upon his union with a tanner’s daughter, and that their son was lord of Allonby Shaw. I doubted it, even as I read the proof. Yet it was true—true that I had precedence even of Monsieur de Puitsange, friend of the King’s though he was, who had kept me on a shifty diet, first coins, then curses, these ten years past—true that my father, rogue in all else, had yet dealt honestly with my mother ere he died—true that my aunt, less fairly treated by him, had shared their secret with the priest that married them, and had most maliciously preserved it till now, when her words fell before me like Jove’s shower before the Lady Danae, chinking, sparkling, pregnant with undreamed-of chances that stirred as yet blindly in the womb of Time.

A sick anger woke in me, remembering the burden of ignoble years she had suffered me to bear; yet my callow gentility bade me deal tenderly with this dying peasant woman, who, when all was said,

had been but ill used by our house. Death hath a strange potency: commanding as he doth, unquestioned and unhidden, the emperor to have done with slaying, the poet to rise from his unfinished rhyme, the tender and gracious lady to cease from all denying words (mixt though they be with pitiful sighs that break their sequence as an amorous ditty heard through the strains of a martial stave), and all men, gentle or base, to follow his gaunt standard into unknown realms, his majesty enshrines the veriest churl on whom the weight of his chill finger hath fallen. I doubt not that Cain's children wept about his death-bed, and that the centurions spake in whispers as they lowered Iscariot from the elder-tree; and in like manner the maledictions that stirred in my brain had no power to move my lips. The frail carnal tenement, swept and cleansed of all mortality, was garnished for Death's coming; I must, perforce, shout "Huzzay!" at his grim pageant, nor could I sorrow at his advent; and it was not mine to question the nobility of the prey which Age and Poverty, his unleashed hounds, now harried at the door of the tomb.

"I forgive you," said I.

"Dear Marquis," quoth she, and her sunken jaws quivered angrily, "one might think I had kept from you the mastership of this wattled hut, rather than the wardage of Allonby Shaw. Believe me, Monsieur de Puyange did not take the news so calmly."

"You have told him?"

I sprang to my feet, half overcome with fear, for the cold hatred of her face was rather that of Bellona, who, as clerks avow, ever bore carnage and dissension in her train, than that of a mortal, mutton-fed woman.

The hag laughed—flat and shrill, like a man's laughter heard in hell between the roaring of the flames. "Were it not common kindness," she asked, "since his daughter is troth-plight to the usurper? He hath known since morning."

"And—and Adeliza?" I cried, in a voice that tricked me.

"Knows nothing as yet. But I think she is like to learn: for the ear of Monsieur de Puyange is keen to catch the melody of a sovereign that jostles with many fellows. Dear cousin, he means to

take the estate of Allonby as it stands; what live-stock, whether crack-brained or not, may go therewith is all one. He will not balk at a drachm or two of brains in his son-in-law. You have but to ask—but to ask, cousin!"

"Woman," I cried, hoarsely, "have you no heart?"

"I gave it to your father," she answered, "and he taught me the worth of it." There was a smile upon her lips, such as that with which the Lady Clytemnestra greeted King Agamemnon, come flushed from the sack of Troy Town. "I gave it—ah, go, ere I curse you, son of Thomas Allonby! Go, cast out your kinsman, and play the fool with all that Tom Allonby held dear—go, make his name a byword that begot a fool to play at quoits with coronets! I have nurtured you for this, and you will not fail me; you are not all fool, but you will serve my purpose. Go, my lord Marquis; it is not meet that death intrude thus unmannerly into your Grace's presence. Go, fool, and let me die in peace!"

I was no longer frightened at the whip (ah, familiar, unkindly whip!) that hung beside the door of the hut; but, I confess, my aunt's looks were none too reassuring, and old custom rendered her wrath yet terrible. If the farmers thereabouts were to be trusted, I knew Lucifer would come erelong for a certain overdue soul, escheat and forfeited to him by many years of cruel witchcrafts, close wiles, and nameless sorceries; and I could never abide unpared nails. Therefore, I left her gladly to the village gossips, who waited without, and tucked my bauble under my arm.

"Dear cousin," said I, "farewell!"

"Farewell!" said she; "play the fool yet."

"'Tis my vocation," quoth I, briefly: and so went forth into the night.



I CAME to Tiverton Manor through a darkness black as the lining of Baalzebub's oldest cloak: for the moon was not yet risen, and the clouds hung heavy as feather beds between mankind and the stars; even the swollen Exe was scarce visible as I crossed the bridge, though it



"'T WAS A STRANGE TALE SHE HAD ENDED"

roared hoarsely beneath me, and shook the frail timbers hungrily. For the bridge had long been unsafe: Monsieur de Puyange had planned one stronger and less hazardous than the old edifice, of which the arches yet remained, and this was now in the making, as divers piles of unhewn lumber and stone attested: meanwhile, the roadway was but a makeshift of half-rotten wood that shook villainously in the wind. I stood for a moment and heard the waters lapping and splashing and laughing beneath, as though they held it rare and desirable mirth to swallow and spew forth a powerful marquis, and grind his body among the battered timber and tree boles and dead sheep swept from the hills, and at last vomit him into the sea, that a corpse, wide-eyed and livid, might bob up and down the beach, in quest of a quiet grave where the name of Allonby was scarce known. The imagination was so vivid that it frightened me as I picked my way through the dark.

The folk of Tiverton Manor were knotting on their nightcaps, by this; but there was a light in the Lady Adeliza's window, faint as a sick glowworm. I rolled in the seeded grass and laughed softly, as I thought of what might be, and murmured to myself an old cradle-song of Devon that she loved and often sang; and was, ere I knew it, singing aloud, for pure wantonness and joy that Monsieur de Puyange was not like to have me whipped now, however much I chose to carol.

Sang I:

"In the lapse of years there lingers yet
A fair and free extent
Of shadowy turret and parapet—
'Tis the Castle of Content.

"Ei ho! Ei ho! the Castle of Content,
With drowsy music drowning merriment,
Where Dreams and Visions held high carnival,
And Love, vine-crowned, sat laughing over all.
Ei ho!
The vanished Castle of Content!"

As I ended, the casement was pushed open, and the Lady Adeliza came wondering to the balcony, the light streaming from behind her in such fashion as made her appear an angel peering out of

heaven at our mortal antics. Indeed, there was something more than human in her beauty, though it savored less of divinity than of a vision of some silent, great-eyed queen of faery, such as those whose feet glide unwetted over our fen-waters as they roam o' nights in search of unwary travellers; the perfection of her comeliness left men almost cold. She was a fair beauty; that is, her eyes were the color of opals, and her complexion as the first rose of spring, blushing at her haste to snare men's hearts with beauty; and her loosened hair rippled in such a burst of glory, that I have seen the shifting gold reflected on her bared shoulders where the scented waves fell heavily against the tender flesh. She was somewhat proud, they said; and to others she may have been, but to me, never. Her voice was a low, sweet song, her look even such as that of St. Elizabeth in the Chapel, and her many deeds of kindness to me so manifold that I cannot set them down: indeed, there was a gracious kindness in all she did that made a courteous word from her of more worth than a purse from another.

"Is it you, Will?" said she.

"Madam," I answered, "with whom else should the owls confer? 'Tis an ancient word that extremes meet. And here you may behold it exemplified, as in the conference of an epicure and an estrich: though, for this once, Wisdom makes bold to sit above Folly."

"Did you carol, then, to them?" quoth she.

"Indeed," said I, "my grim gossips care less for my melody than for the squeaking of a mouse; and I sang rather for joy that at last I may enter into the Castle of Content."

The Lady Adeliza sighed, I thought, though I could scarce be certain. "With whom?" said she.

"Madam," said I, "your wit was ever ready. 'Tis but a woman's hand may lower the drawbridge."

"You—you—?" cried she, incredulous laughter breaking the soft flow of speech.

"By the horns of Europa's bull! 'tis even so: the fool yearns for a fair woman, as a shallow pool were enamored of a summer cloud. What else, being a fool? Ah, madam, as Love, borne on motley-colored wings, sprang long since from



LADY ADELIZA CAME WONDERINGLY TO THE BALCONY

chaos, and by his witchery fashioned out of the primeval tangle the fair earth that sleeps about us—even thus, may he not frame the disorder of a fool's brain into the semblance of a lover's? The change is not so great, believe me. I love a woman far above me—a woman who knows not of my love, or, at most, thinks of it but as the worship that peasants accord the kindly sun; and now that chance hath woven me a ladder whereby to mount to her, I scarce dare set my foot upon the bottom rung."

"A ladder?" she cried—"a—a rope ladder?"

"A golden one," said I.

There was a long silence. The wind wailed mournfully among the gaunt, deserted choir of the trees about us, and an owl hooted sardonically in the distance.

"Be bold," said she, very softly; "and know that a woman loves once and forever, whether she will or no. Love is not sold in the shops, and the grave merchants that trade in all seas, and send forth argosies even to jewelled Ind, to bring home rich pearls, and strange outlandish dyes, and spiceries, and the raiment of proud, long-dead queens, have bought and sold no love, for all their traffic. 'Tis above gold. I know"—her voice faltered somewhat—"I know of a woman whose birth is very near the throne, and—and whose beauty, such as it is, men have commended, who loved a man that the world found far beneath her, for he was not wealthy. And the world bade her relinquish him; but within the chambers of her heart his voice rang more loudly than that of the world, and for his least word said she would leave all and go with him whither he would. And—she waits but for the speaking of that word."

"Be bold?" said I.

"Ay," said she; "'tis the moral of my tale. Make me a song of it, good Will—and—and to-morrow you shall learn how this woman, too, entered into the Castle of Content."

"Madam—!" I cried.

"It is late," said she, "and I must go."

"To-morrow—?" said I.

"Ay, to-morrow—ah, to-morrow draws very near. Farewell!" And she was gone, casting one swift glance backward, even as the ancient Parthians are fabled

to have shot their arrows as they fled; and surely, in this case, if the missile left a wound, 'twas at least fashioned of the purest gold.



WENT forth into the woods that lie thick about Tiverton Manor, where I lay flat on my back among the fallen leaves, dreaming many dreams to myself—dreams that were all pure songs of happiness, to which the papers in my jerkin rustled a reassuring chorus.

I have heard that night is own sister to death; but on this night, as the harvest-moon broke forth in a red glory, and the stars clustered about her like a swarm of golden bees, I thought her rather the parent of a new life. But, indeed, there is a solemnity in the night past all jesting: it knits up the tangled yarn of our day's doings into a pattern either good or ill; it renews the vigor of the living, and draws the dying gently towards its impenetrable depths with the lapsing of the tide; and it honors the secrecy of lovers as zealously as that of rogues. In the morning our bodies rise to their allotted work; but our wits have had their season in the night, or of kissing, or of wassail, or of high resolve; and the greater part of such noble deeds as day witnesses have been planned in the solitude of night.

But even the lark that soars into the naked presence of the sun by day must seek his woven nest among the grass at night; and so, with many yawns, I rose after an hour to seek my bed. Tiverton Manor was but a formless blot on the mild radiance of the heavens, but I must needs pause for a while, staring up at the Lady Adeliza's window, like a hen drinking water, and thinking of many things.

It was then that something rustled among the leaves, and, turning, I stared straight into the countenance of Stephen Allonby, until to-day Marquis of Falmouth, a slim, comely youth, and my very good cousin.

"Fool," said he, "you walk late."

"Faith!" said I, "something warned me that a fool might find fit company here—cousin." He winced at the word,



HE THOUGHT OF HIS LOVE

for he was never prone to admit the relationship, being somewhat of a precisian in his disposition.

"Eh?" quoth he; then paused for a while. "I have more kinsmen than I knew of," said he, at length, "and to-day spawns them thick as herrings. Indeed, your greeting falls strangely pat with that of a—a brother of yours, claiming to be begot in lawful matrimony, who hath appeared to claim the title and estates, and hath even imposed upon the credulity of Monsieur de Puyssange."

"Who, pray?" laughed I, though his speech shook my heart into my mouth. "I have many brethren, if report speaks truly."

"I know not," said he; "I learned it but to-day."

I was moved with pity for him; for I could not doubt he had learned part of the case from Monsieur de Puyssange; but I scarce knew how to word this sympathy. I waved my hand upward. "The match," said I, "is broken, then, until—?"

"Ay!" said he, grimly.

Again I was nonplussed. True, they had been betrothed ere meeting, and his grief, therefore, was not like to be overwhelming: still, the Lady Adeliza was a woman whom one might love greatly. So a silence fell between us.

He cleared his throat; swore softly to himself; took a short turn on the walk;

and approached me, purse in hand. "'Tis time you were abed," quoth he.

"Truly," said I, "it is."

"And—"

"And since one may sleep anywhere," quoth I, "why not here?" Thereupon, for I was somewhat puzzled at his bearing, I lay down flat upon the gravel and snored.

"Fool," said he. I opened one eye. "I have business here"—I opened the other—"with the Lady Adeliza." He tossed me a coin as I sprang to my feet.

"Sir—!" I cried.

"She expects me," said he.

"In that case—" said I.

"The difficulty is to give a signal," said he.

"'Tis as easy as lying," said I; and thereupon I began to sing:

"Small heed had we of the fleet, sweet hours,
Till the troops of Time were sent
To seize the treasures and take the towers
O' the Castle of Content.

"Ei ho! Ei ho! the Castle of Content,
With flaming tower and falling battlement;
Prince Time hath conquered, and the fire-
light streams
Above the wounded Loves, the dying
Dreams—

Ei ho!

The vanished Castle of Content!"



IN THE NIGHT



AND, in truth, I had scarce ended when the casement opened.

"Stephen!" said the Lady Adeliza.

"Dear love!" said he.

"Humph!" said I.

Thereupon a rope ladder unrolled from the balcony and hit me upon the head.

"If you could regard the orchard for a moment—" said she.

"I have company," said he, somewhat vexed—"a bur that sticks to me."

"A fool," I explained—"to keep him in countenance."

"It was ever the part of folly," said she, laughing softly, "to be swayed by a woman; and it is the part of wisdom to be discreet."

We held each a strand of the ladder and stared at the ripening apples, black globes among the wind-vext silver of the leaves. In a moment the Lady Adeliza stood between us. Her hand rested on my shoulder lightly as she leapt to the ground.

"I did not know—" said she.

"Faith, madam!" said I, "no more did I till this. I deduce but now that the

Marquis of Falmouth is the person you spoke of an hour since, and with whom you hope to enter the Castle of Content."

"With whom else?" said she, wonderingly. "My father—"

"Is as all have been since Father Adam's dotage," I ended; "and therefore keeps honest horses—and fools—from their rest."

"In fact—" admitted my cousin.

"There are horses yonder?" said I.

"And fools here—and everywhere? There needs no bearded Merlin to tell us that: and therefore—"

"Come!" said she.

"You will be secret?" asked he, uncertainly.

"In comparison," said I, "the grave is garrulous, and a death's-head but a chattering magpie; yet I think that madam's maid—"

"Beatris is sworn to silence," said she.

"Which signifies she is already on her way to your father. She was coerced; she discovered it too late; and a sufficiency of tears and pious protestations will attest her innocence. It is all one." I winked my eye sagely.

"Fool!" said he. "Come!"

Blaise, my lord Marquis's French servant, held three horses in the shadow, so close that it was incredible I had not heard their trampling. They mounted and were off like the wind ere Blaise put his foot to the stirrup.

"Blaise!" said I.

"Eh?" said he, pausing.

"If, for the nonce, I borrowed your horse—"

"Impossible!"

"If I took it by force"—I exhibited my coin—

"Eh?"

"—no one could blame you."

"Perhaps—"

"Never!" said I: and pushing him aside, a trifle uncertain, mounted and set out into the night after my cousin and the Lady Adeliza.

They rode leisurely enough along the winding highway that lay in the moonlight like a white ribbon in a pedlar's box; and keeping as I did some hundred yards behind, they thought me no other than Blaise, being, indeed, too much engrossed with one another to regard the outer world very strictly. So we rode a matter of three miles in the whispering, moonlit woods, they prattling and laughing as though there were no such monster in all the universe as an irate father, I brooding of many things and with an ear cocked backward for possible pursuit.

In most cases they might escape untroubled to Teignmouth, and thence to Allonby Shaw; they counted fully upon this; but I, knowing Beatris, who was waiting-maid to the Lady Adeliza and consequently in the plot, to be the devil's own vixen, despite an innocent face and a wheedling tongue, was less certain.

I shall not easily forget that ride: about us the woods sighed and whispered, dappled by the moonlight in a mottled chequer-board of silver and swaying leaves. A chaos of light and shadow slept on either side; but ahead rode Love, older than all things and yet eternally young, in quest of the Castle of Content, and the horses' hoofs beat against the pebbles in monotonous chorus to the old Devon cradle-song that rang idly in my brain. 'Twas little to me whether the quest were won or lost; yet, as I watched

the Lady Adeliza's white cloak that tossed and fluttered wantonly in the wind, my blood pulsed more strongly than it is wont to do, and was stirred by the keen odors of the night and many memories of her gracious kindness and a desire to serve somewhat toward the attainment of her happiness.

Then that befell which I had looked for, and I heard the beat of horses' hoofs behind us, and knew that Monsieur de Puyange and his men were come in haste to rescue the Lady Adeliza from my cousin, that she might be my bride. I galloped forward.

"Spur!" I cried—"in the name of St. Cupid!"

With a little gasp, she set her teeth and bent forward over her horse's mane, urging him onward with every nerve and muscle of her tender body: if ever a woman looked Fear in the face and did not know his name, 'twas she. No cry escaped her lips, no anguish wrung her countenance; she seemed scarce to heed the troubled world, with eager eyes set on the far-off goal her heart desired. I could not keep my gaze from her face as we swept through the night.

But our pursuers gained on us steadily: and as we paused to pick our way over the frail bridge that spanned the Exe, the noise was very near.

"Take care!" I cried—but too late, for my horse swerved under me as I spoke, and my lord Marquis's steed caught foot in a pile of lumber and fell heavily. He was up in a moment, unhurt, but the horse was lamed.

"You!" he cried.

"What matter?" said I. "'Tis all one if I have a taste for night riding and the shedding of noble blood. Alack, that I have left my brave bauble at Tiverton! Had I that but here, I might do such deeds! I might show such prowess upon the person of Monsieur de Puyange as your Nine Worthies would quake to read of! For I have the honor to inform you, my doves, that we are taken."

Indeed, we were, for even the two sound horses were well-nigh foundered: Blaise, the idle rogue, had not troubled to provide fresh ones, so easy had the fitting seemed; and it was plain we would be overtaken in half an hour.

"So it seems," said he, moodily.

"Well! one can die but once." Thus speaking, he drew his sword with an air King Leonidas, at Thermopylæ, might have envied.

"Together, my heart!" she cried.

"Madam," said I, dismounting as I spoke, "pray you, consider! With you, there is no question of death; 'tis but that Monsieur de Puyange desires you to make a suitable match. 'Tis not yet too late; his heart is very kindly, and he hath no malice toward—toward my lord Marquis. Yield, then, to his wishes, since there is no choice."

She stared at me, in amazement at this eminently sensible advice. "And you—is it you that would enter into the Castle of Content?" she cried, in scorn that lashed like a whip.

"Madam," said I, "bethink you, you know naught of this man your father desires you to wed. Is it not possible that he, too, may love—may come, in time, to love you? You are very fair, madam. Yours is a beauty that may draw a man to heaven or unclose the gates of hell, at will; indeed, even I, in my poor dreams, have seen your face many times, bright and glorious as is the lighted space above the altar when Christ's blood and body are shared among His worshippers; men will never cease to love you, I think. Will he—your husband that may be—not do so? Suppose, were it possible, that he—even now—yearns to enter into the Castle of Content, and that your hand, your hand alone, may draw the bolt for him—that the thought of you is to him as a flame before which honor and truth shrivel as shed feathers, and that he has loved you these many years, unknown to you, ere the Marquis of Falmouth came into your life with his fair face and smooth sayings. Suppose, were it possible—"

"Fool!" cried my cousin, "have done!"

She rested her hand softly upon his arm. "Hush!" said she; then turned to me an uncertain countenance that was half pity, half wonder. "Dear Will," said she, "if—if you have ever known aught of love, do you not understand?" And a tear stole down her cheek, in which the Marquis of Falmouth had no share. For, at last—at last, praise God!—she saw and read the message my eyes had borne these two years past.

"In that case," said I,—my voice played me strange tricks,—"may I request that you assist me in gathering such brushwood as we may find hereabouts?"

They both stared at me now. "My lord," said I, "the Exe is high, the bridge is of wood, and I have flint and steel in my pocket. The ford is five miles above and quite impassable."

He clapped his hands together. "Excellent!" he cried.

Then, they having caught my drift, we heaped up a pile of broken boughs and twigs and brushwood on the bridge, all three gathering it together. I doubt if the moon, that is copartner in the antics of all rogues and lovers, ever saw a stranger sight than that of a marquis, a lord's daughter, and a fool met at dead of night to make fagots.

When we had done I handed him the flint and steel. "My lord," said I, "the honor is yours."

"Pest!" he murmured, in a moment, swearing and striking futile sparks, "last night's rain has wet the wood through. It will not kindle."

"Dear sir," said I, "in such matters is a fool not indispensable?" I heaped before him the papers that made an honest woman of my mother and a marquis of me, and seizing the flint, cast a spark among them that set them crackling merrily. Then we watched the writhing twigs splutter and snap and burn.

The bridge caught apace and in ten minutes was impassable. In twenty it did not exist: only the stone arches towered above the roaring waters that glistened in the light of the fire, which had, by this, reached the other side and was busily employed in the woods of Tiverton. In fact, our pursuers rode through a glare that was as that of hell, and reached the Exe only to curse vainly and shriek idle imprecations at us, who were as safe from their anger as though the world lay between us.

"My lord," said I, "it may be that your priest expects you?"

"Indeed," said he, laughing, "it is possible. Let us go." Thereupon they mounted the two sound horses. "Good Will," said he, "follow on foot to Teignmouth; and there—"

"Sir," said I, "my home is at Tiverton."

He wheeled about. "Do you not fear—" said he.

"The whip?" said I. "Ah, my lord, I have been whipped ere this. It is not the greatest ill in life to be whipped."

"But—"

"But, indeed, I am resolved," said I. "Farewell!"

He tossed me his purse. "As you will," said he, shortly. "We thank you for your aid; and if I am still the master of Allonby—"

"No fear of that!" quoth I. "I—I cannot weep at your going, my lord, since it brings you happiness."

I stood fingering the gold as he rode forward slowly into the night; but she did not follow.

"Will—" said she. She paused, and the lithe rose-tipped fingers fretted uncertainly with her horse's mane.

"Madam," said I, "you have told me of love's nature: must my halting commentary prove the glose upon your text? Look, then, to be edified while the fool is delivered of his folly. Love was born of the ocean, madam, and the ocean is but salt water, and salt water is but tears; and thus may love claim kin with sorrow,—ay, madam, by a merry whimsey of Dame Fate's, sorrow is one of the many roads whereby we lovers may regain the Castle of Content."

There was a long silence, and the wind wailed among the falling, tattered leaves.

"Had I but known—" said she, very sadly.

"Madam," said I, "I bid you go forward. Yonder your lover waits for you, and the world is very fair; here there is only a fool who discourses tediously of matters his poor brain may not fathom, and whose rude tongue is like to chaunt but an unmannerly marriage-song. Yet—ay for this new Marquis of Falmouth, let him trouble you no longer. 'Tis an Eastern superstition that we lackbrains

are endowed with the gift of prophecy, and as such I predict, very confidently, madam, that you will see and hear no more of him in this life."

I caught my breath swiftly, for she was very beautiful in the moonlight. Her eyes were big with half-comprehended sorrow, and a slender hand stole timorously toward me as I laughed harshly, seeing how she strove to comprehend and could not, by reason of the great happiness that throbbed in each delicate vein.

She stared at me for a little, yet only half in wonder. Then her warm, slim arms clasped about me hurriedly, timorously, and her lips clung and were one with my lips for a moment, and her tears were wet upon my cheek.

"Farewell!" said she.

I mounted the lamed horse, who limped slowly up the river bank: very slowly we came out from the glare of the crackling fire into the cool darkness of the autumn woods; very slowly, for the horse was lamed and wearied, and patience is a discreet virtue when one journeys toward curses and the lash of a dog-whip: and I thought of many quips and jests whereby to soothe the anger of Monsieur de Puy-sange, and sang to myself as I rode through the woods.

Sang I:

"The towers are fallen; no laughter rings
Through the rafters, charred and rent;
The ruin is wrought of all goodly things
In the Castle of Content.

"Ei ho! Ei ho! the Castle of Content,
Beyond the Land of Youth, where mirth
was meant!
The walls are ashes now, and all in vain
Hand-shadowed eyes turn backward and
regain
Only the memory of that dear domain.
Ei ho!
The vanished Castle of Content!"