

## CHAPTER III

### THE COMING OF THE SPANIARD

And now I must go back and speak of my own matters. As I have told, it was my father's wish that I should be a physician, and since I came back from my schooling at Norwich, that was when I had entered on my sixteenth year, I had studied medicine under the doctor who practised his art in the neighbourhood of Bungay. He was a very learned man and an honest, Grimstone by name, and as I had some liking for the business I made good progress under him. Indeed I had learned almost all that he could teach me, and my father purposed to send me to London, there to push on my studies, so soon as I should attain my twentieth year, that is within some five months of the date of the coming of the Spaniard.

But it was not fated that I should go to London.

Medicine was not the only thing that I studied in those days, however. Squire Bozard of Ditchingham, the same who told my father of the coming of the Spanish ship, had two living children, a son and a daughter, though his wife had borne him many more who died in infancy. The daughter was named Lily and of my own age, having been born three weeks after me in the same year. Now the Bozards are gone from these parts, for my great-niece, the granddaughter and sole heiress of this son, has married and has issue of another name. But this is by the way.

From our earliest days we children, Bozards and Wingfields, lived almost as brothers and sisters, for day by day we met and played together in the snow or in the flowers. Thus it would be hard for me to say when I began to love Lily or when she began to love me; but I know that when first I went to school at Norwich I grieved more at losing sight of her than because I must part from my mother and the rest. In all our games she was ever my partner, and I would search the country round for days to find such flowers as she chanced to love. When I came back from school it was the same, though by degrees Lily grew shy, and I also grew suddenly shy, perceiving that from a child she had become a woman. Still we met often, and though neither said anything of it, it was sweet to us to meet.

Thus things went on till this day of my mother's death. But before I go further I must tell that Squire Bozard looked with no favour on the friendship between his daughter and myself--and this, not because he disliked me, but rather because he would have seen Lily wedded to my elder brother Geoffrey, my father's heir, and not to a younger son. So hard did he grow about the matter at last that we two might scarcely meet except by seeming accident, whereas my brother was ever welcome at the Hall. And on this account some bitterness arose between us two brothers, as is apt to be the case when a woman comes between friends however close. For it must be known that my brother Geoffrey also loved Lily, as all men would have loved her, and with a better right perhaps than I had--for he was my elder by three years and born to possessions.

It may seem indeed that I was somewhat hasty to fall into this state, seeing that at the time of which I write I was not yet of age; but young blood is nimble, and moreover mine was half Spanish, and made a man of me when many a pure-bred Englishman is still nothing but a boy. For the blood and the sun that ripens it have much to do with such matters, as I have seen often enough among the Indian peoples of Anahuac, who at the age of fifteen will take to themselves a bride of twelve. At the least it is certain that when I was eighteen years of age I was old enough to fall in love after such fashion that I never fell out of it again altogether, although the history of my life may seem to give me the lie when I say so. But I take it that a man may love several women and yet love one of them the best of all, being true in the spirit to the law which he breaks in the letter.

Now when I had attained nineteen years I was a man full grown, and writing as I do in extreme old age, I may say it without false shame, a very handsome youth to boot. I was not over tall, indeed, measuring but five feet nine inches and a half in height, but my limbs were well made, and I was both deep and broad in the chest. In colour I was, and my white hair notwithstanding, am still extraordinarily dark hued, my eyes also were large and dark, and my hair, which was wavy, was coal black. In my deportment I was reserved and grave to sadness, in speech I was slow and temperate, and more apt at listening than in talking. I weighed matters well before I made up my mind upon them, but being made up, nothing could turn me from that mind short of death itself, whether it were set on good or evil, on folly or wisdom. In those days also I had

little religion, since, partly because of my father's secret teaching and partly through the workings of my own reason, I had learned to doubt the doctrines of the Church as they used to be set out. Youth is prone to reason by large leaps as it were, and to hold that all things are false because some are proved false; and thus at times in those days I thought that there was no God, because the priest said that the image of the Virgin at Bungay wept and did other things which I knew that it did not do. Now I know well that there is a God, for my own story proves it to my heart. In truth, what man can look back across a long life and say that there is no God, when he can see the shadow of His hand lying deep upon his tale of years?

On this sad day of which I write I knew that Lily, whom I loved, would be walking alone beneath the great pollard oaks in the park of Ditchingham Hall. Here, in Grubswell as the spot is called, grew, and indeed still grow, certain hawthorn trees that are the earliest to blow of any in these parts, and when we had met at the church door on the Sunday, Lily said that there would be bloom upon them by the Wednesday, and on that afternoon she should go to cut it. It may well be that she spoke thus with design, for love will breed cunning in the heart of the most guileless and truthful maid. Moreover, I noticed that though she said it before her father and the rest of us, yet she waited to speak till my brother Geoffrey was out of hearing, for she did not wish to go maying with him, and also that as she spoke she shot a glance of her grey eyes at me. Then and there I vowed to myself that I also would be gathering hawthorn bloom in this same place and on that Wednesday

afternoon, yes, even if I must play truant and leave all the sick of Bungay to Nature's nursing. Moreover, I was determined on one thing, that if I could find Lily alone I would delay no longer, but tell her all that was in my heart; no great secret indeed, for though no word of love had ever passed between us as yet, each knew the other's hidden thoughts. Not that I was in the way to become affianced to a maid, who had my path to cut in the world, but I feared that if I delayed to make sure of her affection my brother would be before me with her father, and Lily might yield to that to which she would not yield if once we had plighted troth.

Now it chanced that on this afternoon I was hard put to it to escape to my tryst, for my master, the physician, was ailing, and sent me to visit the sick for him, carrying them their medicines. At the last, however, between four and five o'clock, I fled, asking no leave. Taking the Norwich road I ran for a mile and more till I had passed the Manor House and the church turn, and drew near to Ditchingham Park. Then I dropped my pace to a walk, for I did not wish to come before Lily heated and disordered, but rather looking my best, to which end I had put on my Sunday garments. Now as I went down the little hill in the road that runs past the park, I saw a man on horseback who looked first at the bridle-path, that at this spot turns off to the right, then back across the common lands towards the Vineyard Hills and the Waveney, and then along the road as though he did not know which way to turn. I was quick to notice things--though at this moment my mind was not at its swiftest, being set on other matters, and chiefly as to how I should tell my tale

to Lily--and I saw at once that this man was not of our country.

He was very tall and noble-looking, dressed in rich garments of velvet adorned by a gold chain that hung about his neck, and as I judged about forty years of age. But it was his face which chiefly caught my eye, for at that moment there was something terrible about it. It was long, thin, and deeply carved; the eyes were large, and gleamed like gold in sunlight; the mouth was small and well shaped, but it wore a devilish and cruel sneer; the forehead lofty, indicating a man of mind, and marked with a slight scar. For the rest the cavalier was dark and southern-looking, his curling hair, like my own, was black, and he wore a peaked chestnut-coloured beard.

By the time that I had finished these observations my feet had brought me almost to the stranger's side, and for the first time he caught sight of me. Instantly his face changed, the sneer left it, and it became kindly and pleasant looking. Lifting his bonnet with much courtesy he stammered something in broken English, of which all that I could catch was the word Yarmouth; then perceiving that I did not understand him, he cursed the English tongue and all those who spoke it, aloud and in good Castilian.

'If the senor will graciously express his wish in Spanish,' I said, speaking in that language, 'it may be in my power to help him.'

'What! you speak Spanish, young sir,' he said, starting, 'and yet you are not a Spaniard, though by your face you well might be. Caramba! but it is strange!' and he eyed me curiously.

'It may be strange, sir,' I answered, 'but I am in haste. Be pleased to ask your question and let me go.'

'Ah!' he said, 'perhaps I can guess the reason of your hurry. I saw a white robe down by the streamlet yonder,' and he nodded towards the park. 'Take the advice of an older man, young sir, and be careful. Make what sport you will with such, but never believe them and never marry them--lest you should live to desire to kill them!'

Here I made as though I would pass on, but he spoke again.

'Pardon my words, they were well meant, and perhaps you may come to learn their truth. I will detain you no more. Will you graciously direct me on my road to Yarmouth, for I am not sure of it, having ridden by another way, and your English country is so full of trees that a man cannot see a mile?'

I walked a dozen paces down the bridle-path that joined the road at this place, and pointed out the way that he should go, past Ditchingham church. As I did so I noticed that while I spoke the stranger was watching my face keenly and, as it seemed to me, with an inward fear which he strove to master and could not. When I had finished again he

raised his bonnet and thanked me, saying,

'Will you be so gracious as to tell me your name, young Sir?'

'What is my name to you?' I answered roughly, for I disliked this man.

'You have not told me yours.'

'No, indeed, I am travelling incognito. Perhaps I also have met a lady in these parts,' and he smiled strangely. 'I only wished to know the name of one who had done me a courtesy, but who it seems is not so courteous as I deemed.' And he shook his horse's reins.

'I am not ashamed of my name,' I said. 'It has been an honest one so far, and if you wish to know it, it is Thomas Wingfield.'

'I thought it,' he cried, and as he spoke his face grew like the face of a fiend. Then before I could find time even to wonder, he had sprung from his horse and stood within three paces of me.

'A lucky day! Now we will see what truth there is in prophecies,' he said, drawing his silver-mounted sword. 'A name for a name; Juan de Garcia gives you greeting, Thomas Wingfield.'

Now, strange as it may seem, it was at this moment only that there flashed across my mind the thought of all that I had heard about the Spanish stranger, the report of whose coming to Yarmouth had stirred my



father and mother so deeply. At any other time I should have remembered it soon enough, but on this day I was so set upon my tryst with Lily and what I should say to her, that nothing else could hold a place in my thoughts.

'This must be the man,' I said to myself, and then I said no more, for he was on me, sword up. I saw the keen point flash towards me, and sprang to one side having a desire to fly, as, being unarmed except for my stick, I might have done without shame. But spring as I would I could not avoid the thrust altogether. It was aimed at my heart and it pierced the sleeve of my left arm, passing through the flesh--no more. Yet at the pain of that cut all thought of flight left me, and instead of it a cold anger filled me, causing me to wish to kill this man who had attacked me thus and unprovoked. In my hand was my stout oaken staff which I had cut myself on the banks of Hollow Hill, and if I would fight I must make such play with this as I might. It seems a poor weapon indeed to match against a Toledo blade in the hands of one who could handle it well, and yet there are virtues in a cudgel, for when a man sees himself threatened with it, he is likely to forget that he holds in his hand a more deadly weapon, and to take to the guarding of his own head in place of running his adversary through the body.

And that was what chanced in this case, though how it came about exactly I cannot tell. The Spaniard was a fine swordsman, and had I been armed as he was would doubtless have overmatched me, who at that age had no practice in the art, which was almost unknown in England. But when he

saw the big stick flourished over him he forgot his own advantage, and raised his arm to ward away the blow. Down it came upon the back of his hand, and lo! his sword fell from it to the grass. But I did not spare him because of that, for my blood was up. The next stroke took him on the lips, knocking out a tooth and sending him backwards. Then I caught him by the leg and beat him most unmercifully, not upon the head indeed, for now that I was victor I did not wish to kill one whom I thought a madman as I would that I had done, but on every other part of him.

Indeed I thrashed him till my arms were weary and then I fell to kicking him, and all the while he writhed like a wounded snake and cursed horribly, though he never cried out or asked for mercy. At last I ceased and looked at him, and he was no pretty sight to see--indeed, what with his cuts and bruises and the mire of the roadway, it would have been hard to know him for the gallant cavalier whom I had met not five minutes before. But uglier than all his hurts was the look in his wicked eyes as he lay there on his back in the pathway and glared up at me.

'Now, friend Spaniard,' I said, 'you have learned a lesson; and what is there to hinder me from treating you as you would have dealt with me who had never harmed you?' and I took up his sword and held it to his throat.

'Strike home, you accursed whelp!' he answered in a broken voice; 'it is better to die than to live to remember such shame as this.'

'No,' I said, 'I am no foreign murderer to kill a defenceless man. You shall away to the justice to answer for yourself. The hangman has a rope for such as you.'

'Then you must drag me thither,' he groaned, and shut his eyes as though with faintness, and doubtless he was somewhat faint.

Now as I pondered on what should be done with the villain, it chanced that I looked up through a gap in the fence, and there, among the Grubswell Oaks three hundred yards or more away, I caught sight of the flutter of a white robe that I knew well, and it seemed to me that the wearer of that robe was moving towards the bridge of the 'watering' as though she were weary of waiting for one who did not come.

Then I thought to myself that if I stayed to drag this man to the village stocks or some other safe place, there would be an end of meeting with my love that day, and I did not know when I might find another chance. Now I would not have missed that hour's talk with Lily to bring a score of murderous-minded foreigners to their deserts, and, moreover, this one had earned good payment for his behaviour. Surely thought I, he might wait a while till I had done my love-making, and if he would not wait I could find a means to make him do so. Not twenty paces from us the horse stood cropping the grass. I went to him and undid his bridle rein, and with it fastened the Spaniard to a small wayside tree as best I was able.

'Now, here you stay,' I said, 'till I am ready to fetch you;' and I turned to go.

But as I went a great doubt took me, and once more I remembered my mother's fear, and how my father had ridden in haste to Yarmouth on business about a Spaniard. Now to-day a Spaniard had wandered to Ditchingham, and when he learned my name had fallen upon me madly trying to kill me. Was not this the man whom my mother feared, and was it right that I should leave him thus that I might go maying with my dear? I knew in my breast that it was not right, but I was so set upon my desire and so strongly did my heartstrings pull me towards her whose white robe now fluttered on the slope of the Park Hill, that I never heeded the warning.

Well had it been for me if I had done so, and well for some who were yet unborn. Then they had never known death, nor I the land of exile, the taste of slavery, and the altar of sacrifice.