

VIII. ANNE MAKES A CIRCUIT OF THE CAMP

When Anne was crossing the last field, she saw approaching her an old woman with wrinkled cheeks, who surveyed the earth and its inhabitants through the medium of brass-rimmed spectacles. Shaking her head at Anne till the glasses shone like two moons, she said, 'Ah, ah; I zeed ye! If I had only kept on my short ones that I use for reading the Collect and Gospel I shouldn't have zeed ye; but thinks I, I be going out o' doors, and I'll put on my long ones, little thinking what they'd show me. Ay, I can tell folk at any distance with these--'tis a beautiful pair for out o' doors; though my short ones be best for close work, such as darning, and catching fleas, that's true.'

'What have you seen, Granny Seamore?' said Anne.

'Fie, fie, Miss Nancy! you know,' said Granny Seamore, shaking her head still. 'But he's a fine young feller, and will have all his uncle's money when 'a's gone.' Anne said nothing to this, and looking ahead with a smile passed Granny Seamore by.

Festus, the subject of the remark, was at this time about three-and-twenty, a fine fellow as to feet and inches, and of a remarkably warm tone in skin and hair. Symptoms of beard and whiskers had appeared upon him at a very early age, owing to his persistent use of the razor before there was any necessity for its operation. The brave

boy had scraped unseen in the out-house, in the cellar, in the wood-shed, in the stable, in the unused parlour, in the cow-stalls, in the barn, and wherever he could set up his triangular bit of looking-glass without observation, or extemporize a mirror by sticking up his hat on the outside of a window-pane. The result now was that, did he neglect to use the instrument he once had trifled with, a fine rust broke out upon his countenance on the first day, a golden lichen on the second, and a fiery stubble on the third to a degree which admitted of no further postponement.

His disposition divided naturally into two, the boastful and the cantankerous. When Festus put on the big pot, as it is classically called, he was quite blinded ipso facto to the diverting effect of that mood and manner upon others; but when disposed to be envious or quarrelsome he was rather shrewd than otherwise, and could do some pretty strokes of satire. He was both liked and abused by the girls who knew him, and though they were pleased by his attentions, they never failed to ridicule him behind his back. In his cups (he knew those vessels, though only twenty-three) he first became noisy, then excessively friendly, and then invariably nagging. During childhood he had made himself renowned for his pleasant habit of pouncing down upon boys smaller and poorer than himself, and knocking their birds' nests out of their hands, or overturning their little carts of apples, or pouring water down their backs; but his conduct became singularly the reverse of aggressive the moment the little boys' mothers ran out to him, brandishing brooms,

frying-pans, skimmers, and whatever else they could lay hands on by way of weapons. He then fled and hid behind bushes, under faggots, or in pits till they had gone away; and on one such occasion was known to creep into a badger's hole quite out of sight, maintaining that post with great firmness and resolution for two or three hours. He had brought more vulgar exclamations upon the tongues of respectable parents in his native parish than any other boy of his time. When other youngsters snowballed him he ran into a place of shelter, where he kneaded snowballs of his own, with a stone inside, and used these formidable missiles in returning their pleasantry. Sometimes he got fearfully beaten by boys his own age, when he would roar most lustily, but fight on in the midst of his tears, blood, and cries.

He was early in love, and had at the time of the story suffered from the ravages of that passion thirteen distinct times. He could not love lightly and gaily; his love was earnest, cross-tempered, and even savage. It was a positive agony to him to be ridiculed by the object of his affections, and such conduct drove him into a frenzy if persisted in. He was a torment to those who behaved humbly towards him, cynical with those who denied his superiority, and a very nice fellow towards those who had the courage to ill-use him.

This stalwart gentleman and Anne Garland did not cross each other's paths again for a week. Then her mother began as before about the newspaper, and, though Anne did not much like the errand, she agreed to go for it on

Mrs. Garland pressing her with unusual anxiety. Why her mother was so persistent on so small a matter quite puzzled the girl; but she put on her hat and started.

As she had expected, Festus appeared at a stile over which she sometimes went for shortness' sake, and showed by his manner that he awaited her. When she saw this she kept straight on, as if she would not enter the park at all.

'Surely this is your way?' said Festus.

'I was thinking of going round by the road,' she said.

'Why is that?'

She paused, as if she were not inclined to say. 'I go that way when the grass is wet,' she returned at last.

'It is not wet now,' he persisted; 'the sun has been shining on it these nine hours.' The fact was that the way by the path was less open than by the road, and Festus wished to walk with her uninterrupted. 'But, of course, it is nothing to me what you do.' He flung himself from the stile and walked away towards the house.

Anne, supposing him really indifferent, took the same way, upon which he turned his head and waited for her with a proud smile.

'I cannot go with you,' she said decisively.

'Nonsense, you foolish girl! I must walk along with you down to the corner.'

'No, please, Mr. Derriman; we might be seen.'

'Now, now--that's shyness!' he said jocosely.

'No; you know I cannot let you.'

'But I must.'

'But I do not allow it.'

'Allow it or not, I will.'

'Then you are unkind, and I must submit,' she said, her eyes brimming with tears.

'Ho, ho; what a shame of me! My wig, I won't do any such thing for the world,' said the repentant yeoman. 'Haw, haw; why, I thought your "go away" meant "come on," as it does with so many of the women I meet, especially in these clothes. Who was to know you were so confoundedly serious?'

As he did not go Anne stood still and said nothing.

'I see you have a deal more caution and a deal less good-nature than I ever thought you had,' he continued emphatically.

'No, sir; it is not any planned manner of mine at all,' she said earnestly. 'But you will see, I am sure, that I could not go down to the hall with you without putting myself in a wrong light.'

'Yes; that's it, that's it. I am only a fellow in the yeomanry cavalry--a plain soldier, I may say; and we know what women think of such: that they are a bad lot--men you mustn't speak to for fear of losing your character--chaps you avoid in the roads--chaps that come into a house like oxen, daub the stairs wi' their boots, stain the furniture wi' their drink, talk rubbish to the servants, abuse all that's holy and righteous, and are only saved from being carried off by Old Nick because they are wanted for Boney.'

'Indeed, I didn't know you were thought so bad of as that,' said she simply.

'What! don't my uncle complain to you of me? You are a favourite of that handsome, nice old gaffer's, I know.'

'Never.'

'Well, what do we think of our nice trumpet-major, hey?'

Anne closed her mouth up tight, built it up, in fact, to show that no answer was coming to that question.

'O now, come, seriously, Loveday is a good fellow, and so is his father.'

'I don't know.'

'What a close little rogue you are! There is no getting anything out of you. I believe you would say "I don't know," to every mortal question, so very discreet as you are. Upon my heart, there are some women who would say "I don't know," to "Will ye marry me?"'

The brightness upon Anne's cheek and in her eyes during this remark showed that there was a fair quantity of life and warmth beneath the discretion he complained of. Having spoken thus, he drew aside that she might pass, and bowed very low. Anne formally inclined herself and went on.

She had been at vexation point all the time that he was present, from a haunting sense that he would not have spoken to her so freely had she been a young woman with thriving male relatives to keep forward admirers in check. But she had been struck, now as at their previous meeting, with the power she possessed of working him up either to irritation or to

complacency at will; and this consciousness of being able to play upon him as upon an instrument disposed her to a humorous considerateness, and made her tolerate even while she rebuffed him.

When Anne got to the hall the farmer, as usual, insisted upon her reading what he had been unable to get through, and held the paper tightly in his skinny hand till she had agreed. He sent her to a hard chair that she could not possibly injure to the extent of a pennyworth by sitting in it a twelvemonth, and watched her from the outer angle of his near eye while she bent over the paper. His look might have been suggested by the sight that he had witnessed from his window on the last occasion of her visit, for it partook of the nature of concern. The old man was afraid of his nephew, physically and morally, and he began to regard Anne as a fellow-sufferer under the same despot. After this sly and curious gaze at her he withdrew his eye again, so that when she casually lifted her own there was nothing visible but his keen bluish profile as before.

When the reading was about half-way through, the door behind them opened, and footsteps crossed the threshold. The farmer diminished perceptibly in his chair, and looked fearful, but pretended to be absorbed in the reading, and quite unconscious of an intruder. Anne felt the presence of the swashing Festus, and stopped her reading.

'Please go on, Miss Anne,' he said, 'I am not going to speak a word.' He withdrew to the mantelpiece and leaned against it at his ease.

'Go on, do ye, maidy Anne,' said Uncle Benjy, keeping down his tremblings by a great effort to half their natural extent.

Anne's voice became much lower now that there were two listeners, and her modesty shrank somewhat from exposing to Festus the appreciative modulations which an intelligent interest in the subject drew from her when unembarrassed. But she still went on that he might not suppose her to be disconcerted, though the ensuing ten minutes was one of disquietude. She knew that the bothering yeoman's eyes were travelling over her from his position behind, creeping over her shoulders, up to her head, and across her arms and hands. Old Benjy on his part knew the same thing, and after sundry endeavours to peep at his nephew from the corner of his eye, he could bear the situation no longer.

'Do ye want to say anything to me, nephew?' he quaked.

'No, uncle, thank ye,' said Festus heartily. 'I like to stay here, thinking of you and looking at your back hair.'

The nervous old man writhed under this vivisection, and Anne read on; till, to the relief of both, the gallant fellow grew tired of his amusement and went out of the room. Anne soon finished her paragraph and rose to go, determined never to come again as long as Festus haunted the precincts. Her face grew warmer as she thought that he would be sure to

waylay her on her journey home to-day.

On this account, when she left the house, instead of going in the customary direction, she bolted round to the further side, through the bushes, along under the kitchen-garden wall, and through a door leading into a rutted cart-track, which had been a pleasant gravelled drive when the fine old hall was in its prosperity. Once out of sight of the windows she ran with all her might till she had quitted the park by a route directly opposite to that towards her home. Why she was so seriously bent upon doing this she could hardly tell but the instinct to run was irresistible.

It was necessary now to clamber over the down to the left of the camp, and make a complete circuit round the latter--infantry, cavalry, sutlers, and all--descending to her house on the other side. This tremendous walk she performed at a rapid rate, never once turning her head, and avoiding every beaten track to keep clear of the knots of soldiers taking a walk. When she at last got down to the levels again she paused to fetch breath, and murmured, 'Why did I take so much trouble? He would not, after all, have hurt me.'

As she neared the mill an erect figure with a blue body and white thighs descended before her from the down towards the village, and went past the mill to a stile beyond, over which she usually returned to her house. Here he lingered. On coming nearer Anne discovered this person to be Trumpet-major Loveday; and not wishing to meet anybody just now Anne

passed quickly on, and entered the house by the garden door.

'My dear Anne, what a time you have been gone!' said her mother.

'Yes, I have been round by another road.'

'Why did you do that?'

Anne looked thoughtful and reticent, for her reason was almost too silly a one to confess. 'Well, I wanted to avoid a person who is very busy trying to meet me--that's all,' she said.

Her mother glanced out of the window. 'And there he is, I suppose,' she said, as John Loveday, tired of looking for Anne at the stile, passed the house on his way to his father's door. He could not help casting his eyes towards their window, and, seeing them, he smiled.

Anne's reluctance to mention Festus was such that she did not correct her mother's error, and the dame went on: 'Well, you are quite right, my dear. Be friendly with him, but no more at present. I have heard of your other affair, and think it is a very wise choice. I am sure you have my best wishes in it, and I only hope it will come to a point.'

'What's that?' said the astonished Anne.

'You and Mr. Festus Derriman, dear. You need not mind me; I have known

it for several days. Old Granny Seamore called here Saturday, and told me she saw him coming home with you across Park Close last week, when you went for the newspaper; so I thought I'd send you again to-day, and give you another chance.'

'Then you didn't want the paper--and it was only for that!'

'He's a very fine young fellow; he looks a thorough woman's protector.'

'He may look it,' said Anne.

'He has given up the freehold farm his father held at Pitstock, and lives in independence on what the land brings him. And when Farmer Derriman dies, he'll have all the old man's, for certain. He'll be worth ten thousand pounds, if a penny, in money, besides sixteen horses, cart and hack, a fifty-cow dairy, and at least five hundred sheep.'

Anne turned away, and instead of informing her mother that she had been running like a doe to escape the interesting heir-presumptive alluded to, merely said 'Mother, I don't like this at all.'