## IX. ANNE IS KINDLY FETCHED BY THE TRUMPET-MAJOR

After this, Anne would on no account walk in the direction of the hall for fear of another encounter with young Derriman. In the course of a few days it was told in the village that the old farmer had actually gone for a week's holiday and change of air to the Royal watering-place near at hand, at the instance of his nephew Festus. This was a wonderful thing to hear of Uncle Benjy, who had not slept outside the walls of Oxwell Hall for many a long year before; and Anne well imagined what extraordinary pressure must have been put upon him to induce him to take such a step. She pictured his unhappiness at the bustling watering-place, and hoped no harm would come to him.

She spent much of her time indoors or in the garden, hearing little of the camp movements beyond the periodical Ta-ta-ta-taa of the trumpeters sounding their various ingenious calls for watch-setting, stables, feed, boot-and-saddle, parade, and so on, which made her think how clever her friend the trumpet-major must be to teach his pupils to play those pretty little tunes so well.

On the third morning after Uncle Benjy's departure, she was disturbed as usual while dressing by the tramp of the troops down the slope to the mill-pond, and during the now familiar stamping and splashing which followed there sounded upon the glass of the window a slight smack, which might have been caused by a whip or switch. She listened more

particularly, and it was repeated.

As John Loveday was the only dragoon likely to be aware that she slept in that particular apartment, she imagined the signal to come from him, though wondering that he should venture upon such a freak of familiarity.

Wrapping herself up in a red cloak, she went to the window, gently drew up a corner of the curtain, and peeped out, as she had done many times before. Nobody who was not quite close beneath her window could see her face; but as it happened, somebody was close. The soldiers whose floundering Anne had heard were not Loveday's dragoons, but a troop of the York Hussars, quite oblivious of her existence. They had passed on out of the water, and instead of them there sat Festus Derriman alone on his horse, and in plain clothes, the water reaching up to the animal's belly, and Festus' heels elevated over the saddle to keep them out of the stream, which threatened to wash rider and horse into the deep mill-head just below. It was plainly he who had struck her lattice, for in a moment he looked up, and their eyes met. Festus laughed loudly, and slapped her window again; and just at that moment the dragoons began prancing down the slope in review order. She could not but wait a minute or two to see them pass. While doing so she was suddenly led to draw back, drop the corner of the curtain, and blush privately in her room. She had not only been seen by Festus Derriman, but by John Loveday, who, riding along with his trumpet slung up behind him, had looked over his shoulder at the phenomenon of Derriman beneath Anne's bedroom window and

seemed quite astounded at the sight.

She was quite vexed at the conjunction of incidents, and went no more to the window till the dragoons had ridden far away and she had heard Festus's horse laboriously wade on to dry land. When she looked out there was nobody left but Miller Loveday, who usually stood in the garden at this time of the morning to say a word or two to the soldiers, of whom he already knew so many, and was in a fair way of knowing many more, from
the liberality with which he handed round mugs of cheering liquor whenever parties of them walked that way.

In the afternoon of this day Anne walked to a christening party at a neighbour's in the adjoining parish of Springham, intending to walk home again before it got dark; but there was a slight fall of rain towards evening, and she was pressed by the people of the house to stay over the night. With some hesitation she accepted their hospitality; but at ten o'clock, when they were thinking of going to bed, they were startled by a smart rap at the door, and on it being unbolted a man's form was seen in the shadows outside.

'Is Miss Garland here?' the visitor inquired, at which Anne suspended her breath.

'Yes,' said Anne's entertainer, warily.

'Her mother is very anxious to know what's become of her. She promised to come home.' To her great relief Anne recognized the voice as John Loveday's, and not Festus Derriman's.

'Yes, I did, Mr. Loveday,' said she, coming forward; 'but it rained, and I thought my mother would guess where I was.'

Loveday said with diffidence that it had not rained anything to speak of at the camp, or at the mill, so that her mother was rather alarmed.

'And she asked you to come for me?' Anne inquired.

This was a question which the trumpet-major had been dreading during the whole of his walk thither. 'Well, she didn't exactly ask me,' he said rather lamely, but still in a manner to show that Mrs. Garland had indirectly signified such to be her wish. In reality Mrs. Garland had not addressed him at all on the subject. She had merely spoken to his father on finding that her daughter did not return, and received an assurance from the miller that the precious girl was doubtless quite safe. John heard of this inquiry, and, having a pass that evening, resolved to relieve Mrs. Garland's mind on his own responsibility. Ever since his morning view of Festus under her window he had been on thorns of anxiety, and his thrilling hope now was that she would walk back with him.

He shifted his foot nervously as he made the bold request. Anne felt at

once that she would go. There was nobody in the world whose care she would more readily be under than the trumpet-major's in a case like the present. He was their nearest neighbour's son, and she had liked his single-minded ingenuousness from the first moment of his return home.

When they had started on their walk, Anne said in a practical way, to show that there was no sentiment whatever in her acceptance of his company, 'Mother was much alarmed about me, perhaps?'

'Yes; she was uneasy,' he said; and then was compelled by conscience to make a clean breast of it. 'I know she was uneasy, because my father said so. But I did not see her myself. The truth is, she doesn't know I am come.'

Anne now saw how the matter stood; but she was not offended with him. What woman could have been? They walked on in silence, the respectful trumpet-major keeping a yard off on her right as precisely as if that measure had been fixed between them. She had a great feeling of civility toward him this evening, and spoke again. 'I often hear your trumpeters blowing the calls. They do it beautifully, I think.'

'Pretty fair; they might do better,' said he, as one too well-mannered to make much of an accomplishment in which he had a hand.

'And you taught them how to do it?'

'Yes, I taught them.'

'It must require wonderful practice to get them into the way of beginning and finishing so exactly at one time. It is like one throat doing it all. How came you to be a trumpeter, Mr. Loveday?'

'Well, I took to it naturally when I was a little boy,' said he, betrayed into quite a gushing state by her delightful interest. 'I used to make trumpets of paper, eldersticks, eltrot stems, and even stinging-nettle stalks, you know. Then father set me to keep the birds off that little barley-ground of his, and gave me an old horn to frighten 'em with. I learnt to blow that horn so that you could hear me for miles and miles. Then he bought me a clarionet, and when I could play that I borrowed a serpent, and I learned to play a tolerable bass. So when I 'listed I was picked out for training as trumpeter at once.'

'Of course you were.'

'Sometimes, however, I wish I had never joined the army. My father gave me a very fair education, and your father showed me how to draw horses--on a slate, I mean. Yes, I ought to have done more than I have.'

'What, did you know my father?' she asked with new interest.

'O yes, for years. You were a little mite of a thing then; and you used

to cry when we big boys looked at you, and made pig's eyes at you, which we did sometimes. Many and many a time have I stood by your poor father while he worked. Ah, you don't remember much about him; but I do!'

Anne remained thoughtful; and the moon broke from behind the clouds, lighting up the wet foliage with a twinkling brightness, and lending to each of the trumpet-major's buttons and spurs a little ray of its own. They had come to Oxwell park gate, and he said, 'Do you like going across, or round by the lane?'

'We may as well go by the nearest road,' said Anne.

They entered the park, following the half-obliterated drive till they came almost opposite the hall, when they entered a footpath leading on to the village. While hereabout they heard a shout, or chorus of exclamation, apparently from within the walls of the dark buildings near them.

'What was that?' said Anne.

'I don't know,' said her companion. 'I'll go and see.'

He went round the intervening swamp of watercress and brooklime which had
once been the fish-pond, crossed by a culvert the trickling brook that still flowed that way, and advanced to the wall of the house. Boisterous

noises were resounding from within, and he was tempted to go round the corner, where the low windows were, and look through a chink into the room whence the sounds proceeded.

It was the room in which the owner dined--traditionally called the great parlour--and within it sat about a dozen young men of the yeomanry cavalry, one of them being Festus. They were drinking, laughing, singing, thumping their fists on the tables, and enjoying themselves in the very perfection of confusion. The candles, blown by the breeze from the partly opened window, had guttered into coffin handles and shrouds, and, choked by their long black wicks for want of snuffing, gave out a smoky yellow light. One of the young men might possibly have been in a maudlin state, for he had his arm round the neck of his next neighbour. Another was making an incoherent speech to which nobody was listening. Some of their faces were red, some were sallow; some were sleepy, some wide awake. The only one among them who appeared in his usual frame of mind was Festus, whose huge, burly form rose at the head of the table, enjoying with a serene and triumphant aspect the difference between his own condition and that of his neighbours. While the trumpet-major looked, a young woman, niece of Anthony Cripplestraw, and one of Uncle Benjy's servants, was called in by one of the crew, and much against her will a fiddle was placed in her hands, from which they made her produce discordant screeches.

The absence of Uncle Benjy had, in fact, been contrived by young Derriman that he might make use of the hall on his own account. Cripplestraw had

been left in charge, and Festus had found no difficulty in forcing from that dependent the keys of whatever he required. John Loveday turned his eyes from the scene to the neighbouring moonlit path, where Anne still stood waiting. Then he looked into the room, then at Anne again. It was an opportunity of advancing his own cause with her by exposing Festus, for whom he began to entertain hostile feelings of no mean force.

'No; I can't do it,' he said. ''Tis underhand. Let things take their chance.'

He moved away, and then perceived that Anne, tired of waiting, had crossed the stream, and almost come up with him.

'What is the noise about?' she said.

'There's company in the house,' said Loveday.

'Company? Farmer Derriman is not at home,' said Anne, and went on to the window whence the rays of light leaked out, the trumpet-major standing where he was. He saw her face enter the beam of candlelight, stay there for a moment, and quickly withdraw. She came back to him at once. 'Let us go on,' she said.

Loveday imagined from her tone that she must have an interest in Derriman, and said sadly, 'You blame me for going across to the window, and leading you to follow me.'

'Not a bit,' said Anne, seeing his mistake as to the state of her heart, and being rather angry with him for it. 'I think it was most natural, considering the noise.'

Silence again. 'Derriman is sober as a judge,' said Loveday, as they turned to go. 'It was only the others who were noisy.'

'Whether he is sober or not is nothing whatever to me,' said Anne.

'Of course not. I know it,' said the trumpet-major, in accents expressing unhappiness at her somewhat curt tone, and some doubt of her assurance.

Before they had emerged from the shadow of the hall some persons were seen moving along the road. Loveday was for going on just the same; but Anne, from a shy feeling that it was as well not to be seen walking alone with a man who was not her lover, said--

'Mr. Loveday, let us wait here a minute till they have passed.'

On nearer view the group was seen to comprise a man on a piebald horse, and another man walking beside him. When they were opposite the house they halted, and the rider dismounted, whereupon a dispute between him and the other man ensued, apparently on a question of money.

''Tis old Mr. Derriman come home!' said Anne. 'He has hired that horse from the bathing-machine to bring him. Only fancy!'

Before they had gone many steps further the farmer and his companion had ended their dispute, and the latter mounted the horse and cantered away, Uncle Benjy coming on to the house at a nimble pace. As soon as he observed Loveday and Anne, he fell into a feebler gait; when they came up he recognized Anne.

'And you have torn yourself away from King George's Esplanade so soon, Farmer Derriman?' said she.

'Yes, faith! I couldn't bide at such a ruination place,' said the farmer. 'Your hand in your pocket every minute of the day. 'Tis a shilling for this, half-a-crown for that; if you only eat one egg, or even a poor windfall of an apple, you've got to pay; and a bunch o' radishes is a halfpenny, and a quart o' cider a good tuppence three-farthings at lowest reckoning. Nothing without paying! I couldn't even get a ride homeward upon that screw without the man wanting a shilling for it, when my weight didn't take a penny out of the beast. I've saved a penn'orth or so of shoeleather to be sure; but the saddle was so rough wi' patches that 'a took twopence out of the seat of my best breeches. King George hev' ruined the town for other folks. More than that, my nephew promised to come there to-morrow to see me, and if I had stayed I must have treated en. Hey--what's that?'

It was a shout from within the walls of the building, and Loveday said--

'Your nephew is here, and has company.'

'My nephew here?' gasped the old man. 'Good folks, will you come up to the door with me? I mean--hee--hee--just for company! Dear me, I thought my house was as quiet as a church?'

They went back to the window, and the farmer looked in, his mouth falling apart to a greater width at the corners than in the middle, and his fingers assuming a state of radiation.

''Tis my best silver tankards they've got, that I've never used! O! 'tis my strong beer! 'Tis eight candles guttering away, when I've used nothing but twenties myself for the last half-year!'

'You didn't know he was here, then?' said Loveday.

'O no!' said the farmer, shaking his head half-way. 'Nothing's known to poor I! There's my best rummers jingling as careless as if 'twas tin cups; and my table scratched, and my chairs wrenched out of joint. See how they tilt 'em on the two back legs--and that's ruin to a chair! Ah! when I be gone he won't find another old man to make such work with, and provide goods for his breaking, and house-room and drink for his tear-brass set!'

'Comrades and fellow-soldiers,' said Festus to the hot farmers and yeomen he entertained within, 'as we have vowed to brave danger and death together, so we'll share the couch of peace. You shall sleep here to-night, for it is getting late. My scram blue-vinnied gallicrow of an uncle takes care that there shan't be much comfort in the house, but you can curl up on the furniture if beds run short. As for my sleep, it won't be much. I'm melancholy! A woman has, I may say, got my heart in her pocket, and I have hers in mine. She's not much--to other folk, I mean--but she is to me. The little thing came in my way, and conquered me. I fancy that simple girl! I ought to have looked higher--I know it; what of that? 'Tis a fate that may happen to the greatest men.'

'Whash her name?' said one of the warriors, whose head occasionally drooped upon his epaulettes, and whose eyes fell together in the casual manner characteristic of the tired soldier. (It was really Farmer Stubb, of Duddle Hole.)

'Her name? Well, 'tis spelt, A, N--but, by gad, I won't give ye her name here in company. She don't live a hundred miles off, however, and she wears the prettiest cap-ribbons you ever saw. Well, well, 'tis weakness! She has little, and I have much; but I do adore that girl, in spite of myself!'

'Let's go on,' said Anne.

'Prithee stand by an old man till he's got into his house!' implored

Uncle Benjy. 'I only ask ye to bide within call. Stand back under the trees, and I'll do my poor best to give no trouble.'

'I'll stand by you for half-an-hour, sir,' said Loveday. 'After that I must bolt to camp.'

'Very well; bide back there under the trees,' said Uncle Benjy. 'I don't want to spite 'em?'

'You'll wait a few minutes, just to see if he gets in?' said the trumpet-major to Anne as they retired from the old man.

'I want to get home,' said Anne anxiously.

When they had quite receded behind the tree-trunks and he stood alone, Uncle Benjy, to their surprise, set up a loud shout, altogether beyond the imagined power of his lungs.

'Man a-lost! man a-lost!' he cried, repeating the exclamation several times; and then ran and hid himself behind a corner of the building. Soon the door opened, and Festus and his guests came tumbling out upon the green.

''Tis our duty to help folks in distress,' said Festus. 'Man a-lost, where are you?'

''Twas across there,' said one of his friends.

'No! 'twas here,' said another.

Meanwhile Uncle Benjy, coming from his hiding-place, had scampered with the quickness of a boy up to the door they had quitted, and slipped in. In a moment the door flew together, and Anne heard him bolting and barring it inside. The revellers, however, did not notice this, and came on towards the spot where the trumpet-major and Anne were standing.

'Here's succour at hand, friends,' said Festus. 'We are all king's men; do not fear us.'

'Thank you,' said Loveday; 'so are we.' He explained in two words that they were not the distressed traveller who had cried out, and turned to go on.

''Tis she! my life, 'tis she said Festus, now first recognizing Anne. 'Fair Anne, I will not part from you till I see you safe at your own dear door.'

'She's in my hands,' said Loveday civilly, though not without firmness, 'so it is not required, thank you.'

'Man, had I but my sword--'

'Come,' said Loveday, 'I don't want to quarrel. Let's put it to her. Whichever of us she likes best, he shall take her home. Miss Anne, which?'

Anne would much rather have gone home alone, but seeing the remainder of the yeomanry party staggering up she thought it best to secure a protector of some kind. How to choose one without offending the other and provoking a quarrel was the difficulty.

'You must both walk home with me,' she adroitly said, 'one on one side, and one on the other. And if you are not quite civil to one another all the time, I'll never speak to either of you again.'

They agreed to the terms, and the other yeomen arriving at this time said they would go also as rearguard.

'Very well,' said Anne. 'Now go and get your hats, and don't be long.'

'Ah, yes; our hats,' said the yeomanry, whose heads were so hot that they had forgotten their nakedness till then.

'You'll wait till we've got 'em--we won't be a moment,' said Festus eagerly.

Anne and Loveday said yes, and Festus ran back to the house, followed by all his band.

'Now let's run and leave 'em,' said Anne, when they were out of hearing.

'But we've promised to wait!' said the trumpet-major in surprise.

'Promised to wait!' said Anne indignantly. 'As if one ought to keep such a promise to drunken men as that. You can do as you like, I shall go.'

'It is hardly fair to leave the chaps,' said Loveday reluctantly, and looking back at them. But she heard no more, and flitting off under the trees, was soon lost to his sight.

Festus and the rest had by this time reached Uncle Benjy's door, which they were discomfited and astonished to find closed. They began to knock, and then to kick at the venerable timber, till the old man's head, crowned with a tasselled nightcap, appeared at an upper window, followed by his shoulders, with apparently nothing on but his shirt, though it was in truth a sheet thrown over his coat.

'Fie, fie upon ye all for making such a hullaballoo at a weak old man's door,' he said, yawning. 'What's in ye to rouse honest folks at this time o' night?'

'Hang me--why--it's Uncle Benjy! Haw--haw--haw?' said Festus. 'Nunc, why how the devil's this? 'Tis I--Festus--wanting to come in.'

'O no, no, my clever man, whoever you be!' said Uncle Benjy in a tone of incredulous integrity. 'My nephew, dear boy, is miles away at quarters, and sound asleep by this time, as becomes a good soldier. That story won't do to-night, my man, not at all.'

'Upon my soul 'tis I,' said Festus.

'Not to-night, my man; not to-night! Anthony, bring my blunderbuss,' said the farmer, turning and addressing nobody inside the room.

'Let's break in the window-shutters,' said one of the others.

'My wig, and we will!' said Festus. 'What a trick of the old man!'

'Get some big stones,' said the yeomen, searching under the wall.

'No; forbear, forbear,' said Festus, beginning to be frightened at the spirit he had raised. 'I forget; we should drive him into fits, for he's subject to 'em, and then perhaps 'twould be manslaughter. Comrades, we must march! No, we'll lie in the barn. I'll see into this, take my word for 't. Our honour is at stake. Now let's back to see my beauty home.'

'We can't, as we hav'n't got our hats,' said one of his fellow-troopers--in domestic life Jacob Noakes, of Muckleford Farm.

'No more we can,' said Festus, in a melancholy tone. 'But I must go to

her and tell her the reason.  She pulls me in spite of all.'

'She's gone.  I saw her flee across park while we were knocking at the door,' said another of the yeomanry.

'Gone!' said Festus, grinding his teeth and putting himself into a rigid shape.  'Then 'tis my enemy--he has tempted her away with him!  But I am a rich man, and he's poor, and rides the King's horse while I ride my own.  Could I but find that fellow, that regular, that common man, I would--'

'Yes?' said the trumpet-major, coming up behind him.

'I,'--said Festus, starting round,--'I would seize him by the hand and say, "Guard her; if you are my friend, guard her from all harm!"'

'A good speech.  And I will, too,' said Loveday heartily.

'And now for shelter,' said Festus to his companions.

They then unceremoniously left Loveday, without wishing him good-night, and proceeded towards the barn.  He crossed the park and ascended the down to the camp, grieved that he had given Anne cause of complaint, and fancying that she held him of slight account beside his wealthier rival.