

'O yes,' said Captain Bob cheerfully, and passed out of the garden.

John allowed his eyes to follow his brother till his shape could not be seen, and then he turned and again walked up and down.

XVIII. THE NIGHT AFTER THE ARRIVAL

John continued his sad and heavy pace till walking seemed too old and worn-out a way of showing sorrow so new, and he leant himself against the fork of an apple-tree like a log. There the trumpet-major remained for a considerable time, his face turned towards the house, whose ancient, many-chimneyed outline rose against the darkened sky, and just shut out from his view the camp above. But faint noises coming thence from horses restless at the pickets, and from visitors taking their leave, recalled its existence, and reminded him that, in consequence of Matilda's arrival, he had obtained leave for the night--a fact which, owing to the startling emotions that followed his entry, he had not yet mentioned to his friends.

While abstractedly considering how he could best use that privilege under

the new circumstances which had arisen, he heard Farmer Derriman drive up

to the front door and hold a conversation with his father. The old man had at last apparently brought the tin box of private papers that he wished the miller to take charge of during Derriman's absence; and it being a calm night, John could hear, though he little heeded, Uncle Benjy's reiterated supplications to Loveday to keep it safe from fire and thieves. Then Uncle Benjy left, and John's father went upstairs to deposit the box in a place of security, the whole proceeding reaching John's preoccupied comprehension merely as voices during sleep.

The next thing was the appearance of a light in the bedroom which had been assigned to Matilda Johnson. This effectually aroused the trumpet-major, and with a stealthiness unusual in him he went indoors. No light was in the lower rooms, his father, Mrs. Garland, and Anne having gone out on the bridge to look at the new moon. John went upstairs on tip-toe, and along the uneven passage till he came to her door. It was standing ajar, a band of candlelight shining across the passage and up the opposite wall. As soon as he entered the radiance he saw her. She was standing before the looking-glass, apparently lost in thought, her fingers being clasped behind her head in abstraction, and the light falling full upon her face.

'I must speak to you,' said the trumpet-major.

She started, turned and grew paler than before; and then, as if moved by

a sudden impulse, she swung the door wide open, and, coming out, said quite collectedly and with apparent pleasantness, 'O yes; you are my Bob's brother! I didn't, for a moment, recognize you.'

'But you do now?'

'As Bob's brother.'

'You have not seen me before?'

'I have not,' she answered, with a face as impassible as Talleyrand's.

'Good God!'

'I have not!' she repeated.

'Nor any of the --th Dragoons? Captain Jolly, for instance?'

'No.'

'You mistake. I'll remind you of particulars,' he said drily. And he did remind her at some length.

'Never!' she said desperately.

But she had miscalculated her staying powers, and her adversary's

character. Five minutes after that she was in tears, and the conversation had resolved itself into words, which, on the soldier's part, were of the nature of commands, tempered by pity, and were a mere series of entreaties on hers.

The whole scene did not last ten minutes. When it was over, the trumpet-major walked from the doorway where they had been standing, and brushed moisture from his eyes. Reaching a dark lumber-room, he stood still there to calm himself, and then descended by a Flemish-ladder to the bakehouse, instead of by the front stairs. He found that the others, including Bob, had gathered in the parlour during his absence and lighted the candles.

Miss Johnson, having sent down some time before John re-entered the house to say that she would prefer to keep her room that evening, was not expected to join them, and on this account Bob showed less than his customary liveliness. The miller wishing to keep up his son's spirits, expressed his regret that, it being Sunday night, they could have no songs to make the evening cheerful; when Mrs. Garland proposed that they should sing psalms which, by choosing lively tunes and not thinking of the words, would be almost as good as ballads.

This they did, the trumpet-major appearing to join in with the rest; but as a matter of fact no sound came from his moving lips. His mind was in such a state that he derived no pleasure even from Anne Garland's

presence, though he held a corner of the same book with her, and was treated in a winsome way which it was not her usual practice to indulge in. She saw that his mind was clouded, and, far from guessing the reason why, was doing her best to clear it.

At length the Garlands found that it was the hour for them to leave, and John Loveday at the same time wished his father and Bob good-night, and went as far as Mrs. Garland's door with her.

He had said not a word to show that he was free to remain out of camp, for the reason that there was painful work to be done, which it would be best to do in secret and alone. He lingered near the house till its reflected window-lights ceased to glimmer upon the mill-pond, and all within the dwelling was dark and still. Then he entered the garden and waited there till the back door opened, and a woman's figure timorously came forward. John Loveday at once went up to her, and they began to talk in low yet dissentient tones.

They had conversed about ten minutes, and were parting as if they had come to some painful arrangement, Miss Johnson sobbing bitterly, when a head stealthily arose above the dense hedgerow, and in a moment a shout burst from its owner.

'Thieves! thieves!--my tin box!--thieves! thieves!'

Matilda vanished into the house, and John Loveday hastened to the hedge.

'For heaven's sake, hold your tongue, Mr. Derriman!' he exclaimed.

'My tin box!' said Uncle Benjy. 'O, only the trumpet-major!'

'Your box is safe enough, I assure you. It was only'--here the trumpet-major gave vent to an artificial laugh--'only a sly bit of courting, you know.'

'Ha, ha, I see!' said the relieved old squireen. 'Courting Miss Anne! Then you've ousted my nephew, trumpet-major! Well, so much the better. As for myself, the truth on't is that I haven't been able to go to bed easy, for thinking that possibly your father might not take care of what I put under his charge; and at last I thought I would just step over and see if all was safe here before I turned in. And when I saw your two shapes my poor nerves magnified ye to housebreakers, and Boneyes, and I don't know what all.'

'You have alarmed the house,' said the trumpet-major, hearing the clicking of flint and steel in his father's bedroom, followed in a moment by the rise of a light in the window of the same apartment. 'You have got me into difficulty,' he added gloomily, as his father opened the casement.

'I am sorry for that,' said Uncle Benjy. 'But step back; I'll put it all right again.'

'What, for heaven's sake, is the matter?' said the miller, his tasselled nightcap appearing in the opening.

'Nothing, nothing!' said the farmer. 'I was uneasy about my few bonds and documents, and I walked this way, miller, before going to bed, as I start from home to-morrow morning. When I came down by your garden-hedge, I thought I saw thieves, but it turned out to be--to be--'

Here a lump of earth from the trumpet-major's hand struck Uncle Benjy in the back as a reminder.

'To be--the bough of a cherry-tree a-waving in the wind. Good-night.'

'No thieves are like to try my house,' said Miller Loveday. 'Now don't you come alarming us like this again, farmer, or you shall keep your box yourself, begging your pardon for saying so. Good-night t' ye!'

'Miller, will ye just look, since I am here--just look and see if the box is all right? there's a good man! I am old, you know, and my poor remains are not what my original self was. Look and see if it is where you put it, there's a good, kind man.'

'Very well,' said the miller good-humouredly.

'Neighbour Loveday! on second thoughts I will take my box home again, after all, if you don't mind. You won't deem it ill of me? I have no

suspicion, of course; but now I think on't there's rivalry between my nephew and your son; and if Festus should take it into his head to set your house on fire in his enmity, 'twould be bad for my deeds and documents. No offence, miller, but I'll take the box, if you don't mind.'

'Faith! I don't mind,' said Loveday. 'But your nephew had better think twice before he lets his enmity take that colour.' Receding from the window, he took the candle to a back part of the room and soon reappeared with the tin box.

'I won't trouble ye to dress,' said Derriman considerately; 'let en down by anything you have at hand.'

The box was lowered by a cord, and the old man clasped it in his arms.

'Thank ye!' he said with heartfelt gratitude. 'Good-night!'

The miller replied and closed the window, and the light went out.

'There, now I hope you are satisfied, sir?' said the trumpet-major.

'Quite, quite!' said Derriman; and, leaning on his walking-stick, he pursued his lonely way.

That night Anne lay awake in her bed, musing on the traits of the new friend who had come to her neighbour's house. She would not be critical,

it was ungenerous and wrong; but she could not help thinking of what interested her. And were there, she silently asked, in Miss Johnson's mind and person such rare qualities as placed that lady altogether beyond comparison with herself? O yes, there must be; for had not Captain Bob singled out Matilda from among all other women, herself included? Of course, with his world-wide experience, he knew best.

When the moon had set, and only the summer stars threw their light into the great damp garden, she fancied that she heard voices in that direction. Perhaps they were the voices of Bob and Matilda taking a lover's walk before retiring. If so, how sleepy they would be next day, and how absurd it was of Matilda to pretend she was tired! Ruminating in this way, and saying to herself that she hoped they would be happy, Anne fell asleep.