

enclosed field. Back in two minutes, dear!

He ran off, and was lost to her view.

## XXVIII. ANNE DOES WONDERS

Anne fearfully surveyed her position. The upper windows of the cottage were of flimsiest lead-work, and to keep him out would be hopeless. She felt that not a moment was to be lost in getting away. Running downstairs she opened the door, and then it occurred to her terrified understanding that there would be no chance of escaping him by flight afoot across such an extensive down, since he might mount his horse and easily ride after her. The animal still remained tethered at the corner of the garden; if she could release him and frighten him away before Festus returned, there would not be quite such odds against her. She accordingly unhooked the horse by reaching over the bank, and then, pulling off her muslin neckerchief, flapped it in his eyes to startle him. But the gallant steed did not move or flinch; she tried again, and he seemed rather pleased than otherwise. At this moment she heard a cry from the cottage, and turning, beheld her adversary approaching round the corner of the building.

'I thought I should tole out the mouse by that trick!' cried Festus exultingly. Instead of going for a ladder, he had simply hidden himself at the back to tempt her down.

Poor Anne was now desperate. The bank on which she stood was level with the horse's back, and the creature seemed quiet as a lamb. With a determination of which she was capable in emergencies, she seized the rein, flung herself upon the sheepskin, and held on by the mane. The amazed charger lifted his head, sniffed, wrenched his ears hither and thither, and started off at a frightful speed across the down.

'O, my heart and limbs!' said Festus under his breath, as, thoroughly alarmed, he gazed after her. 'She on Champion! She'll break her neck, and I shall be tried for manslaughter, and disgrace will be brought upon the name of Derriman!'

Champion continued to go at a stretch-gallop, but he did nothing worse. Had he plunged or reared, Derriman's fears might have been verified, and Anne have come with deadly force to the ground. But the course was good, and in the horse's speed lay a comparative security. She was scarcely shaken in her precarious half-horizontal position, though she was awed to see the grass, loose stones, and other objects pass her eyes like strokes whenever she opened them, which was only just for a second at intervals of half a minute; and to feel how wildly the stirrups swung, and that what struck her knee was the bucket of the carbine, and that it was a pistol-holster which hurt her arm.

They quickly cleared the down, and Anne became conscious that the course of the horse was homeward. As soon as the ground began to rise towards the outer belt of upland which lay between her and the coast, Champion, now panting and reeking with moisture, lessened his speed in sheer weariness, and proceeded at a rapid jolting trot. Anne felt that she could not hold on half so well; the gallop had been child's play compared with this. They were in a lane, ascending to a ridge, and she made up her mind for a fall. Over the ridge rose an animated spot, higher and higher; it turned out to be the upper part of a man, and the man to be a soldier. Such was Anne's attitude that she only got an occasional glimpse of him; and, though she feared that he might be a Frenchman, she feared the horse more than the enemy, as she had feared Festus more than the horse. Anne had energy enough left to cry, 'Stop him; stop him!' as the soldier drew near.

He, astonished at the sight of a military horse with a bundle of drapery across his back, had already placed himself in the middle of the lane, and he now held out his arms till his figure assumed the form of a Latin cross planted in the roadway. Champion drew near, swerved, and stood still almost suddenly, a check sufficient to send Anne slipping down his flank to the ground. The timely friend stepped forward and helped her to her feet, when she saw that he was John Loveday.

'Are you hurt?' he said hastily, having turned quite pale at seeing her fall.

'O no; not a bit,' said Anne, gathering herself up with forced briskness, to make light of the misadventure.

'But how did you get in such a place?'

'There, he's gone!' she exclaimed, instead of replying, as Champion swept round John Loveday and cantered off triumphantly in the direction of Oxwell, a performance which she followed with her eyes.

'But how did you come upon his back, and whose horse is it?'

'I will tell you.'

'Well?'

'I--cannot tell you.'

John looked steadily at her, saying nothing.

'How did you come here?' she asked. 'Is it true that the French have not landed at all?'

'Quite true; the alarm was groundless. I'll tell you all about it. You look very tired. You had better sit down a few minutes. Let us sit on this bank.'

He helped her to the slope indicated, and continued, still as if his thoughts were more occupied with the mystery of her recent situation than with what he was saying: 'We arrived at Budmouth Barracks this morning, and are to lie there all the summer. I could not write to tell father we were coming. It was not because of any rumour of the French, for we knew nothing of that till we met the people on the road, and the colonel said in a moment the news was false. Buonaparte is not even at Boulogne just now. I was anxious to know how you had borne the fright, so I hastened to Overcombe at once, as soon as I could get out of barracks.'

Anne, who had not been at all responsive to his discourse, now swayed heavily against him, and looking quickly down he found that she had silently fainted. To support her in his arms was of course the impulse of a moment. There was no water to be had, and he could think of nothing else but to hold her tenderly till she came round again. Certainly he desired nothing more.

Again he asked himself, what did it all mean?

He waited, looking down upon her tired eyelids, and at the row of lashes lying upon each cheek, whose natural roundness showed itself in singular perfection now that the customary pink had given place to a pale luminousness caught from the surrounding atmosphere. The dumpy ringlets about her forehead and behind her poll, which were usually as tight as

springs, had been partially uncoiled by the wildness of her ride, and hung in split locks over her forehead and neck. John, who, during the long months of his absence, had lived only to meet her again, was in a state of ecstatic reverence, and bending down he gently kissed her.

Anne was just becoming conscious.

'O, Mr. Derriman, never, never!' she murmured, sweeping her face with her hand.

'I thought he was at the bottom of it,' said John.

Anne opened her eyes, and started back from him. 'What is it?' she said wildly.

'You are ill, my dear Miss Garland,' replied John in trembling anxiety, and taking her hand.

'I am not ill, I am wearied out!' she said. 'Can't we walk on? How far are we from Overcombe?'

'About a mile. But tell me, somebody has been hurting you--frightening you. I know who it was; it was Derriman, and that was his horse. Now do you tell me all.'

Anne reflected. 'Then if I tell you,' she said, 'will you discuss with

me what I had better do, and not for the present let my mother and your father know? I don't want to alarm them, and I must not let my affairs interrupt the business connexion between the mill and the hall that has gone on for so many years.'

The trumpet-major promised, and Anne told the adventure. His brow reddened as she went on, and when she had done she said, 'Now you are angry. Don't do anything dreadful, will you? Remember that this Festus will most likely succeed his uncle at Oxwell, in spite of present appearances, and if Bob succeeds at the mill there should be no enmity between them.'

'That's true. I won't tell Bob. Leave him to me. Where is Derriman now? On his way home, I suppose. When I have seen you into the house I will deal with him--quite quietly, so that he shall say nothing about it.'

'Yes, appeal to him, do! Perhaps he will be better then.'

They walked on together, Loveday seeming to experience much quiet bliss.

'I came to look for you,' he said, 'because of that dear, sweet letter you wrote.'

'Yes, I did write you a letter,' she admitted, with misgiving, now beginning to see her mistake. 'It was because I was sorry I had blamed

you.'

'I am almost glad you did blame me,' said John cheerfully, 'since, if you had not, the letter would not have come. I have read it fifty times a day.'

This put Anne into an unhappy mood, and they proceeded without much further talk till the mill chimneys were visible below them. John then said that he would leave her to go in by herself.

'Ah, you are going back to get into some danger on my account?'

'I can't get into much danger with such a fellow as he, can I?' said John, smiling.

'Well, no,' she answered, with a sudden carelessness of tone. It was indispensable that he should be undeceived, and to begin the process by taking an affectedly light view of his personal risks was perhaps as good a way to do it as any. Where friendliness was construed as love, an assumed indifference was the necessary expression for friendliness.

So she let him go; and, bidding him hasten back as soon as he could, went down the hill, while John's feet retraced the upland.

The trumpet-major spent the whole afternoon and evening in that long and difficult search for Festus Derriman. Crossing the down at the end of



the second hour he met Molly and Mrs. Loveday. The gig had been repaired, they had learnt the groundlessness of the alarm, and they would have been proceeding happily enough but for their anxiety about Anne. John told them shortly that she had got a lift home, and proceeded on his way.

The worthy object of his search had in the meantime been plodding homeward on foot, sulky at the loss of his charger, encumbered with his sword, belts, high boots, and uniform, and in his own discomfiture careless whether Anne Garland's life had been endangered or not.

At length Derriman reached a place where the road ran between high banks, one of which he mounted and paced along as a change from the hard trackway. Ahead of him he saw an old man sitting down, with eyes fixed on the dust of the road, as if resting and meditating at one and the same time. Being pretty sure that he recognized his uncle in that venerable figure, Festus came forward stealthily, till he was immediately above the old man's back. The latter was clothed in faded nankeen breeches, speckled stockings, a drab hat, and a coat which had once been light blue, but from exposure as a scarecrow had assumed the complexion and fibre of a dried pudding-cloth. The farmer was, in fact, returning to the hall, which he had left in the morning some time later than his nephew, to seek an asylum in a hollow tree about two miles off. The tree was so situated as to command a view of the building, and Uncle Benjy had managed to clamber up inside this natural fortification high enough to watch his residence through a hole in the bark, till, gathering from the

words of occasional passers-by that the alarm was at least premature, he had ventured into daylight again.

He was now engaged in abstractedly tracing a diagram in the dust with his walking-stick, and muttered words to himself aloud. Presently he arose and went on his way without turning round. Festus was curious enough to descend and look at the marks. They represented an oblong, with two semi-diagonals, and a little square in the middle. Upon the diagonals were the figures 20 and 17, and on each side of the parallelogram stood a letter signifying the point of the compass.

'What crazy thing is running in his head now?' said Festus to himself, with supercilious pity, recollecting that the farmer had been singing those very numbers earlier in the morning. Being able to make nothing of it, he lengthened his strides, and treading on tiptoe overtook his relative, saluting him by scratching his back like a hen. The startled old farmer danced round like a top, and gasping, said, as he perceived his nephew, 'What, Festy! not thrown from your horse and killed, then, after all!'

'No, nunc. What made ye think that?'

'Champion passed me about an hour ago, when I was in hiding--poor timid soul of me, for I had nothing to lose by the French coming--and he looked awful with the stirrups dangling and the saddle empty. 'Tis a gloomy sight, Festy, to see a horse cantering without a rider, and I thought you

had been--feared you had been thrown off and killed as dead as a nit.'

'Bless your dear old heart for being so anxious! And what pretty picture were you drawing just now with your walking-stick!'

'O, that! That is only a way I have of amusing myself. It showed how the French might have advanced to the attack, you know. Such trifles fill the head of a weak old man like me.'

'Or the place where something is hid away--money, for instance?'

'Festy,' said the farmer reproachfully, 'you always know I use the old glove in the bedroom cupboard for any guinea or two I possess.'

'Of course I do,' said Festus ironically.

They had now reached a lonely inn about a mile and a half from the hall, and, the farmer not responding to his nephew's kind invitation to come in and treat him, Festus entered alone. He was dusty, draggled, and weary, and he remained at the tavern long. The trumpet-major, in the meantime, having searched the roads in vain, heard in the course of the evening of the yeoman's arrival at this place, and that he would probably be found there still. He accordingly approached the door, reaching it just as the dusk of evening changed to darkness.

There was no light in the passage, but John pushed on at hazard, inquired

for Derriman, and was told that he would be found in the back parlour alone. When Loveday first entered the apartment he was unable to see anything, but following the guidance of a vigorous snoring, he came to the settle, upon which Festus lay asleep, his position being faintly signified by the shine of his buttons and other parts of his uniform. John laid his hand upon the reclining figure and shook him, and by degrees Derriman stopped his snore and sat up.

'Who are you?' he said, in the accents of a man who has been drinking hard. 'Is it you, dear Anne? Let me kiss you; yes, I will.'

'Shut your mouth, you pitiful blockhead; I'll teach you genteeler manners than to persecute a young woman in that way!' and taking Festus by the ear, he gave it a good pull. Festus broke out with an oath, and struck a vague blow in the air with his fist; whereupon the trumpet-major dealt him a box on the right ear, and a similar one on the left to artistically balance the first. Festus jumped up and used his fists wildly, but without any definite result.

'Want to fight, do ye, eh?' said John. 'Nonsense! you can't fight, you great baby, and never could. You are only fit to be smacked!' and he dealt Festus a specimen of the same on the cheek with the palm of his hand.

'No, sir, no! O, you are Loveday, the young man she's going to be married to, I suppose? Dash me, I didn't want to hurt her, sir.'

'Yes, my name is Loveday; and you'll know where to find me, since we can't finish this to-night. Pistols or swords, whichever you like, my boy. Take that, and that, so that you may not forget to call upon me!' and again he smacked the yeoman's ears and cheeks. 'Do you know what it is for, eh?'

'No, Mr. Loveday, sir--yes, I mean, I do.'

'What is it for, then? I shall keep smacking until you tell me. Gad! if you weren't drunk, I'd half kill you here to-night.'

'It is because I served her badly. Damned if I care! I'll do it again, and be hanged to 'ee! Where's my horse Champion? Tell me that,' and he hit at the trumpet-major.

John parried this attack, and taking him firmly by the collar, pushed him down into the seat, saying, 'Here I hold 'ee till you beg pardon for your doings to-day. Do you want any more of it, do you?' And he shook the yeoman to a sort of jelly.

'I do beg pardon--no, I don't. I say this, that you shall not take such liberties with old Squire Derriman's nephew, you dirty miller's son, you flour-worm, you smut in the corn! I'll call you out to-morrow morning, and have my revenge.'

'Of course you will; that's what I came for.' And pushing him back into the corner of the settle, Loveday went out of the house, feeling considerable satisfaction at having got himself into the beginning of as nice a quarrel about Anne Garland as the most jealous lover could desire.

But of one feature in this curious adventure he had not the least notion--that Festus Derriman, misled by the darkness, the fumes of his potations, and the constant sight of Anne and Bob together, never once supposed his assailant to be any other man than Bob, believing the trumpet-major miles away.

There was a moon during the early part of John's walk home, but when he had arrived within a mile of Overcombe the sky clouded over, and rain suddenly began to fall with some violence. Near him was a wooden granary on tall stone staddles, and perceiving that the rain was only a thunderstorm which would soon pass away, he ascended the steps and entered the doorway, where he stood watching the half-obscured moon through the streaming rain. Presently, to his surprise, he beheld a female figure running forward with great rapidity, not towards the granary for shelter, but towards open ground. What could she be running for in that direction? The answer came in the appearance of his brother Bob from that quarter, seated on the back of his father's heavy horse. As soon as the woman met him, Bob dismounted and caught her in his arms. They stood locked together, the rain beating into their unconscious forms, and the horse looking on.

The trumpet-major fell back inside the granary, and threw himself on a heap of empty sacks which lay in the corner: he had recognized the woman to be Anne. Here he reclined in a stupor till he was aroused by the sound of voices under him, the voices of Anne and his brother, who, having at last discovered that they were getting wet, had taken shelter under the granary floor.

'I have been home,' said she. 'Mother and Molly have both got back long ago. We were all anxious about you, and I came out to look for you. O, Bob, I am so glad to see you again!'

John might have heard every word of the conversation, which was continued in the same strain for a long time; but he stopped his ears, and would not. Still they remained, and still was he determined that they should not see him. With the conserved hope of more than half a year dashed away in a moment, he could yet feel that the cruelty of a protest would be even greater than its inutility. It was absolutely by his own contrivance that the situation had been shaped. Bob, left to himself, would long ere this have been the husband of another woman.

The rain decreased, and the lovers went on. John looked after them as they strolled, aqua-tinted by the weak moon and mist. Bob had thrust one of his arms through the rein of the horse, and the other was round Anne's waist. When they were lost behind the declivity the trumpet-major came out, and walked homeward even more slowly than they. As he went on, his face put off its complexion of despair for one of serene resolve. For

the first time in his dealings with friends he entered upon a course of counterfeiting, set his features to conceal his thought, and instructed his tongue to do likewise. He threw fictitiousness into his very gait, even now, when there was nobody to see him, and struck at stems of wild parsley with his regimental switch as he had used to do when soldiering was new to him, and life in general a charming experience.

Thus cloaking his sickly thought, he descended to the mill as the others had done before him, occasionally looking down upon the wet road to notice how close Anne's little tracks were to Bob's all the way along, and how precisely a curve in his course was followed by a curve in hers. But after this he erected his head and walked so smartly up to the front door that his spurs rang through the court.

They had all reached home, but before any of them could speak he cried gaily, 'Ah, Bob, I have been thinking of you! By God, how are you, my boy? No French cut-throats after all, you see. Here we are, well and happy together again.'

'A good Providence has watched over us,' said Mrs. Loveday cheerfully.

'Yes, in all times and places we are in God's hand.'

'So we be, so we be!' said the miller, who still shone in all the fierceness of uniform. 'Well, now we'll ha'e a drop o' drink.'

'There's none,' said David, coming forward with a drawn face.



'What!' said the miller.

'Afore I went to church for a pike to defend my native country from Boney, I pulled out the spigots of all the barrels, maister; for, thinks I--damn him!--since we can't drink it ourselves, he shan't have it, nor none of his men.'

'But you shouldn't have done it till you was sure he'd come!' said the miller, aghast.

'Chok' it all, I was sure!' said David. 'I'd sooner see churches fall than good drink wasted; but how was I to know better?'

'Well, well; what with one thing and another this day will cost me a pretty penny!' said Loveday, bustling off to the cellar, which he found to be several inches deep in stagnant liquor. 'John, how can I welcome 'ee?' he continued hopelessly, on his return to the room. 'Only go and see what he's done!'

'I've ladled up a drap wi' a spoon, trumpet-major,' said David. "'Tisn't bad drinking, though it do taste a little of the floor, that's true.'

John said that he did not require anything at all; and then they all sat down to supper, and were very temperately gay with a drop of mild elder-wine which Mrs. Loveday found in the bottom of a jar. The trumpet-major,

adhering to the part he meant to play, gave humorous accounts of his adventures since he had last sat there. He told them that the season was to be a very lively one--that the royal family was coming, as usual, and many other interesting things; so that when he left them to return to barracks few would have supposed the British army to contain a lighter-hearted man.

Anne was the only one who doubted the reality of this behaviour. When she had gone up to her bedroom she stood for some time looking at the wick of the candle as if it were a painful object, the expression of her face being shaped by the conviction that John's afternoon words when he helped her out of the way of Champion were not in accordance with his words to-night, and that the dimly-realized kiss during her faintness was no imaginary one. But in the blissful circumstances of having Bob at hand again she took optimistic views, and persuaded herself that John would soon begin to see her in the light of a sister.