

Hearts Courageous

By... HALLIE ERMINIE RIVES

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She moved her shoulders with a gesture of impatience.

"Why am I doomed to be ever in your bad graces, Mistress Tillotson? Oh, 'tis true. I would it were not! 'Twas so in Williamsburg. Had you a smile for me? 'Twas when I went. Well, I return to the frown."

"I have naught else for you. I have told you so."

"And yet," he said constrainedly, "for another kind of look from you I would forget all else. I would change all, risk all. Can I never win aught from such a love as mine? Will you never tell me how to change myself for you? Shall I go always wanting? A fierce and unhappy passion was written in his face.

She turned from him coldly. "I beg you will not recur to that, captain," she said. "My answer was my answer. I can never give you more."

He touched his breast, drawing his hand across the gold slashes of his coat. "Is it this? Do you frown upon his majesty's uniform? I swear I would I were a Whig!"

"A Tory before a turncoat," she answered him.

Jarrat shut his teeth like a trap. Then without reply he bowed to her and strode toward the ship. Betsy, turning her horse, saw only his vanishing figure, Anne's face a flush red with anger and her eyes gleaming like blue ice.

"Why," exclaimed she in surprise, "'twas Captain Jarrat!"

"I wish," said Anne, with temper, giving Betsy's horse a slap that made him dance and called forth a curdling scream from its rider—"I wish Captain Jarrat was in Guinea!"

As Jarrat stepped on to the deck the gangway was thrown down for the herded human cattle that had thronged the lower deck. Sixty odd, they came trooping out to where the factors were gathered, and the ship's agent at once began the bidding by offering a convict smith bound for seven years and allowed only diet and lodging, who, he declared, made great diversion by singing and whistling, besides being rare at iron work.

The sale proceeded rapidly, for bond servants were in demand and the lot was above an average one. They stood for inspection eagerly or stolidly, as their faces promised, some sullen eyed, some smirking. The women were offered last. But few remained when the agent beckoned to the swarthy skinned woman whose babe had died during the voyage, and she came forward timidly, turning her slob-black Italian eyes upon the crowd in misunderstanding and covering dread. Her hair and the red olive of her skin made a curious contrast to the light complexions of the other women.

Burnaby Rolph, who had purchased two laborers, looked her over with satisfaction.

"A likely wench," he gulped. "Twenty pounds is enough, I doubt not, since she is foreign. I take her. Put that down to my reckoning, Master Clarkson."

"Poor thing!" said Anne. "I would I were a man. That brute should never have her!" She looked up and felt the young Frenchman's eyes full upon her. He had clearly overheard.

"You belong to him now," said the agent to the woman, pointing to Rolph. "D'ye understand?"

She gazed into Rolph's face and shrinkingly about the circle. Then, with a sudden cry, doubling like an animal, she dodged between the knots of spectators and threw herself at Armand's feet.

Rolph's curse was lost in a great laugh which rose from the factors, and Anne's face stung red at a coarse remark from one of them.

M. Armand did not seem displeased. He stooped and lifted the cringing woman to her feet as Rolph approached, his lean eyes winking.

"My wench seems to have an uncommon fancy," the latter sneered. "Call me, why did you not buy her?"

"Will you sell her to me?"

The latter looked at the secretary's dress and glowered at the merriment of the onlookers.

"No," he blurted.

Armand smiled with suavity. "Perhaps it would pleasure you to game with me for her? In my country, gentlemen," he remarked to those around, "we are overfond of the dice table. As for me, I could never resist to woo the hazard of fortune. Mayhap, however, here you are less adventurous, more cautious, monsieur, or, as those who, having little, hesitate to risk."

Rolph grunted at this airy thrust and gnawed his lip. His estate of Bentcliff was the largest on all the James, and this, it was said, he had won in the palace in Williamsburg fifteen years before in a wild night of play with Governor Fauquier's gambling crew.

"I will lay against her," added Armand, "double the amount she cost you. And a toss of a coin shall decide."

The factors gasped and stood looking the speaker over. Rolph stared an instant, then: "Done! Leave the indenture open, Master Clarkson, and bring it here."

A wager in Virginia never failed to provoke interest, whether it was for

walked quickly across the wharf to the spot where Armand stood. He made no movement as she came.

"Monsieur"—She faltered and stopped.

His hat was in his hand instantly, and he was gravely deferential.

"I wish to take back," she went on, "my words of awhile ago. I assure you they were not rudely meant. I—"

He stayed her with a gesture. "What am I that mademoiselle should speak thus? I was brusque, unmannerly."

"No, no!"

"I forgot where I was—forgot that I had not the joy of knowing her—forgot everything but what I saw in her face as she sat in the chariot. For I am a great magician, mademoiselle. I know all who are lovely and gracious of heart."

"I was wrong," she said proudly. "And for this I ask your pardon. May—may I have the bond servant?"

He smiled gayly and bowed low to her. "To be treated with such pleasant surgery all the world would be glad of wounds," he cried. "You recompense me a thousand times!"

He signed to the serving woman who sat stolidly upon a nearby chest and pointed from himself to Anne. She understood, and when Anne put her in charge of John the Baptist to take on ahead a-pillion she went without question.

Betsy watched this transaction open mouthed.

"Did you ever!" she gasped. "I wonder what mother will say to that!"

Armand had stepped to position, hat under arm, at the coach door. "Mademoiselle will permit me to assist her?" he asked and gave her the tips of his fingers. His eyes were bright on her face.

On the step she stopped, half turned, a delicate flush coming to her cheek—a flush that deepened to damask at his look. She hesitated an instant as if about to speak, then suddenly entered, sat down, gave the word to the driver and was whirled away. The secretary stood looking after the retreating chariot.

"A splendid creature," purred Brooke, at his elbow, "albeit you found her wintry."

"Wintry!" exclaimed the young man. "She who is made only of summer, its incense, its colors, its dreams! Yours is an enchanted land, monsieur, and she its goddess!"

"Egad, I'll make a sonnet of that!" exclaimed Brooke. "Sink me, but it's coming back!" The latter remark was applied to the chariot, which had turned and was now approaching more slowly the spot where they stood.

As it drew up Anne leaned from the window. "Monsieur," she called, "I had quite forgot to speak of the indenture."

He drew it from his pocket and held it out to her.

"Such have to be conveyed, I make sure," she said, looking at it doubtfully. "Your delicacy, sir, forbade you to set me right. We shall have to sign and witness a deed and what not, I suppose."

"'Tis a plain indenture," said Brooke, peering.

She drew it away sharply. "Alas, we women know so little of business. I bethink me my father will wish to receipt you for it."

"Mademoiselle!"

"Aye, but he will. At any rate, you would not be so ungallant as to have me blamed, sir? Will you not ride to Gladden Hall with me? 'Tis scarce a half league away."

"Mademoiselle!"

"Your father is in Williamsburg, mistress," ventured the exquisite. "I chanced to overhear him say this morning he would remain over at Colonel Byrd's until tomorrow."

Anne frowned. "I fear you did not hear aright, sir," she returned coldly.

with the master of the Two Sisters. Now he had an errand, though he was somewhat long in coming to the point.

"The Marquis de la Tronerie," he said finally and in a purely casual way as he smacked his lips. "It was nigh two months since that he died, if I remember."

The mariner took down his log from the shelf and, turning it with a hairy thumb, pushed it across the board. The other looked at it closely and laid the book open before him. Incidentally he filled up the glasses. "Knew you aught of his affairs in this colony?" he queried.

One might have noticed that the eyes opposite narrowed perceptibly.

"Not I," answered the skipper. "I hold to my own helm."

"A close tongue," vouchsafed Jarrat, "makes a wide purse."

The drift of this succinct remark was not lost upon his companion, who discreetly kept his eyes upon his glass.

The speaker continued, dropping his voice and leaning on the table: "The marquis and I had somewhat of business together, although we never met. In fact, I made this voyage at his own request. Now, to be frank, the news of his death will not aid a mutual venture of ours here in Virginia, which, for my part, has gone too far for backing. Zooks! A mortal pity to publish it!"

There were interest and speculation in the narrow eyes if nothing more. Something jingled. It may have been the visitor's sword knot or a hand in a pocket. The skipper was not deaf.

"The passengers?" he hazarded.

"They are off for the north today. Boston blab will not hurt me. 'Tis the gazettes here I care about. As for the factors, they are bent on business. Our young Virginia wool-sack has gone to Pennsylvania, I'll risk him."

"There's the marquis' secretary."

Jarrat snapped his fingers. "He'll be cheap. I know the breed. A leaf lost from a log is no great matter," he continued slowly as though to himself. Again the jingle. The skipper cleared his throat.

Jarrat's hand slowly, very slowly, tore out the leaf, folded it and placed it in his pocketbook. Yellow disks passed across the table.

"I'll be keel hauled if I see your game," said the skipper.

The other smiled. "I'll be keel hauled if I see why you should," said he.

Brooke was scarce done twisting his loveclock when Jarrat crossed the wharf from the ship hot from his bargain with the skipper. He made inquiries concerning a young gentleman dressed in gray and by good luck hit upon an apprentice lad who told him he had carried the young gentleman's chest to the Swan tavern, at which he had been directed to bespeak supper and lodging.

CHAPTER IV.

FOR some time the two in the coach rode in silence. The way, when they had left the clustered shipping of the town behind them, wound along the red rimmed bank of the river where plethoric crows cawed to their mates. The afternoon had come with a vivid sky burning to a char on the horizon. The young secretary gazed out of the open window, and through it the wind came, sweet with the clean smell of dry grass. Anne stole a side glance from under drooping lids.

"You are deeply occupied, monsieur," she said at length, with a lurking thread of sarcasm. "I should not marvel since all Virginia lies just outside."

He threw her a smile that softened his clean cut mouth and lightened his eyes. "All Virginia is not outside the window—for me, mademoiselle."

With a woman it is the new sensation which captivates. Mistress Tillotson had been used enough to pretty speeches. The beaus of half Virginia had recited quatrains to her fan. Here was an unaccustomed subtlety.

"Yet your eyes were there," she rejoined. "Had your thought fled still farther? Oversea, mayhap?"

He met her look full eyed. "Shall I tell you of what I was thinking? I have seen many fair ladies in my own land, gracious and kind belike, but few whose charity could reach to an object so far beneath them as a bond-woman; fewer yet whose graciousness would lead them to sue for pardon from a stranger—like me."

"I," she answered more lightly, "was thinking of how the frost has set the woods afire. Saw you ever such copper reds and russet golds? And those wedges of pink rock—they have the look of raspberries crushed in curdled milk. God is spendthrift of his hues."

The country through which they passed was hung with the marvelous colors which a Virginian autumn lavishes so prodigally. There were the brown of the wild rose stalk, the ripe brown seams of butternut bark and the shifting tints the sun lends the frosted alder, the gray lichen and bronze far splashed with scarlet creeper and stippled mosses like saffron butterflies. Here and there showed the splash of a bluebird's wing or the vermilion crest of a kingfisher.

"It is very fair," he said, "as it should be."

Again a silence fell, while the road swung across forest stretches, under springing roofs through which the sky swam in dazles.

At last she spoke demurely:

"And of what else were you thinking, monsieur?"

"I was thinking what you are most like. Some ladies are like snow mountains that stand very far off, white and beautiful, but cold—so cold you cannot warm them, and so high. Some are like blossoms, sweet and perfumed, made for only a nosegay in the evening. When the sun is hot they wither. Some are like a song that one hears and thinks lovely—hums it awhile and forgets."

"And which of these am I, sir?"

"You are like a sword—slim and shin-

ing and straight and yet delicate. It took centuries to make the sword, mademoiselle. It will bend, bend, but not break. It is sharp and cold to all the world save one—the one who wears it at his side. But to his touch it becomes alive to ward him harm, to guard his life, to keep his honor."

"An we were truly swords," she flashed, "we ladies of Virginia, there were less of bitterness in this fair colony of ours."

"So the sword has the temper?" he cried, his eyes kindling. "It is not for ornament alone! And these troubles of the colonies—they strike so deeply then? Do even the ladies of a land such as this feel the sting?"

She gazed out toward the low knobbed hills limned against the deepening sky, her elbow on the window sill, her chin in her gloved hand, silent. Above them in sun stained air shreds of torn clouds folded away like dreams. From near by came the startled flutter of field larks and the rustle of ripening corn.

The road curved quickly and lurched into a pine forest, where the day flamed to twilight and the hoofs fell noiselessly into a carpet of brown needles. It was a pleasant way, full of mingled odors, all strangely pure and agreeable, where clamorous wood things piped to a musical silence.

"'Tis not all Virginia, after all, that one sees here, monsieur," she said slowly after a time. "Far to the west of us is a vast region, raw, full veined and of scattered tenants. There are great mountain peaks and ravines, wastes waiting seed and hoe, plateaus and woodlands where the musket and the ax are never silent. Deer run in the brake. Wolves race along the ridges. These strong men have lived and toiled and fought back the savages and cleared themselves homes. Their children have grown up unyielding like the granite in the mountain's heart, untrammelled like its torrents. And this life amid the silences has taught them a justice that may not be bought, a strength that knows neither fear nor favor. The region you see here, monsieur, to this great weave I speak of is but the raveled edge."

"Here broad rivers run brackish with tidewater, and ships lie at the wharfs. They bring to our manor houses all of luxury and refinement which Virginia tobacco can buy. And here the planters—for Virginia was first settled by gentlemen, monsieur—choose to put on courtliness and dress in gold lace and make a bit of London for themselves on the edge of the wilderness."

"Just beyond those hills to the southward is Williamsburg, the capital they have built. It has a college and a court. There the cocks are ever fighting, the horses are ever running, the fiddles are ever playing, and there in his palace sits the royal governor his majesty is pleased to put over his colonials, levying on their leaf and sneering at their buckskins."

"The Earl of Dunmore?"

"Aye, my lord the earl. Think you he knows one whit more of this Virginia than does the king, a thousand leagues away? He drinks in his palace and drives his white horses and bullies his burgesses, the representatives whom the people have elected. They must please him or he dissolves them. The king has forgot that the Virginians are Englishmen and that Englishmen love Englishmen."

"And Englishwomen, too," he said.

"We can do little," she went on. "We wear no swords. All we can do is to hope and to wait."

"Little!" There was a thrill in his tone. "Little! You call such a hope, such a feeling, small? You think it valueless or weak? Ah, mademoiselle, know you what makes a lady adorable to a man's heart, what makes him worship her? It is that she inspires him; that is it—not to dress for her or bow or sing her little songs, but to toil, to struggle, to fight, to die maybe—something high like the stars. Man has a want for two things—a cause to fight for first, and then—then a one, a perfect one, a loved face, to wait and smile on him when he has won."

"With this a man could do miracles. Ah, it could make of a poor nobody a king, an emperor! I, even I, mademoiselle, a stranger from another land—I could fight so well for these great things, for this Virginia of yours, if I—if I—"

He paused. There was a tense moment.

Then the air filled itself with a long, dull sigh, and on its train came a sudden snapping of dead boughs, an unjoined, cracking report, and both looked up startled.

A strange faraway circumstance had had part in this. Indians had not been used to fell trees as did their white conquerors. Instead they cut deep rings into the bark and let nature be axman. These trunks fell when dry rot had done its work, sometimes in storms, often when no wind stirred, crashing in a forested silence. A quarter century before perhaps a Mattaponi brave had thus girdled a great pine with his tomahawk, and it was this dead tree, its limbs now white as bleached wolf bones, which was now, after its time, leaning to its fall from the roadside.

A shriek burst from Anne's lips as she saw the toppling bulk through the window, and she started to her feet. Simultaneously came a howl of terror from Rashleigh and a leaping jerk from the horses as he tried to lash them to safety.

There was an instant when the huge bole seemed to hang motionless in the air above them, an instant in which Anne frenziedly wrenched open the door and made as if to leap out. The same instant Armand seized her, dragged her back and threw himself and her against the rear wall of the chariot.

She struggled, but he forced her back and held her as the groaning mass came to earth with a crash that rocked the ground.



He forced her back.

forward cushions, where it had crashed its way through. A great, gnarled limb, broken off, thrust itself a yard from her face, and through the jagged edges of the top she saw the fall foliage swaying. Armand's face bent above her. It was white and strained with an anguish that was slipping away, but it was calm.

Rashleigh's head appeared at the wrecked window, his features blue black with fear.

"Bress God!" he stammered, his grizzled forelock working. "Bress his name! So yo' ain' hurt, honey? Den I gwineer ketch de hosses 'fore dey scare missus to deff!"

The head withdrew, and Anne tried to smile up at Armand.

"We are safe," she said, speaking slowly, like a child. "I know. 'Twas—so sudden. Let me—wait a moment."

She closed her eyes again, sick and faint in the reaction.

He did not speak at once, but she felt his arms, which were under and around her, shake with a little tremor and draw her closer.

"Suppose," she breathed, her eyes still closed—"suppose it had struck nearer?"

"We should not have felt it—a quick death and merciful."

She shuddered.

"They would have found us—so," he said, with an underbreath.

She lifted her head at this and started, the color coming back to her lips. "Help me out."

Stooping under the splintered door frame, he assisted her to the ground. It was a hurl of broken branches, sprangling spokes, thrusting springs and distorted fragments of wood. A snapped limb a foot in thickness lay with its end upon the bent and twisted step.

"Had I leaped it would have struck me!"

"Yes," he answered.

"So swift and terrible!" she said, her voice catching. "Like a bolt from a cloud—like the judgment. That moment—I would not live it again for worlds!"

He spoke with a flame in his cheeks. "And I—I would I might! Ah, I would endure all agonies for that moment again, that moment when—"

"Monsieur!"

He stopped at the indignation in her tone.

"Let us go," she said. "Gladden Hall is just behind these pines."

"I beg you—"

"Bethink, sir," she added coldly, "that so late as yesterday I had never seen you!"

"So late as yesterday!" he cried. "To measure all things by the hands of the clock! What has time to do with the feeling of the heart? Is death all that comes suddenly, unexpectedly? Are there no sweeter things that come as swiftly? Ah, a man can live a year in an hour, mademoiselle—a lifetime within one little day. Yesterday, you say? Mademoiselle, yesterday for me were only dim waters and gray sky; now there are flowers and birds and laughter and all glad things. Shall I tell you what has changed it all? The moment you spoke to me on the wharf, the hour we have ridden side by side along the field, most of all, mademoiselle, the moment you will not have me tell you of, that one moment I lived when death came falling out of the sky upon us, when you cried out—when—"

"Stop!" she protested, her hands to her red cheeks.

"When your face was on my shoulder—I felt your breath! You clung to me—to me—yonder, the fairest lady God has made! My arms were around you."

"Oh!" she gasped. "No more! You have no right!"

"Right?"

"No!" she cried stormily, her breast rising and falling. "No! You presume upon a danger into which fate thrust me without my wish. Why, we have but ridden a half league. I know not even your name! Who are you to speak thus to me?"

"Whom am I?" repeated the young man slowly, the rich color dying in his face. "I am—only a Frenchman, mademoiselle, only a man who gazed upon your face in a crowd and whom—whom you asked to ride beside you in the coach."

(Continued next week.)

pair of spurs or a pipe of canary, and now all were listening eagerly. The two girls, from their positions, could see without difficulty over the intervening heads.

"Let us go farther away," said Anne, but Betsy was of a different mind. "No, no," she protested. "They are going to toss. I wouldn't miss it now for anything. He is French, Anne. I can tell it by the accent."

Rolph called and threw the gold coin he had drawn from his pocket with a flourish. "The king's head!" rose a score of voices as it fell. "Mr. Rolph wins."

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Betsy in great vexation.

"I really believe," said Anne, with heat, "that you want that man to win."

"Weren't you just now wishing you were a man so Mr. Rolph shouldn't?" retorted Betsy.

M. Armand had drawn forth a wallet from his pocket and lifted out the sum. "Fortune beams upon you, monsieur," he smiled. "I was ever unlucky of a Wednesday. Shall we have one more throw? And double or quits mayhap, monsieur? Unless you deem the stake overhigh."

"High!" said Rolph, with a growl. "Double or quits it is. Eighty pounds against your lost forty and the wench. But, mind you, this one throw ends it. D'you hear?"

The other tossed. There was a shout as the coin descended, for it lodged in the brim of a spectator's hat and could not be counted. At the next trial it rolled in a spiral and finally stood edge-wise in a crack of the wharf flooring.

A third time the young Frenchman sent it spinning. It twinkled in the sunlight, fell, bounded sideways, the crowd parting before it, rolled across the open space and toppled over a few feet from Anne. Instinctively she leaned far out of the coach and looked.

"It shows the arms!" she cried in spite of herself. The coin had fallen on its obverse side.

"Fortune has turned," the secretary observed easily. "It appears, monsieur, that the servant is mine. The remainder of the stake is yours. The wench and the horse are yours, as you are wont to be." "I was but his assurance he wavered with," snarled Rolph. "It will not hold. What does this sorry raiment with thus much money, gentlemen? He does not own so much. I dispute the bet!"

"And Mr. Rolph calls himself a gentleman?" Anne said disgustedly.

M. Armand looked at his antagonist with undisguised contempt, and murmurs of the assembly, who loved fair play, were so unmistakable that Rolph drew out bills and indenture with a curse and drove off with a black look.

Anne watched him go, a curl on her lip. When she turned at Betsy's exclamation it was first to be aware that all on the wharf were looking her way, that some of them were smiling and then that the young Frenchman, with the redemption woman following him, was approaching her.

Before she had recovered from her astonishment he was bowing low. "Mademoiselle," he said, "will pardon the liberty I take in addressing her?"

She bowed coldly, half startled.

"Fate," he went on, "has made me the owner of this servant, for whom, being no landholder, I have scant use. She speaks a strange tongue and is in a strange land, and to free her without bond time were small kindness. May I beg the favor, mademoiselle, that you take her in your service, demanding such labor as will requite her support?"

The indignant color flooded Anne's brow. "Sir," she said frigidly, drawing herself up, "we have strange surprises in Virginia, but surely the effrontery of our visitors surpasses them all."

Armand looked clearly at her out of his dark eyes. "Mademoiselle will pardon," he answered, "the error of one of these visitors, who, seeing her face, has overestimated her graciousness and charity."

With this he bowed again till his hat swept the ground, and, followed by the bondwoman, walked down the wharf toward the unloading vessel.

The red in Anne's cheeks had grown to frebrands and her anger lent sting to the half concealed smirks of those who stood nearest.

"Land of mercy!" said Betsy, with emphasis. "What impudence!"

Soon the curious crowd was thinning, Betsy's search was ended, and Anne, having left her seat in the coach, watched at near view the disgorging of the cargo.

Here Brooke came primed with a new sensation. This now nothing less than the tale of a fight which had occurred during the voyage between the mate of the vessel and a passenger. Anne's eyes were very soft as he finished.

"And who d'ye think," he ended, "was this champion? Why, the young Frenchman yonder that you crushed so mercilessly, Mistress Tillotson?"

"And the redemption woman?" asked Anne, with something like dread.

"'Twas the wench he won from Burnaby Rolph."

"Oh!" The cadence was full of liquid self reproach.

"Where are you going?" Betsy asked as Anne rose. She did not answer, but

walked quickly across the wharf to the spot where Armand stood. He made no movement as she came.

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His hat was in his hand instantly, and he was gravely deferential.

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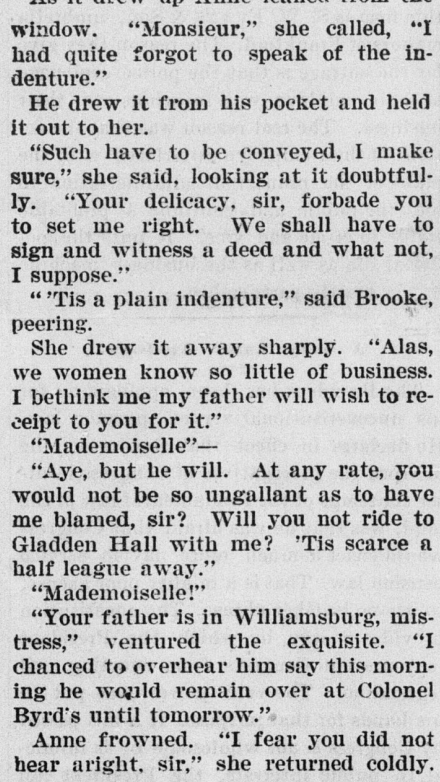
"Mademoiselle!"

"Aye, but he will. At any rate, you would not be so ungallant as to have me blamed, sir? Will you not ride to Gladden Hall with me? 'Tis scarce a half league away."

"Mademoiselle!"

"Your father is in Williamsburg, mistress," ventured the exquisite. "I chanced to overhear him say this morning he would remain over at Colonel Byrd's until tomorrow."

Anne frowned. "I fear you did not hear aright, sir," she returned coldly.



Mademoiselle will permit me to assist her.

Then, with an enchanting smile, she opened the coach door and made room for the secretary beside her. "I await you, monsieur," she said, her eyes like fringed gentians. He bowed to her with a new light on his face, entered and closed the door.

"Home, Rashleigh!" she cried to the driver, and the heavy coach rolled away.

"Wintry," said the fox to himself, with a chuckle. "Methinks report does the lady wrong."

Jarrat meanwhile had been sitting in the skipper's dingy cabin, for Master Elves had now transferred responsibility to the ship's agent, his face properly smoothed to good fellowship over a noggin of rum from the locker. He had long ago cultivated a new affabil-

ity with the master of the Two Sisters. Now he had an errand, though he was somewhat long in coming to the point.

"The Marquis de la Tronerie," he said finally and in a purely casual way as he smacked his lips. "It was nigh two months since that he died, if I remember."

The mariner took down his log from the shelf and, turning it with a hairy thumb, pushed it across the board. The other looked at it closely and laid the book open before him. Incidentally he filled up the glasses. "Knew you aught of his affairs in this colony?" he queried.

One might have noticed that the eyes opposite narrowed perceptibly.

"Not I," answered the skipper. "I hold to my own helm."

"A close tongue," vouchsafed Jarrat, "makes a wide purse."

The drift of this succinct remark was not lost upon his companion, who discreetly kept his eyes upon his glass.

The speaker continued, dropping his voice and leaning on the table: "The marquis and I had somewhat of business together, although we never met. In fact, I made this voyage at his own request. Now, to be frank, the news of his death will not aid a mutual venture of ours here in Virginia, which, for my part, has gone too far for backing. Zooks! A mortal pity to publish it!"

There were interest and speculation in the narrow eyes if nothing more. Something jingled. It may have been the visitor's sword knot or a hand in a pocket. The skipper was not deaf.

"The passengers?" he hazarded.

"They are off for the north today. Boston blab will not hurt me. 'Tis the gazettes here I care about. As for the factors, they are bent on business. Our young Virginia wool-sack has gone to Pennsylvania, I'll risk him."

"There's the marquis' secretary."

Jarrat snapped his fingers. "He'll be cheap. I know the breed. A leaf lost from a log is no great matter," he continued slowly as though to himself. Again the jingle. The skipper cleared his throat.

Jarrat's hand slowly, very slowly, tore out the leaf, folded it and placed it in his pocketbook. Yellow disks passed across the table.

"I'll be keel hauled if I see your game," said the skipper.

The other smiled. "I'll be keel hauled if I see why you should," said he.

Brooke was scarce done twisting his loveclock when Jarrat crossed the wharf from the ship hot from his bargain with the skipper. He made inquiries concerning a young gentleman dressed in gray and by good luck hit upon an apprentice lad who told him he had carried the young gentleman's chest to the Swan tavern, at which he had been directed to bespeak supper and lodging.

CHAPTER IV.

FOR some time the two in the coach rode in silence. The way, when they had left the clustered shipping of the town behind them, wound along the red rimmed bank of the river where plethoric crows cawed to their mates. The afternoon had come with a vivid sky burning to a char on the horizon. The young secretary gazed out of the open window, and through it the wind came, sweet with the clean smell of dry grass. Anne stole a side glance from under drooping lids.

"You are deeply occupied, monsieur," she said at length, with a lurking thread of sarcasm. "I should not marvel since all Virginia lies just outside."

He threw her a smile that softened his clean cut mouth and lightened his eyes. "All Virginia is not outside the window—for me, mademoiselle."

With a woman it is the new sensation which captivates. Mistress Tillotson had been used enough to pretty speeches. The beaus of half Virginia had recited quatrains to her fan. Here was an unaccustomed subtlety.

"Yet your eyes were there," she rejoined. "Had your thought fled still farther? Oversea, mayhap?"

He met her look full eyed. "Shall I tell you of what I was thinking? I have seen many fair ladies in my own land, gracious and kind belike, but few whose charity could reach to an object so far beneath them as a bond-woman; fewer yet whose graciousness would lead them to sue for pardon from a stranger—like me."

"I," she answered more lightly, "was thinking of how the frost has set the woods afire. Saw you ever such copper reds and russet golds? And those wedges of pink rock—they have the look of raspberries crushed in curdled milk. God is spendthrift of his hues."

The country through which they passed was hung with the marvelous colors which a Virginian autumn lavishes so prodigally. There were the brown of the wild rose stalk, the ripe brown seams of butternut bark and the shifting tints the sun lends the frosted alder, the gray lichen and bronze far splashed with scarlet creeper and stippled mosses like saffron butterflies. Here and there showed the splash of a bluebird's wing or the vermilion crest of a kingfisher.

"It is very fair," he said, "as it should be."

Again a silence fell, while the road swung across forest stretches, under springing roofs through which the sky swam in dazles.

At last she spoke demurely:

"And of what else were you thinking, monsieur?"

"I was thinking what you are most like. Some ladies are like snow mountains that stand very far off, white and beautiful, but cold—so cold you cannot warm them, and so high. Some are like blossoms, sweet and perfumed, made for only a nosegay in the evening. When the sun is hot they wither. Some are like a song that one hears and thinks lovely—hums it awhile and forgets."

"And which of these am I, sir?"

"You are like a sword—slim and shin-

ing and straight and yet delicate. It took centuries to make the sword, mademoiselle. It will bend, bend, but not break. It is sharp and cold to all the world save one—the one who wears it at his side. But to his touch it becomes alive to ward him harm, to guard his life, to keep his honor."

"An we were truly swords," she flashed, "we ladies of Virginia, there were less of bitterness in this fair colony of ours."

"So the sword has the temper?" he cried, his eyes kindling. "It is not for ornament alone! And these troubles of the colonies—they strike so deeply then? Do even the ladies of a land such as this feel the sting?"

She gazed out toward the low knobbed hills limned against the deepening sky, her elbow on the window sill, her chin in her gloved hand, silent. Above them in sun stained air shreds of torn clouds folded away like dreams. From near by came the startled flutter of field larks and the rustle of ripening corn.

The road curved quickly and lurched into a pine forest, where the day flamed to twilight and the hoofs fell noiselessly into a carpet of brown needles. It was a pleasant way, full of mingled odors, all strangely pure and agreeable, where clamorous wood things piped to a musical silence.

"'Tis not all Virginia, after all, that one sees here, monsieur," she said slowly after a time. "Far to the west of us is a vast region, raw, full veined and of scattered tenants. There are great mountain peaks and ravines, wastes waiting seed and hoe, plateaus and woodlands where the musket and the ax are never silent. Deer run in the brake. Wolves race along the ridges. These strong men have lived and toiled and fought back the savages and cleared themselves homes. Their children have grown up unyielding like the granite in the mountain's heart, untrammelled like its torrents. And this life amid the silences has taught them a justice that may not be bought, a strength that knows neither fear nor favor. The region you see here, monsieur, to this great weave I speak of is but the raveled edge."

"Here broad rivers run brackish with tidewater, and ships lie at the wharfs. They bring to our manor houses all of luxury and refinement which Virginia tobacco can buy. And here the planters—for Virginia was first settled by gentlemen, monsieur—choose to put on courtliness and dress in gold lace and make a bit of London for themselves on the edge of the wilderness."

"Just beyond those hills to the southward is Williamsburg, the capital they have built. It has a college and a court. There the cocks are ever fighting, the horses are ever running, the fiddles are ever playing, and there in his palace sits the royal governor his majesty is pleased to put over his colonials, levying on their leaf and sneering at their buckskins."

"The Earl of Dunmore?"

"Aye, my lord the earl. Think you he knows one whit more of this Virginia than does the king, a thousand leagues away? He drinks in his palace and drives his white horses and bullies his burgesses, the representatives whom the people have elected. They must please him or he dissolves them. The king has forgot that the Virginians are Englishmen and that Englishmen love Englishmen."

"And Englishwomen, too," he said.

"We can do little," she went on. "We wear no swords. All we can do is to hope and to wait."

"Little!" There was a thrill in his tone. "Little! You call such a hope, such a feeling, small? You think it valueless or weak? Ah, mademoiselle, know you what makes a lady adorable to a man's heart, what makes him worship her? It is that she inspires him; that is it—not to dress for her or bow or sing her little songs, but to toil, to struggle, to fight, to die maybe—something high like the stars. Man has a want for two things—a cause to fight for first, and then—then a one, a perfect one, a loved face, to wait and smile on him when he has won."

"With this a man could do miracles. Ah, it could make of a poor nobody a king, an emperor! I, even I, mademoiselle, a stranger from another land—I could fight so well for these great things, for this Virginia of yours, if I—if I—"

He paused. There was a tense moment.

Then the air filled itself with a long, dull sigh, and on its train came a sudden snapping of dead boughs, an unjoined, cracking report, and both looked up startled.

A strange faraway circumstance had had part in this. Indians had not been used to fell trees as did their white conquerors. Instead they cut deep rings into the bark and let nature be axman. These trunks fell when dry rot had done its work, sometimes in storms, often when no wind stirred, crashing in a forested silence. A quarter century before perhaps a Mattaponi brave had thus girdled a great pine with his tomahawk, and it was this dead tree, its limbs now white as bleached wolf bones, which was now, after its time, leaning to its fall from the roadside.

A shriek burst from Anne's lips as she saw the toppling bulk through the window, and she started to her feet. Simultaneously came a howl of terror from Rashleigh and a leaping jerk from the horses as he tried to lash them to safety.

There was an instant when the huge bole seemed to hang motionless in the air above them, an instant in which Anne frenziedly wrenched open the door and made as if to leap out. The same instant Armand seized her, dragged her back and threw himself and her against the rear wall of the chariot.

She struggled, but he forced her back and held her as the groaning mass came to earth with a crash that rocked the ground.

forward cushions, where it had crashed its way through. A great, gnarled limb, broken off, thrust itself a yard from her face, and through the jagged edges of the top she saw the fall foliage swaying. Armand's face bent above her. It was white and strained with an anguish that was slipping away, but it was calm.

Rashleigh's head appeared at the wrecked window, his features blue black with fear.

"Bress God!" he stammered, his grizzled forelock working. "Bress his name! So yo' ain' hurt, honey? Den I gwineer ketch de hosses 'fore dey scare missus to deff!"

The head withdrew, and Anne tried to smile up at Armand.

"We are safe," she said, speaking slowly, like a child. "I know. 'Twas—so sudden. Let me—wait a moment."

She closed her eyes again, sick and faint in the reaction.

He did not speak at once, but she felt his arms, which were under and around her, shake with a little tremor and draw her closer.

"Suppose," she breathed, her eyes still closed—"suppose it had struck nearer?"

"We should not have felt it—a quick death and merciful."

She shuddered.

"They would have found us—so," he said, with an underbreath.

She lifted her head at this and started, the color coming back to her lips. "Help me out."

Stooping under the splintered door frame, he assisted her to the ground. It was a hurl of broken branches, sprangling spokes, thrusting springs and distorted fragments of wood. A snapped limb a foot in thickness lay with its end upon the bent and twisted step.

"Had I leaped it would have struck me!"

"Yes," he answered.

"So swift and terrible!" she said, her voice catching. "Like a bolt from a cloud—like the judgment. That moment—I would not live it again for worlds!"

He spoke with a flame in his cheeks. "And I—I would I might! Ah, I would endure all agonies for that moment again, that moment when—"

"Monsieur!"

He stopped at the indignation in her tone.

"Let us go," she said. "Gladden Hall is just behind these pines."

"I beg you—"

"Bethink, sir," she added coldly, "that so late as yesterday I had never seen you!"

"So late as yesterday!" he cried. "To measure all things by the hands of the clock! What has time to do with the feeling of the heart? Is death all that comes suddenly, unexpectedly? Are there no sweeter things that come as swiftly? Ah, a man can live a year in an hour, mademoiselle—a lifetime within one little day. Yesterday, you say? Mademoiselle, yesterday for me were only dim waters and gray sky; now there are flowers and birds and laughter and all glad things. Shall I tell you what has changed it all? The moment you spoke to me on the wharf, the hour we have ridden side by side along the field, most