

up yonder track, steep and rough as it is, I think that you might gain the valley beyond. Then on to the prince, and tell him how we fare.

"But, my dear lord, how can we hope to reach the horses?" asked Norbury.

"Ye cannot go round to them, for they would be upon you ere ye could come to them. Think ye that ye have heart enough to clamber down this cliff?"

"Had we but a rope."

"There is one here. It is but one hundred feet long, and for the rest ye must trust to God and to your fingers. Can you try it, Alleyne?"

"With all my heart, my dear lord, but how can I leave you in such a strait?"

"Nay, it is to serve me that ye go. And you, Norbury?"

The silent squire said nothing, but he took up the rope, and, having examined it, he tied one end firmly round a projecting rock. Then he cast off his breast-plate, thigh pieces, and greaves, while Alleyne followed his example.

"Well, Chancelor, or Calverley, or Knowles, should the prince have gone forward," cried Sir Nigel. "Now may God speed ye, for ye are brave and worthy men."

It was, indeed, a task which might make the heart of the bravest man within him. The thin cord dangling down the face of the brown cliff seemed from above to reach little more than half-way down it. Beyond stretched the rugged rock, wet and shining, with a green tuff here and there thrusting out from it, but little sign of ridge or foothold. Far below the jagged points of the boulders bristled up, dark and menacing. Norbury tugged at his rope, and twice he failed to get a foothold at which he aimed, but even as he swung himself for a third effort a stone from a sling buzzed like a wasp from amid the rocks and struck him full upon the side of his head. His grasp relaxed, and his feet slipped, and in an instant he was a crushed and mangled corpse upon the sharp ridges beneath him.

"If I have no better fortune," said Alleyne, leading Sir Nigel and Sir Hugh, my dear lord, that you will give my humble service to the Lady Maude, and say to her that I was ever her true servant and most unworthy cavalier.

The old knight said no word, but he put a hand on either shoulder, and kissed his squire, with the tears shining in his eyes. Alleyne sprang to the rope, and sliding swiftly down, soon found himself at its extremity. From above a well-aimed touch, but now, when swinging a hundred feet down, the squire found that he could scarce reach the face of the rock with his foot, and that it was as smooth as glass, with no resting-place where a hand or foot could stand. Some three feet lower, however, his eye lit upon a long jagged crack which slanted downwards, and this he must reach if he would save not only his own poor life, but that of the eight-score men above him. Yet it were madness to spring for that narrow slit with nought but the wet, smooth rock to cling to. He swung for a moment, full of thought, and even as he hung there another of the hellish stones sang through his curls, and struck a clip from the face of the cliff. Up he clambered a few feet, drew up the loose end after him, ensnaring his belt, held on with neck and with elbow while he spliced the tough leathern belt to the end of the cord; then lowering himself as far as he could go, he swung backwards and forwards until his hand reached the crack, then he left the rope and clung to the face of the cliff. Another stone whizzed over his head, and he heard a sound like a breaking stick, with a keen stinging pain which shot through his chest. Yet it was no time now to think of pain or ache. There was his lord and his eight-score comrades, and they must be plucked from the jaws of death. On he clambered, with his hand shuffling down the long sloping crack, sometimes bearing all his weight upon his arm, and sometimes finding some snag which he could use to rest his foot. Would he never pass over that fifty feet? He dared not look down, and could but grope slowly onwards, his face to the cliff, his feet against its face, every vein and crack and notching of that face of rock remained forever stamped upon his memory. At last, however, his foot came upon a broad resting-place and he ventured to cast a glance downwards. Thank God! he had reached the highest of those fatal pinnacles upon which comrades had fallen, and he felt that he sprang from rock to rock until his feet were on the ground, and he had his hand stretched out for the horse's rein, when a sling-stone struck him on the head, and he dropped senseless upon the ground.

An evil blow it was for Alleyne, but a worse one still for him who struck it. The Spanish squire, seeing the youth lie slain, and judging from his dress that he was no common man, rushed forward to plunder him, knowing well that the howl which he had expended their last shaft. He was still three paces, however, from his victim's side when John upon the cliff above plucked up a huge boulder, and, pointing it for an instant, dropped it with fatal aim upon the squire beneath him. It struck upon his shoulder, and hurled him, crashing and screaming, to the ground, while Alleyne, recoiling to his senses by these shrill cries in his very ear, staggered on to his feet and gazed wildly about him. His eyes fell upon the horses, grazing upon the scanty pasture, and in an instant all had come back to him—his mission, his comrades, the need for haste. He was dizzy, sick, faint, but he must not die, and he must not tarry for his life meant many lives that day. In an instant he was in his saddle and sprung down the valley. Loud rang the swift charger's hoofs over rock and reef, while the five riders of the White Company, and the loose stones showered up behind him. But his head was whirling round, the blood was gushing from his brow, his temple, his mouth. Ever keener and sharper was the deadly pain which like red-hot arrows through his side. He felt that his eye was glazing, his senses slipping from him, his grasp upon the reins relaxing. Then with one mighty effort, he called up all his strength for a single minute. Blood down his loosened stirrup-straps, bound his knees tightly to his saddle flaps, twisted his hands in the bridle, and then, putting the gallant horse's head for the mountain path, he dashed the spurs to the hilt and galloped with his face buried in the coarse, black mane.

Little could he ever remember of that wild ride. Half-conscious, but ever with the one thought beating in his mind, he galloped the horse onwards, rushing swiftly down steep ravines, over huge boulders, along the edges of black abysses. Dim memories he had of venturing faces at the doors, of foaming, clattering water, and of a bristle of mountain berceas. Once, ere he had ridden far, he heard behind him three deep, sullen shouts, which told him that his comrades had set their faces to the foe once more. Then all was blank until he woke to find kindly blue English eyes peering down upon him and to hear the blessed sound of his country's speech. They were but a foraging party—a hundred archers and as many men-at-arms—but their leaders were Sir Hugh Calverley, and he was not a man to bide idle when good blows were to be had not three leagues from him. A scout was sent flying with a message to the camp, and Sir Hugh, with his two hundred men, thundered off to the rescue. With them went Alleyne, still bound to his saddle, still dripping with blood, and swooning and recovering, and swooning once again. On they rode, and on, until, at last, topping a ridge, they looked down upon the fatal valley. Alas! and alas! for the sight that met their eyes.

There, beneath them, was the blood-bathed hill, and from the summit plumed and bannered it. For two months Alleyne had watched the hills and the towers of the

royal house of Castle. Up the long slope rushed ranks and ranks of men—exultant, shouting, with waving pennons and banners. The instant that the whole summit were dense throngs of knights, with no enemy that could be seen to face them, save only that at one corner of the plateau an eddy and swirl amid the crowded mass seemed to show that all resistance was not yet at an end. At the sight a deep groan of rage and of despair went up from the baffled rescuers, and, spurring on their horses, they clattered down the long and winding path which led to the valley beneath.

But they were too late to avenge, as they had been too late to save. Long ere they could gain the level ground, the Spaniards, seeing them riding swiftly amid the rocks, and being ignorant of their numbers, drew off from the captured hill, and, having secured their few prisoners, rode slowly in a long column, with drum-beating and cymbal-clashing, out of the valley. Their rear ranks were already passing out of sight ere the newcomers were urging their panting, foaming horses up the slope which had been the scene of that long-drawn and bloody fight.

And a fearsome sight it was that met their eyes! Across the lower end lay the dense heap of men and horses where the first arrow-storm had burst. Above, the bodies of the dead and the dying—French, Spanish, and Aragonese—lay thick and thicker, until they covered the cold ground two and three deep in one dreary tangle of slaughter. Above them lay the shadows of a great rock, even as they had stood, and higher yet upon the plateau a wild medley of the dead of all nations, where the last deadly grapple had left them. In the further corner, under the shadow of a great rock, there crouched seven bowmen, with great John in the centre of them—all wounded, weary, and in sorry case, but still unconquered, with their blood-stained weapons waving and their voices raising a welcome to their countrymen. Alleyne rode across to John, while Sir Hugh Calverley followed close behind him.

"By Saint George!" cried Sir Hugh. "I have never seen signs of so stern a fight, and I am right glad that we have been in time to save you."

"You have saved more than us," said John, pointing to the banner which leaned against the rock behind him.

"I have done nobly," cried the old free companion, gazing with a soldier's admiration at the huge frame and bold face of the archer. "But why is it, my good fellow, that you sit upon this man?"

"By the rood! I had forgot him," John answered, rising and dragging from under him no less a person than the Spanish Caballero, Don Diego Alvarez. "This man, my fair lord, means to use a new little one—a grindstone, and I know not what besides, so that I thought it well to sit upon him, lest he should take a fancy to leave me."

"He is dead, I fear. I saw them throw his body across a horse and ride away with it, but I fear the life had gone from him."

"Now were worth me! And where is Aylward?"

"He sprang upon a riderless horse and rode after Sir Nigel to save him. I saw them through around him, and he is either taken or slain."

"Blow the bugles!" cried Sir Hugh, with a scowling brow.

"We must back to camp, and ere three days I trust that we may see these Spaniards again. I would fain have ye all in my company."

"We are of the White Company, my fair lord," said John.

"Nay, the White Company is here disbanded," answered Sir Hugh solemnly, looking round him at the lines of silent figures. "Look to the brave squire, for I fear he will never see the sun rise again."

CHAPTER XVII.

It was a bright morning four months after that fatal fight in the Spanish hills. The sun was yet low in the heaven, and the red cows stood in the long shadow of the eims, chewing the cud and gazing with great vacant eyes at two horsemen who were spurring off down the long white road which dipped and curved away back to where the towers and pinnacles beneath the flat-topped hill marked the old town of Winchester.

Of the riders, one was young, graceful, slowly from side to side with eyes which shone like blue Brussels cloth, which served to show his active and well-knit figure. He rode with lips compressed and anxious face, as one who has much care upon his mind. Young as he was, and peaceful as was his dress, the dainty golden spurs which twinkled upon his heels proclaimed his knighthood, while a long seam upon his brow and a scar upon his temple gave a manly grace to his refined and delicate countenance. His comrade was a large, red-headed man upon a great black horse, with a huge canvas bag slung from his saddle-bow. His broad, brown face was lighted by a continual smile, and he looked slowly from side to side with eyes which twinkled and shone with delight. Well might John rejoice, for he was not back in his native Hampshire, for he had not Don Diego's five thousand crowns ransoming against his knee, and above all was he not himself squire now to Sir Alleyne Erickson, the young Soeman of Minstead, lately knighted by the sword of the Black Prince himself, and esteemed by the whole army as one of the most rising of the soldiers of England.

For the last stand of the Company had been told throughout Christendom where, over a brave deed of arms was loved, and honors had flowed in upon the few who had survived it. For two months Alleyne had wavered betwixt death and life, with

a broken rib and a shattered head; yet youth and strength and a cleanly life were all upon his side, and he awoke from his long delirium to find that the war was over, that the Spaniards and their allies had been crushed at Navarretia, and that the prince had himself borne the tale of his ride for success and had come in person to his bedside to touch his shoulder with his sword and to insure that so brave and true a man should die, if he could not live, within the circle of chivalry. The instant that he could set foot to ground Alleyne had started in search of his lord, but no word could he hear of him, dead or alive, and he had come home now and-here, in the hope of raising money upon his estates and so starting upon his quest once more. Landing at London, he had hurried on with a mild roll of care, for he had heard no word from Hampshire since the short note which had announced his brother's death.

"By the rood!" cried John, looking around him excitedly, "where have we seen these we left such noble cows, such fleecy sheep, grass so green, or a man so drunk as yonder rogue who lies in the gap of the hedge?"

"Ah, John," Alleyne answered wearily, "it is well for you, but I never thought that my home-coming would be so sad a one. My heart is heavy for my dear lord and for Aylward, and I know not how I may break the news to the Lady Mary and to the Lady Maude, if they have not yet had tidings of it."

John gave a groan which made the horses shy. "It is indeed a black business," said he. "But be not sad, for I shall give half these crowns to my old mother, and half will I add to the money which you may have, and so we shall buy that yellow cog wherein we sailed to Bordeaux, and in it we shall go forth and seek Sir Nigel."

Alleyne smiled, but shook his head. "Were he alive we should have had word of him ere now," said he. "But what is this town before us?"

"Why, it is Romsey!" cried John. "See the tower of the old gray church, and the long stretch of the nursery."

Ere Alleyne could answer there swung round the curve of the road a lady's carriage drawn by three horses abreast with a postilion upon the outer one. Within there sat a stout and elderly lady in a pink cotehardie, leaning back among a pile of cushions. None could seem more safe and secure and at her ease than this lady, and yet here also was a symbol of human life, for in an instant, ever as Alleyne reined aside to let the carriage pass, a wheel flew out from among its fellows, and over it toppled with the horses plunging, the postilion shouting, and the lady screaming from within. In an instant Alleyne and John were on foot, and had lifted her forth all

and lady superior had had their will, it should mark the glad occasion.

But alas! for plots and plans when love and youth and nature, and above all, fortune are arrayed against them. Who is to ride so nimbly through the crowded streets? Why does he fling himself from his horse and stare so strangely about him? See how he has rushed through the license-bearers, thrust aside lay-sister Agass, scowled at the two-and-twenty damozels who sang so sweetly—and he stands before the novice with his hands outstretched, and his face shining, and the light of love in his gray eyes. Her foot is on the very lintel of the church, and yet he bars the way—and she, she thinks no more of the wise words and holy rede of the lady abbess, but she hath given a sobbing cry and hath fallen forward with her arms around her drooping body and her wet cheek upon his breast. A sorry sight for the gaunt abbot, an ill lesson too for the stainless two-and-twenty who have ever been taught that the way of nature is the way of sin. But Maude and Alleyne cared little for this. A dank, cold air comes out from the black arch before them. The birds are singing that the way of nature is the way of sin. Their choice is made, and they turn away hand-in-hand, with their backs to the darkness and their faces to the light.

Very quiet was the wedding in the old priory church at Christchurch, where Father Christopher read the service, and there were few to see save Lady Loring and a John woman from the castle. The Lady of Twyham had drooped and pined for weary months, so that her face was harsher and less comely than before, yet she still hoped on, for her lord had not yet been seen, and she could scarce believe that he might be stricken down at last. It had been her wish to start for Spain and to search for him, but Alleyne persuaded her to let him go to her place. There was much to look after, now that the lands of Minstead were joined to those of Twyham, and Alleyne had promised her that if she would but bide with his wife he would never come back to Hampshire again until he had gained some news, good or ill of her lord and lover.

The yellow cog had been engaged, with Goodwin Hawtayne in command, and a month after the wedding Alleyne rode down to Southampton to see to it, and came round yet from Southampton. On the way he passed the fishing village of Pitt's Deep, and marked that a little creyer or brig was tackling off the land, as though about to anchor there. On his way back, as he rode towards the village, he saw that she had indeed anchored, and that many boats were round her, bearing cargo to the shore.

A bow-shot from Pitt's Deep there was an inn a little back from the road, very large and wide-spread, with a great green bush hung upon a pole from one of the upper windows. At this window, he marked, she rode up, that a man was seated who appeared to be craning his neck in his direction. Alleyne was still looking up to him, when a woman came rushing from the open door of the inn, and made as though she would climb a tree looking back the while with a laughing face. Wondering what these doings might mean, Alleyne tied his horse and was walking amid the trees toward the inn, when there shot from the entrance a second woman who made also for the trees. Close at her heels came a burly, brown-faced man, who leaned against the door post and laughed loudly with his hand to his side. "Ah, ma belle!" he cried, and is it thus you treat me? Ah, my pet! I swear by these fingerbones that I would not hurt a hair of your pretty head; but I have been among the black paynim, and by my hills! it does me good to look at your English cheeks. Come, drink a stomp of muscadine with me, mes enges, for my heart is warm to be among ye again."

At the sight of the man, Alleyne had stood staring, but at the sound of his voice such a thrill of joy bubbled up in his heart that he had to bite his lips to keep his face from showing outright. But a deeper pleasure yet bubbled there. Even as he looked, the window above was pushed upwards, and the voice of the man whom he had seen there came out from it. "Aylward," cried the voice, "I have scarce seen a very worthy person come down the road, though my eyes could scarce discern whether he carried contraband. I pray you to wait upon him and tell him that a very humble knight of England abides here, so that if he be in need of advancement, or have any small vex upon his soul, or desire to exit his lady, I may help him to accomplish it."

Aylward at this order came forward amid the trees, and in an instant the two men were clinging to each other's arms, laughing and shouting and patting each other in their delight; while Sir Nigel came running with his sword, under the impression that some bickering had been going on, only to be embraced and congratulated, until all three were hoarse with their questions and outcries and congratulations.

On their journey home through the woods Alleyne heard their wondrous story; how, when Sir Nigel came to his senses, he with his fellow-captive had been hurried to the coast, and conveyed by sea to their captor's castle; how upon the way they had been taken by a Barbary rover, and how they exchanged their light captivity for a seat on a galley bench and hard labor at the pirate's oars; how, in the port at Barbary, Sir Nigel had slain the Moorish captain, and had swam with Aylward to a small cutter which they had taken, and so made their way to England with a rich cargo to reward them for their toils. All this Alleyne listened to, until the dark keep of Twyham towered above them in the gloaming, and the rippling Avon red sun lying athwart the rippling Avon. No need to speak of the glad hearts at Twyham Castle that night, nor of the rich offerings from out that Moorish cage which found their way to the chapel of Father Christopher.

Sir Nigel Loring lived for many years, full of honor and laden with every blessing. He rode no more to the wars, but he found his way to every jousting within thirty miles; and the Hampshire youth possessed it as the highest honor when a word of praise fell from him as to their management of their horses, or their breaking of their lances. So he lived and he died, the most revered and the happiest man in all his native shire.

For Sir Alleyne Erickson and for his beautiful bride the future had also sought but what a good. Twice he fought in France, and came back each time laden with honors. A high place at court was given to him, and he spent many years in Windsor under the second Richard and the fourth Henry—where he received the honor of the Garter, and won the name of being a brave soldier, a true-hearted gentleman, and a great lover and patron of nobles life.

As to John, he took unto himself a village maid and settled in Lyndhurst, where his five thousand crowns made him the richest franklin for many miles around. For many years he drank his ale every night at the "Pied Martin," which was now kept by his friend Aylward, who had wedded the good widow to whom he had committed his plunder. The strong men and the bowmen of the country round used to drop in there of an evening to wrestle a fall with John or to shoot a round with Aylward, but though a silver shilling was to be the prize of the victory, it has never been reported that any man earned much money in that fashion. So he lived, these men, in their own busy, cheery fashion—rude and rough, but honest, kindly and true. Let us thank God if we have outgrown their vices. Let us pray to God that we may ever hold their virtues.

THE END.

COOL GARMENTS FOR COMFORT. Beside these shirts, there are very attractive little white flannel suits which may be worn on any outing, for tennis, or driving which consist of shirt waist and skirt in simple design. White appears in everything with black as a smart contrast. Black is promised a great prominence in the early fall but it seems to have anticipated its popularity to such an extent that it is grading all smart costumes. When a suit is of white the hat and gloves are of black as well as the footwear. Numerous black and white mallette ruffles and bows are being worn and look especially well on women, not too young.

COOL AND DAINTY NEGLIGES. Many very attractive negliges for house wear are quite simple to make and require but a small outlay to realize. These are of lawn and dimity which come in the most attractive designs. One pretty pattern slips on over the head. It has a square yoke cut out in square neck, and the lower portion hangs in full folds from the yoke. The sleeves are of elbow length and these too hang free from any band at the lower edge. The advantages of this are that it can be slipped on at a second's notice and no buttons remain to be fastened when it is once on. Then, too, it is immensely becoming to any wearer. The neck ends at the hip-line. Others are of the loose flowing variety edged down the front and about the neck and sleeves with soft filmy ruffles. These are of white lawn and Swiss. Dotted Swiss makes up into very attractive negliges as well as blouses for nice wear.

THE SHIRTWAIST THE LEADER—WHITE THE COOLEST COLOR. Bertha Browning. The month of August means a good many warm days and those who stay at home as well as the more fortunate individuals who enjoy the coolness of some resort need cool apparel. It has always been true everywhere that white proved much less warm beneath a scorching sun than a darker tone and the American woman has adopted it as her summer wardrobe this year. Everything which can be of white will be found much cooler and pleasanter to look upon than other colors and this means every article of dress. It is a scientific fact that white is the coolest, as black is the warmest color. The fashion makers have supplied womankind with real summer dress this year. No more hot collars and fitted waists for summer wear but instead, neck wear of sheerest lace or material and loose comfortable-looking blouses suitable for all ages. The shirt waist is the real monarch of the field for general wear and this takes a very wide variety of forms, from the drossy and funny waist elaborately embroidered and inset with lace to the real negligee shirt with its low collar and half-sleeves. The latter is a new comer this season and is favored by the girl who enjoys any sort of out-of-door sport. It is made of madras, linen, lawn and silk and prettily trimmed with flat collar, cuffs and tie of the same or a contrasting color.



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