

'I would indeed I might remain,' replied the youth, at the same time avoiding those clear, truthful eyes 'I long, like thee, to hear Mass once more, but duty calls, and I must from hence on urgent business. I may return, however, before he leaves,' he added after a slight pause.

'Come, that is right, Dick my lad!' exclaimed his uncle, cordially; 'I know that thou wilt do thy best. Now, let's to supper.'

That night, when all but himself lay wrapt in slumber, Richard Trevor paced restlessly up and down his room, with knitted brows and hands clenched.

'It must be done,' he muttered; 'twill never do to allow such a chance to slip me. This fellow, Morgan, is the very man they are bent on taking; the price of his capture will be well worth the having. And yet—but why should I hesitate? 'Tis only my business, for what am I—a paid spy?' and he laughed harshly. 'Yes, a paid spy; easy work and good wage! But that Norton, how he did threaten me. "Trevor," he said, "dost think I keep thee in my service to lead the life of a lazy dog? 'Tis time thou bestir thyself! Track out that rascal Morgan, or in the foul fiend's name I'll out thee, bag and baggage." What a chance! Here is this Morgan flying to my very arms! Norton and his band are scarce thirty miles away; I have but to ride hence and make my terms. Ah! I forget my uncle! Should they capture a priest beneath his roof he will be in danger. 'Twill be certain imprisonment, if not death. Nay, I cannot—he has been more than a father to me all these years. And little Gwynyth—I love her, too—shall I cause her this bitterest grief? Nay, I have not fallen thus low. Yet the reward—the money—God knows I need it. And Norton's favour—in a moment he can undo me, turn me away, penniless and in debt. Surely there is a way between the two. I shall find it—I must.' And he paced feverishly up and down. All at once he drew up. 'I have it!' he cried. 'It shall be done! The money shall be mine, and yet my uncle shall be safe. They think I hie to London on the morrow. I shall return quickly with pressing tidings to Sir Rupert. His sister, the Lady Marjory, shall be in danger of death, and implore his presence. He will go. In his absence, Norton and his band shall come. The priest discovered, I shall hie after my uncle, and warn him to keep away. As for Gwynyth, the child will be safe enough in Dame Rachel's care.'

And so the night wore away, and the household of Llanfair slept peacefully on, all unconscious of the danger brooding in their very midst.

CHAPTER II.

On the morning following Father Morgan's arrival Gwynyth set out on her palfrey to tell an old servant who lived at some distance of the priest's presence among them.

'How rejoiced he will be,' she thought, as she passed the avenue gates, and gaily shaking her bridle she set off at a brisk canter across an open bit of country. Her soul was happy within her—for had she not assisted once more at the great Sacrifice, and received once again her God, for Whom she was ready to suffer so much? Coming to the cross-roads, she paused a moment. Her eyes followed the white line winding far away to the left.

'In a few days,' she thought, 'Dick will be returning from London by this way. I will be here to meet him, and learn his news.'

She turned her horse's head in the opposite direction, along the less-frequented lane which passed by the old man's dwelling. Trotting briskly, she turned a sharp corner, and came unexpectedly upon a horseman, riding slowly towards her. He was reading intently some papers in his hand, so that she could not see his face. She glanced at his horse inquisitively.

'Surely that is Black Saladin,' she said, unconsciously speaking aloud. 'How comes a stranger to be riding him?'

At the sound of her voice the man raised his head.

'Richard!' she cried in amazement. For a moment she was utterly taken aback. 'Dick! It cannot be thee!' she exclaimed again, approaching him.

Apparently startled, he drew in his horse, quickly thrusting the papers into his doublet.

'And why not forsooth,' he replied hastily, 'have I not as much right to ride on the Queen's highway as thou thyself, Mistress Gwynyth?'

'Yes, yes,' she half laughed, but continued, still in amazement. 'I thought thou wert still in London, how comes it that thy business was so quickly dispatched?'

'Thou art not overjoyed to see me, methinks. Does my unexpected presence disturb thee or my uncle, or interfere with your devotions? If so, I can return from whence I came,' and he half turned his horse.

'Nay, stay, Dick, stay! Thou knowest I mean not that. I was but surprised at this unexpected meeting.'

Suddenly a thought struck her.

'But Richard, say! thou canst not have been to London, for thou comest from the wrong direction!'

Bending over his horse, he hesitated before replying.

'Black Saladin cast a shoe, and I sought the nearest forge at hand. But come, sweet Gwynyth, let us return together: and tell me how fares it with Father Morgan? I would fain see him again,' and he laid his hand on her bridle to lead her home.

'Nay, Dick, I must ride on, for my father hath but now bade me seek out old Daniel and tell him the glad news. I will speed swiftly, and be with thee ere long.'

'Nay, Gwynyth, thou canst not do so.'

The girl's eyes spoke her surprise.

'And why not, forsooth? My father's errands are not to be so lightly discarded. Leave my bridle, Richard, and let me go!'

'Dear cousin, I have good reason in seeking to hinder thee. Believe me I have a purpose in what I say; thou canst not go.'

'But I must, I will go,' she cried.

Seeing her prepare to ride on, the lad became exasperated and angrily clutched her arm.

'Thou shalt not, I say. Look thee, wench, in yonder hollow a whole company of troopers lies hid. Thinkest thou I will let thee ride by, to be jeered at and insulted, perchance?'

'Soldiers, Dick, soldiers!' She passed her hand over her brow in a dazed manner. 'Why are the soldiers here, Richard?' She caught his arm and gazed anxiously into his face. 'How dost thou know, good Dick, that they are here?'

'Because I have seen them, thou silly wench,' he answered sullenly, 'but come, I have loitered long enough, let us ride home.' He spurred on Black Saladin, and caught the bridle of the white palfrey.

Once again that sudden chill struck the girl's heart, and a heavy foreboding fear passed over her. Silently she rode by her cousin's side, thinking deeply. And as they gained the terrace, Sir Rupert appeared in the doorway.

'What! now my Richard! Art back again so soon? This is indeed sweet fortune.'

'Ay, good uncle, I have made great speed, for alas! I bring evil tidings. Thy sister, the Lady Marjory, lies in London dangerously ill, even at death's door, I fear me, and greatly desires thy presence.'

'This is sad news, indeed,' groaned Sir Rupert, 'but God grant she may yet recover. I will to her this very day. Look thee, lad, do thou prepare my own good horse for my journey to-night. I have many things to do ere I start, but with God's grace I will set forth at sunset. Wilt see to it, Dick?'

'Gladly, uncle,' and he led the palfrey away, Black Saladin following by his side.

'And now, my Gwynyth, let us visit the good priest, and tell him of this fresh sorrow; he will succor us by his prayers.'

'But, father, I have also evil tidings: the soldiers are hard by, encamped beyond the wood. Thinkest thou, my father, that they have heard a priest lies here?'

'Tut, tut, child, the soldiers are ever on the move just now. Their presence here portends no evil to us. But I am glad, sweet child, thou hast told me, for it behoves us to use every caution. I grieve me that I must away to London; but yet, I think my absence will tend to allay all suspicion. They will never dream that a priest is harbored here while I am elsewhere. Thou art growing fanciful, child, and seest danger at every turn. Come, my Gwynyth, kiss thy father, then run and bid Rachel prepare for my journey about sundown.'

With his own hands Richard saddled Sir Rupert's horse that evening, and led him from the stables. Twilight was settling on the country side, beginning to shroud all things in its sombre, mystic gloom. Dick knew that now every moment was precious, and it was with difficulty that he restrained his impatience. At length his uncle appeared on the doorstep, closely followed by Gwynyth, who was bravely trying to force back the tears, which would rise up in spite of herself.

'You must take good care of thy cousin while I am away, Dick,' said Sir Rupert, cheerily. 'Well, John, what is it?' he added as the old man came hobbling up, apparently in a great state of excitement.

'Please, yer honor, there's the Queen's men, soldiers, acoming over the hill at the back. They be making for the Court, yer honor!'

Gwynyth grew deadly pale, for a moment she could scarcely stand.

'It has come at last!' she thought.

Dick muttered an angry exclamation under his breath. He must make one more effort, now or never!

His face was flushed with excitement, and there was a strange quiver in his voice, as he urgently addressed Sir Rupert.

'My uncle,' he said, 'I implore thee, postpone not thy journey another instant! 'Twill but draw down their suspicions to see thee thus stayed, in the very act of setting forth. Believe me, go as though nothing were amiss. Leave the rest to me. I assure thee it is best!'

'Perhaps thou art right,' replied Sir Rupert slowly, 'and yet I like not to leave the child—'

'Think not of her,' interrupted Richard, chafing with impatience, 'I shall make her my first thought. I undertake to disarm all suspicion. Leave all to me!'

'I trust thee, Dick, I shall go.'

It was almost more than even Richard could bear, he winced under the honest, confiding eyes of his uncle, and muttered, turning away to hide his confusion:

'I go to parley with the Captain, 'twill the better cover thy departure.'

'Rachael! have you my saddle bag?' called Sir Rupert, his foot on the stirrup.

''Tis here, Master. He re-entered the house, but before he had taken the bag, the old servant stayed him. Her small, sharp eyes looked keenly into his, as she well nigh hissed the words:

'Beware! we are betrayed! See here!' and she produced a paper, signed by Thomas Norton, to the effect that a certain sum of money should be paid to Richard Trevor, on his delivering one James Morgan, Popish priest, into the hands of the State.

'I found it, but now, in Master Dick's room,' she said, 'there are few who can go undetected when Rachael is about!' and she almost smiled in triumph at her own cunning.

Sir Rupert grasped the back of an oaken chair for support; for a moment everything seemed to reel about him. He saw it all; Richard's absence, his prompt reappearance with a forged story, his impatience to get his uncle safely away; yes it was as clear as day, they were betrayed! With a well nigh superhuman effort of will he collected his thoughts. But a few moments for action remained. The priest must be saved, but how?

'Rachael,' he said, 'I charge you, speak of this to no one,' and without another word he had turned and bounded up the stairs.