
Robin Hood
and Little John
BOOK ONE
By Pierce Egan The Younger

Dedicated to Ernest and Mary

Robin Hood and Little John

By Pierce Egan, The Younger
REPRINT

BOOK ONE

YOUR PERSONAL PURSUIT of HAPPINESS

"*Oath of Happiness*"

"*The Pursuit of Happiness*" is the central theme of the Founding Documents of the United States. It was based on the ancient Greek concept of '*eudaimonia*', which means "*happiness, blessing or flourishing*".

To achieve that state of mind, the Founders recognized that citizens needed a government that was just and which would enable and encourage everyone to live their best life.

Eudaimonia is achieved through each individual's **R**[oots] ----- *Their families and their education*--- **A**[nd] their **W**[ings] ----- *Their Communities* ----- working together to unleash both personal and community **R.A.W. Power.**

The framework is freely-available to everyone in the U.S. Constitution.

But, for many, if not most people, "*The Pursuit of Happiness*" often gets stalled because they don't know about the "*Oath of Happiness*".

"*The Oath*" is a silent promise to yourself at the start of your day that you will accomplish two things

1. Do something extra for someone and
2. Learn at least one new thing.

And then, before you fall asleep, you silently review what you did and what you learned. (Something that can be as simple as

"*Today I smiled at a stranger and I learned that I don't like green eggs and ham*" or as amazing as "*Today I saved someone's life and I learned a useful life hack*").

The first change that you experience will probably be almost immediate ---- More restful sleep.

But, in a relatively short time, you will find other improvements in your personal and professional lives, in addition to gaining more respect from both friends and strangers.

Before you write this off as foolishness,
you will lose nothing if you try it for a day or two.

CONTENTS

Summary of "*Robin Hood and Little John*" BOOK ONE

"*Robin Hood and Little John*" narrates the adventures of the legendary outlaw Robin Hood, who becomes a symbol of resistance against tyranny in medieval England. This tale begins with introductory notes on Robin Hood's elusive historical persona, emphasizing that while he is widely celebrated as a hero, much about his life is shrouded in myth. Despite vague details of his purported noble background and intentions to aid the common people against oppressors, these assertions mostly come from folklore rather than reliable historical accounts.

Understanding Robin Hood
Heroic Character: Robin is characterized as a noble outlaw who steals from the rich to give to the poor, acting as a champion for justice.

Cultural Impact: His widespread appeal over the centuries is reflected in various forms of art—ballads, plays, and literature—that highlight his admirable qualities of generosity and bravery.

Courage and Defiance: Robin's legend illustrates his ongoing battle against corrupt officials, such as the Sheriff of Nottingham, making him an enduring figure of rebellion.

The Story's Structure
The narrative unfolds through a series of chapters, each rich with adventure and moral lessons, and begins with two travelers journeying through Sherwood Forest. Among significant events, a key moment involves the arrival of young Robin Hood, an orphan raised by the yeoman Gilbert Head and his wife. Robin's upbringing fosters in him skills in archery and a strong sense of justice.

Main Themes
Courage and Bravery: Robin quickly establishes himself as a protector. Friendship and Loyalty: Robin's bonds with characters like Little John and later companions develop largely around themes of camaraderie and mutual support.

Conflict with Authority: Throughout, conflicts with imposing figures accentuate Robin's role as a hero of the underprivileged.

Major Adventures

As Robin matures into an outlaw leader, he forms a band of Merry Men, embarking on numerous escapades that range from competitions in archery to thrilling rescue missions. The adventures serve not only entertainment but also weave in profound morals about justice, loyalty, and the importance of standing against oppression.

Identity and Romance

The narrative introduces romantic subplots, notably between Robin and Maid Marian, adding emotional layers to his character. Their love is depicted as pure and noble, grounded in mutual respect, which underlies the epic quality of the story.
Robin's Exploits

Robin's band grows, and together they take on mighty foes, including the baron Fitz Alwine and his men. The story captures intense action as the band uses clever tactics, guerilla warfare, and their unwavering spirit to combat oppressive forces.

Community and Resistance

They aim to create a sense of community among the impoverished, sharing their spoils and offering protection to those in need. Robin Hood’s resilience culminates in a legendary status, portraying him as a martyr for justice.

Ultimately, "*Robin Hood and Little John*" serves as not just an adventure tale but a rich exploration of themes like freedom, justice, and the human spirit's resilience against tyranny. It reflects deeply on the bonds of friendship, the complexities of love, and the ongoing struggle for righteousness in a society plagued by inequality.

Through engaging storytelling, vivid characterizations, and moral complexities, this text continues to captivate and inspire readers, reminding them of the timeless fight against injustice, and the profound power of camaraderie. As the chapters unfold, they leave readers eagerly anticipating the next bold endeavor of Robin Hood and his merry companions, wrapped in both adventure and heartwarming moments of friendship.

Summary of the Story

In this tale of Robin Hood, we find ourselves deep in a narrative that explores themes of heroism, honor, and identity. The events unfold in a forest setting where Robin Hood, accompanied by his foster father Gilbert, engages in a series of adventures involving bravery and intrigue. Let’s break down the key elements of this story in simple terms.

Setting the Scene

The story begins with Robin Hood observing a sinister event. A grim man tries to shoot an arrow at a lady and a cavalier from beneath an oak tree. Fueled by courage, Robin intervenes, wounding the archer and saving the visitors.

Robin and Gilbert

Gilbert, proud of Robin's bravery, admits he underestimated Robin and appreciates his spirit. Robin proves himself not only a skilled archer but also loyal and protective towards those around him.

The Introduction of the Guests

Meeting Marian

As Robin and Gilbert converse, they are joined by Marian and Allan, the guests who were nearly harmed. Robin is instantly struck by Marian's beauty, and the interaction provides a glimpse of Robin's character, revealing his fondness for the fairer sex and hinting at romantic inclinations.

Describing Marian

The narrative takes a moment to paint a vivid picture of Marian, describing her physical beauty in great detail, emphasizing her large dark eyes, graceful form, and enchanting smile, which captures Robin's attention and affection.

Bravery and Danger

Fears of Attack

Tension arises with concerns about the injured archer seeking revenge. Gilbert, protective of Marian and Margaret, expresses his desire not to leave them alone, knowing how dangerous the situation could become.

The Threat Intensifies The story escalates as the archer's companions arrive, implying a serious threat to the innocent guests. The clever strategies of Robin and his allies showcase their abilities in dealing with danger while maintaining the goodwill and hospitality of their home.

The Struggle Against Evil

Confrontation with Intruders

The atmosphere thickens as marauding outlaws attempt to attack Gilbert's home. Robin and his companions, knowing they are outnumbered, rise to the challenge with courage and strategic thinking, preparing themselves for a fierce confrontation.

The Fight

The ensuing conflict showcases Robin's bravery, the loyalty of his friends, and their combined skills in battle. They fight off the intruders, utilizing their strengths and instincts to protect one another and their home.

Complexity of Identity

Secrets Revealed

As the dust settles from the confrontation, discussions among Gilbert and Allan reveal deeper truths about Robin's identity. It is suggested that he may be of noble birth, hinting at his potential heritage and purpose.

Mysteries of the Past

The narrative shifts towards uncovering the mystery of Robin's lineage, suggesting that his life and future may be intertwined with noble ties and noble responsibilities.

Conclusion and Reflection

The story deeply explores Robin Hood's character—he is not just a skilled archer or a bold savior. He embodies loyalty to his friends, a romantic heart captivated by fair maidens, and a fierce protector of the innocent. The layered storytelling weaves in themes of bravery, love, and identity, making it a complex narrative about a beloved folk hero navigating the trials of life. Robin's story is not merely a tale of adventure but also one of self-discovery in the face of danger and uncertainty.

Encounter in Nottingham Castle

In a lively and tumultuous scene within Nottingham Castle, Robin Hood finds himself caught in a series of comic and violent confrontations. Initially, a conversation erupts between a friar and a baron, showcasing a clash of wits that leads to physical altercation. The baron, angered by the friar's retorts, hurls a missal at the friar's head, igniting a brawl where the friar retaliates with his staff, resulting in the baron being overwhelmed and begging for mercy.

The scene escalates as the baron, determined to detain Robin Hood and the friar for his own purposes, instructs his men to lock them away. However, Friar Tuck, displaying the courage expected of a friar, charges out with a crucifix in one hand and his staff in the other, invoking divine protection to clear a path for him and Robin. Despite the friar's audacity, Robin is ultimately captured, restrained, and questioned by the baron.

In a witty exchange, Robin Hood claims ignorance about the whereabouts of his companion Allan Clare, leading the baron into a fit of rage, further complicating the matter. As the baron attempts to extract information from Robin, unexpected reinforcement arrives in the form of two men from a previous scuffle; they reveal that Robin played a significant role in defending against an attack on the baron's men, heightening the baron's anger while simultaneously drawing attention to Robin's undeniable prowess.

Determined to keep Robin Hood as leverage against Allan Clare, the baron orders Robin to be imprisoned in a turret until he complies with his demands. Yet, both the friar and Robin refuse to yield to the baron's threats—Robin even cheekily bids farewell and expresses confidence in his eventual escape, foreshadowing his legendary resourcefulness.

The narrative then shifts to the preparation for Robin's escape, highlighting the camaraderie among the shared prisoners while introducing a romantic subplot involving Allan Clare and Christabel, the baron’s daughter. Christabel's loyalty to her father and her love for Allan present an emotional conflict that underpins the actions of the protagonists.

As Maude, the attendant, provides critical information on Allan's dire condition, the urgency heightens. The friar, well-regarded for his clever deceit, devises a plan to rescue both Robin and Allan. They manage to navigate the castle’s daunting corridors, only to face yet another threat from the baron’s henchmen who are hot on their trail.

In the climax, a fight ensues wherein Gilbert Hood comes to realize the shocking state of his beloved hound, Lance. The fierce determination to save Marian leads Gilbert to confront the outlaw responsible for Lance's

injury. A fierce brawl takes place, with Gilbert displaying valiant bravery until he triumphs, albeit at the cost of his emotional turmoil stemming from losing his loved ones. As the struggle continues, the fate of Marian, the baron's daughter, becomes intertwined with the legends of Robin Hood, foreshadowing future adventures filled with loyalty, romance, and the quintessential battle against tyranny.

The story chronicles the vivid escapades of outlaws and lords, set against the backdrop of medieval folklore, emphasizing themes of bravery, loyalty, love, and the complex relationships between characters caught in a web of social hierarchies and personal aspirations.

"*Robin Hood and Little John*"

In this gripping passage from the narrative of *Robin Hood and Little John*, we find ourselves midst tension and turmoil as several characters navigate through dark emotions and dangerous scenarios.

The Outlaw's Revenge

The scene begins with an outlaw who lies wounded and vows revenge against Gilbert, the protagonist. His thoughts are filled with dark desires, wishing ill on his enemies, including *Robin Hood and Little John*. Despite his intense pain, he plots a terrifying method of revenge, yearning for retribution after being thrashed by Gilbert. This sets a dark tone, reflecting his desperation and rage.

The outlaw plans to retaliate violently against his foes. He is currently hiding and nursing his physical wounds. His mental state is depicted as unstable, indicating desperation and grief.

Gilbert's Anxiety

Meanwhile, Gilbert walks through the woods, weighed down by anxiety about Marian, who he fears may be in danger due to the outlaw's actions. His concerns deepen when he recalls the outlaw’s sinister laughter and questions about Marian's fate. As he broods, he becomes agitated, even hoping to encounter someone to wrestle with, expressing his pent-up frustration.

Gilbert worries about Marian's well-being, reflecting his emotional turmoil. He struggles with feeling powerless and channels this into anger.

The Encounter With Friends

As Gilbert walks, he hears familiar voices and soon encounters Will Gamwell, who lifts the mood momentarily with a lively ballad that praises a beautiful maiden. However, Gilbert, despite being amid friends, remains discontent, irritated by the cheerful attitude around him while he grapples with his inner turmoil.

Will Gamwell's song contrasts Gilbert's gloomy mood.
Gilbert acknowledges his change in attitude, feeling guilty for not sharing in the mirth.

Supernatural Elements

The narrative takes an eerie turn as Gilbert and his companions sense something supernatural happening in the forest. They see a ghostly figure that sends Gilbert into a shock, where he believes he has encountered his deceased sister's spirit. This moment underscores the themes of loss and guilt, as Gilbert struggles with past tragedies.

The appearance of the ghost adds a layer of supernatural intrigue. Gilbert's emotional reaction ties back to his deep-seated grief.

A Disturbing Revelation

As the characters process everything, they discover an unsettling truth within the forest that involves uncovering graves. The ghostly appearance, along with the revelation of a female body buried, intensifies both the fear and solemnity of the scene. When the outlaw appears again, he acts erratically, claiming his innocence in the presence of the dead, which culminates in his tragic demise.

The gruesome discovery of a body heightens the sense of dread. The outlaw's deranged actions mirror his mental instability and lead to his end.

Throughout this episode, we witness a blend of supernatural intrigue, deep emotional struggles, and themes of revenge and justice within the world of Robin Hood. Characters confront both internal dilemmas and external dangers, with the tension building towards a climactic resolution that underscores the interplay of fate, choice, and moral reckoning.

This narrative artfully balances dark themes with adventurous undertones, encapsulating the essence of Robin Hood's legendary tales while inviting readers into a world where the boundaries of life, death, and the supernatural converge.

Escape and Pursuit

In a tense escape scene, Robin Hood manages to escape from captivity after cleverly extinguishing a torch held by a guard named Lambie, shrouding the area in complete darkness. He takes this opportunity to flee through the dark passages of Nottingham Castle, evading his pursuers by recalling the intricate layout of the dungeon-like structure. In a moment of panic during his escape, he bumps into Hal of the Keep, who offers to guide him to safety. Hal knows the castle well and leads Robin through the darkness, utilizing whispers for guidance without drawing attention.

As they navigate the castle, the duo faces various dangers and challenges, including guards searching for Robin, who is now considered a fugitive. They ultimately reach a secret chamber where they encounter Maude, Hal's sister, who shares an emotional reunion with Robin. It becomes evident that Robin is deeply valued by both Maude and Lady Christabel, who have been plotting a rescue for him.

With the urgency of impending capture from the baron and his men, who are alerted to Robin's escape, they strategize a way to boldly leave the castle unnoticed. Robin is concerned about the fate of Christabel, as her father, Baron Fitz Alwine, is relentless in his pursuit. Through a series of misadventures, including the fierce confrontation with Lambie and the cunning capture of a soldier who might betray them, Robin maneuvers himself and the ladies through a series of underground passages designed for quick escapes.

The narrative shifts as Robin uses his archery skills to incapacitate the Baron's horse, causing a chaotic pursuit. The Baron is thrown from his steed and finds himself in a precarious situation, hanging from a branch with a wolf closing in, exemplifying the humorous misfortunes of a once authoritative figure. Robin's cleverness contrasts sharply with the Baron's blunders, heightening the comedic tension of the narrative.

As Robin and Christabel settle into their temporary safe spot, they share vulnerability and emotions that reveal the depth of their characters. Maude and Hal are en route to send a warning to Robin and the ladies. Meanwhile, a still angered Baron and his retainers are bewildered by the turn of events in the forest as they continue their futile search. The scene captures the essence of camaraderie and the unpredictable twists of the chase, ultimately painting a picture of Robin as a clever hero using both wit and prowess to navigate the complexities of his world.

This dramatic chapter serves as an engaging illustration of Robin Hood's character—a young man striving for justice while navigating personal relationships, struggles against tyranny, and the comical folly of his foes. The overarching themes of loyalty, courage, and the tension between

freedom and captivity play out through memorable encounters and effective storytelling, making it accessible and relatable to readers.

In a serene dell, where a small stream flows, the Lady Christabel waits alongside Robin Hood for the arrival of their companions, Allan and his group. Robin occupies his time by recounting stories, particularly the sad history behind the dell, including family memories and his beloved Marian. As they converse, Robin grows increasingly anxious about Marian's romantic status, fearing that she may have chosen another suitor, making him doubt his worthiness.

Despite his feelings of insecurity, Robin reflects on his physical skills: he can wield weapons, run, and ride horses with great talent. These musings lead him to believe he could compete for Marian's affection if needed. However, when his conversation with Christabel shifts towards Marian, Robin learns that she lacks a close friend aside from her brother Allan. As the sun rises, their wait intensifies, and Robin's worries about potential dangers cause him to heighten his senses.

Suddenly, a series of loud shouts signal the approach of members of the Baron's group—enemies of Robin. Quick to protect Christabel, he urges her to follow his lead as they stealthily navigate through the woods to avoid capture. Robin decides to mark their path with arrows for Allan and his band to follow if they arrive after the pair has left.

As they traverse the thicket, Robin's concern for Christabel grows; she begins to tire. They come across a shocking sight—a dead man, which turns out to be Christabel's father, leading to her distress. Realizing the danger of staying, Robin tries to uplift her spirits, even though she begins to faint from grief. As they hide to regroup, Robin fights his own feelings about the challenges they face together.

Chaos ensues when they encounter a group of the Baron's retainers. Robin employs his archery skills to protect Christabel, but in the process, he overhears disturbing news regarding his own family's fate—the burning of his father's cottage and the attack on his mother. This deeply affects him, igniting a fierce determination to fight for revenge against those responsible.

Unfortunately, just as they find a moment of safety, Robin learns that Christabel has been captured while he attempted to defend himself, leading to further frantic moments as he navigates the forest seeking help from his companions. After intentional distractions and daring escapes, Robin finally reunites with his friends and seeks to rescue Christabel, now confronted with the responsibility of avenging the harm done to both his family and Christabel's.

Amidst all the action, the narrative explores themes of love, loyalty, and the burdens of duty. As Robin and Christabel's relationship deepens against adversity, he swears an oath to protect and avenge those he cares for. The chapter concludes with tragic loss—the death of Christabel's mother—tormenting Robin, who vows heartfelt revenge against the villains involved in these wrongdoings. The story weaves rich emotional dynamics with Robin's heroic endeavors, navigating the complexities of love, friendship, and conflict in a turbulent world.

Ultimately, the tale encompasses Robin's evolution as a leader and protector, setting the stage for his quest for justice and a quest for personal fulfillment amidst the chaos.

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“WAT TYLER”, “QUINTON MASTYS”,
“THE LONDON APPRENTICE”, ETC.

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J. WALL

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

The materials for a life of Robin Hood are but scanty; for, although his fame is universal, the existing details of his life are but few, and so surrounded by the mists and obscurity of age, that but little certain can be gathered. Many traditions have been handed down respecting him, bearing some stamp of authority, if it be only in the fact that the feats narrated are within the bounds of credibility, while they illustrate the customs and manners of the period; yet, on the other hand, there are many which are quite beyond the pale of human belief, and must be discarded accordingly.

Among his biographers, some have contended for the nobility of his birth; others have repudiated it: the latter have labored hard to support the proofs they have advanced, but they have little foundation in fact, and, in truth, tend more to mystify than to enlighten the enquirer on this subject. The view taken by one writer on this question, though not original, is, perhaps, nearer the truth than any other speculation concerning the famous hero which has yet been formed. It is, that he was the last Saxon who made a positive stand against the dominancy of the Normans; that, in fact, his predatory attacks upon them were but the national efforts of one who endeavoured to remove the proud foot of a conqueror from the neck of his countrymen.

His means were all unequal to accomplish this noble and daring design; but his efforts were unceasing, and must have been the source of constant alarm and harass to the Normans within his three counties, as well as of much uneasiness to the governments under which he lived.

But this, though probable and feasible, is, after all, only a speculation; there is no positive evidence to prove it, although the collateral proofs are very powerful, His popularity among the common people was universal, and has come down to us as fresh and untarnished as it must have been in his own day. There is not an authority but has a good word for him. Fordun, a writer and a priest in the fourteenth century, calls him *ille famosissimus siccarius*, "that most celebrated robber". Major styles him "the most humane and the prince of all robbers." He was compared by the author of a curious Latin poem, dated July 1304, to William Wallace, the hero of Scotland. The renowned Camden speaks of him as "the gentlest of thieves." Shakespeare, in As You Like It, in his description of the Duke's mode of life, in allusion to its happiness, says "He is already in the Forest of Arden, and a many merry men with him, and there they live like the Old Robin Hood of

England and fleet the time carelessly as they did in the Golden World." Drayton, a charming poet, in his Polybion, a work of extraordinary ability, thus characterises him:

What often times he took, he shared amongst the poor.
The widow in distress he graciously reliev'd,
And remedied the wrongs of many a virgin griev'd;
He from the husband's bed no married woman wan,
But to his mistress dear, his loved Marian,
Was ever constant know.

Geoffrey Chaucer hath named him in kind terms: indeed, were we to enumerate all who have made mention of his name in their works, in strains of eulogy and tones of panegyric, we should exhaust the patience of our readers; we may sum them up in the words of a gentleman who has most ably edited a very handsome edition of the "*Robin Hood Ballads,*" and whose title to his opinion, from his very close research into the subject, is unquestionable. In concluding his life, he says, "He was a man who, in a barbarous age, and under a complicated tyranny, displayed a spirit of freedom and independence which has endeared him to the common people whose cause he maintained (for all opposition to tyranny is the cause of the people); and in spite of the malicious endeavors of pitiful monks, by whom history was consecrated to the crimes and follies of titled ruffians and sainted idiots, to suppress all record of his patriotic exertions and virtuous acts, will render his name immortal."

This is an opinion formed after the most careful and impartial investigation of almost every record existing respecting him extant, and it goes far to bear out the opinion upon his real position, and the object by which he was influenced, already mentioned.

He has been the subject of poems, ballads, songs, and versification, without number, of dramatic exhibitions, written by the best skilled poets of the time. For years, May Day never passed without seeing Robin Hood, Maid Marian, and their renowned followers, among the motley members of the festivals, and Robin Hood is, perhaps, the only instance of a man of his class, although not actually canonized, having "a festival allotted to him and solemn games, instituted in honor of his memory; which were celebrated until the latter end of the sixteenth century, not by the populace only, but by kings or princes, and grave

magistrates, and that as well in Scotland as in England; being considered, in the former country, of the highest political importance, and essential to the civil and religious liberties of the people."

His character, traced through every rhyme, ballad, song, tradition, proverb, or tale, in which he figures, is that of a man noble in spirit, unequaled in courage and daring, active and powerful, prudent, patient, just in his awards, generous and kind hearted in his dispensations, of charity unbounded, and so full of every estimable quality, that he was not only devotedly beloved by his followers – no instance of anyone proving unfaithful or treacherous appearing in any ballad or tradition extant – but he was revered by the people at large, at least, of the three counties in which he ranged, as a generous benefactor – as the true and faithful friend who stood between them, starvation, injury, and oppression.

In the following pages the Author had no material for the earlier portion of Robin Hood's life but such as his imagination supplied him with; the latter portion embodies the exploits contained in the best ballads yet existing, and he trusts, from the extraordinary success with which this humble effort of a youthful pen has been attended, that in combining the imaginative with all he could obtain of the actual, he has not failed in his desire to please.

In conclusion, he wishes to make especial mention that this is the ONLY edition which he has revised with scrupulous care, and, without abridging, in many parts re-written such portions as appeared to him weak or defective.

Entered at Stationer's Hall, 1850

A Slight Token of Esteem and Gratitude, for many kind and affectionate services,

The accompanying, humble production, in all sincerity of heart, is inscribed to

BENJAMIN WEBSTER, ESQ.,

(Lessee of The Theatres Royal Haymarket and Adelphi)

By his highly obliged and attached friend, Pierce Egan

Dawn Corleone's Foreward

We transcribed and edited ***Robin Hood and Little John*** to re-create both digital and printed editions that didn't reflect the damage suffered to the original, centuries-old copy. That damage made the archived, digital version less than a pleasure to read.

The original archaic and British-English spellings were retained in the transcription, but we corrected several typographical oversights that the original proof readers failed to uncover. An abundance of words that may appear to a modern reader to be typographical errors in this remastered edition are, in fact, now-outdated spellings.

We did not condense any part of the story. As is often the case with serialized stories, publishing deadlines that conflicted with author rough drafts resulted in the concluding chapters speeding the narrative's pace and minimizing the quality of detail that was the standard earlier in the story.

To provide added perspective, we annotated and included a Medieval map of England on the next page of this book.

We added definitions of some of the lesser known, outdated vocabulary.

Except in the most extreme cases, we retained the original punctuation, the run-on paragraphs and the run-on sentences. Many words like 'merrie and merry', phrases like 'by-the-bye and bye-the-bye' (Also 'by-and-bye' and 'bye-and-bye') and surnames like 'Lindsay and Lindsey' were left with whichever spelling was originally used at their locations in the story.

Mr Egan's innumerable uses of '*ellipsis*' — omitting words to create a conversational tone — were also retained. (For example: 'We must there' instead of 'We must go there')

For the sake of clarity, we re-positioned many of the original illustrations to more relevant locations in the story. We reduced their sizes to improve their visual appeal. (Their original placements often represented previews of future chapters of the serialized story and, frequently, they were not accurately placed when the serialized issues were assembled into the anthology of the completed work. Multiple artists account for the lack of uniformity in the appearances of various characters in this presentation of the legends.)

We retained the use of the surname 'Hood', which Egan adopted in Chapter 2. As a later evolution of the family name 'Head' or 'Hode' (according to Mr Egan), it would have more accurately appeared much later in the story. (In Chapter 2, Robin's foster father is referred to as both 'Gilbert Head' and 'Gilbert Hood'.)

We retained references to the ‘merk’ or the ‘mark’, a coin that wasn’t circulated in England until over 300 years after the events described in *Robin Hood*. In at least a few of the original ballads that are cited by the author, ‘merks’ were identified as ‘pounds’ or ‘poundes’. (At the later, actual period of its use, the merk’s value was approximately the same as a shilling. However, in this story, a single ‘gold merk’ was a sufficient offer for the purchase of a cow and nearly equal to the daily income of a successful feudal estate. But, at other times in this story, it was referred to as ‘a sorry sum’ or as little more than walking-around-money)

We also retained references to ‘Lincoln Green’ which wasn’t referred to by that name until 300 years after the time of Robin Hood.

The original anthology, published in 1840, was assembled from the forty-one issue series that was published in 1839 and 1840 by Foster and Hextall. This 1850, author re-edited, anthology of the series was one of many serializations and books that followed Egan’s initial publication date. These works included five re-serializations of his original story throughout the 1840s.

In years following, other authors published an edition of the old Robin Hood ballads, *Robin Hood and His Merrie Foresters*, *Maid Marian, the Forest Queen*, *Little John and Will Scarlett*, and *The Outlaws of Sherwood Forest*.

This serialized version of the Robin Hood legend was popular during the youth of Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain), so it is believed to be the version that his fictional character, Tom Sawyer, found inspirational for his adventures during that same period in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. (“*I am Robin Hood, as thy caitiff carcase soon shall know*.”, etc.)

However, some sources have claimed that the story *Robin Hood and His Merrie Foresters* inspired Twain, despite the fact that it was less dramatic (making it less appealing to young males) and it was published after the Egan treatment of the story. Mr. Twain is still unavailable for clarification or comment.

Perhaps it was from both authors’ interpretations of the legends, and from the Biblical personalities and events that the original legends had contemporized.

The Egan story was written for adults, but it was so popular among young boys that it immediately inspired serializations and books that were created for the youth market in Great Britain and the United States, making this book a great-great-godfather of comic books and graphic novels.


ENGLAND
AND
FRANCE
1259.
0 20 40 60 80 100
English Miles
Note:
The red lines underneath the names of some provinces signify that they were to be transferred to the King of England after the death of the Countess of Poitou, which took place in 1271.
SCOTLAND
ENGLAND
WALES
IRELAND
IRISH SEA
NORTH SEA
ENGLISH CHANNEL
BAY OF BISCAY
SPAIN
North Channel
St. Georges Channel
Bristol Channel
Berwick
Norham
Bamborough
Alnwick
Newcastle
R. Tyne
Carlisle
Durham
R. Tees
Northallerton
Scarborough
I. of Man
Lancaster
Ripon
York
Beverley
Bridlington Bay
R. Humber
Dublin
Athlone
Limerick
Wexford
Waterford
Cork
Chester
Nottingham
Lincoln
Newark
Shrewsbury
Leicester
Stamford
The Wash
Lynn
Norwich
Yarmouth
Bury St. Edmunds
Cambridge
Kenilworth
Warwick
Northampton
Worcester
Hereford
Evesham
Woodstock
Oxford
Colchester
Gloucester
Wallingford
London
Westminster
R. Thames
Rochester
Sandwich
Canterbury
Dover
Bristol
Cardiff
Odiham
Runnimede
Salisbury
Winchester
Clarendon
Lewes
Hastings
Exeter
I. of Wight
Lands End
Lizard Pt.
Scilly Is.
Alderney
Guernsey
Jersey
Calais
Boulogne
Flanders
Bouvines
Artois
R. Somme
Ponthieu
Amiens
Vermandois
Rouen
R. Seine
Bayeux
Caen
Normandy
Falaise
Evreux
Vexin
Chateau Gaillard
R. Oise
Reims
R. Marne
St. Denis
Paris
Isle of France
Champagne
Verneuil
Brittany
Maine
Perche
Chartres
Orleans
Orleannois
Sens
Anjou
Tours
Blois
Touraine
Nantes
Saumur
Fontevrault
Chinon
Loches
Bourges
Sancerres
Nevers
Berry
Burgundy
Poitou
Poitiers
Lusignan
La Rochelle
La Marche
Clermont
Limoges
Angoumois
Angouleme
Saintonge
Limousin
Perigord
Bordeaux
Guienne
Agenais
Quercy
Auvergne
Gevaudan
Velay
Vivarais
Uzes
Lyons
R. Rhone
Macon
Gascony
Toulouse
Alby
Melgueil
Nimes
Beaucaire
Beziers
Narbonne
Golfe du Lion
Foix
Bearn
Aragon
Barcelona
Cerdagne
Roussillon
Carcasonne
Longitude West
Longitude East
R. Maas
Clairvaux
Pontigny
Auxerre
Vezelai
Citeaux
R. Saone
R. Doubs
R. Loire
R. Allier
R. Lot
R. Dordogne
Garonne R.

Come lithe and lysten gentlemen
That bee of freeborn blood,
I shall tell ye of a good yeman –
Hys name was robyn hode.

Old Ballad

Chapter 1

In silence then they took the way
Beneath the forest's solitude.
It was a vast and antique wood,
Thro' which they took their way;
And the grey shades of evening
O'er that green wilderness did fling
Still deeper solitude.

----- Shelley

In the year of Grace, 1161, during the reign of the second Henry, two travelers, travel-stained and mounted upon jaded steeds, wended their way through the intricacies of the vast forest of Shire Wood or Sherwood, situated in Nottinghamshire. It was an evening in March, chill and cold; the wind came in sharp fitful gusts, whistling now, and anon, sighing through the young green leaves and old boughs of the huge trees. The sun was fast declining, and was setting with a wild aspect, deep red clouds clustered gloomily about him, and as he sunk behind the trees, long streams of grey mist rapidly uprose, giving dreary evidence of a stormy night.

The travelers were sufficiently weather-wise to recognize in these indications an imperious necessity for a speedy arrival at their journey's end, or, failing in that, to obtain the nearest shelter. One of them, who rode in advance, and appeared the superior, as well as the elder of the two, drew his mantle, in which he was well-enveloped, closer around him, and called to his companion to quicken his speed; the other obeyed the command with such right goodwill that he brought himself in a few minutes to a level with his fellow traveler. For a short time, they continued their journey in silence, at length the elder traveler broke it by observing –

"The wind is increasing; I expect it will be a wild night – what think you, Ritson?"

"It looks threatening, my Lord," replied Ritson "I would our steeds were not so miserably fagged, for it will be somewhat serious to be benighted in this forest."

"I trust you have no cause to expect an occurrence so unpleasant," returned his companion quickly. "I imagined our journey was nearly at its close. You are the guide – you have not lost your road, I hope?"

"Oh, no!" answered Ritson, "but if we do not make better progress before the sun sinks down and the storm comes up, I shall be likely to

miss my road in the darkness; as it is, I have nothing but a quick eye and an imperfect recollection to guide me. As yet we have journeyed in the right path, and with good steeds a short hour's ride would bring us to Head's Cottage."

"See if you cannot lash that lazy beast of thine into something like a pace," exclaimed his companion, spurring his horse sharply; "My steed, although tired, lags not as does thine."

Ritson complied with his master's request, and the tired beast, under the influence of whip and spur, cantered but wearily along. The wind had risen considerably; it howled and moaned like the wail of unquiet spirits; the sun had nearly vanished, and the darkness had increased apace, while the vast trees, which even in the broad daylight shed a sombre hue around, now added to the gloom, and made the twilight almost night; heavy drops of hail began to fall, and the indications of foul weather were being now rapidly realized.

"Are we near the dwelling of this yeoman yet?" asked the elder traveler.

"We are, my Lord" replied his man, "a quarter of an hour will bring us there."

"It is well," muttered the noble. "this man – this Head, is one on whom I may depend?"

"You may, my Lord, particularly when he believes the tale which your Lordship has coined so admirably," replied Ritson. "He is a rough, frank, honest fellow, who has not two ideas of one thing; he believes right ought to be might, and does his best to make it so – Wheugh! there was a blast," he cried, as a gust of wind of tremendous force came tearing through the forest, followed by a vivid flash of lightning and a loud clap of thunder.

"There it is, my Lord, there it is!" cried Ritson, with a joyful burst, when the long peal of thunder had ceased; "You see that light twinkling through the trees; that comes from Head's house; it's now eight years since I saw that glimmering light from this spot. Ah! many a merry night have I passed with Gilbert Head."

"You have the brat safe?" interrogated the Lord.

"I have, my Lord," was the reply: "He is fast asleep. I cannot see, my Lord, why you should take all this trouble; if this boy is in your way, the quietest and most certain way to remove him would be to give him two inches of cold steel; it is a good time now, it will not take me a minute, and your Lordship will thank me, and remember me in your will, for the deed."

“No, no,” returned his Lordship, hurriedly; “although he is in my way, and did he reach man’s estate, knowing his birthright, it would bring rain on me, yet I would not imbrue my hands in his blood, no, ‘tis better as it is. I shall rid myself of him without being guilty of so foul a crime as murder; and if he never becomes aware of his right of title to the earldom – and he never can unless you disclose it, which it shall be my peculiar care to prevent – brought up to a yeoman’s life, he will never miss it; I shall enjoy that which I need, and he will not be the worse for losing that which he never needed.”

“Be it as you will, my Lord,” returned Ritson coolly; “but for my part, I think a brat’s life not worth a journey from Huntingdonshire to Nottinghamshire. This is the house, my Lord,” he concluded, as they arrived in front of a well-built cottage standing on the borders of the forest.

It was a welcome sight to both, for their journey had been a long and weary one. It was therefore with a feeling of satisfaction that both dismounted, and Ritson knocked loudly for admittance, accompanying his blows by a series of shouts, which would, he anticipated, gain for them instant ingress.

“What ho! Neighbor Head; *Goodman* [‘*Mr./Head of Household*’] Head!” he roared. “Gilbert Head! A kinsman knocks; the blazing logs are on thy hearth, and the outside of thy door is to my front. A shelter – a shelter for the benighted!”

His appeal was answered by the deep-mouthed baying of hounds who, on the instant he had struck the door, had rushed to it and poured forth a fierce clamor. A voice was soon heard quieting them, and then inquiring “Who knocks?”

“Thy kinsman, Roland Ritson,” was the reply. “Open quickly, good Gilbert. I have a companion with me. We are wet to the skin; quick, quick!”

“What, Roland Ritson, of Mansfield?” asked the voice.

“Aye, aye, the same, at least I was of Mansfield,” returned Ritson, impatiently. “You forget, good Gilbert, the rain is coming down in torrents – hear ye not the wind?”

“No, I do not forget that ‘tis a rough night, neither forget I that you played me a scurvy trick at our last meeting, Master Roland,” said the voice. “But as you have one with you, and the night is not over pleasant, why, my hospitality shall not be questioned; else *beshrew* [*archaic.‘curse’*] me, but I would let you thump till your arm ached, and shout till you were hoarse, ere I would let a door of mine fly back at your command.” Saying which, the speaker unbound the door, and admitted the travelers.

“Give me thy hand, Gilbert,” said Ritson, with an appearance of frank cordiality. “I acknowledge my offence, and am heartily ashamed of it. I freely ask thy pardon, and beg of thee to remember I was some eight years younger than I stand now before you, and that much wilder. Besides, good Gilbert, you had your revenge of me.”

“And so I had!” replied Gilbert, laughing, “It’s ill sport to draw a shaft on a dead buck, and so there’s my hand. A welcome to my humble roof, sir stranger,” he added, turning to Ritson’s companion. “Judge not harshly of my goodwill, that an oaken door stood some time between you and my hearth after you had asked for admittance, but some rude neighbours in the forest here, who would be hand-and-glove with whatever they can lay claw on, without consulting the inclination of the owner, make it needful to trust to bars and bolts for a security which is denied to a strong arm and stout heart, when opposed to numbers; and a difference between me and my kinsman there, which occurred some years since, made me tardy in bidding ye welcome, which I now do heartily and truly.”

“Ah! You have steeds with you; we must see to their comfort. Ho! Lincoln!” he shouted, and a stout serving man, in the garb of a forester, made his appearance; “Here, lead these steeds to the shed, and see them well-served,” he cried. The man obeyed without uttering a word, or scarcely glancing at the new comers. Gilbert Head led the travelers to the fire, and a female about thirty, with pretty features, and altogether of a pleasing exterior, met them and bade them welcome. This was the wife of Gilbert Head, and Ritson’s sister.

“Why, Margaret!” cried her brother, “Eight years have not added much weight to thy brow. Thy forehead is as clear and thine eye as bright as when Gilbert came awooing.”

“I have been well and very happy,” she replied, bestowing a glance of affection upon her husband, who returned it with a hearty kiss.

“You may say we, Maggie girl, for *we* have been very happy,” cried the honest yeoman, his eyes dwelling upon the pleasing face of his wife with a look of intense satisfaction; “and thanks to thy sweet temper, there has been no sullen looks nor rough words to mar our peace. But come, kinsman, doff your cloak; and you, sir, the rain hangs upon thy cloth like dew on the leaves. Bustle, Margaret; make the faggots blaze; a hot supper shall soon drive out the cold which the rain has worked in.”

The worthy couple moved themselves with a good will, and hastened to place materials for a hearty supper upon the table. While thus employed, Ritson took the opportunity of throwing his cloak from his shoulders, and discovered a sleeping child resting upon his arm, wrapped in a cloak of fine blue cloth. The face of the infant was of great beauty, round and well

formed, and the clear skin, ruby lips, and red cheeks exhibited the appearance of extreme health. When Ritson had quite disengaged himself from his mantle, and disposed the child to as much advantage as circumstances would allow, he turned to his sister, and assuming a tone of voice which would best answer his purpose, said – “Margaret, come hither, I have a present for thee; you shall not say that I returned after eight years’ absence empty handed. See what I have brought thee.”

“Holy Mary!” ejaculated the astonished Margaret as she saw the child, “a child! Why, Roland, where got you this, is it thine? What an angel! Oh, Gilbert, look at this sweet child.”

“Why, what now?” exclaimed Gilbert Head, as he looked upon the child with almost as much amazement as his wife. “A sleeping babe! What, Roland, at your old tricks again, eh? — or have you turned nurse in your reformed state? – it’s strange for you to be scouring the country on stormy nights with an infant in your arms. What’s in the wind, lad? Out with it; I know thee, Roland, now, I’ve seen this babe, I am well assured it was not a mere matter of being benighted that brought you hither.”

“Out with it, Ritson, let’s have the worst and best.”


Robin's Arrival

“You shall have all I know, in good truth,” replied Roland. “This child is none of mine nor of anyone’s, now; it is an orphan, but this friend of mine is the present owner; he knew the family and the whole story, which he shall tell you. But if you have Christian charity, you will spread the supper table and say ‘sit ye down and eat and drink your fill, and to what there is ye are kindly welcome.’ Here, Margaret, take the boy; my arm has been his cradle these two days – hours I mean – and my arm aches.”

“The sweet innocent shall not stay thy stomach from its feast,” said Margaret, taking the child from her brother’s arms, while an expression of pleasure passed over her features as she received him and gazed on the sweet calm features reposing in gentle slumber. She carried him gently up a flight of stairs which led from the room they were in to her bedroom; she placed the sleeping infant upon the bed, and covering him with her own scarlet mantle which decorated her fair person when she went to mass or to holiday treats, returned to the room she had previously quitted. She found her husband bantering her brother and the stranger alternately, upon the possession of the child; which the former took in good part, but the latter rather stiffly, although he

strove to conceal the dislike he felt to the honest yeoman's freedom of speech.

The supper passed away without an occurrence worthy of remark, and with little conversation, save a few questions from Gilbert and Margaret to her brother, which he saw fit to answer only as it would serve his present purpose. At length, when Gilbert began to entertain serious notions of retiring for the night, and to think in what way he could dispose of his guests to their satisfaction, the noble broke the silence which had reigned for a short time, by remarking to his host –

"You were making some observations respecting the infant which your relative brought hither tonight and consigned to the custody of your wife. I am in a position to satisfy your curiosity, and as I have a proposition to make which will affect his future welfare, I wish to put you in possession of all matters connected with him."

"His father was a soldier, of good family, a most dear and intimate friend of mine, and a comrade in arms. We served for some time together in France under the present King Henry, in Normandy, Aquitaine, Poictou, and many other places, and again, a few years since, in Wales. While in Normandy, he contracted an intimacy with a young girl, a native of Auvergne; they were married; he brought her to England with him, but he could not acknowledge her as his wife, on account of the prejudices of his family, who were high, proud, and valued themselves upon their pure descent from a Saxon monarch. The poor girl died in giving birth to the child, and my friend lost his life, about ten months since, in the war on the frontiers of Normandy. I was by his side when he received his death wound, and his last thoughts were upon his child; he gave me the name and address of the female to whose charge he had committed it ere he quitted England, and begged me, by the remembrance of our old friendship, for his sake to foster and cherish it; I promised to do so; but, good yeoman, I am a rough soldier, without kith or kin, passing a chequered life in the camp and field."

"What, then, am I to do with a tender babe, e'en though I passed a soldier's word for its health and safety? In this strait I advised with thy kinsman, and he bethought him of thee; he said thou hadst a young wife, had no family of thine own, were trustworthy, honest folk, and would do kindly by the boy, if, on a promise of being well paid, you consented to take charge of him until he is of an age to follow me, should I be spared, to the field, and emulate the deeds of his brave sire. What say you, honest friend, shall it be as I wish? My pay and my share of spoil hath made my income good; I can spare a round sum from it yearly to pay for his keep. What say you, pretty dame, you will not say me nay to nurture a fair child, albeit it is none of thine?"

“A pretty plaything for thee, Margaret, by St. Peter and pin money to boot; think of that, kinswoman,” chimed in Roland Ritson.

Margaret looked at her husband, and he looked at her, but neither spoke.

“You hesitate,” said the noble, a frown gathering on his brow; “my proposition likes you not.”

“In good “truth,” said the yeoman quickly, “it likes me well, for since it hath not pleased the Holy Mother to grant us bantlings, I should be well pleased to fondle one, to bring him up to good thoughts and honest deeds, though he be not son of mine; but it rests with Maggie; if it likes her, we will cry a bargain, sir stranger. What say you, girl?”

“I am well content the child stay with us, Gilbert; for as this good soldier truly says, what should he do with a young and tender babe, being kinless and passing his life in the rough scenes of war? It is a sweet child, and pity indeed ‘twould be that harm should come to it. Let him be as though he were our own, until you, sir, shall think it time he change a forest home for one of thy choosing,”

“Our thoughts and wishes jump together in this, as they do in all things, dear Maggie,” said her husband affectionately to her. Then turning to the traveler, he continued “Well, sir soldier, it is bargain; we keep the boy until he is of an age to give you no trouble, and when that time arrives you will see we have dealt honestly by him, to which I pledge my faith, and there’s my glove on it,” he concluded drawing one of his gauntlets from his belt, and throwing it on the table.

“I accept the token,” returned the traveler, taking up the glove, and giving one of his own in exchange. He then drew a small bag from a pocket in his doublet, adding, “Here is a sum in gold pieces, which each year I will transmit to you, be I at what quarter of the globe I may, for his support and clothing.”

This proposition met with strong opposition on the part of the good yeoman, who stoutly refused to receive a fraction of it; but the friendly altercation was at length terminated by a proposal from Margaret to receive the sum and put it by each year, until the boy quitted them; it would then make a pretty purse to begin the world with. This was agreed to, a few arrangements were made and the parties separated for the night.

When Gilbert Head rose next morning, his first act was to visit the shed, to see that his visitors steeds had met with good treatment. He found them well groomed, but still labouring under the effect of long and hard riding; they were noble steeds, of high breeding and excellent value.

Gilbert Head possessed two horses, and it was with something like a smile he turned to compare these high-bred cattle with his own forest nags.

To his surprise he missed them; they were absent from the stable, and as he knew none connected with his establishment (for he was a keeper of the forest) dare take either or both without his permission, as he kept them for his own especial riding, his mind misgave him that his guests had not stayed for leave-taking. He sought the chamber in which he led them to repose, and found it empty: they had gone ere daybreak.

“There is something afloat that should not be,” he muttered, “or they would not have left in this strange manner. At least they have not been dishonest, everything is as I left it; and so far from robbing me, they have given me a bag of gold, exchanged two blood horses for a pair of sturdy forest nags, but common brutes in comparison with those I have in exchange, and I have a pretty boy thrown into the bargain. No, no, ‘tis no picking and stealing they have been after; there is something in which this child is concerned, of some particular importance, that has made them journey long and wearily to seek me out. Well, be it what it may, I will do my best by the boy, and turn him out something like what a man should be, if wicked blood be not in his veins; and if it be, the fiend himself would not make a stout yew bow out of a broken reed.”

He returned to the room below, and found his wife seated by the fire nursing the little stranger. He communicated to her the unceremonious departure of their guests, and she, who had no very high opinion of her brother’s principles, could give no explanation of their singular conduct; it served them for some speculative conversation.

“It is very odd,” concluded Margaret, after a speech of some length, “that this stranger and my brother should have quitted the house without even letting us know where to find them, in case we need their presence, or even by what name we should call this little dear child.”

“I have thought so too,” answered Gilbert; “but since we know not whether he has had a name given to him by his godfather and godmother, we will even stand sponsors to him ourselves, and call him by the name of my dear brother whom I loved so well, he who died some years since, even Robert – Robyn, as I used to call him, Heaven rest his soul!”

And so the child was named Robyn Head; or as in after times it became corrupted, Robin Hood.

Chapter 2

See a youth of clene compacted him,
Who, with comely grace, in his left hand
Holding his bow, did take his steadfast stand,
Setting his left leg somewhat forth before,
His arrow with his right hand nocking sure
Not stooping, nor yet standing straight upright
Then with his left hand little 'bove his sight
Stretching his left arm out with an easie strength,
To draw an arrow of a yard in length
----- Richard Niccols 1616

Fifteen years after the events related in the preceding chapter, upon a beautiful morning near the end of May, Gilbert Head rode through Sherwood Forest, with the purpose of visiting the pretty little village Mansfieldwoodhaus to obtain some articles for housekeeping. The morning was bright and clear; the trees were clothed in their now bright vestments of green; the grass, sparkling with dew, seemed spotted here and there with small flowers, like a mosaic pavement inlaid with millions of diamonds; the wild ivy clambered up the twisted trunks of the huge oaks, and the sweet flowers which grew in profusion followed them, caressing twiningly alike the ivy and the trees; singing birds thronged the oaks, the beech, the elms and the heavens, making the air redolent with melody; ever and anon a buck, startled by the sound of the horse's footsteps, would start from its resting place, bound across the path, and in an instant be lost in some thicket which stood friendlily near.

Gilbert felt the influence of the bright morning upon him, and in the fullness of his lightheartedness contributed his share to the harmony which reigned around, by chanting portions of Saxon ballads, which it is to be regretted, from their quaint humour, have not been handed down to us; he was busily engaged in shouting forth one which told of the marvelous re-appearance of good King Harold, after his supposed death at the battle of Hastings, to William Rufus, at the moment he was shot in the New Forest by Sir Walter Tyrrel de Poix, and how it was the Evil One, in the shape of a hart, who had caused the horrid catastrophe,

His bowstring had broken, the hart seem'd lame,
"Shoot, Walter, shoot! In the devil's name!"
He cried to the knight, who drew to the head
His shaft, loosed it, and the king fell dead.

At that instant an arrow whistled by his ear, and stood quivering in the trunk of an oak near him. *"**And the king fell dead**"* he repeated in rather a startled tone; he drew up his nag; another moment, and a second arrow flew by him with no better aim. Close enough it was to make him start, for he felt the wind of it as it swept by his cheek.

Ere a third shaft could follow its predecessors, he dismounted, sprung behind an oak, and lost not a second in bending his bow, which he had kept unstrung, as he was upon a peaceful mission, and did not wish even a pleasant opportunity of sport to interfere with what he considered domestic duties. He drew an arrow from his quiver, and placing it to his bow, drew it ready to discharge the first moment he caught a glimpse of his unseen enemy. He looked earnestly in the direction from which the arrows had proceeded, but saw not the slightest appearance which could betoken the presence of aught human.

His horse stood perfectly still, and he imagined that while there it remained, it would be a kind of finger post to indicate to his hidden foe where to send his arrows. As he had no particular fancy to make his body a target to the archer who had been pleasant enough to make an effort for his removal from this state to another, it struck him that the best thing he could do would be to send on the nag and await the issue, trusting to a bountiful Providence for an opportunity of repaying the favours he had received in the same coin.

When he arrived at this conclusion, he gave a particular sound with his tongue, with which the beast was well acquainted, and accordingly soon as he heard it, he pricked up his ears and jogged on. Gilbert waited patiently a short time, but nothing appeared; not sight nor sound met his eyes or ears, save the blue sky, the green trees, the flowers, the warbling of the birds, and the gentle rustling which the cool breeze stirred among the leaves; he loosed his arrow from the bow, and it went whistling to the spot where he imagined his foe lay concealed; he looked hard and closely where it disappeared, but all was still. He tried another ruse, he took a shaft from his quiver, and putting a gauntlet upon it, placed it against the trunk of the tree, in order, should it attract attention and be shot at, he might see from whence the shaft came.

It had scarce glanced in the sunlight, ere an arrow pinned it to the tree; so quick, so speedy had been the act, that he remained as ignorant as ever from whence the arrow proceeded; but he looked at the shaft, and, as it had flown straight, he well knew that its heel pointed to the spot from whence it had been discharged. Taking a deliberate aim at the part where he deemed it most probable the unseen archer lay, he fancied he saw something glitter; he let fly his shaft on the instant, and heard a clear laugh ring in the air nearly as soon as the bow string twanged, and a rich

voice, almost like a woman's, sing —

There are deer in the woods, there are flow'rs in the lea
Sing lily, oh, hey! oh, hey, sing lily!
But think not of these, love, come thou hither to me;
Sing lily, oh, hey! oh, hey, sing lily!
Though 'tis merry to shoot in the bonny green wood,
With the deer in the glade, and thy yew bow so good;
Yet leave them for me, love,my own dear Robin Hood.
Sing lily, oh, hey! Oh, hey, sing lily!

"It's Robin – young, saucy, merry Robin, as I am a sinful man!" cried Gilbert, advancing from behind the tree and calling out lustily, "Ho! Come forth, young hide and seek. Is this thy sport to level thy shafts at thy father? By the Mass! but I thought I had the arrow of an outlaw picking acquaintance with my skull. Have you no more reverence for my grey locks than to see if thine arrow will turn them as t'would the hair upon a deer's hide? Ho! come out, lad what ho! Robin! The lad's in one of his freakish fits; ah! These humours will someday lead him into wild scrapes. Here he comes, a merry rogue, singing the song, too, which I made for Mary Gray to sing to my poor brother Robin,"

"What ho! goodman Hood, blithe father of mine," shouted the voice, the person still in concealment, "Hath my whistling bolt made an ache or a tickle in thine ear?"

There's no cloud o'er the moon, there's no sound in the dell
Sing lily, oh, hey! oh, hey, sing lily!
There's no voice in the air from the convent's soft bell;
Sing lily, oh, hey! oh, hey, sing lily!
Wilt thou wander with me in the merrie Shire Wood,
To the green trysting tree, 'neath whose deep shade we stood;
When you stole my fond heart, my own love, Robin Hood
Sing lily, oh, hey! oh, hey, sing lily!

As the burden of this little ditty was yet being echoed by the hollow places in the greenwood, there emerged from the thicket into which Gilbert had fired, a youth. He approached the keeper, and, when within a few feet, he stopped, and, leaning upon his bow, looked him hard in the face, indulging in another long, clear-toned laugh.

He was barely sixteen years old, yet looked eighteen, for he was tall for his age, and exposure to the weather had deeply browned a skin once exquisitely fair; his frame was slight, but well formed; his limbs, though slender, had that easy set – that freedom of action, which, in youth, indicates coming strength; his chest was open even to an unusual


Gilbert Head (Hood) and Robin

breadth, his uprightness of bearing giving it an expanse in appearance which it perhaps did not really possess; his head and face were round, and well set upon his shoulders; his eyes were a deep hazel, large, full, and bright to a degree; there was a clearness and an expression in them which would tell the beholder the tenor of the thought passing in their possessor's mind ere his lip could give it utterance – they laughed at the witty thought, looked tristful and full of sympathy at aught sad, and round and flashing if his ire was raised; his nose was straight, his lips handsomely shaped, and his teeth looked as he laughed like a row of pearls; his hair was a deep brown, and hung, as was the custom of the period, in rich luxuriance around his shoulders; upon his head was a small cap of bright green cloth, decorated with a heron's feather; a doublet of green – the far-famed Lincoln green – adorned his body; his legs were encased in long hose of fine buckskin reaching to the waist, called *Chaussés*; his feet were encased, in a sort of slipper, something between the buskin and shoe, bearing the Saxon name of *unhege soeo*, it came tight round the foot, reaching up behind, so as to cover the ancle, but open on the instep, it was secured by a thong passing over the instep from one side to the other; this article was also made of buckskin, but of much stouter material than the hose; a baldrick, studded with bright steel points, crossed his shoulder, and passed beneath his arm; his sheaf was buckled to it behind, and at his belt hung a small horn. Thus equipted, a laughing, merry, careless youth of sixteen, stood he who was in future years to make such a figure in the history of his times.

"Made an ache or a tickle in mine ear?" cried Gilbert, reiterating his words, and affecting a sternness which he felt not, "By'r Lady, but that sort of tickling had like to take away all aching."

"Nay," said Robin, "I did not hit you; I did not intend."

"In good sooth," answered Gilbert, "I am much bound to thee. I am happy to say thou didst not hit me; and give thee the credit of fully believing thou did'st not intend to do so; but thou might'st Robin, thou might'st! A turn, a sudden jerk, or halt in the pace of my nag, and by this time I might have been introducing myself to the notice of my ancestors, who, Heaven rest their souls! have quitted the world long ago."

"But as you see you are not," laughed Robin, "My good father, don't show me a stern brow for a boyish trick – a sport."

"Yes; but consider, Robin," said the good forester, mildly, "as Æsop hath it '*what may be sport to thee, is death to me*'."

"Nay," returned Robin, a shade passing over his brow at the continued gravity of his foster father, "Never heed it; I will not offend thee again by

such a trick. But thou said'st this morning, at breakfast, that I was not archer good enough yet to rustle the hair on a deer's ear, by way of startling him, without hitting him. I saw thee jogging quietly along on old Gip, and I had a mind to show thee that I could."

"A pleasant way of satisfying me, truly! But let it pass, Robin, I am not angry with thee; not I," said Gilbert, patting him on the shoulder. "I have but to say, try not thy skill again in the same way."

"Thou need'st not fear; for careless, thoughtless fellow though I be, I would not hurt a hair of thy head, father, or give thee an instant's pain for this green wood and all its joy," said Robin, with warmth, stretching out his hand, which Gilbert took, grasped warmly, and said earnestly —

"I know thou would'st not, my boy. Bless thee! I know thou would'st not! It is now fifteen years, Robin, since thou wert brought, an infant, to my humble home. From that time until now I have felt for thee an affection, which, wert thou my own offspring, could not be warmer, truer, or more sincere. Thou hast always been an honest, open-hearted lad, wearing thy heart outside thy doublet, that those who knew thee once, might know thee always; thou hast never given me one moment's pain; for an' thou wert a little wayward and wilful, thou wert never wicked. Marry 'tis what I would see in a boy. I would not have the young hardy tree grow up clogged and fettered by your trailing, creeping things, handsome though they be to gaze upon! And while thou art with me, and set as thou hast done, I will be unto thee a father and a friend."

"As you have ever been, dear Gilbert!" exclaimed Robin, with fervour. "And may my right arm lose its strength, and every shaft I loose miss its aim, if ever I forget it, But tell me, father, have you not heard from the friend who brought me to you?"

"I have never seen him since," replied Gilbert, "and only heard once; and that was by a scroll delivered to me about a year after I had received you. It was deciphered to me by my confessor, and ran thus –

Gilbert Head or Hood, I placed twelve months since an infant boy in thy charge; I agreed to pay thee a yearly sum for his support, which I enclose. As I am leaving England for France, and my stay or return is uncertain, I have made arrangements for thee to receive yearly a like sum, upon application to the sheriff of Nottingham; the money is placed in thy name, and can only be received by thee. Bring up the boy as though he were thine own son, and on my return to this land will claim him,

Signed, Hubert Stanley

"There was neither date nor name of place from whence it was sent; and with the story which I related to you as told me by him who brought you to me, you know as much concerning your birth and parentage as I

do. If he never returns, there is always the same home for you as you have ever known; and when the green turf is growing over me, Robin, – for you know, boy, the sturdiest oak must fall when its time arrives – why there will still be the cottage, and the bit of stock it contains, to make up for the loss of those who once sat round the hearth, and they will, perhaps, serve to keep those who have gone in thy memory."

The tear glistened in Robin's eye as Gilbert gave utterance to his kindly feelings, and hastily dashing his glove across his eyelid to brush away the large drop which stood there, he said – "Let's talk no more of it; it's a dull subject, and when you say such monstrous kind things you always give me a watery eyelid and an aching throat, and that's not manly, but weak and girlish; such must not be the character of Robin Hood. I shall know, I dare say, someday, who I am and what I am, and if I don't, well, what listeth. I have not a doubt that I shall sleep just as light and wake as merrily as I do now. I know not who I am, but I will tell you what I mean to be — that is, the bonniest archer that ever drew bow in Sherwood Forest; I can bring down a flying bird or a fleeing buck now – but that's not half enough, tell me something to hit, Gilbert; you are a good shot; show me something you deem too hard even for you to accomplish, and I will succeed in it, or you shall say I am no marksman."

"You're the best for your age in this country, and no lie told," Said Gilbert proudly, "and I taught you. I used to do a thing, Robin, when many years younger, that I deemed the topping of all archery, for I knew none but myself that could do it."

"And what was that?" impatiently asked Robin.

"You see yonder leaf hanging by its thin stalk to that bough?" he answered, pointing to the straggling branch of an oak which stood opposite to them.

"I do," was the reply.

"Well, I could cut that leaf from the branch with one shaft, place a second in the branch on the same spot from which I had cut the leaf, and split that arrow with a third ere the first had reached the ground!" concluded Gilbert, with a satisfied nod of the head.

"That's worth trying for; see what I can do," cried Robin, his eyes sparkling with the idea of accomplishing that which appeared almost an impossibility. He drew three arrows from his sheaf, and put two of them loosely in his belt, so as to draw them quickly from it; he then stood to take his aim, and a more graceful figure or attitude could not well be imagined; his legs were but a short distance apart, the left a little in advance of the right; his body inclining a little to the out stretched left arm which held the bow, as it was a peculiar art to throw the weight of the body to the horns of the bow, thus saving a necessity for great muscular

power in drawing the string, enabling the archer to take a steadier and surer aim. As he stood motionless, Gilbert eyed him with a proud satisfaction in his eyes, a youth of nobler bearing never stood in the green wood.

“Keep your eye on the leaf boy,” he cried; “wag not an eyelid, budge not the millionth part of an inch until the first shaft has left your bow.”

Robin followed his advice, and when the twang of the bow discharging the first arrow caught Gilbert’s ear, he held his breath as if it would influence Robin’s success.

The first arrow tore the leaf away, the second stood quivering in the branch almost as soon as the first had left the bow, but, the barb of the third shaft, as he drew it quickly from his belt, caught, and thus prevented him being successful. An exclamation of impatience burst from him, but Gilbert checked him, and putting his hand upon his shoulder, exclaimed:

“‘Twas well tried for – a good shot, Robin; why your best foresters, in their prime of shooting, could not have done more; ‘twas well done.”

“No, it was not done, father; but it shall be ere I stir out of the wood,” was Robin’s rejoinder, as he took three more shafts from his sheath to make a second essay. Gilbert was about to give him minute directions for the furtherance of his object, when a loud neigh rung in the air.

“Gip, as I live,” he cried laughingly; “The old dame is tired of her own company. By the *Rood* [‘*The Holy Cross*’]! I must away to Mansfieldwood-haus, or Margaret will be giving me the length of her tongue and where’s the shaft that will measure with it? On with thy trial, boy; when I return I shall perhaps find that thy skill in the use of the long bow equals Gilbert Hood’s in his best days.” So saying, hallooing to his nag, he disappeared among the vast trees, leaving Robin to his task, alone.

For some time Robin continued his efforts, and his perseverance met with a tolerable return. He found the greatest difficulty in displacing his second shaft with the third, but his determined and continuous efforts were at length crowned with complete success; the leaf was borne away by his first shaft, his second entered the branch from which the leaf had been displaced, and the third clove in twain the second arrow ere the first had reached the ground. He felt an inward pride heave his chest as he gazed upon the evidence of his success, and he thought how gratified his foster father would be to find that he had accomplished a feat which rivaled the best efforts of the most famous archers known.

He was startled from a reverie into which he had fallen, by a buck suddenly bursting through the thicket from which he had himself made his appearance to Gilbert Hood; it dashed down the broad glade, and disappeared in the intricacies of the forest. He followed it with his eyes until it was lost to his sight, and on turning them again to the spot from

whence the buck had broken, he was surprised by the hasty appearance of a man attired in the garb of a forester. The stranger crouched watchingly, as if expecting the coming of someone from whom he wished to keep concealed. His back was turned to Robin. After retiring a few paces, he knelt down on one knee, and putting a shaft to his bow took a steadfast aim, and discharged it. By a sudden exclamation of disappointment, Robin supposed him to have missed his object.

He looked in the direction in which the fellow shot, to ascertain at what he was aiming, but a second arrow departed on its errand without his discovering the object at which it was loosed. The stranger watched the tract of his shaft, but again gave utterance to his disappointment in the shape of a round oath, which Robin distinctly heard. He drew a third arrow, and with an expression of the utmost anxiety, aimed, and again missed, as well as Robin could judge from an extravagant utterance of rage falling from his lips. There was a small opening between two bulky beech trees, commanding a view of a small portion of the glade, or, as it might have been termed, the pathway, leading to and past the spot on which Robin stood. As the man's movements had created an interest in him, he kept his eyes fixed in the direction in which he shot, and this opening just described, lying a little to his left hand, as he gazed at the other point, enabled him to see who or whatever passed; he was, therefore, much surprised on perceiving a couple of forest nags, bearing a female and one habited in the costume of a knight or cavalier, appear and pass slowly on.

The female seemed alarmed, and the cavalier's head was moving and turning in every direction, evidently endeavoring to discover that with which Robin was already acquainted, that is, from whence the arrows, which ever and anon flew around him, were proceeding. Robin presently observed the lady start; he heard a scream, and saw an arrow sticking through the pommel of her saddle. There was no time to lose, and taking advantage of the same means which the fellow who was discharging his shaft at the coming strangers had used, he got behind a tree, and fixing an arrow to his bow, he determined to make the forester remember as long as he lived, shooting thus iniquitously at unprotected people.

It is needless to say that Robin was in good practice, and when the outstretched left arm of the man told that he was again drawing his bow in base attack upon the strangers, ere his shaft quitted the bowstring, Robin's arrow transfixed his left hand to his bow. With a roar of mingled anguish and rage, he turned his eyes to the place which concealed our hero, but without avail, the small figure of the youth being effectually concealed by the broad trunk of an oak. Robin could not help laughing with the heartiest glee, to see the futile efforts the man made to withdraw the arrow which fastened his hand so firmly to the yew bow.

The shaft which Robin had discharged was, like all he carried, made by himself, with the exception of the barbed heads, and for the construction of those he was indebted to the skill of Gilbert Hood, himself an admirable bowman. They were formed of the best steel, were long, thin, and tapered to a fine point, enabling a good archer to hit the smallest mark with unerring precision. With one of these had Robin pinned the strange forester's hand to his bow, with a firmness which would prevent their speedy separation.

The idea of killing the man never entered his imagination; but he had not done with him yet; and, leveling a second shaft, whipped the fellow's cap from his head, to his great alarm. Being at a loss to discover by whom he was attacked, he looked around him in the greatest trepidation, and ejaculating loudly "**the foul fiend!**" turned and fled. With a loud laugh Robin discharged an arrow, to assist him on his flight. It overtook him; and, although it did no great damage, still, from its receipt, he would for some time find it more easy than agreeable to take a seat anywhere. As the arrow entered, he gave a leap, and, at the same time, a frantic yell.

With a desperate effort, he seized and drew the arrow out, redoubling his speed; leaving his blood to track his footsteps, he dashed through the foliage, and was soon out of sight. Indulging in a laugh that made his sides ache, Robin then prepared to meet the strangers, knowing that a few moments would bring them to the place where he stood. Leaving the shadow of the tree, he carelessly leaned against the part facing the pathway, and awaited the coming lady and cavalier. Round they came at full trot; and the instant the cavalier observed Robin leaning composedly against the tree, he made a fierce exclamation, drew his sword, and dashed up to him. It did not take a second for Robin to discover that he was mistaken for the assassin who had fled; but there was no time for explanation, and, exerting his agility, be bounded from the tree to a short distance; he drew his bow, and, with an arrow ready to discharge, he called a parley.

"Hold thy hand, I prithee, sir knight," he cried. "I am not he whom thou takest me for; he that attacked you has fled."

"Fled!" echoed the stranger. And then hastily interrogating Robin, continued. "How know you who attacked me? Where is the ruffian? Art, thou one of the gang? Speak! Ere I cut you down."

"Had I twenty tongues, I might answer your questions at once," coolly retorted Robin. "And as for cutting me down, ere you could raise your weapon to put your threat into execution, this arrow which is now extended towards you, would be quivering through your heart. However, as neither act would serve honest purpose, I will answer your questions as well as I can, in the order presented me, and briefly too."

“I stood here – I saw a man break the covert, and send shafts at some object hidden to me by the thick trees. Yon opening showed me yourself and that gentle lady were the butts at which his shafts were leveled; and calling upon our Holy Mother, I put a stop to his devilish purpose by pinning his hand to his long bow. He did not see me, and I fancy he believed the Evil One was at his shoulder, for he called out his name aloud, and dashed through yonder thicket, but not until I put an arrow into his doublet to quicken his speed.” Here Robin laughed heartily again. “Where the ruffian has fled I know not, but wherever he may be, he can’t be very happy; and as to being one of the gang, do I look like one?”

The stranger gazed at him earnestly while he spoke, to see if he could read aught in the shape of falsehood; but the frank manner in which he related his story, his clear and open brow, which seemed the abode of truth itself, and his extreme youth, quite removed him beyond doubt. When Robin concluded, the stranger exclaimed —

“No, thou dost not look like a rogue! Thy youth and honest bearing remove thee from such thoughts; return thine arrow to its sheath; come hither, and receive my thanks for thy timely aid;” and he drew a small bag of gold coin from his belt. “Tell me who thou art, and, if thou canst, guide me to some place where I can refresh these exhausted nags, this lady, and myself for we are right weary.”

“Keep your gold, fair sir,” returned Robin; “I neither want nor wish it. My name is Robin Hood; I dwell with my father and mother a short two miles from hence on the borders of the forest. If you will follow me I will promise you rest and refreshment, in all sincerity and true heartiness of spirit.”

The lady had now arrived, and Robin saw from beneath a black hood a pair of sparkling dark eyes, brilliant and beautiful; making her a courteous bow, he gazed his full at them with rather more of admiration than politeness.

“May we put faith in thee?” said the cavalier, interrupting his agreeable gaze.

Robin threw up his head proudly in answer to the question, and saying, “Else is there no faith on earth,” led the way to the cottage of Gilbert Hood.

Chapter 3

A sweet disorder in the dress
(A happy kind of carelessness);
A lawn about the shoulders thrown
Into a fine distraction;
An erring lace which here and there
Inthralls the crimson stomacher;
A cap neglectful, and thereby
Ribands that flow confusedly;
A winning wave, deserving note
In the tempestuous petticoat;
A careless shoe-string in whose tie
I see a wild civility.
----- Robert Herrick, 1623

In a mood half mirthful, half thoughtful, Robin Hood preceded the stranger and the lady. He had mixed with no society above the class in which Gilbert Hood was placed, and therefore knew little of the courtesy due to a rank considerably above what was apparently his own. There was a certain deference which he knew was paid to the lords of the soil; but he had yet to learn that the male stranger, though habited in the garb which betokened gentility of birth, was one of these. He did not choose, therefore to humble himself to one to whom he had just rendered a service, and was now favouring by leading him to a place of rest and shelter – one who might be no better than himself, and, to sum up all, was at present his debtor. These ideas, united with the freedom of speech and manners which a society of foresters, and a forest life gave, produced a roughness in his bearing that was, in truth unnatural. It was his ambition to be a skillful archer, and a bold, daring forester. Although the slightness of his frame and the want of physical strength rendered the attainment of the latter somewhat improbable, yet he affected what he wished to be, rather than appearing what nature had really made him.

Gilbert Head, who had united to his other qualities the one of ballad making had taught him a collection of ditties which would have filled a stout volume, one which would have been valuable had it been preserved to the present day; when in mirthful or reckless humour, he sung some one of these, *maugre* [*archaic. 'in spite of'*] where or in whose company he might happen to be. On the present occasion he felt a marvelous propensity to carol one, but every time it rose to his lips, the thoughts of the lady who was following restrained him and it died away in a murmur. He had only seen her eyes, but how bright they were! Yet why should he have a dare to restrain his joyousness because he had seen a pair of bright eyes beneath a hood?

Any eyes would look bright beneath a hood; perhaps her face was not so handsome as her eyes, her person probably less agreeable than her face, and manners than both. Why should he feel as if ashamed to act before these strangers, as he would not have hesitated a second to have acted before others?

He might have spared himself the trouble of asking these questions; he did care, that was the truth. It was beyond his wit to discover why the lady engrossed all his thoughts, so he continued to wonder whether she was really pretty, for he felt convinced, spite of his endeavours, that such eyes could belong to no face without features to correspond. “Ì shall see,” muttered he to himself, “when I get home, so I’ll think no more about it;” but although the cavalier enter-ed into a kind conversation with him, there was an absence of that ready wit which usually sparkled through his replies. He occasionally addressed the lady, and felt almost as much admiration for the tone of her voice as he had hitherto for her eyes, which, from the shade of that envious hood, seemed to sparkle brighter than ever, even when his back was to her, he could tell that they were playing with full force upon his shoulders; making them glow, and him walk uneasily.

“You were not wanting in a stout heart, good youth,” said the cavalier, “to try thy shafts upon an outlaw. Did you not fear that he would turn upon you, had you failed in your aim?”

“I had no fear of failing in my aim,” replied Robin, after eyeing him a moment to see whether the observation had not been made in jest.

“Are you so good a marksman as to be sure of pinning a man’s hand to a bow, at fifty yards?” asked the stranger.

“Aye! if you call that being a good marksman,” cried Robin, a sneer curling his lip.

“You will not object to give me a proof of your skill, as we journey to your home,” said the cavalier.

“No,” was the reply.

At that moment, a large bird sprung into the air, and a young fawn bounded down the glade. Ere the stranger’s request to make either of these objects a test of his skill had left his lips a minute, the bird and the fawn lay on the ground, each transfixed with an arrow from Robin’s bow.

The cavalier cried “admirable!”, the lady uttered an exclamation of surprise while Robin laughed, and thought them strange judges of the art of shooting with the yew bow.

“They will serve for supper,” he cried, “We are just home; I will run on and prepare my mother for your coming,” and bidding them keep the track they were pursuing, he darted down the glade and disappeared.

“‘Tis a noble youth Marian.” said the cavalier to the lady, gazing after Robin with unqualified approbation; “The best and brightest specimen of an English forester I have yet seen.”

“He is very young,” suggested the lady.

“True; and younger, perhaps, than his looks give him credit for; but a life in the free air and the green woods impress the strength and manliness upon youth which years alone give in the close atmosphere of a town,” replied the cavalier, and sighed.

“I fancy, Allan,” said the lady, “that the green woods of Sherwood Forest have less to do with that profound sigh, than the fair daughter of Nottingham’s proud Baron?”

“And you have often strange fancies, Marian” replied Allan; “Yet ‘tis needless to deny it. I proudly confess I would sooner spend my days with a forest such as this for my ramblings, a yeoman’s cot for my home, and Christabel for my wife, than enjoy the wealth and honors which encircle a throne, had I the opportunity of choosing.”

“Very romantic and very pretty,” cried the lady archly. “But, good Allan, would Christabel – always providing the proud Baron, her most worshipful sire, gave his willing consent to your union, which, I am sorry to say, I much doubt – consent to give up her present luxuries for the cold comforts of a forest home?”

“Why, Marian,” exclaimed Allan, “I have often heard you speak in animated praise of a forest home.”

“Which I most honestly confess,” answered Marian, “But, you know, I have often strange fancies and, therefore, good brother, I am allowed to think as I please. Would Christabel think thus, even after we have taken this long journey upon some such errand as putting the question to her?”

“If she loves me truly, she will share whatever home I have, and in which I endeavour to make her happy, without a thought contrar’. If I can but discover the truth of the information upon which I am acting, I will bring the proud Baron upon his knees, and make him consent to my demand, or Nottingham Castle shall become a smoking ruin. Not one stone–”

“Hush!” hurriedly interrupted the lady; “Here is the cottage — there is the youth. I presume that is his mother by his side – a cleanly dame, and well-looking.”

“And so is the boy,” suggested her brother.

“He’s more man than boy,” rose to the lady’s lips quickly, but she let the words go quietly down without utterance, and wondered why she blushed so very crimson. She drew her hood closely over her head; and when she had dismounted by her brother’s assistance, and thrown back the hood, all the crimson had departed, save the delicate tinge remained upon her cheek

Robin opened his eyes wider than ordinarily as her face was presented to him, and, quite unconsciously exclaimed aloud – “I knew those eyes could only belong to a beautiful face.”

Dame Margaret ejaculated “Robin!”

The cavalier smiled; while the lady blushed again, almost as deeply, as the crimson hue which covered, like a scarlet veil, the face of the youth. Had any pit, however deep, stood near, he would have leaped into it, and blessed its friendly aid. He seemed to feel as though he stood in a very foolish position; but the lady, although blushing, was not displeased, and the kind glance with which she repaid his observation slightly reassured him. Taking the steeds, he gladly seized the opportunity of leading them to the shed; while Margaret ushered, with a kindly welcome, the brother and sister to her humble abode.

In a short time afterwards, Gilbert Hood returned from his domestic expedition. He also, as well as his foster son, had been acting the part of the good Samaritan to a wounded stranger, whom he had met upon his way, bleeding and helpless. He led him into the cottage at the same moment that Robin entered, after seeing the horses served, the latter started as he heard Gilbert exclaim hastily, “Margaret, I have brought a wounded man requiring thine aid; some rogue has played him the scurvy trick of pinning his hand to his yew bow. By my faith but it was neatly done, whoever did it, and no easy matter to extract. If it had not been for my wood knife, it might still have been sticking there. Quick, dame, the man is faint from loss of blood! How is it with thee? So, man, keep up! Dame, cold water. Quick! He has fainted.”

The man, weakened by an excessive loss of blood, had swooned into Gilbert’s arms, and, as his face turned to Robin, he saw the grim and ghastly visage of the man he had shot in the forest. The features were rough and forbidding; indeed his whole exterior had villain stamped upon it, as plainly as majesty’s countenance upon a new golden coin of the realm.

It should have been stated that the cavalier and his sister had been shown to separate sleeping apartments, to arrange their attire, ere the

man was brought into the cottage by Gilbert; consequently, Robin was the only person who could be aware of the character of the wounded forester; he therefore requested his father not to say to the other guests in what manner the man had been wounded, for reasons which he himself would afterwards explain, determining inwardly to keep a strict watch upon the *rencontre* [*archaic. 'unexpected encounter'*] between the forester and the cavalier, and, whatever the result, to act upon it.

"And what mysterious intimacy do you suspect exists between the gentle cavalier and the rough forester," demanded Gilbert, "that you should require me to keep silence upon the singular manner in which this poor devil is hurt?"

"You shall know anon" returned Robin, evasively.

"Know anon, quotha!" uttered Gilbert; "but I should like to know now; for it is a marvel to me in what manner the intimacy — if any such there be between these folks – can affect either you or I. I have, however, one thing to say, Master Robin, of which I trust you are perfectly conscious, albeit I bruit the subject – it is that you do not play any of your tricks upon travelers with our guests. I know you to love a jest or trick as well as e'er a lad, Christian or Infidel, and it is not always that you have considered the fitting time or subject: I prithee do now."

"What should make you hit on such a thought, good man?" said Robin, somewhat surprised by the purport of Hood's speech.

"Forget you that there is a lady? It behoves one to consider twice ere we put a jest, rough or smooth, time fitting or unfitting on one so gentle – at least, so I think."

"And so think I, lad. But know ye aught of this?" cried Gilbert, holding up a headless arrow. "Marry, to me this looks like a shaft whose make I fancy I know, and whose barbed head," he continued, producing it as he had severed it with his wood-knife, when he had extracted it from the forester's hand, "looks marvellously like my own fashioning. I believe I am right in in my conjecture if I say 'tis thine, Robin?"

"It is mine!" replied he.

"And looks it not like a rough jest, Robin, to essay a trick this shaft has done so effectually?" interrogated Gilbert, rather gravely. "Is it not somewhat of a shame to thine honour, that from a covert thou shouldst wantonly wound, even to danger, one who never harmed thee?"

"There is no shame, father," returned Robin, the blood mantling his forehead; "an' you had been there you would have done even as I did. The shame is not to me, but to him who could send his shafts seeking the

lives of unprotected travellers, who little deemed their persons and their purses were in such danger from one who sought the covert to execute his villainous intention."

"And who was that?" demanded his foster father.

"Who but him you brought in with you, to give shelter and relief. You draw from me that which I would fain keep. In my own defence must I tell you now what I would have delayed to a time when I could have made better use of it. Listen, Gilbert: I stood in the forest seeking to accomplish the task you had given me; after several trials I succeeded in performing it. While practising to perfect myself in the performance of it, I observed the grim dog you brought here steal through the brake, kneel down, and aim his shafts at some unseen object. He discharged many. At length an opening showed me that the cavalier and lady, our guests, were those at whom his shafts were directed."

"And seeing, also, that one stood quivering in the pommel of the lady's saddle, I thought it time to put a stop to his base attempt, and I honestly confess I pinned his hand to his bow, to make him remember another time not to basely seek the lives of his fellow creatures."

"When you wounded him, did he perceive you?" asked Gilbert, thoughtfully.

"No," answered Robin, "No; I sought the same means of secrecy that he did. The trunk of an old oak screened me from his sight. He turned with a horrible grin and an oath when I hit him, to see who had done him the kindness; but I was too well hidden for him to discover me. I then removed the cap from his skull, and he verily believed *Sathanas* ['*satan*'] was at his heels: '**the foul fiend!**' he roared, and fled. I then gave him his second wound, to speed him on his journey. The remainder is easily told: I met the cavalier and lady, and conducted them hither."

"I wronged you in my thoughts, Robin" said Gilbert, taking his foster son kindly by the hand, "and I see no shame in begging thy pardon for it. Thou didst well, boy, and I love thee for thy spirit. By the Mass! I must look to my moveables, for the rogue's green wound will soon be healed, and he may take it into his head to bring some of his friends to thank me for my hospitality, in a manner I shall by no means relish. It appears to me that I know the fellow's face well; but the ghastliness his faintness produced, and the haggard expression hard fare has imprinted on his features, have wrought such a character on them that I cannot remember exactly where I have seen them. I am sure I know him, but when or where is dark to me."

Their conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Allan and Marian; and if Robin had been struck by the beauty of the lady's face upon its first

presentation to him, he was now entirely smitten when he saw the whole of her person unencumbered by hood or mantle.

She stood about the middle height; beautifully proportioned. Her limbs, her taper waist, her form and bearing were perfect symmetry; they were in the choicest keeping with her face, whose beauty was of a description which is in general much admired. She possessed large dark hazel eyes, deep enough in colour to be termed black; her eyelids were full and long, adorned by a silken fringe that made a rare appearance of dreaminess when the eye itself was wakeful, and even darting arrowy glances fraught with sweet death. Her nose was straight and thin; her lips were of that particular pinky tint — that ripe, pulpy appearance that made one's very heart jump to look upon, and wonder, until wonder could go no farther, if it were possible ever to obtain a kiss from them, and if ever one could recover it when obtained; and then, when the gentle smile or the sweet words were kindly bestowed, who could see the assemblage of pearls in that choice mouth and not thank their lucky stars they had not missed the sight?

There was also a beautifully clear skin, not exactly white, but then it was of a hue most delightful, lending a tone to the peach blossom-tinted cheeks that dealt destruction to all attempts to gaze upon them indifferently. She was attired in a close-bodied kirtle, coming right up to the throat and fitting tight to the body, displaying the beauty of her form deliciously. There were wide sleeves covering the arm from the shoulder to the elbow, and then hung down for the wind to sport with, leaving bare the fair arm, whose wrist was encircled with a modest bracelet, while the small white taper-fingered hand – the softest of the soft, displayed a few rings of value, borrowing fresh lustre from the hand that bore them. The dress, which was made of fine fawn-coloured, woollen cloth, was trimmed here and there with a crimson *riband* [‘*ribbon*’], and ever and anon a wave *in the tempestuous petticoat* exhibited a small foot peeping out, encased in a laced slipper of fine buckskin.

Her hair, which we have not forgotten, but left to the last to do due honour unto, was of the very darkest shade of brown, and shone as brightly as her marvelous eyes. It descended in long ringlets, whose graceful curves – whose exquisite silkiness of texture — tore the admiration from heart and eyes ere lips could utter them. There was a beauteous profusion, languishing and luxuriating, over the neck and shoulders, and there was a small crimson velvet band passing round the head, fastened by a golden clasp, whose adornment was a large diamond which found its home on her fair expanse of forehead. Her age was tender, albeit her appearance, language, and manners betokened a maturer age.

Of the few feelings to which Robin had turned a willing attention, that of a kindly one to the fair sex was one. From a child to the present time, when a visitant at neighbours' cottages, or mixing in the village sports at Mansfieldwoodhaus, his ambition and his pleasure had been to shine in the eyes of the gentle ones, and his success had been commensurate to his efforts.

There were few female eyes that were not cast kindly on him, there were few soft hands hastily withdrawn, if he pressed them in his own, there were few ears turned away when he had something low and tender to murmur; and few lips snatched angrily from him if he imprinted a kiss upon them. But as the kindness he received had been general, so was his return, he loved them all, and all alike. There had been no one in particular to whom he had spoken, danced, laughed, or walked with more often than another; and though occasionally he had been bantered that this or that little maiden was the chosen one of his heart, he knew that the charge was without foundation. But now he was as entirely a victim to the susceptibility of his nature as was mortal ever. He looked at the lady, and every look went straight from his eyes to his heart, like his own arrows at their object.

His glances were sidelong glances, it is true, because the recollection of his outburst was not obliterated, but they drew in large draughts of an admiration which was fraught with the extremest danger to his peace. The lady's eye occasionally met his, much to his embarrassment, and he as speedily turned it on some other object, with an earnestness of manner which would have led an observer, if they had not been a woman, to have imagined that his whole thoughts and attention were fixed upon the object on which his eyes rested. There was a flush on his cheeks, and a pleasing sensation in his breast; one of those feelings which we have but once in our existence that, when faded, never returns. Robin never felt so strangely before; he thought he should like to be away, walking alone in the broad wood, and yet he did not wish to leave the lady's company.

He felt dull, and yet inclined to be joyous. He could not explain the cause of his being thus; he felt annoyed that he should appear sheepish, and yet he could not help himself. He felt a relief when he heard Gilbert, who had been conversing with his guests, exclaim –

"Robin, this good cavalier tells me you shot a fawn and a wild fowl; 'tis good news, for our larder is at its gasp, and guests rest tonight with us. You know where the game lies, take old Lincoln with you, and bring them in." Robin obeyed with a light step, and as the door closed behind him, they heard his voice sing —

Up! sluggards up! from your blazing logs.
Ay, soho, hoo, tellal la!
Do ye not hear your loud baying dogs?
Ay, soho, hoo, tellal la!
Through the bonnie old wood there flies a red deer,
As the horn of the huntsman breaks on his ear;
His speed's as the lightning, he trembles with fear.
Ay, soho, hoo, tellal la!

The last words faded in the ears of the listeners, and Allan exclaimed — "Are ye not fond of your son, good forester?"

"I am, sir; I am, indeed; he's a youth to be proud of. His skill in archery, sir, surpasses all I have ever witnessed, taking his youth into consideration. I am bold to say, that in the broad lands of merry England there dwells not a youth that can bend a bow at a mark with like skill. Aye, many of our best archers would boast proudly of feats I have seen him do easily. I am accounted a good shot myself; and therefore can judge these matters."

"'Tis to be hoped that his spirit and honesty equals his skill," suggested Marian.

"His spirit and honesty!" reiterated Gilbert, in a glow of enthusiasm. "He has the boldest, freest, gentlest spirit of any that ever placed foot on green turf; he's as true as Damascus steel, every inch of him. You read his character in his every act; he's as open as a clear sky; and I am free to say the bonniest, merriest, wittiest lad in Christendom."

"And the most affectionate," exclaimed Margaret, as a wind up.

Marian felt pleased that she had brought forth this eulogy on him.

"God bless him!" continued Margaret, "Were he my own child, I could not love him more truly or tenderly than I do."

"Is he not your own child?" ejaculated Allan, with surprise.

"No," said Gilbert, "he is only ours by adoption; but he is unto us as our own offspring, and were his parents to claim him, 'twould be as sad a day to me as if it had pleased the Almighty to take him from us forever."

"I feel quite interested in him," remarked Allan. "If your story is not too long for your patience to relate, or if, indeed, there is any story at all, I shall be glad to hear it."

Gilbert, as he knew of no motive for concealment, readily related all he knew of the matter, and when he mentioned that the persons who had brought Robin had come from Huntingdon, Allan mentioned that himself and sister had just come from that town, which was his native place.

“There is more in this than meets the eye,” he continued; “The story is plausible, but I doubt its truth; the child was the offspring, he told you, of a younger son of good family, who died in battle; it may be so, but without some strange motive, why was the infant brought the very long distance from Huntingdon to this place, for the mere purpose of placing him with one who should bring him up? You tell me a relation of your wife’s proposed this to the person into whose charge the dying father consigned his child: still I am convinced that there is a mystery, which has some motive for his concealment more powerful than his well-being.”

“Give me a description of the persons who brought him hither, and I will ascertain on my return to Huntingdon whether there was at the period you received him any child for whose concealment there could be a motive, and I will forward to you the result of my investigation. I am well assured that he bears upon him the impress of noble blood; added to that, he has saved my sister’s and my own life from the treacherous attack of a robber, and I owe him a good turn, which I will not be backward in doing, so soon as opportunity serves.”

The afternoon passed away; Robin returned with his game, and being somewhat better acquainted with the strangers, recovered his sprightliness; by his remarks, his mirth, and wit, he fully bore out the character his foster father had given him.

“I wish to visit Nottingham in the morning; would you like to accompany me, Robin?” enquired Allan; “I have some important business to transact. I will leave my sister for a day to recruit, and we will return ere the sun sets. It is not far from hence, is it?”

“About twelve miles from here,” answered Gil-bert; “it is called fourteen from Mansfield. I, myself, should wish to pay the sheriff a visit. I have not been there these two years, and I should like to hear if aught has transpired respecting Robin.”

“We can journey together,” suggested Robin.

“Do not leave us alone with that grim wounded man, Gilbert,” said Margaret. “I do not like his looks I am not easily alarmed, but there is something so ferocious in his demeanour that I do not like being left alone in the house with him.”

“Pshaw!” laughed Gilbert; “There’s old Lincoln. Besides, girl, have you not the hounds to protect you? Why there’s old Lance would tear out the heart of any one that dared to lay finger in the way of outrage upon you.”

Margaret still hesitated, and she found an able seconder in Marian, who most resolutely declared that she would not stop alone; adding, that if they were all determined to go, she would make one of the party. This

determination effectually decided the question, and Gilbert was therefore compelled to consent to stay behind; most reluctantly did he give way, for most gladly would he have gone.

But who could withstand the opposition of two females? Mortal man, as was Gilbert, he found he could not.

The curfew had not long given forth its accustomed peal, when the supper table smoked with the proofs of Robin's skill, and a snug little party was there to partake of it. There was much laughing and merriment, much talking and no little eating, for it was the custom in those days to bring an appetite to the meal about to be partaken.

The young people appeared very comfortable: Robin and the fair Marian getting on very good terms, and Allan listening with most earnest attention to Gilbert's stories of the green wood. In the midst of their enjoyment they were startled by the sound of a loud whistle proceeding from an upper room; this, after the lapse of a minute, was answered from the wood.

For a minute or so a pause took place in the conversation, but the sound was not repeated; the uneasy whine of a hound rose once on the air, but that also subsided and silence reigned; Gilbert broke it by observing – "There's mischief brewing; Lance would not have sent forth that cry if all was as it should be. I fear there are those abroad in the forest that love to dip their claw into honest men's pouches, nill he, will he!"

"The first whistle came from the little chamber, overhead," said Robin; "Shall I steal softly up and see what the wounded man is dreaming about? I warrant me if he is at any tricks I will trick him!"

"No," interposed dame Margaret, "Don't go, Robin; there is something in the man's appearance that betokens good to none; you would be but a reed to him, if he were wickedly inclined, and I would not have you hazard the danger."

"By'r lady," muttered Gilbert, clenching his fist, "an' he harmed a hair of Robin's head, the ungrateful hound should with a short *shrift* [*archaic. 'absolution'*] be slung up by the throat to an arm of the first oak, and that's not many yards from this door!"

"Have you ought to fear from attacks of lawless men?" enquired Allan; "Would they not leave an honest yeoman's cottage free, and attack the more wealthy?"

"In good truth," replied Gilbert, "there are few to drink beer where wine is to be had, and the hungry man will eat meal in thankfulness when he cannot put meat into his mouth. Thus it is with your outlaws; when the rich man's bounty is not to be had, they thrust an ungodly claw upon a poor

man's mite. They have several times attempted to share my humble pittance uninvitedly; but, thanks to a good bow, good dogs, and a stout heart, they have as yet been compelled to decamp with what they sought not — a stout arrow in their jerkin!"

"A forest life, then, has its dangers and inconveniences," suggested Marian, with a look of meaning at her brother.

"None that I ever heard of," exclaimed Robin, enthusiastically, "It's all pleasure. I have been for a whole day in the village, and have wondered how the folks can rest in their cots day after day, and not even see the rich glades of the merry old green wood, glowing with the golden sunlight. If I were not to breathe its fresh air, hear the sweet singing birds, frolic among the flowers, or hunt down a fawn with old Lance to assist me, or be without the use of bow, I should die away like a bird in a cage."

"Its charms to you, then," said Marian, "far eclipse those of a village or town life."

Robin's answer was disturbed by a loud thwack at the door, which raised the clamorous baying of two stout deerhounds, who had been lying in luxurious ease before the large wood fire that blazed upon the hearth. Marian echoed the knock with a faint scream, while Gilbert, Allen, and Robin, sprung to their feet.

Ere a demand could be made as to who knock-ed, a second blow was given, with a sound and force that plainly told the arms were stalwart, and the staff stout that had performed it.

"Who beats thus loudly at my door post?" inquired Gilbert, whose voice could be scarce heard, loudly as he shouted, above the baying of the hounds.

"Down, dogs!" cried Robin. "Down, Lance! Silence, rogues."

Gilbert repeated his question, as a third blow descended upon the door, with such right earnestness that it shook on its hinges. A voice, deep and loud, answered.

"Two poor friars of the Benedictine Order, who crave the exercise of your Christian charity for a night's shelter and food."

"From what monastery, and whither bound?" inquired Gilbert.

"From the Abbey of Linton, our destination, Mansfield. In the darkness of the night have we lost our path, and the sudden rain has compelled us to seek the shelter of thy friendly cot. In the name of our Holy Mother, deny us not, for we are faint and weary," concluded a voice in deep sonorous tones, more befitting a command than a prayer.

“Thy voice bears none of thy body’s faintness,” argued Gilbert, “and excuse me if I hesitate to open my doors, when wild folks are abroad to injure honest men. How should I know that you are holy friars?”

“By opening your door and looking upon us,” returned the voice; “and be speedy, good yeoman, or I may endeavour to take by force, spite of my fatigue, the hospitality of which you are so niggard in the bestowal.”

A second voice interposed, milder than the first, exclaiming – “I swear by our holy patron, St. Benedict, it is as my brother has stated. Open thy doors, good yeoman for the heavy rain hath no tenderness unto our thin clothing.”

“It may be as they say, and if not, ‘tis but a tussle,” said Gilbert. “Robin, hold the hounds, and if our coming guests be not to our fancy, or attempt any sudden thievish tricks, give them a taste of Lance’s fangs.”

Robin held the dogs by the collar, and Gilbert unbarred the door – in those days of lawless strife and bloodshed, a necessary precaution. As the door opened, so entered a man, as though his nose had been affixed to it, and he had followed his nose. He was young, but tall and stout. He was habited in a loose black gown, with large wide sleeves; upon his head was a cowl, or capuche, terminating in a point behind; his waist was girt with a belt or rope of long grass, to which was affixed a rosary. He bore in his hand a stout crab staff, with which he had hammered at the door so lustily.

He was closely followed by his companion, one considerably older than himself, but habited exactly similar; indeed, it was a rule of the order for them to go two and two together. The first comer made a slight acknowledgment to those present, and saying:

“Good yeoman, thy board is daintily served, and mine appetite hath a keener edge than thy poniard. If I wait thy bidding to partake of the table’s bounty, I may possibly have a longer time to go fasting than I had to gain admission. I will, therefore, anticipate thy welcome, and with a blessing on what is spread before me, even fall to and help myself.”

“The blessing of the Holy Virgin be upon thee and thy house,” meekly exclaimed his companion to Gilbert, who, now that he had witnessed the shaven crowns, doubted not their honesty. He, therefore, requested their pardon for his tardiness in admitting them.

“Talk not of it, honest yeoman” said the stout friar, who was getting rid of his appetite and the food speedily. “Thy prudence is to be commended. By St. Julian, but there are as villainous a set of black-muzzled sinful rogues in this neighourhood as ever were the chosen favourites of Satan. Not a very long distance from this spot, we were stopped by two knaves, who, notwithstanding our protestations to the contrary, insisted that we had filthy lucre upon our persons, Much as I am bound to peace

and goodwill, I should have certainly tried my crab staff upon the knave's skull, had he proceeded to search me, as he intended, but a whistle from somewhere breaking on his ear stopped his wicked intent: he answered it, and, calling his companion, they left us alone. We pursued our way, the rain descended in torrents, and observing the light from your fire gleaming through the forest trees, we made towards it and here we are," he concluded, washing down his speech with a draught of beer, which he took, he said, in a mistake for some water that had been placed near him, at the request of his brother friar, who had partaken frugally of the meal before him.

They had not recovered the stir which the arrival of the friars had occasioned, when the dog Lance began snuffing, whining, and appeared altogether restless and, uneasy. He pricked up his ears, and trotted from the fire, to which he had returned after the Black Friars were seated, and, placing his nose to the door, he set up a cry, something between a bark and a howl. He then laid himself down by the door and gave vent to a series of short growls, like a safely valve throwing off waste steam.

"There's something afloat that's wrong, depend on't," said Gilbert. "I never saw old Lance so unruly before. I know the hound to a turn. There are those near the house to whom he shows his row of teeth whenever they cross his path. See how he lays grunting, and throwing his eyes at me and the door. What is't, Lance eh, dog?" The dog, thus appealed to, as his master neared him, started to his feet, and stood at the door, ready to fly out, if it was opened for him.

"Get my bow, Robin. Whoever come, be it for good purpose or for bad, we will be prepared for them."

"If you expect aught of foal play, I have a stout arm and a good cudgel at your service, bold yeoman, in return for thy dainty meal," said the young stalwart friar.

"Beshrew me, good father! Though by thy looks I might call thee son, but I thank thee for thine offer," said Gilbert, with a laugh. "Yet I should have thought the cloth would have kept thee from such rough and ungodly work as cracking skulls, even though they be those of rogues."

"My office, my worthy host, so am I taught by my superior, and by the rules of my order, is to be charitable and kind to my fellow creatures, to lend my assistance to the unprotected, and to wrestle with the unrighteous, spiritually and worldly, which latter I take to be the aid of a stout arm, stick, and heart, all of which, thanks to St. Benedict, I possess. If there are rogues coming, in the name of their lord and master, and that is Satan himself, let them come. Here are some, I'll be bound, to match them; you can draw a good bow, yeoman. I can wield a good quarter staff and you two youths can do their share, with bow and blade, I doubt not. Open the door, goodman host, and let the knaves come."

“Tarry awhile, good folks!” exclaimed the elder friar; “Seek not for danger and violence; go not forth even unto the hands of wicked men, whose strength is in the copsewood, the thicket, and the covert. If they attack thine house, defend it, if not, defile not thine hands with them.”

“You counsel well, father!” returned Gilbert; “it shall be as you advise. If they come for robbery and violence, they shall have the welcome of a true arrow and a stout staff; if they seek —”

He was interrupted by a slight scream from Margaret, who declared that she saw the white face of the wounded man, supposed to be in the apartment above, peeping from the stairs, his eyes glaring horribly on all who were present. No sooner had Robin heard the cause of his foster mother’s scream, than, without waiting for more, he lightly darted up the stairs, unheeding the call for his return, determining to ascertain if this fellow, whom he knew to be a rogue, was really brewing mischief.

Noiselessly he reached the door of the room in which he had been placed, and found it partly open; the place was in profound darkness, he peeped in but could discover nothing; he heard, however, to his surprise, a mysterious whispering. He entered the room stealthily, and by the dim light from the window could just distinguish the wounded forester leaning out of it, holding a subdued conversation with someone beneath. Robin stole up to him, and heard him mutter –

“They are here; I have just seen them. I should have effectually obeyed my orders as they passed through the forest, had not the devil himself I think, or some wood demon in a prankish fit, wounded me severely.”

“How are we to gain admittance; the door is strongly bound, and if forced, there are hounds to tear a man’s throat; besides, in the confusion of a melée our quarry may escape?”

“How many have you with you?”

“Six”

“That is well, we shall outnumber them. You can enter the hut by this window. I have bed clothing here, which I will lower down to you. Affix it firmly somewhere, and you can climb up it, our object will then speedily be obtained.”

“Will it!” shouted Robin.

Beneath the window there stood a huge butt or reservoir to catch the rain water; there had been heavy rains of late, and this cistern, which was deep, was within an inch or so of being full. Robin recollected this, and as he shouted, he seized the unprepared rogue by his legs, and with great strength and dexterity, hurled him out of the window into the reservoir. He heard him shriek as he splashed into the water. With a quiet laugh, he closed the casement; the fellow who had been in conversation with the

knave, who was now floundering about in a drowning state, was so startled by this sudden occurrence, that acting upon the impulse the shock occasioned, he turned and fled.

Robin barred the casement and descended the stairs. He found the party below in a state of commotion, they had heard the shriek and the splash, and eagerly looked to Robin for an explanation, which in a few brief words he gave. It was now pretty evident that foul play was intended to the youth and his fair sister; and Gilbert inquired of him whether he had done aught to make an enemy so revengeful as to seek his life.

“I cannot deny that there is one who will pursue me to the death. I well believe he would gladly hail the sun that shone upon my grave,” returned Allan.

“What hast thou done, young man?” asked Gilbert, gravely, “that any one should harbour such a deadly determination against you.”

“Naught for which a man proud and tenacious of the spotlessness of his honour could feel a blush of shame,” returned Allan, with a proud sparkling of his eyes. “I may not say by whom, or why, I am thus pursued so vengefully; but of this rest assured, I would not place one hair of your head in danger on my account, were it otherwise.”

“I believe thee!” replied Gilbert; “I will take thy open countenance as a guarantee for thy truth.” During this brief colloquy, the man who had been holding secret conversation with the fellow now in the water tub, finding all appeared quiet, called his men together and returned close up to the house.

“We must have this pair alive or dead” he exclaimed between his teeth. “Such were the Baron’s orders, and he is not the man to be trifled with. By the devil and his imps! I swear I would rather board a hungry wolf than return to him empty-handed. We must drag Taillefer out of his wet den, and then if they deny us admittance peaceably, we will batter the door down.”

When his speech was ended, he cautiously – fol-lowed by his fellows – advanced to the butt in which his friend Taillefer had been injected. They could just perceive his eyes above the top of the staves and his fingers, clutching convulsively to it. As it stood too high for one man to reach, one of the men mounted another’s shoulders, and tried to drag the half drowned wretch out. As soon as assistance was proffered, he left his hold of the edge, for the doublet of the man assisting him, and tried to scramble out. Then followed much dragging and hauling, until the one who bore the second on his shoulders began to entertain very serious doubts as to whether it would be possible to retain his situation. The question was speedily decided, inasmuch as Taillefer having got his knees placed against the top of the butt, gave a spring, and threw himself, soaked dress, water and all into the arms of the man assisting him.

The man who had shouldered his comrade to assist Taillefer, had from the struggling and tugging speculated upon the continuance of his power to do so, but upon this sudden addition of weight, he swayed to and fro, tottered and ultimately deposited his burden and himself full length upon the ground. A laugh was raised among the surrounding men, but they pulled up their prostrate companions, and turned seriously to the accomplishment of their intention.

Advancing to the door of the house, they knocked loudly; there was instantly a furious barking from the dogs, and the voice of Gilbert, rising above their clamour, demanded the cause of their knocking.

The leader of this little troop answered in a coarse voice– “We come on a mission from the Baron Fitz Alwine, for the purpose of securing to justice two persons, now beneath your roof, who have been convicted of vile and wicked intents, militating against the peace, the well-being, and family honour of the said Baron Fitz Alwine; and do hereby charge and require you to deliver them up peaceably and with all content; at your peril contrary.”

When Gilbert Hood heard this demand, he turned to Allan, and asked in a tone of voice which appealed at once to his honour – “You have not deceived me, young sir? You have been guilty of no act unto this Baron that should make an honest cheek burn with a blush of shame?”

“Of nothing, good yeoman, I swear by my mother’s spotless name, but what I am prepared to defend with heart, hand, and untainted honour,” replied Allan, with a glowing cheek.

“It is enough,” returned Gilbert; “I am content. Robin, go you to the shed, and rouse old Lincoln. The old man has not youth on his side, but he’s as tough as a ground ash, both wind and limb; he’ll play a bout at quarter staff; and make a fellow’s head cry twang, with a ring that tells pretty plainly the lustiness of his muscles. Put him on a piece of ground and he’ll keep it, unless knocked from it; and that anyone ever accomplished that feat I never yet heard. Bid the old man come here; tell him we’ve some quarter staff play for him. Then to the window above, and see what the knaves are about, while I keep them in play here.”

Robin obeyed his foster father’s directions and, while he ascended the stairs to reconnoiter, Lincoln, a tall, gaunt, athletic man of about sixty entered, bearing in his hand a staff near five feet in length, and about three inches in circumference. He advanced quietly to Gilbert, and said –

“You sent for me. I am here”

“Good,” returned Gilbert. “There are some knaves about to force admittance into my cottage. I shall save them the trouble, by opening my door. If they attempt any violence, do thou, when I give the word, rattle thy staff about their pates, and show us and them that you have not forgotten the use of thy weapon.”

Lincoln gave a grim smile and a nod of assent.

During this short colloquy, the troopers on the outside of the door had seen fit to grow impatient, for they had received no answer – that affronted their dignity. Also it rained in torrents, and there was every prospect of their becoming quite as drenched as their friend Taillefer, who had just been extricated from the water vat, and who stood a shivering emblem of ghastly wretchedness, fluctuating between life and death.

There was also another incentive which these questionable gentry had to gain an entrance – it was that they had not had their supper, and every fellow felt the appetite of a wolf gnawing his entrails. Now be it understood, their nostrils had been regaled with the savory smoke proceeding from the supper table. Their hunger grew fiercer, and each man inwardly determined to have a hearty meal, if he could get it. Therefore, after several tremendous whacks upon the door, accompanied by a request to know if the inmates heard them — and the inmates must have been very deaf indeed if they had not – they resolved, not receiving any answer to their application, without further parley, should it even be requested, at once to batter the door down.

It is easy to resolve, but the job is to execute. This was a truism which forced itself upon the minds of the men who were belabouring the door. They were armed with spears, bows, and swords, and these weapons were all called into action for the destruction of the door. But the door was of oak, banded with iron, rudely but stoutly, had massive bolts, a huge lock, and a bar of tough oak placed diagonally from the one corner to the other, which completed the fastenings. It was therefore to no purpose that the besiegers dashed their spears and their swords against it: and they might, with about just as equal a possibility of success, have attempted to have effected a breach in a stone bastion with paper weapons. They raised a most dreadful din: they hammered, battered, clattered, until they shook the door; then they shouted, and were answered by a scornful laugh from the interior.

Their ire was mounting, and this raised it three degrees. They all gave a dash together, but the door was immoveable; this fact forced itself upon them with a slow conviction. Fatigued, breathless, and perspiring profusely, they ceased — to hear another laugh raised at their expense. Their leader vented his wrath in a volley of oaths, and, determining not to be defeated, resolved to attempt some other method by which to carry his design into execution.

The window was not so large but that two persons might have easily kept it free from intrusion. In most of the domestic buildings of this period, the ground floor was lighted only by loopholes, was strongly barricaded, and chiefly used to secure the cattle at night, while the family resided in apartments above, almost as wretchedly lighted as those beneath; but

this was a necessary precaution from the incessant warfare between neighbouring Barons, and the outrages and depredations committed by marauders, who, having broken from their vassalage, roamed at large, robbing and murdering all those too weak to resist.

Gilbert Hood, a freeman and forest keeper, had superintended the erection of his own cottage, and had built it for comfort, seeking his protection from stout fastenings rather than gloomy walls, depending upon his own skill in the use of the bow, his dogs, and his nerve to use them, should occasion require them. The staircase, which was in other buildings placed on the outside of the house, movable, in cases of necessity, was inside in his; and indeed he had altogether made improvement upon the style of building the ville or farm building of that day.

That the house was well protected in case of attack, was pretty evident to the hitherto unsuccessful band, but the opposition they had met with had inflamed their passions, and they resolved, as they found their weapons of little service in effecting an entrance, to try what fire would do. The cottage was built all of timber, and they had little doubt would blaze bonnily. The fire, they fully expected, would make the inhabitants turn out, and if so, they determined to unrelentingly massacre them. This, at least, was the plan which they formed, one which was concocted in a voice by no means so low but that Robin heard it while at the window from which he was watching their actions.

Flint and steel were easily procured, for it formed one of the most important articles deemed necessary to carry on the person at a time when folks were obliged often to shoot and cook their dinner before they could eat it. A heap of dry leaves was made at the foot of a tree, and two of the party departed in search of a few pine trees, to cut branches for the bonfire that was to see the cottage in flames.

Robin patiently waited until he had heard the plan digested, and the means to put it into execution partly obtained. When he had learned sufficient to make sure what were their intentions, he descended the stairs, and communicated all he had overheard, adding, likewise, that he had counted seven stout fellows, beside the knave who had got the dunking. “But,” said Robin, “he stands for nothing, for he is shivering and trembling like a decayed leaf hanging to an old bough in the wind.”

“So they intend to burn us out,” cried Gilbert. “We must not give them a chance of putting their threat into execution, for the timber is dry, and will blaze like pine log. We must open the door and admit them.”

“***Admit them?***” echoed Margaret and Marian, in a breath.

“Aye,” replied Gilbert, “and give them a crab staff and broken bones for supper. Margaret, do you take the lady upstairs, fasten the door on the

inside, and keep yourselves quiet and free from alarm. We will do our best in the meanwhile to satisfy these importunate knaves without."

The females, with fear stamped upon their countenances, retired upstairs, and had scarce cross-ed the threshold of the sleeping room, when Gilbert and his friends heard several boughs, lopped from pine trees, thrown down at the door. Assisted by Lincoln and the young friar, Gilbert removed the chairs and tables, in order to have a clear stage, for he intended to give the rascals battle in his kitchen, and not trust his party, the weakest, in the darkness prevailing outside. The floor was lighted by a good fire, kept blazing in despite of the curfew, which had given forth its peal some time since.

"By its light," said Gilbert, "we can see where to put in a stiff blow. Now, Robin, lad, show thy learning. Let us see that Lincoln has not wasted his time in teaching thee quarter staff play."

"He'll play a bout with the best in Christendom, without knocking under ere he draws blood – whoever gainsays it, lies," ejaculated Lincoln, quietly.

"It's well to praise those whom you teach," said the young and stalwart black friar, "neither would I wish to gainsay what thou hast uttered; but me thinks I could crack his master's skull ere I had dealt four blows."

"Monk or no monk, thou liest," spoke Lincoln, in the same quiet tone as before; "Thou couldest not in a lifetime."

"Tush! Tush!" interposed Gilbert, "Try thy skill on those without; trust me, we have need of it; the rogues are used to hard knocks, and know the use of the staff well. Hark! By the cracking of the branches, they are assembling round the door. I will unbar it gently. When they enter, Lance will grip the first comer, Lincoln shall take the second; for the remainder, we will take them as they come, and as we can. Are ye all ready? Stand by – here goes."

A voice outside cried suddenly "Now we shall see whether you will give us an answer! Now" – but the speaker was interrupted, to his surprise, by the door quietly opening. He waited not to recover, but calling to his fellows to follow, leaped over the branches they were proceeding to fire, and entered the cottage full speed. His haste was, however, checked by Lance, who, let slip by Robin, flew at his throat, pinned, and brought him to the ground. The second who followed received so hearty a knock upon the head from Lincoln's staff that he measured his length across his leader's body senseless; the other five rushed through in a body and were quickly engaged in rattling strife. The din – the clatter raised immediately, as may be imagined, was fearful. The man who lay pinned to the earth by Lance, roared to some of his fellows to run the dog through; however, they were too much engaged to assist him. But Taillefer, who

had crawled in the rear, took up the spear from him who had been knocked down senseless, and was in the act of driving it through Lance's body, when he received such a rattling whack from the quarter staff of Lincoln, that it placed him by the leader's side. The old man then continued coolly drubbing one of the party till he made him feel faint and sick, with an earnest desire to be away.

Lance had learned to hold fast, and well did he honour his teaching. Three of the intruders' party were down, and five remained — all stout, sturdy villains, armed with spears, which they found of little use but to ward off the blows liberally and profusely bestowed by their antagonists.

It was a pleasant sight to see the friar play. He had tucked up his sleeves to his elbows, and the skirt of his gown as high as his knees. He flourished his staff as if it had been a thin cane. He held it at the quarters, diagonally one minute, and the next it was playing upon the head, shoulders, or shins of his enemy – a huge fellow, who not only grinned like a tiger at every hard knock he got, but foamed with rage at finding himself so occupied in guarding that he could not return one blow for the many he had received.

Old Lincoln kept to his work as steady as if he had been a wooden cross on a highway. He played methodically but uncommonly well. His features bore the same undisturbed calmness as usual. It was only occasionally when he gave his antagonist a rattling rap, that his features relaxed and he showed his teeth in a satisfied grin. Gilbert did his work in a style which exhibited his thorough knowledge of the art, and leaving a nimble fellow opposed to him who imagined he could avoid the blows by leaping, he kept him dancing like a monkey.

Allan and Robin were also stoutly employed. Allan was fighting with his sword a fellow who opposed a good blade, but Alan was a perfect master of fence, and maintained his ground manfully, although his foe was his superior in height and strength. Robin had also engaged one vastly superior in height, length, and strength. He was but a boy, and with a kind of sneering laugh his antagonist attacked him fiercely, in order to crush him at once; he pressed forward and thrust fiercely with a hunting spear, but ere he had bestowed his fourth thrust, he had a gash in his cheek, a bruise on his shin, a bump on his forehead, and blows continued raining on him. Thus admonished he grew cooler – he found it necessary; he fought warily; still Robin rapped his knuckles, his sides, and his legs. Lincoln had succeeded in knocking the senses out of his opposer. He had worked quietly and steadily, following up every opportunity inch by inch, and not giving the hundredth part of one, until the fellow, with bleeding head, aching bones, and fingers terribly cut, cried for quarter. He granted it, but bound him firmly with some thongs of deer hide, and then made his way to Robin's side to assist him, if necessary.

He watched his pupil quietly but closely, occasionally giving a hint, which Robin made the most of. The man opposed to our youthful hero grew furious at seeing Lincoln standing unoccupied, for he knew that one of his party had fallen. He therefore redoubled his efforts to beat Robin down. His passion put his judgment to flight, and the consequence was, he received from Robin's staff a tremendous whack on the skull, which discovered every echo in the hut.

"**ONE!**" cried Lincoln, coolly.

The man gnashed his teeth as the knock was ringing on his head, and in spite of blows, administered with a rapidity quite astonishing, on his ears and body, he dashed at Robin headlong. The latter, however, leaped lightly on one side, and dealt him another blow on the sconce, on the sore place, with terrific force.

"**TWO!!**" uttered Lincoln, with a slight grin. Maddened by the pain, and stung by the observations of the old man, he attacked Robin more furiously than ever. The youth had need of all his agility and all his coolness to keep him at bay. At length, the fellow, blinded with rage, dashed his spear wildly right and left, leaving himself open to Robin's staff. The opportunity no sooner offered than he took advantage of it, and let his staff fly with all the strength he could exert. It descended on the old spot with a force that did credit to Robin's muscle, and sounded twang with a vengeance.

"**THREE!!!**" cried Lincoln, and interposed his own staff. "Go to that youth, Robin," he added, "he has need of thy aid; I will finish this fellow;" and he commenced an attack upon him. Robin, freed from his opponent, turned to the assistance of Allan, who had not the same opportunity of defeating his enemy that Robin had. But although he had gained no advantage, he had lost none, and when Robin reached his side, he cried "Fair play, Robin! Do not interfere! I can cope with him!"

But the words had barely left his lips when, in parrying a thrust, his ankle turned, and striving to recover himself, he fell. His opponent rushed at him with a fierce oath to bury his sword in his breast, but ere be could accomplish his intention, Robin sent his staff full swing, and caught him a blow of such immense violence, that it sent him flying to the ground like a shot.

At the same moment Lincoln dropped his antagonist heavily to the ground. He then advanced to Gilbert's assistance, accompanied by Robin and Allan. They seized the fellow whom he was encountering, and bound him, and turned to the black friar's aid, but he cried out for them to keep off, and let him have his bout out. His opponent was also furnished with a staff, an oaken one, which he managed with a skill equal to that with which the friar used his one of crab tree. They both played and fought fiercely, the blows rattling soundly on either side. At length, after some

manœuvering, the affray was decided by the black friar letting his staff descend with a vigorous whirr upon the forehead of his antagonist. His skull rung again, and the blood spirited out.

"**One!**" called Lincoln in the old tone.

"**One!**" shouted the friar, making himself up to deliver a second, as near the same place as his dexterity would permit.

"**Quarter!**" cried the man, lowering his staff, and rubbing his head with a rueful expression.

"Granted," exclaimed the friar, brandishing his staff.

"Who's ready for another bout?"

"That am I," said Lincoln, stepping quietly out, and elevating his quarter staff.

"Come on, old Toughstaff," cried the friar, twirling his staff, and, in the excitement, quite forgetting his holy calling.

"Hold!" loudly uttered Gilbert, as the two prepared to combat. "This is folly – madness; we have had enough for one bout. In God's name, let's have no more on't, but see to our prisoners."

This was acceded to, and the vanquished intruders were now subjected to the investigation of their conquerors. Three of the eight were bound; the remaining five lay upon the ground senseless. One of them, the leader, upon whom Lance had fixed, was quite dead. The hound had fastened his teeth in his throat, and bit through the jugular vein; he had been assisted by the other hound, and the miserable wretch had perished, notwithstanding his desperate efforts to beat them off.

The other four were recovered by the efforts of Gilbert and his companions. They were all bound together, and Lincoln was to march them, accompanied by Lance, for a few miles through the forest, and then leave them to themselves. Ere they departed, a hasty grave was dug a short distance from the cottage, and the dead man, still warm, but deluged in blood, was placed in it. The elder friar repeated a few prayers for his soul's sake, and the mould was replaced over him who a short hour since was alive in health and blaspheming.

His fellows now prepared to depart; but he who bore the appellation of Taillefer – weak, haggard, and seeming to have but a few hours to live, called feebly to Gilbert, and begged to have a few minutes conversation with him. Hood granted the request, but sent the others on their way.

"Now," he demanded, "What hast thou to say to me, thou ungrateful hound? 'Twould serve thee rightly were I to hang thee on the first tree."

"Gilbert," said the man feebly, and placed his hand restingly on his arm.

“Touch me not!” hastily uttered Gilbert, with-drawing his arm; but he repented the act, for the man fell to the ground. He immediately knelt and raised him on his knee.

“Gilbert,” murmured the fellow hoarsely, “I have wronged you, but I yet may make atonement for what I have done.”

“I need no atonement,” returned Gilbert. “Away to your fellows, and let me see thy face no more.”

“I cannot,” ejaculated the man, in a hollow voice; “I am dying. Look on me, Gilbert dost thou not know me?”

“Well, I have seen you somewhere,” replied he; “but I remember not where, and forsooth care not.”

“I am Ritson, your wife’s brother,” was the reply, and in giving utterance to the words he fainted.

Chapter 4

When I beneath the cold red earth am sleeping,
Life's fever o'er,
Will there for me be any bright eye weeping.
That I'm no more?
Will there be any heart still memory keeping
Of heretofore?
When the great winds through leafless forests rushing,
Like full hearts break;
When the swollen streams, o'er crag and gully gushing,
Sad music make;
Will there be one, whose heart despair is crushing,
Mourn for my sake?

----- Motherwell

Great was the surprise of Gilbert at thus hearing that in the haggard wretch at his feet he saw the brother of his wife. The change in his lineaments, even to the characteristic expression nature had originally stamped upon them, was so extraordinary, that there was but the faintest resemblance left by which he might recognize his disreputable relative.

So great, indeed, had it been, that his own sister, Margaret, who had several times during the day waited upon him, had not discovered the affinity. He still lay in his swoon; and as Gilbert gazed upon his features, drawn into the semblance of death, he read a fearful catalogue of crime and suffering in the wrinkled brow, the hollow eye, the sunken cheek, and in the lines around the mouth, produced by strong passion and wild irregularities.

"Poor wretch!" he muttered, "He seems to have undergone hard fare – he looks very badly. Get some water."

Water was given, and the man revived, although there seemed but little life in him. His eyes glared wildly round, and he essayed to speak, but was too feeble for the effort. He was therefore carried up the stairs, and placed upon the pallet he had previously occupied. The place was then cleared from all marks of affray. Lincoln sat up to watch, in case of any further attack; and the rest of the party, after having quite satisfied the two females that they were unhurt and that there was very little probability of another attack that night, retired to repose. The morning broke beautifully clear and sunny.

Each bird was fondly kissing
The young buds of this spring time;
All kindly, kindly missing
The want of their coming prime;
The gentlest flowers were laughing
In their robes of white sunlight,
O'er the nectar they were quaffing,
Which the last sad sigh of night;
Left in their cups of deepest hue and white,

At the morning's repast were assembled the party of the night before, and the battle was discussed with the eatables. There was many a laugh and lauding bandied from one to the other upon their prowess, and upon the besiegers having obtained what they looked not for.

Robin received especial praise, and a warm eulogy from Allan drew for our hero a reward from Marian, which to him at that particular moment was of a value beyond all price – a look, a smile, and a few words of earnest thanks, delivered in a tone of voice which thrilled through every nerve, and – but imagination does its work better than the pen, therefore imagination must depict his feelings.

The breakfast was cleared away. Robin and Allan prepared for their journey; the friars, also, were about to leave; but as Ritson had grown worse, and there was little prospect of his living much longer, the elder friar was requested to remain to give him shrift and absolution, if it were necessary. To this he at once acquiesced, but his companion, the fighting friar, requested to make one in Allan and Robin's journey. They readily consented, and ere the sun was three hours old he saw them on their way to Nottingham.

Gilbert was not sorry that he had Ritson once more under his roof, for he now hoped to learn something more respecting the birth and parentage of Robin, and also to gather some intelligence of him who had placed the child in his keeping. Accordingly, when he ascertained from Margaret that her brother had awoke from an uneasy and restless sleep, he repaired to his pallet's side. He started as he gazed upon the wretched being. Haggard and care-worn as his countenance had appeared, Gilbert was unprepared for the ghastly change they had undergone. Every prominent feature stood out fearfully sharp, while the eyes, supernaturally bright, were deeply sunk in their sockets. The black, matted, ragged beard which covered the lower part of his face, added to the marble hue of the complexion from its violent contrast. So horrible did he appear, that Gilbert shuddered as he looked upon him, and half turned away as he addressed him.

"How is it with you, Ritson?" he inquired in a low tone.

“Miserably, miserably,” gasped Ritson. “The hand of Death is on me – I feel his cold iron grip about my heart. – I am fast dying.”

The tone of his voice was so abject, so utterly spiritless, that Gilbert, although he could plainly see his hour was nearly come, with that feeling which induces us to put hope into the bosoms of those whom we know to be past it, tried to cheer him.

“’Tis not so bad as that, man,” he said; “You’re grievously sick, ‘tis true, but you'll get over it.”

“Never – never!” muttered Ritson; “There is no hope for me, here or hereafter – none, none!” and he groaned bitterly.

Gilbert tried to soothe him, but he would listen to no consolation.

“You know not,” He uttered feebly, “the foul crimes, the monstrous deeds, I have committed – things you would shudder to hear – mortal sins for which there is no redemption, for which my soul must be damned to all eternity. ‘Tis useless to strive to make me think otherwise. I am lost forever – forever.”

In this strain for some time he ran on ramblingly. At length, Gilbert succeeded in getting him to speak upon the subject of Robin’s parents.

“It is a long story,” said he, “and I feel too feeble to tell it now. Let me rest a while, and you shall know all.”

Gilbert complied with his request, and returned to the ground floor, where he found the good father engaged in his devotion, which the Black Friars, by the rules of their order, were obliged to perform seven times a day. He waited until he had finished, and then discoursed upon the condition of the dying man. Margaret and Marian had gone for a quiet walk in the green shades of the old wood. When they returned, and the dinner had been eaten and cleared sway, Gilbert again sought the chamber of his brother-in-law. He knew that his life hung upon a thread, and he felt that it was, therefore, necessary to obtain from him, as soon as possible, the information he so much desired.

Ritson had been in a deep sleep for a few hours, and awoke considerably refreshed. He smiled faintly as he saw Gilbert, and motioned him to a seat at his bedside; he was obeyed, and in a voice low, and at times inarticulate, he commenced his story —

“I know,” he began, “that you feel the greatest anxiety to ascertain all the information which I possess respecting the boy you call Robin. I know all, and what I know I will tell you – a poor return for the wrong I have done you.”

“Twenty-three years since I quitted Mansfield, after I had made the place too hot to hold me, disgraced my family, and serving you, among the rest, shamefully – you, however, repaid me with your cudgel. Well, on

quitting my native town, I crossed the country, caring little where my feet should let me rest. I stayed at Huntingdon for a short period, and by chance got into the service of Philip Fitzooth, Baron de Beaseant, an English knight, who had that title conferred upon him for some services rendered by him to Henry during the war in Normandy. He was a younger son of the old Earl of Huntingdon.

At the time I entered his service, his father was no more, having died a few years previously; his brother, Robert Fitzooth – he had but one – was then Earl. This brother had married before his father died, and his wife, in bringing into life her first child, lost her own. The infant, a boy, thrived but delicately and weakly; he was tended and fostered with the greatest care and affection by his father, who mourned his sad bereavement almost incessantly. At length, his constant melancholy preying upon a constitution naturally fragile, he sunk under it, and committing his boy to the guardianship of de Beaseant, died."

"It was then, Gilbert, that the guardian began to look with a greedy eye upon the earldom. A weak, puny boy alone stood in his path. He was not a man to suffer slight obstacles to impede his ambitious views, and would have at once removed this boy by death, but had not the attention of too many been turned upon him. The late earl, his father, had compelled such attention, such care, such a compliance with his son's every wish, that he was too much in the eye of the servants and vassals to be removed without foul suspicion falling at once upon de Beaseant, whose best hope, therefore, was, that he would speedily die. The weakness of his constitution much assisted this hope, and his uncle believed he should be hurrying him to an early grave if he withdrew from him the attention he had been accustomed to receive. He induced him to hunt in the woods, trusting the fatigues of the chase, the damps of the forest, would all lend a helping hand to further his design, and, possibly, the arrow of an outlaw would complete the work."

"But, as if it had been fated by Heaven, the boy, instead of wasting away, grew stronger, until, at length, the delicate youth became a robust young man. At this time, also, the presence of de Beaseant was required by King Henry in Normandy. Some services of a peculiar nature which I had rendered my master induced him to single me from his people, and place me at Kimbolton Castle, to watch the young Earl's every act, and lend my assistance to send him to his grave. As I had a promise of a handsome reward in case of his demise, I readily consented, and de Beaseant departed."

I did my utmost to carry my lord's wishes into effect, but without success. We were abroad in the green woods when the sun rose, nor did we leave it until the mists of night enveloped us. Often were we drenched in the sudden showers while overheated in the pursuit of game; still he thrived under it."

“This was discouraging. I racked my brain to hit on some method by which I might destroy him, without actually using poison or knife. There was only one way, which was to seek out some of the outlaws infesting the forest, and get them to murder him while hunting. But then I should be exceeding my orders, besides placing us in the power of those who would not fail to make use of their knowledge in some way highly disadvantageous to de Beaseant. While these thoughts were possessing me – while I was endeavoring to accomplish his destruction – a change occurred, which roused new hopes in me.”

“Of a sudden, his demeanor was altered. He grew thoughtful and abstracted, his mirth, his cheerfulness all disappeared. We went into the woods as hitherto, but even when the dogs started the game, he showed not half the ardor in the pursuit he had done until now. Occasionally he would leave me to follow the deer, and wander alone, absorbed and oppressed by some secret feeling. Gladly as I hailed this change, still my curiosity was excited to discover the cause; but as I dared not challenge him with it, for his temper was hasty, I determined, when he should again leave, to follow him at a distance, and ascertain whither, and for what purpose he quitted me.”

“One bright morning in June we went out together, as usual, for having exerted myself to gain his favour, and succeeded, I accompanied him as always. We started a deer, which led us towards the borders of the forest. In the heat of the pursuit he suddenly stopped, and pointing out a large oak tree, he bade me meet him there when the sun had descended about two hours from the meridian. I bowed in acquiescence, and he disappeared among the trees.”

“I determined to follow him. I noted the direction which he had taken, and called off the dogs. I fastened them to the tree, and then followed in his track, as swiftly as the rugged intricacies would permit. Quick as I had been, he had outstripped me so far, that I saw no glimpse of his person. I looked to the right and left, as well as the copsewood would allow, but saw him not. I, however, kept on the path I deemed him likely to pursue, and after half an hour’s rapid chase, I reached the outskirts of the wood without having discovered him.”

“Disappointed and chagrined at my failure, I turned back, with the intention of retracing my steps to the oak where I had left the dogs and was to meet him, but discovered that, not having taken sufficient note of the way I had come, I should have considerable difficulty in returning to the spot I had quitted. I, however, started in the direction I fully believed to be the correct one, but had not proceeded far, when, by the difference of the trees and the narrowness of the glades, I saw that I had mistaken my way. I went on for short time, but their changing character assured me still stronger that I was wrong.”

“I hesitated for a moment, and during that hesitation the sound of voices fell upon my ear. The tone aroused my suspicions. I stole stealthily to the spot, and beheld the young Earl encircling with one arm the waist of a beautiful young female. This was a sight for which I was unprepared, but which at once accounted for the change in his demeanor.”

“Here was news for de Beaseant. He was in love! My next object was to find out with whom, and getting as near as I could without being discovered, I listened earnestly, in hopes to gather something which might satisfy me; but nothing transpired to tell me who was the lady. I heard her swear to be true to him, in thought, hopes, word, and deed, and he gave her an oath of a like nature. More I could not, at this interview, ascertain. He led her to the borders of the forest, almost to the very spot I had so recently quitted. There he parted with her, and gazing after her a short time, he turned to seek our appointed meeting place. I took him for my guide, and soon observed he knew the path well, for I began to remember places which I had passed in pursuit of him.”

“When he had nearly reached, as I imagined, the old oak tree, I struck off to the right, and, taking a circuitous route, sought to gain the tree before him. I exerted all my speed, but when, as I supposed, I had reached the tree, I found myself mistaken. I had but one alternative, which was to cheer the dogs. I was immediately answered by a loud baying near me. I turned in the direction of the sound, and gained the old oak tree. I had barely released the hounds, who clamored immediately they saw me, when I perceived, by their pricking up their ears, and giving a short, low whine, that he was approaching. To lull any suspicion I fancied he might have at my cheer, I gave a long blast with my horn, which he answered by appearing from a covert close at hand.”

“What made you wind your horn?” he demanded.

“The sun has already sunk three hours,” I returned “and knowing the intricacies of the forest, I feared you might have lost your way, and blew the blast, as I have several times previously, to attract your attention.”

“I did not lose my way,” was the only reply he made, and we returned to the castle.

“For a long period these secret meetings were carried on, and I had been fortunate enough to attend them all; gathering little by little, until I had sufficient to make up a good story for de Beaseant. I forwarded it to him to Aquitaine, in Normandy, and received for reply, that the young Earl must not marry, that the lady must be sacrificed rather.”

“This was a startling command, but I had put myself in a condition which prevented my refusing to undertake it, if ‘twere necessary. I had by degrees ingratiated myself so much into the young Earl’s favour, that I wormed his secret – none to me – out of him, but learned also much with which I was unacquainted.”

"It appeared that his intimacy with this maiden had originated in his accidentally having saved her life. One day, when separated from me and some of his vassals in the heat of a spirited chase, his attention was taken from his pursuit by loud screams."

"He turned to the spot, and beheld a female upon her knees, struggling with a rough outlaw, who, with uplifted dagger, was dragging her to a cave near to the spot. The Earl heard him menace her with a fierce oath, that unless she was silent he would bury his skean in her heart. As she still uttered the most piercing shrieks, the fellow proceeded to carry his threat into execution, when an arrow, discharged from the Earl's bow, quivered in his heart, and he fell with a terrific groan at her feet. The Earl sprang to her side, and having allayed her fright and excitement, saw her safely to the borders of the forest."

"He ascertained during their walk that she was of good family, one whose alliance would not sully his escutcheon, and whose beauty and personal acquirements would add fresh laurels to his high-born position. He was already smitten with her, and conceived the romantic notion of gaining her heart without communicating his rank to her, in the hope that she would love him for himself, and not for his title. He, therefore, under a feigned name, wooed her and won her. He told her that he was the son of a yeoman, and more fully to make the deception bear the appearance of reality, he gave out to his vassals that he was about to visit his uncle in Normandy."

"He took but one attendant with him. I was that one. He furnished a cottage at Locksley,* in this county, besought her to wed him secretly, and fly with him to his home."

"For some time she objected; but at length, on his expressing a belief that she did not love him, and a determination, if she refused to consent, to go to the wars, she gave him her hand, and, with tears in her eyes, told him she would give up the world for his sake. He pressed her to his


**In Locksley town in merry Nottingham*
In merry sweet Locksley town,
There bold Robin Hood he was born and bred
Bold Robin Hood of famous renown.
Robin Hood's Birth, Breeding, Valor and Marriage

No known map of Nottinghamshire contains the name of this town, although that may be considered no proof that it did not exist, as the names of a vast number of towns and villages which are known to have existed have disappeared. A Loxley in Warwickshire and one in Staffordshire are both mentioned in Spelman's "Villare Anglicum," Adams' "Index Villaris" and in "England's Gazetteer" by Whaetley, but neither appears to be the true one.

him she would give up the world for his sake. He pressed her to his bosom in joy and thankfulness, and soon after they were married by his confessor, the only one let into the secret besides myself."

"I did not attempt to prevent the wedding, in order that I might have a hold on de Beaseant at some future time. We retired to the cottage, and for some time they lived very happily. The Earl liked his privacy so well, and wishing his people to believe that he had been across the sea, stayed a twelve-month at this humble abode. I sent the whole history to de Beaseant, and he communicated in reply his determination of returning. In the meanwhile a child was born, but the Earl's wife, like his mother, perished in giving birth to her first-born."

"And the child was," hastily interrupted Gilbert waiting for the reply with intense anxiety.

"The boy you call Robin" returned Ritson, almost exhausted by his long tale.

"I knew he came of noble blood" cried Gilbert exultingly. "Then he is Robert, Earl of Huntingdon! My Robin, the yeoman's foster son, Robert, Earl of Huntingdon! Proceed, for Heaven's sake, Ritson, proceed. Your informa-tion more than purchases your entire forgiveness."

With a feeble smile, he continued his story. "The Earl was distracted at his loss. He refused all consolation, would listen to nothing, but gave himself up entirely to despair; his reason forsook him, we were compelled to confine him; his strength gave way, and he was stretched on a bed of sickness, reduced by fever to the last extremity. I knew not how to act, but thinking I should best comply with de Beaseant's wishes, I gave the lady burial as a yeoman's wife, in the precincts of a neighboring monastery."

"The child I placed with a cottager's dame, and waited with impatience for de Beaseant's return. He arrived while the Earl was still confined to his bed, and he approved of what I had done."

"To prevent the suspicion of foul play, and as yet there had been none very material, fortune having favoured his views in the preceding circumstances, he directed the Earl's removal to his castle, accompanying him, as if he had brought him from the Continent. Seemingly fortune had determined that Baron de Beaseant should be Earl of Huntingdon; his nephew declined daily – all hopes of his recovery were fled."

"One day de Beaseant sat by his bedside, and for the first time since his wife's death, the Earl spoke coherently. He related to his uncle the whole of the preceding events, and drew from him a promise to bring up his boy as though he were his own son. To this de Beaseant consented, although he had no intention of carrying his promise into effect. The Earl,

after a few more words, sunk back upon his pillow, dead. I was in the room, and de Beaseant made me swear, over the dead body, never to reveal what I knew while he lived."

"There was great mourning among the vassals when the Earl's death was made known, for he was beloved by them, and he was buried with all the pomp his rank demanded in a monastery at St. Neot's. Spite of what I had done – of the motive with which I had attended him, I grieved sincerely for his loss, his uniform goodness to me having affected even my thankless heart."

"de Beaseant, as Philip Fitzooth, assumed the Earldom; and it now remained for him, in order to enjoy it securely, to put the child away. I proposed death, but he had sworn to act as though 'twere his son, and he would not imbrue his hands in its blood. We planned several schemes. At length I thought of you."

"The distance you lived from Kimbolton, your retired forest life, your honesty – all decided that you were the best person to whom the charge of the boy could be committed. It was resolved, and 'twas done; you know the rest concerning him."

"True," observed Gilbert, on finding that he stopped; "But what has become of the Earl?"

"He went, some years since, to Normandy, taking me with him. On our return we were wrecked. He perished. I bore the tidings to the castle, and the rich Abbot of Ramsey, William Fitzooth, de Beaseant's nearest relative, now holds possession of his estates. In a quarrel with a favorite attendant of the Bishop, I drew my skean and stabbed him to the heart; I was thrust from the castle, and excommunicated into the bargain. I should have been hanged on the ramparts, but some of my fellow men proved that he had commenced the quarrel, and had first wounded me. Stung with rage, I swore to be revenged, and I shall be, although I shall be dead long ere it is accomplished. But I know little of Gilbert Head, if he suffers Robin to be defrauded of his right."

"You indeed know little of me if you believed otherwise," cried Gilbert, with enthusiasm. "Robin shall be reinstated, or I'll lose my life in the effort. What relations were there on the mother's side? If you know aught of them I might claim their assistance, for 'twill be to their interest to place their kinswoman's son in his right station as an Earl of England."

"Her father is old Sir Guy, of Gamwell Hall," said Ritson.

"What!" cried Gilbert, starting to his feet, "Old Sir Guy, of Gamwell, the other side of the forest, with his stout sons and stouter foresters, one of the rangers of the forest?"

“The same,” articulated Ritson, almost inaudibly, growing faint and exhausted.

“Here’s goodly help, indeed,” rejoined Gilbert. “With his powerful aid I doubt not I shall oust Master Abbot of Ramsey, albeit he is styled the rich Abbot of Ramsey and Baron of Broughton.”

“You will, you will” suddenly and eagerly exclaimed Ritson, springing up on his bed; “You will promise me that?”

“With heart and hand,” returned Gilbert, surprised by his act. “If there is but half a chance, Robin shall be Earl of Huntingdon, in spite of all the abbots in Christendom and there’s a round number of them.”

Ritson’s eyes gleamed vividly while Gilbert spoke, and he held up his hand pointing, as if registering the speech as an oath; and when it was concluded, fell back in his bed saying — a bitter smile crossing his features – “I shall not die unrevenged. I am content. I am content!”

There was a dead silence for a minute, and Gilbert thought he had breathed his last. He approached and bent over him. He found him yet alive, gasping for breath, his eyes glaring hideously. His struggles were terrible, but eventually he overcame the spasm, and said, with a voice awfully changed —

“Gilbert, I have but a few moments to live: I feel it. Listen to me while I can speak, and do not interrupt me. Yesterday, the Earl of Nottingham, in whose pay I have lately been retained, commissioned me to murder the two persons, a youth and his sister, now in your house. You know I attempted, and was prevented. Bid them beware of the Earl. He seeks their destruction; why, I know not.”

“And now for myself: when I am dead, bury me in the spot I shall name to you. Not far from hence there is an oak which has a beech tree growing from its trunk – the branches of the two put forth their leaves together; beneath its shade lay me. Do not fail in this – promise me by your hope of Heaven you will.”

“I promise,” returned Gilbert.

“Then shall I die happy,” uttered he.

“Will you not have a priest to shrive you? There is one in the house; I will fetch him,” said Gilbert, preparing to depart.

“No, no come back,” hastily uttered Ritson, half rising in his earnestness. Gilbert returned to his couch, and seated himself.

“No,” he continued, “I will see no one – all will shortly be over; you alone shall receive my last words; I have yet more to say. Gilbert, you know not the wrong I have done you – do not dream how deeply I have injured you. Gilbert Head, you had one only sister.”

“Ha!” exclaimed Gilbert, starting and clenching his hands, while a foreboding of something horrible flashed like lightning through his brain.

“Peace! Hear me out,” said Ritson, motioning him to silence. “You and I were play-fellows – grew up companions. You fell in love with my sister, and I with yours – nay, start not; you knew it not, I was too much of a villain to let you. I loved her to madness; this I knew not myself, until offering to wrong her. She spurned me from her, and refused ever again to meet me.”

“I could not live without her; I followed her at every turn; I urged, I entreated, prayed her forgiveness; at last she yielded to my earnest, nay, frantic appeals, and granted it. I could at that moment have worshiped her. I adored her, and used every means, employed every art, to make her return my affection, and succeeded, Beneath that tree did she plight her vows to me; I swore to be faithful, honest, and true to her and seek her happiness alone in every future act. She believed me. Her gentle nature knew no guile; but I deceived her, grossly, wickedly deceived her. We were married, she thought, by a monk from Linton, but a wild companion personated the character – ”

“Hell and death!” interrupted Gilbert, grinding his teeth, scarcely able to prevent himself from springing on the dying wretch, and at once inflicting the death upon whose verge he now trembled.

“Restrain your rage, Gilbert. Although I deserve annihilation from you, the worst is yet to come; I fear I shall not have breath to finish. She remained for some time longer under your father’s roof, until her condition was such that she must either quit or acknowledge the marriage. About this time you married my sister, and there existed no earthly reason why I should not have acknowledged yours, but that I wished to travel. My passion was satiated, and I began to grow tired of her. I had serious thoughts of quitting secretly and at once.”

“One evening she met me, as usual, beneath the oak and beech tree. She there urged me to acknowledge her as my wife, or take her away. I made a thousand shuffling excuses, but she set them all aside. She conjured me by my love, by my honour, to have compassion on her and consent. To her entreaties I proved deaf. She still continued to urge me. I grew surly – I felt a devil within me. I resisted her importunities and in a passion of tears she fell at my feet, beseeching me to kill her rather than expose her to shame.”

“She had no sooner uttered the words than the thought of its advantage ran like lightning through my brain; ‘twas as if the foul fiend had whispered I was alone with her, no soul near, none knew of her meeting me.”

“None, but one, knew of our connection, and I could not be discovered. As the tempter’s words sounded in my ears I drew my knife, and looked hastily round; there was none near. – God! There was none near. Had there been any human soul – aye, one living thing I had not done the foul deed; but there was none to step between me and my horrid intent. She looked up in my face, and said–

“‘You must consent to what I ask! Let us leave this place together! I care not where you go, I will cheerfully follow. Every spot in the world is the same to me, if thou art with me. Have mercy, Roland! Take me! Take me! Should my brother know of this, I am lost!’

“The last words decided her fate; my knife gleamed in the air, and –”

“You did not – you could not –” almost frantically screamed Gilbert.

“**I murdered her!**” gasped Ritson.

“Holy Mary!” groaned Gilbert, and buried his face in his hands in agony.

“The knife I buried in her bosom!” he continued hoarsely. “She shrieked as she received the blow, and for a short time was senseless. I awoke then to the horror of my crime. Hell was raging in my soul. A hundred times was the knife raised to plunge into my own heart, but I was withheld by the promptings of a worse spirit. She, in a short time, opened her eyes, and turned them with a faint look upon me, and smiled. Almighty God! That smile was to me the most tremendous punishment I ever endured.”

“You have once more been kind to me,” she feebly uttered, “Once more ere we part forever. I have noticed lately that you treated me, looked, and spoke to me coolly; I thought you had ceased to love me; and ‘tis better to die, I feel, than to outlive your love. You have spared me the misery of living to learn its truth; and I forgive you having taken my life, for as freely do I give it you as I gave you my heart.”

“Farewell! Let no one know that I am even dead they will think me lost, or carried away, or anything, rather than they should know the truth. Lay me beneath this tree; ‘twas where I first owned my love for you. I would it should be my last earthly resting place, and if you will promise me that when your time arrives, you will be laid beside me there, I shall die so happy. You will promise me, will you not?”

“Blinded by tears, in an agony of maddening grief and remorse, I swore to comply with her wish. She took my hand, pressed it, even kissed it; she prayed the Holy Mother to intercede for me. With kind glances from her dying eyes, with a smile and blessing on her lips, she yielded up her spirit.”

“When I found that she was dead, I committed a thousand extravagances. I railed, swore, cursed my villainy, and flung myself, exhausted, upon her bleeding body. At length, when somewhat recovered, the necessity for concealing the body forced itself upon me. With my hunting spear and my skean I dug the grave at the foot of the tree, loosening the earth with my weapons, and throwing it out with my hands. When I had dug it sufficiently deep, I laid the body in it. I kissed her cold lips, and dared to offer up a prayer for her repose. As I threw the mould over her, like a weak child I wept, sobbed, rained tears.”

“When I had completed my task, I sank senseless upon the ground. I slowly recovered to be attacked by a wolf. As well as my scattered senses would permit, I kept him at bay. At that moment, you came up, and saved my life. The night had passed away during my occupation and my swoon. You had spent it madly seeking for your sister, whom I had so recently murdered. The wolf wounded me in my shoulder, and you took your sister’s blood, which stained my dress, for the effects of my wound. You thought my incoherent replies were caused by my alarm at the encounter with the animal, for it was a large and fierce one. I accompanied you in your search. We wandered through the forest until the sun was high: ‘twas in vain – I – I – I – Holy Mother of God! look there, Gilbert! ‘Tis Annie! she smiles on me, she calls me, I come! Gilbert, remember the foot of the oak and beech.”

He suddenly ceased, and when Gilbert raised his eyes from his hands, Roland Ritson was dead.

Chapter 5

Now for a welcome,
Able to draw men's envies upon man.
A kiss, now, that will hang upon my lip
As sweet as the morning dew upon the rose,
And full as long.
----- Middleton's "Women, Beware Women" 1567

King *My guards – seize him. How stand we now?*
To whom belongs it now to sue? Kneel thou.
Mel. *Not though the block were there.*
Lo! There's the sword!
I ne'er shall wear again; that ne'er knew spot
Till in a tyrant's heart I tried, but failed to sheathe it.
King *You do hear — to prison with him!*
Mel. *And to the rack with thee! — the bed, where groans,*
And not repose, await thee. I defy thee!
----- The Bridal

Blithely and merrily, in the morning's brilliancy, did Robin, Allan, and the stout-hearted, sturdy-limbed friar take their way through the sun-tinted glades of the broad forest. The bonny Shirewood was not merrier with its bright green leaves, its fair flowers, and its blithe singing birds, than were the three travelers. There was the witty saying, the lively ditty, and the clear, silver-toned laugh of Robin, tempered with the steadier, yet sprightly converse of Allan; while the jolly friar, by turns, yielding to the influence of both, doing honour by a lusty chorus to the ballads of the one, or lending a pious exordium to the counsels of the other. In this fashion did they leave Gilbert's forest home behind them, and in this way did they proceed, until the altitude of the sun proclaimed it midday.

"Good Master Allan," observed Robin, "the sun has found out the broad of my back, with a most scorching discernment. Likewise hath my stomach discovered, with a grumbling precision that my breakfast was taken when the lark rose. Now, a short distance from hence, there exists a babbling, bubbling brook, a stream of clear, sparkling, chrystal water, which runs laughing over some glittering pebbles, moistening and nourishing quantities of wild flowers. Where it rises, or where it loses itself is of no import, but I know where it is shaded by a wide-spreading, fantastical oak. I, therefore, propose that we seat ourselves beneath its shelter, and discuss in grateful cheerfulness the contents of this wallet and wineskin."

“I echo thy words in all heartiness of spirit,” cried the friar; “and my teeth shall bear witness how much I am of thy opinion.”

“I have no opposing voice to offer,” said Allan, “but I would it should not be late ere we turn our eyes on Nottingham’s proud towers. I have matters of some moment to transact there, which must not be interfered with by a loitering journey.”

“We are at your command,” returned Robin, “and go or stay, as you list.”

“We will to the stream, there rest and refresh,” exclaimed Allan, “and when our repast has concluded, prithee have we far to journey?”

“Oh, no,” answered Robin, “Three miles from this glade will cover the distance.” It was with considerable satisfaction that Allan received this intelligence, and felt, consequently, less reluctance to accompany his youthful guide to the intended resting place. And when it was reached, the satisfaction was still greater that it had not been missed.

It was situated in the bosom of a small dell, encompassed by trees of all descriptions. Here was the monarch of the woods, with its fanciful gnarled branches twisted into straggling, but admired disorder; there, the tall beech, with its thin, elegant boughs; the graceful acacia, the stately elm, the dark pines, the larch, and the gentle willow, with its drooping dress of pale green leaves, like unto the aerial drapery of a fairy. The earth was carpeted with a turf, whose tint and smoothness made it difficult to believe that it was grass and not velvet the feet were pressing.

There was a profusion of flowers here, there, and everywhere; they sprang up among the grass, just of sufficient frequency to make the variation sweet to gaze upon, but they clustered at the foot of the trees, as though they sought protection of a power stronger than their own, as fragile and delicate females in their weakness cling to man.

In the midst of this dell stood an oak of enormous magnitude, its twining, strangely shaped arms, shot out to an almost incredible distance, while its trunk, decorated with moss, and encircled by the dainty ivy, was of a girth whose extraordinary dimensions betokened a good old age.

At the foot of this king of the forest sparkled the stream of which Robin had spoken; it was a cool, delicious, winding piece of nature’s wine; looking like a fluttering satin riband of purest white, waving over a dress of rich green velvet; a sweet refreshing thing which –

Wanton and wild, through many a green ravine
Beneath the forest flowed.
Sometimes it fell among the moss with hollow harmony.
Dark and profound.
Now on the polished stones it danced,
Like childhood, Laughing as it went;
Then through the plain in tranquil wanderings crept,
Reflecting every herb and drooping bud
That overhung its quietness,

"This is a treat I counted not on!" exclaimed Allan, gazing his fill upon the scene before him, "Right glad am I that you have brought me hither. Is this sweet and sequestered spot well known? How came you to know it, Robin, distant as it is from thy home?"

'Twas Gilbert, my foster father, who gave me the knowledge of this place. Once in the year, at the close of autumn, do we pay it a visit – it looks not then as now you see it – the yellow leaves thickly strew the ground, and the long branches of the trees around throw themselves nakedly in the air. 'Tis a sad sight to see, after having beheld it in its prime; but it is sad duty we come to perform, and the scene befits it."

"May I enquire what the duty can be that leads you, in a drear season of the year, to such a distance?" asked Allan, with an air of interest.

"Beneath yon beech tree," replied Robin, pointing to one a short distance from them, "lies a twin brother of Gilbert Hood's. I bear his name. He was christened Robert, but his brother, in his fond familiarity, called him Robin. The reason of his lying there is this: the two brothers, as was their wont, had been hunting together; the chase led them to this spot, and here they slew it. While refreshing themselves after the fatigues of the chase, two fierce outlaws broke rudely upon them, demanding with savage action their money and their weapons, at the same time expressing their intention of carrying off the slain deer. The brothers, however, coolly defied them, and prepared to resist their lawless intrusion."

"Ere they could put their resolve into action, one of the villains, who bore a crossbow, discharged a bolt at poor Robin, which he, unprepared, could not avoid: it entered his brain, and killed him on the spot. Even while the laugh was in the mouth of the outlaw at his success, an arrow from Gilbert's bow pierced his heart. The second outlaw, surprised by the sudden destruction of his comrade, was for a moment paralysed, but he was not allowed time for even an ejaculation of wonder – Gilbert sent him to his account as speedily as he had his companion."

“Thus in one little minute he was bereft of him to whom he had been so affectionately attached, to whom he had borne the most devoted love as a dear brother, as a most esteemed friend. He dug his grave where he fell, and with no soul near save his own, no eye save Heaven’s, laid him in the earth, weeping over him with a heart almost broken, as he covered his body with mould and leaves.”

“The bodies of the ruffians he left to the beasts of the forest and the birds of prey; soon there was nothing but their bones to whiten in the sun. It was a twelvemonth ere Gilbert prevailed upon himself to visit this spot. When he had done so, he made a vow to make a pilgrimage to it annually, and religiously has he fulfilled it. Thus became I acquainted with this place.”

“‘Tis a pity that so sweet a spot have been thus desecrated”, remarked Allan.

“Ah!”, chimed in the friar, who had listened to the foregoing with a feeling like impatience, “Where will you find the spot, however fair, which has not in some way or other been desecrated? Why even my breast has had its share. I wish I could say the same for my stomach; but I am afraid if you boys get talking so spiritually, there will be a forgetfulness of things bodily. Come, master Robin. Seat thyself and show us the contents of thy wallet!”

Robin, at the friar’s request sat down and laid bare his store of provisions. There was plenty to satisfy their wants, much as they might have been hungered, and certainly plenty to slake their draught had they been ever so athirst, for was not the limpid stream flowing at their feet? But, pure and tempting as it looked, they did not pay it so much homage as they rendered unto the wineskin. Indeed, they had com-menced to assuage their thirst with the juice of the grape, and as the day was warm and they were dry, they were less abstemious than was perhaps prudent.

Robin waxed exceedingly merry as the wine mounted to his brain, nor did his hilarity remain unseconded by his companions.

Allan grew romantic, and the friar talkative. The latter gave them his whole history, birth, parentage, and education; how he came of a good family; his name, Giles Sherborne; had been educated for the church, but preferred a life in the merry old woods, rough as it was, to cloistered ease and luxury; how, for some certain reasons, which he did not think it advisable to explain, he had not entirely absolved himself from the convent, but was a lay brother, with a kind of carte blanche from his abbot, as regarded his conduct — in consideration for a decent handful of property received. How when occasion served, he handled his quarter staff with masterly skill, and how, from the frequency of such handling,

and from his invariable habit of tucking up his sleeves and gown, he had been nicknamed Friar Tuck*! How he fully intended to continue his career as he had hitherto done — Being happy and kind with all he could, and fighting with those with whom he could not be friendly, lending a hand to assist a friend and a quarterstaff to whack a foe, saying prayers for those who needed their efficacy, and singing a ballad for those whose taste led them to prefer the profane to the sacred.

The fumes of the wine mounting to Allan's brain, it became his turn now to dilate. He spoke of his descent of the high Norman and proud Saxon blood which flowed through his veins, shewed how, through a staunch adherence by his father to the cause of Thomas à Becket, he had been banished the kingdom by King Henry. What he said of his ancestors met with little attention. But he spoke of Marian, and then did Robin open his eyes and ears, while Friar Tuck opened his mouth and that of the wineskin, making a most loving union between them. And then when Allan had said many kind things of his sister, he spoke of the Baron of Nottingham and of his fair daughter. In the generous enthusiasm of his youth and of his nature, brought out by the wine he had drank, he told how dearly he loved the daughter, and how particularly and heartily he hated the father – one all angelic gentleness, and the other all fiery roughness.

* *"With respect to Frier Tuck, though some say he was another kynd of religious man, for that the order of Freyers was not yet sprung up" (M.S. Sloan)*

Yet, as the Dominican Frier, (or friers preachers) came into England in the year 1221, upwards of twenty years before the death of Robin Hood, and several orders of these religious had flourished abroad for some time, there does not seem much weight in that objection.

Nor, in fact, can one pay much regard to the term frier, as it seems to have been the common title given by the vulgar (more especially after the reformation) to all the regular clergy, of which the friers were at once the lowest and most numerous.

He said that he had been brought up with the fair Christabel, for that was the name the Baron's daughter bore. While the world had smiled upon his parents, so had the Baron, but that so soon as the world showed a grave countenance, immediately there was a frown of awful portent upon the Baron's, and shortly afterwards he turned the broad of his back upon them.

Thus the marriage which had been planned between himself and Christabel was rudely broken off, and they were harshly separated — as the lady's father had determined, forever. But Allan had no intention that the Baron's determination should be carried into effect, and had, therefore, used every effort to frustrate whatever design the fierce old fellow conceived to render his wishes realities. He had obtained possession of a secret, by which the father of his ladye love was completely in his power.

He had found means to make him acquainted with his knowledge, and the old noble had spent an hour alone in his chamber, raging, fretting, fuming, raving, and ejaculating fierce oaths. When his passion had reached almost a white heat, he grew exhausted, and cooled down, until he had so far moderated his wrath as to hit on the idea of cutting off his youthful enemy, '*even in the blossom of his sins*.'

Allan had politely intimated by 'verbal process' at the time he gave the Baron to understand that he possessed his secret, that he would pay him a visit for the purpose of coming to an amicable arrangement, but as this was not a conclusion at which the Baron intended Allan should arrive, he, knowing the route the young man must take, sent a party of his people to put a stop his journey to Nottingham, and to his life as well.

Their ill success has been recorded. Their attempts in no way damped the resolution of Allan; he had fully resolved to see the Baron, and force upon him the absurdity of dreaming even of preventing his becoming his son-in-law and if he still persisted in refusing him that gratification, he would divulge the secret.

Where, then, would be the projects, the schemes of the mighty Baron? Much longer might he have continued in this strain, had Allan not suddenly discovered that he was expending his breath for his own malefaction alone. He was aroused to sense of this fact by a running fire of snores proceeding from the capacious nose of his ghostly fellow traveler who had talked and drank himself into a sound slumber, while Robin had silently withdrawn himself from the spot, and kneeling at the foot of the beech tree which waved over the remains of Gilbert's brother, offered up prayers to Our Lady for the repose of his soul.

As soon as Allan awakened to the fact that his conversation was listened to only by the green things blooming around, he at once perceived the necessity for proceeding on their way to Nottingham – a desire which he speedily communicated by pricking the point of a spear with which he was armed, upon the crupper of the sleeping friar.

Perhaps a little too much wine had rendered his hand unsteady, or probably a little annoyance at the little attention the lay brother had paid to his story, induced rather too forcible an insertion of the spear's point. Be it as it may, the effect was such, that with a roar, like that of a raging lion, Tuck jumped to his feet, possessed himself of his quarter staff, and lent Allan such a blow, that, if he had not dexterously interposed his spear, he must have measured his length upon the ground. The friar, still smarting under the pain of the wound, which bled freely, blinded by fury, considering not whom he was attacking, laid about him with the best of his ability, raining a shower of blows upon Allan – whose agility was his best defence – without listening to the repeated calls for quarter which the youth made.

At length, Robin hearing the clatter, arose from his knees, and ran hastily to the scene of the affray; he interposed, and inquired the cause of this sudden encounter.

Allan laughed so heartily, so convulsively, that he could not reply, but the friar, whose countenance bore anything but a smile, exclaimed with asperity, rubbing tenderly the wounded place –

"Cause? Beshrew me! 'tis cause enough when pious folks lie stretched, engaged in their devotions, some rude comer, in very wantonness of spirit, inserts with vigour his hunting spear in the person of the unexpectant, unprotected devotee, in a place too, forsooth, where not having let or hindrance, it enters freely, letting blood like water."

"I humbly crave thy pardon, most reverend, most pious father!" cried Allan, as well as his mirth would permit him. "I meant not to hurt thy feeling or to make the wound as wide as thy wit, or as deep as thy goodness. Forgive me, I mistook thy devotions for a most unsaintly sleep."

Robin joined heartily in Allan's mirth on discovering the cause, and eventually, the pain having in a degree subsided, the friar himself laughed freely. A reconciliation was effected, and they proceeded on their way. In less than an hour they were in Nottingham, and it was now to be considered how access might be obtained to the castle by Robin and the friar, provided any unforeseen circumstances should prevent the return of Allan, and in case of incarceration, how a liberation might be effected.

“Rest your minds easily upon that point,” observed the friar; “There is a maiden in the castle whose confessor I am. I have, I am assured, the greatest influence over her, and I know she possesses one equally great over an influential of the castle. Therefore there is no difficulty in obtaining access, even at the same time as yourself, Master Allan.”

“But if you are going to poke any of your fun at the Baron, as you did at me, I cannot so easily promise to get you out of the dungeon he will introduce you to, so certainly as you will find an admittance to it. Be advised by me – do nothing hastily.”

“Fear not for me,” said Allan, “My mind is fixed upon one point, and come what may, I’ll not yield an inch!”

“If you know that you are justified by honour in your determination, you are quite right,” said Robin; “Nothing should move me.”

“Nothing shall,” responded Allan firmly.

They proceeded through the town, continuing their walk up the hill until they reached the drawbridge of the castle. Ere Allan could return answer to the warder, who had demanded the nature of the business leading them to seek admittance, Tuck stepped forward and cried —

“The blessing of St. Benedict, our holy patron, upon thee, Herbert Lindsey. I crave admittance for myself and these friends, one of whom is bound to your noble master upon a special mission of a private nature, while I would give thy daughter the benefit of my ghostly counsel; and my friend, the youth here in his forest garb, will take whatever is to be given to the wearied traveler in the buttery, whither I will join him and you as soon as my spiritual converse with the fair Maude hath concluded.”

“What, jolly Tuck, honest Tuck, the merry friar of Linton Abbey!” shouted the warder. “Ho, ho! Right welcome, my mirthful Sir, an open gate and a hearty welcome to thee!” The drawbridge was lowered, and they entered the castle keep.

“The Baron is in his chamber, Sir,” exclaimed the warder to Allan, in answer to an enquiry respecting him. “Unless your errand is one of importance and of a nature to gladden a disturbed mind, I would scarce advise you to see him.”

“Is he ill or angry?” asked Tuck.

“Both,” answered the warder; “The gout has clapped his red-hot claws into his shoulder, and he is like a mad bull bound to a stake. If anyone goes near him, he roars and chafes as if he had been goaded. Ah! he’s never been right since he received that ugly cut in his skull from an Infidel’s scimitar in the Holy Wars.”

“His humour will not daunt me,” said Allan. “I am resolved to see him.”

“Be it as you will. Hey! Tristram,” called the warder to one of the serving men passing, “How runneth the Baron’s humor?”

“I’ve just left him roaring like a tiger, because the *leech* [*‘physician’*], in operating upon him, folded some bandage unskillfully. He kicked him out of the chamber, and made me do the job, sitting with his poniard in his right hand, swearing that if I did it as bad as the leech, he’d cut my nose off.”

“You had better defer your business till his health is better,” suggested Herbert.

“Not a day, not an hour, a minute even,” said Allan, speaking excitedly.

“As you will, noble Sir,” returned the warder. “Tristram, lead this gentleman to the Earl.”

The man did not like to refuse, but his face lengthened marvelously. He had just been congratulating himself upon his escape from the lion’s den, and now he was about to walk into his mouth, being well convinced, that upon him the Baron would wreak his wrath if the stranger should happen to be one whom he wished not to see. It was therefore with some hesitation that he asked—

“Does the Baron expect to see you?”

“No,” replied Allan.

“Shall I announce your name, if you please?”

“No”

“Oh!” responded the man with a bow to conceal his chagrin, “Follow me then, Sir;” and so he led Allan from the spot.

“Ha, ha, ha!” laughed the warder, as they disappeared. “Poor Tristram returns to the Baron’s presence as if he was going to his execution. By the holy Mass! but his heart beats not his ribs faster than the Baron will his head if thy friend be not a welcome guest. But I must not stand dallying here, I must to the walls. Good Father Tuck, you will find my daughter in the larder – go thou to her, she will make thee welcome. I shall be relieved in about an hour, and will join you. Go in with ye, you know the way.”

“Most assuredly, right well do I,” answered Tuck. “Fare thee well, for the present, honest Herbert.”

The civilities of departure being exchanged, the friar led Robin through divers and sundry passages, until they reached the door of the larder. He knocked, and the permission to enter being accorded, they walked into a convenient apartment fitted up for the reception of edibles and cooking utensils. From a seat by the side of a sparkling fire rose a young girl, about eighteen years of age, and greeted them. Robin looked at her as he spoke, and smiled. “Aha!” thought he, “this is the damsel Friar Tuck confesses, is it? Well, of all the wicked looking, mischief loving, merry-eyed, merry-hearted Christians I have ever seen, this little darling surpasses all!” And in his enthusiasm this mental ejaculation very nearly became audible. He was not displeased to hear Friar Tuck exclaim, when he merely pressed the maiden’s hand —

“Her lips, boy! – her lips, never mind the palm, the little ruby lips for me. Kiss her, Robin; you will leave a little of your shame-facedness behind you.”

“Fie!” said the girl, with a wicked toss of the head, and a throwing of the eyes into the corners of the lids, “How can you talk such nonsense?”

Robin, nonsense or not, acted upon his advice, and after a faint struggle – truly a faint one – in fact, a very faint struggle, on the part of the lady, for she rather admired Robin’s looks, he succeeded in getting a good long hearty kiss, which quite refreshed him, and left its fragrance upon his mouth for a long while. The friar did himself this same kind office, bestowing the kiss of grace and the kiss of peace, to which the young damsel made but a slight objection.

Indeed, she seemed rather to treat the worthy friar as a young lover, instead of a ghostly adviser, and his treatment of her was anything but purely canonical. There was some refreshment, with some stiff ale, placed before them and in the height of their jollity, for they waxed wondrous merry, Robin took upon himself to insinuate that certain little passages passing between the two was certainly unlike the general behaviour of confessor and penitent.

The friar laughed, and said a little affection between relatives could not be of much harm.

“Relatives!” echoed Robin, “I did not know that you were relatives.”

“Didn’t I tell you that?” said the friar with a roguish leer; “Only think of my forgetfulness! Oh, yes, we are relatives.”

“In what degree?” asked Robin, a little wickedly, for he perceived, at every question, the maiden’s cheek grew deeper in scarlet.

“Oh, very near, I can promise you” answered Tuck, coolly – “Cousins of the tenth degree: my grandfather that is, my mother’s father’s sister’s aunt’s cousin’s nephew’s son, married this young lady’s father’s cousin’s uncle’s niece’s aunt’s grandmother by the father’s side.”

“Indeed!” returned Robin, laughing, “Cousins too! I shouldn’t have thought it.”

As the ale went down their spirits uprose, and two hours passed away without their perceiving it. The three were very merry; they sung by turns, they joked, laughed, and sometimes – we blush to say it – they kissed – Robin taking especial care to have his share of the latter. In the midst of their festivity, in the height of their hilarity, the door opened, and a fellow, martially equipped, followed by six stout men, well-armed, entered. The leader saluted Maude with a smile, and then bent his eye sternly on Robin and the friar.

“You were the two persons,” he exclaimed, interrogatively, “who accompanied the young stranger lately seeking an interview with the Baron?”

“We were,” replied Robin.

“And what then?” demanded Tuck, saucily.

“You must accompany me to the Baron’s presence,” returned the soldier.

“For what purpose?” asked the friar.

“That is a question you must put to the Baron”. answered he. “All I know is that I am to bring you before him. So, good father, prithee attend me to his chamber.”

“I must finish my ale,” cried the friar, taking a long pull at the tankard, and then offered its remains to the soldier, who instantly availed himself of the proffered gift, nor took it from his mouth until he had drained its contents. He drew a long breath, and, with a grin of satisfaction, led the way to the Baron’s chamber. They traversed galleries, pas-sages, antechambers in great numbers, and at length stopped before a massive oak door. Here the soldier gave three loud taps.

“Come in,” cried a gruff voice. The man beckoned Robin and the friar to follow him close. “Come in!” roared the voice passionately, and the soldier, followed by his prisoners, entered the room. They were at once confronted by Baron Fitz Alwine.

“Where have you been wasting your time, villain?” exclaimed he, addressing himself to the leader of the soldiers, as they all approached.

“May it please you, my lord, I have —”

“Thou liest, hound, thou hast not!” roared the Baron, interrupting him fiercely, “How dare you say you have? You have kept me here three hours waiting for you.”

“My lord, three hours!” echoed the soldier, surprisedly, “It is scarce ten minutes since!”

“Insolent slave!” cried the testy Baron, “Do you give me the lie i’ my teeth? Ho, rascals!” he bawled, turning to the men attending, “Disarm him take him, drag him to the deepest dungeon beneath the castle keep. Away with him.”

The fellows proceeded instantly to obey the command, and were conveying forcibly their leader from the apartment, when the Baron, in a voice of thunder, roared to them to desist.

“Knaves!” he shouted, “Would you dare to carry him off before he answers any of the questions I intend to put to him?”

The men hesitated, but a second still more peremptory command for them to take their hands from their leader, and restore him his weapons, was instantly obeyed.

“Now, villain!” exclaimed the Baron, “Now that you have experienced my clemency, tell me, are these serfs companions of the dog that thrust his filthy carcase into my presence a short time since?”

“Yes, my lord, they are,” replied the soldier.

“And how do you know they are? How are you sure of that?”

“Because, my lord, they said they were.”

‘*Because, my lord, they said they were*,’ mimicked the Baron, “And because they said they were, I suppose you believe them. Do you believe every knave’s tale you hear?”

“My lord, I thought –”

“You did not, fellow! How should you, how dare you think? Quit the room, rascal – take your fellows with you, be gone to your lair! Stay! Come back! Keep within hearing. There, away with you.”

Robin listened to the foregoing almost in a state of bewilderment. He looked with astonished eyes at the impetuous, hot-headed Earl. He was a man of about fifty, of the middle height, with a small quick eye, a Roman nose, thick bushy eyebrows, large mustachio, a grisly beard, long black hair, and an angry fierce expression of countenance. He was habited in a

suit of scale armour, with a white shirt over it, bearing the cross upon the breast, showing him to be one of the Crusaders. By his side hung a lengthy toledo; and, take his appearance generally, he seemed just the man to use the last mentioned weapon upon any and every occasion; an embodiment of '*the word and the blow*', the latter coming first.

A perfect living gunpowder magazine that would, with the least spark, make a terrific explosion. A fiery, fierce, fighting, fuming, ferocious, frantic slave to passion, a brawler, a quarreler, at the slightest cause for anger, fighting for a look, deadly enemy for a careless word. Moral and high-principled only where his own private interest was concerned, and decidedly unprincipled and immoral in every other point of view. Brave, when beyond the reach of danger, but undoubtedly the reverse where courage was a virtue, and to sum up all, a complete epitome of venality.

"So, my young forest whelp, and you, my roving friar," he exclaimed, at the top of his voice, "for what vile purpose did you sneak into my castle? What thieving expedition have you quitted, in order to favour me with a specimen of your pilfering abilities?"

Robin looked indignantly at him, but vouchsafed no answer, while the friar grasped his staff a little more firmly as he leaned upon it.

"Am I not to be answered?" roared the Baron, enraged at their silence. "Tell me to what undeserved honour am I to attribute the visit of an outlaw's bastard, and the scum of some beggarly priory – fit attendants on the brawling beggar who preceded you?"

"Thou liest, as regards me," cried Robin, chafing at the Baron's language; "I am no outlaw's bastard, nor came I with a brawling beggar. Neither am I your slave, nor any man's, be he Baron, Earl, Duke, or Prince."

"Oh, ho! Mighty well! Out upon thee, thou wood cur! Dost thou beard me? Dost thou fling thy saucy words in my face? By St. Ignatius! I'll have thee hanged up by thy ears, and whipped with thine own bow, thou yelping pup! Darest thou to tell me I lie!"

"Thou, or anyone who defiled his teeth by uttering such foul epithets," returned Robin, coolly stringing his bow, an act which the Baron eyed askance rather unsatisfactorily, but without suffering his uneasiness to appear.

"Had I not a most entire conviction," he said. "that you will be safely locked up in a cell a short time hence, I would instantly on the spot punish your audacity. I shall, however, be lenient to you, and suffer you for a short time to exist, on consideration that you answer several questions I purpose putting to you."

“I am not so entirely in your power as you fondly imagine,” said Robin, with a calmness and a coolness which inexpressibly delighted the friar, who stood a quiet spectator, but quite prepared for any contingency the Baron’s inflammable temper might produce. “You will be much deceived if you believe otherwise. You may ask me whatsoever questions you please. None will I answer until you have replied honestly and truly, as you hope for grace and mercy hereafter, to one which I shall put to you!”

The Baron, accustomed to be implicitly obeyed in every word or motion, was absolutely *petrified* [‘*unmoving*’] at Robin’s, to him, unparalleled impertinence; he clenched his right hand, while, with his left he sawed the air warningly. For a moment he seemed to have lost his breath; he moved his lips, but did not articulate a word. At length it burst from him in a torrent, the words tumbling so fast over each other, that they were scarcely distinguishable –

“Ha! ha! ho! ho! Not in my power! Question me! Ho! ho! Witch’s brat! Thou unlicked bear’s cub, what dost mean? A sentence, a word, the thousandth part of an exclamation from me, and thou wouldst be with thy ancestors in hell, base born churl! Not in my power, thou serf’s mongrel! Why I’d strangle thee myself with my sword belt; and will, if thou dost not answer me as becomes a slave to his lord.”

“No you won't,” said the friar, quietly; “That is, I think you won’t.”

Earl Fitz Alwine turned to him as he spoke, with somewhat of the manner a starving tiger would make an acquaintance with an object offering an easy prey. He poured upon him the most degrading epithets, he called him a hang dog type of his gorging, rapacious, guzzling brethren; but the friar replied, that he entirely differed with him, with all due deference, and begged to observe, that either the gout, or a large quantity of wine, had impaired his understanding, an expression which drew a loud laugh from Robin. This incensed the Baron to such an extent, that in an ecstasy of passion he seized hold of a missal, of a tolerable size and weight, standing upon the table, and hurled it at the friar with such form and dexterity, that, alighting on his bald head, it almost stunned him, and made him stagger rapidly backwards.

He, however, recovered himself, and, without having that consideration for rank which should induce us all to bow quietly to any freak or whim the great may possess, he gathered his staff at the quarters firmly in his hand, and returned the Baron’s gift with a sturdy blow on the gouty shoulder. The recipient uttered a roar like a wounded bull, and the next instant his skull gave a very hollow sound from a second blow, which was followed up by a vast quantity more, for lo! the friar’s forehead exhibited blood, and smarting under the pain of the blow, he gave vent to the passion it created, by beating the giver all-round the apartment.

The Baron attempted to ward off the blows with his arms, but the pain was almost as great as though he had stood still to be beaten. He roared for aid and for mercy, until he was beaten down upon his knees in a corner of the room, alternately begging for quarter, and calling for his people.

Just as Friar Tuck felt that he had obtained about satisfaction in full, and was allowing the Baron to rise, the soldier, who had the command of the six retainers, put his head gently through the half open door to see if he was really wanted. No sooner did the almost exhausted Earl catch a glimpse of him, than he flew at him, seized him by the throat, and bumped him violently against the wall, obliging him with that small mark of his favour for not coming and assisting at the very moment he was needed.

When he had given him as much of that discipline as his smarting shoulders and sides would permit, he bade him seize the friar and Robin, and convey them to separate dungeons, until he made known his pleasure what further was to be done with them. As this was a proceeding to which both had most positive objections, they prepared to resist it, and the friar, bidding Robin follow close at his heels, marched up to the door, pushing, with a strong hand the Baron, who stood at the threshold, out of his path. He elevated with his left hand a crucifix, which he had snatched from the table, and brandishing his staff in the other, called out in a loud voice —

“In the name of the Holy Virgin, I charge thee, let me pass free. He that dares to offer me the slightest molestation shall feel the weight of excommunication and my staff – the last will not be the lightest – in the strong hand of a son of the Church — out of my path, ye dogs!” And he cleared his way.

The men, awed by the cross and his friar’s habit, fell back, giving him free way in spite of the commands issued by the Baron to hold him. Robin followed close behind him but, though they suffered Friar Tuck to stalk away, they were not so liberal to his young companion. Just as he imagined he was clear of them, he was seized from behind, his arms pinioned, a poniard hilt forced into his mouth as a gag, and his weapons taken from him, ere he could make the slightest resistance.

The friar, believing that he was following, did not turn round, but kept on the even tenour of his way, chuckling at his success. The Baron did not send after him, for in the year of our Lord eleven hundred and seventy six, it was no joke to meddle with any of the members of the Church, as Henry the Second found to his cost when he quarreled with Thomas à Beckett. Therefore, did Baron Fitz Alwine wisely, as he deemed, suffer Friar Tuck to escape.

But determined to keep Robin, in the hope of obtaining an elucidation of some circumstances concerning his daughter and Allan, which he could

not thoroughly comprehend. With a patience rather unusual to him, he waited until his prisoner had ceased struggling, for when Robin found that, at present, there was no chance of escape for him, he became still, and then the gag was removed from his mouth, in order that be might answer the questions the Baron was anxious to obtain.

"You accompanied Allan Clare hither today, what was his purpose in coming?" was the first inquiry made.

"I do not know – it was not my business," replied Robin.

"'Tis, false," exclaimed the Baron, anger and voice beginning to rise together; "You both know and can tell – aye, and shall tell."

Robin smiled, the Baron chafed.

"How long have you known Allan Clare?" he demanded.

"About twenty-four hours."

The Baron opened his eyes, and said, "Truly for one so young, thou art well-skilled in lying."

"Thou liest to say so!" cried Robin, with a flushed brow, "An' 'twere my last breath, I'd tell thee so and since you credit not my speech, I'll speak no more."

"And be flung from the ramparts, as thy choice companion, Allan, will be speedily," growled the Baron. "Answer me boy; were not thou and thy companions attacked on thy way hither? If not, which path did ye take?"

Robin made no answer, but coolly turned his eyes from the interrogator to the window. The Baron gnashed his teeth, and was about to commit some extravagance when the door opened, and there entered two of the men who had attacked the cottage of Gilbert Hood the night preceding. One of them was he that had been antagonist to Robin, and was finished off by Lincoln. There was quickly a recognition between the two, decidedly unfavorable to Robin, for the fellow made a hasty recital of the ill success attending his expedition, and ended by giving a glowing description of the part the young gentleman, then in the Baron's custody, had taken in the fray.

Fitz Alwine, ere the conclusion of his tale, had worked himself up into a perfect whirlwind of fury — his rage at the loss of two of his men, the remainder being sadly bruised and beaten, and no point gained – was assisted by the agony the gout in his shoulder had produced, and the splitting headache with which the staff of Friar Tuck had endowed him. He turned like a hyena to Robin, and would have inflicted summary vengeance upon the spot, but that he thought he might make him the means of exquisite revenge upon Allan, or some-body – he did not care whom.

In a voice, husky with passion and pain, he bade the retainers drag their prisoner from the spot, and confine him in one of the turrets of the castle, there to thrust him in, until he confessed all he knew respecting Allan Clare and, upon his bare knees begged, in humblest humility, for forgiveness of his insolence.

“Farewell, Baron Fitz Alwine,” said Robin, with a calm smile, “If my liberation depends upon that condition, we shall not meet for a very long time, and, so, a long farewell. Perhaps you will be kind enough to send to my foster father, Gilbert Hood, who is one of the forest keepers, and holds a snug tenement on the borders of the forest, near Mansfieldwoodhaus”

“Bye-the-bye, yon fellow can direct you — and let him know that you have undertaken to provide me with board and lodgement until further notice. He might be uneasy at my absence. You are a father yourself, good my Lord Baron, and can appreciate my motive.”

“In the name of the foul fiend! Away with him, drag him hence!” roared the Baron in a paroxysm of rage.

“Fear not my stay,” cried Robin, with a saucy laugh, “The desire to part is mutual.” and then, in a loud, clear voice, as they dragged him away, he sang:

The old Baron’s daughter was young and fair,
With her sweet blue eyes, and her golden hair;
The Baron was gloomy, gouty, and wild,
He hated the world, but he loved his child.
With a hey down and a down.
The old Baron’s daughter loved the old boar,
Her father, but loved another much more;
A tall handsome youth, with monstrous fine eyes,
Who won her young heart — a delicate prize.
With a hey down and a down.
The Baron he raved, he stamped, and he swore,
Tore his hair, cursed his stars, and many things more
On learning his child, the last of his race,
Loved dearly a youth, whose wealth was his face.
With a hey down and a down.
He swore with fierce oaths, they never should wed,
Was stone to the tears his gentle child shed.
At length, when she found he would not relent,
She married one morn without his consent.
With a hey down and a down.

As he finished his ditty, his dungeon door was locked upon him.

Chapter 6

No light, save yon faint gleam,
Which shows me walls
Which never echo'd but to sorrow's sounds;
The sigh of long imprisonment; the step
Of feet on which the iron clank'd; the groan
Of death; the imprecation of despair!

----- The Two Foscari. Byron

A casement high, and triple arched there was,
All garlanded with carven imag'ries
Of fruits and flowers, and bunches of knot grass,
And diamonded with panes of quaint device,
Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes,
As are the tiger-moth's deep damask wings;
And in the midst, 'mong thousand heraldries,
And twilight sain's and dim emblazonings,
A shielded scutcheon blushed with blood of kings and queens.
Full on this casement shone the wintry moon,
And threw warm gules on Madeline's fair breast,
As down she knelt for Heaven's grace and boon.
Rose-bloom fell on her hands, together prest,
And on her silver cross soft amethyst;
And on her hair a glory like a saint.
She seemed a splendid angel newly drest,
Save wings, for Heaven: – Porphyro grew faint.
She knelt, so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint!

----- John Keats

Robin listened to the departing footsteps of the men-at-arms until they died away, and all became still – he felt strangely, he hardly knew how he felt. It was the first time that he had been placed in a situation of this nature; he therefore scarcely knew in what light to view it. He did not much care about it, yet he decidedly did not like it; he felt a sort of reckless mirth upon him – yet he felt inclined to be serious, when he reflected how anxious Gilbert would be if he was detained there for some time; or, indeed, if the Baron should keep his word of flinging him from the ramparts, there would be an end to his returning – and that would be the worst of all.

He gazed round his cell, ‘twas a wretched looking place, about ten feet square. It contained two doors, over one of them was an opening to let in light, but guarded with oaken bars which did not appear to be over strong – Damp and age having placed them on the high road to be rotten. The cell was built of stone, the doors were stoutly banded with iron, and the fastenings of each were on the opposite side. He tried them both, but found them to be quite immoveable. But it was evident that it was not intended to proceed to very harsh measures, for he was not chained – had been accommodated with a stool and a kind of bench intended as a substitute for a table, but bearing a very small resemblance to one. He sat himself down to collect his thoughts. It would not do to stop there, but how to get out? Perhaps by the window, it seemed practicable. But if he succeeded in accomplishing that, where then was he to go?

He knew none of the intricacies of the building, not even where the window overlooked; and he concluded that if he attempted to make his escape, he should be detected, brought back to his dungeon, and probably undergo the most rigorous treatment. Still it was not his nature to sit quietly down in a dilemma like this, and let fate do its worst; he felt that a danger was half surmounted when it was stoutly stared in the face, and so as a commencement, he thought, at all events, he would try and see where the window over-looked. He accordingly took his bench, and placed it under the window, then the stool upon it; he gave a spring, and caught firmly hold of one of the bars.

He raised himself up until he got his elbows upon the horizontal flat portion of the opening, the upper part of which was built in the form of a half circle. He then thrust his body up, edging his chest along, until he could touch the bars; he found to his surprise, as well as his gratification, that he could put his head easily between them. Now he had often heard that where the head will go the body will follow, and it was with no small pleasure that the conviction forced itself upon his mind, that it would be an easy matter to escape. He saw that this cell was level with a portion of the ramparts, the door beneath him leading on to them. He looked down to see what depth he should have to drop, and started as he saw a soldier applying his ear to the keyhole — he supposed to ascertain in what way he was amusing himself.

In a moment, he dropped from the window quietly onto his stool, and thence to the ground. He began humming an air, then stopped, he heard the soldier’s footstep leaving his door. He began singing again, and then, even while doing so, listened for the soldier with the most earnest attention; presently he heard him returning stealthily, and then he broke out carelessly into a song—

The sun brightly smiled on sweet flowers,
And they pantingly felt his warm smile;
The dew distilled tears in faint showers,
Their swooned spirits to freshen the while.
A maiden peered round for her lover,
From the leafiest dell e'er could be:
And blushingly trembled all over,
When she found the fond youth at her knee!
Heigho! well-a-day!
Soft fingers will mingle, And blushes will tingle,
The cheeks of young souls!
Well-a-day!

Here he heard the soldier rub his hands and cough, depart a few steps and then return, — he wondered how long the fellow meant to stop there. If there was always a guard on that spot, he must give up all hopes of escape that way. Yet, if he could only lull any suspicion the fellow might have, he perhaps would not, after leaving, return so near but that he might have a chance to get out without being seen by him. The soldier was still listening — he went on with his song —

Kind glances that maiden was stealing,
At the youth who breathed passionate sighs;
And words of such wondrous deep feeling,
That sweet pearls trembled in her blue eyes.
He cried, the blue heaven above me,
Ever prints a fond kiss on my brow;
I've sisters, sweet spirits, who love me,
And I faint as I ask — wilt not thou?
Heigho! Well-a-day
Ah kind ears will listen, And blue eyes will glisten,
At words from young souls,
Well-a-day!

He stopped — all was quiet; was the soldier gone? He listened intensely, not a sound met his ear — he thought he'd have a peep. He cautiously mounted his bench and stool, and sprung up to the bars again, he edged forward got his head through, and looked beneath. What was his consternation on perceiving two soldiers listening at his door; and who should come up at this precise moment, but the pretty Maude, the warder's daughter.

Of course she turned her eyes at once full upon poor Robin, started, and made an exclamation, while he dropped like a shot upon the floor, without stopping to get down by means of his artificial ladder. He heard a talking outside, and could very plainly distinguish the voice of Maude chattering volubly.

In a fit of desperation he proceeded with his song, hoping that it might drown the explanation of why she had started and half screamed, which he fancied she was giving.

The ivy the oak is entwining
And with fondness it tenderly clings;
Fair sunbeams are lovingly shining
O'er the frailest, most delicate things;
The streamlet its bank is caressing,
Gentle clouds are embracing the sky,
Light zephyrs thy rose-lips are pressing
I implore thee, sweet love, may not I?
Heigho! Well-a-day
When faint words breathe consent,
Blue eyes will beam content,
Ah! these vows from young souls,
Well-a-day!

He ceased, for he had come to the end of his song, and he waited with some anxiety to see what was to be the result of the deliberations of the party outside. He thought it advisable to remove his stool and bench from beneath the window, and had scarce accomplished it, when he heard the door unlock, and Maude entered, bearing some refreshment. She set it down, and telling the man who unlocked the door that she wished to exchange a few words with the prisoner, requested his absence for a short period. He hesitated; but Maude murmuring some-thing about having nothing to say to him again if he did not, he took the hint, and made himself scarce.

"Well, young forester, you are in a pretty hobble," she said to Robin when the door had closed upon the gaoler; "Here you are, and here you are likely to stop, like a bird in a cage. The Baron is in a towering fury, storming and stalking about like one of the great horrid infidel Moors he said he killed so many of. Well, you must make yourself comfortable."

"If I thought you would keep me company, my charming Maude, I should be happy enough," cried Robin, snatching a kiss from her lips, which he had several times that day saluted.

“You are a forward boy, and require teaching,” observed Maude, with a most wicked smile, disengaging herself from his embrace.

“I am sure under your tuition I should improve,” laughed Robin. “But to be serious, know ye what has become of Allan Clare?”

“Yes,” replied she; “He is safely chained in a dungeon far more wretched than this, and I am very much afraid he will be cut off in an untimely manner very soon, and very suddenly. It was foolish of him to tell our lord the Baron to his teeth that he was a hoary villain, and that he would marry his daughter, the Lady Christabel, in spite of him. I happened to be attending my lady, and we entered the room just as he made the speech. Directly he saw my lady, he called her by name, rushed and caught her in his arms. She shrieked and fainted. The Baron tore them asunder. I carried her to her chamber, and when she got there I recovered her, left her weeping, and arrived in time to meet you and the friar, jovial Giles, in the larder. Now you know the whole true and faithful history.”

“Supposing, by any chance, I should find my way out of this cell,” said Robin; “How may I avoid detection, and get safely away? Should I meet ‘jovial Giles’, as you call him, I may be able to assist in some way Allan Clare.”

“Ah!” said Maude, “But how are you to find your way out?”

“Never mind how — perhaps you can guess. At all events, do as I ask you, and I will someday return the obligation. Where’s Friar Tuck?”


Robin Hood and Maude Lindsay

“In the larder,” said Maude, slightly blushing. “I have told my lady where her lover is, and trust her she will set her true knight free. But the friar’s service may be needed, so you must not expect to see him just yet. If you succeed in getting out without being seen — and I doubt it — steal round the ramparts to the left. The first door you come to in the next turret you will find open; enter, and keep to the left, down the stairs, along the corridor, antechambers, galleries, until you come to the larder. If you hear no sound from it, enter, and hide yourself somewhere until I come; I will then contrive some means to get you outside the castle.”

“A thousand thanks, my pretty Maude,” said Robin, joyously; “I shall not forget this kindness, believe me;” and he looked in her eyes with an

expression which said more plainly than even words could, “I should like to have another kiss.”

Maude perfectly understood the look, and laughingly throwing up her head, her long black curls dancing about, returned his look with a glance which said as plainly in answer, ‘There, take one.’

Robin instantly availed himself of this tacit permission, and gave her a hearty kiss, which the young lady by no means resisted — and perhaps; to say truth, rather liked.

It was very agreeable for the second it lasted, but it was disagreeably interrupted by the harsh voice of a soldier who entered, exclaiming –

“So ho! my sprightly damsel, this is your exchange of words with the prisoner, is it? This is bringing refreshment, eh? ‘Tis fit honest Herbert knows how his daughter cheers the hard fate of the captives. Truly it must be no unpleasant thing to be one.”

Maude started and half-screamed as his voice broke on her ear; but as he approached to lead her from the cell, she recovered herself, and dealing him a smack on the face that made it tingle again, ran laughing from the cell.

The fellow looked after her, rubbing his cheek, and then bestowed a glance and an epithet by no means affectionate upon Robin ere he passed through the doorway, carefully locking the door after him. When he was gone, Robin sat himself contented down, and partook of some bread and ale that Maude had brought him, determining to wait patiently until the moon was up before he attempted an escape. He heard the sentinel pace backwards and forwards before his door; he heartily wished him in the bosom of his ancestors; but not wishing to show his concern, he kept singing at the top of his voice snatches of all the ballads he was master of.

He had for some time indulged himself in this fashion, when he heard the voice of the sentry in harsh tones bidding him be less noisy, telling him it better became his situation to be a trifle less merry. Robin thanked him for his advice, and in a jeering tone wished him a very good night. The man made no reply, but walked on, and Robin kept very quiet.

He could tell by the decreasing light the sun was fast sinking, and at the lapse of another hour the moon was high in the heavens, without a cloud to dim its brilliancy. Listening with an anxiety and an attention quite intense, he waited in expectation of hearing the constant, heavy tread of the sentinel, but all was still as death — no sound met his ear, save the dull dreamy hum of the night air.

He believed the time had now arrived to attempt his meditated escape and his heart beat short and fast as he placed his stool upon the bench beneath the barred opening. He mounted it, and thrust his head between the bars, turning his anxious eyes in earnest search for his guard. He saw him leaning on his pike, watching something in the valley with breathless attention. He stood so still, so motionless, that he looked like a statue.

Robin saw at a glance that, if he wished to escape, now was his time. He looked at the depth, and found it too great to drop without making a noise, which must lead to his discovery, unless he had the assistance of something to lower himself by. He paused for a moment to think what he could employ for the purpose, and bethought himself of his sword belt.

Although his weapons had been taken from him, his belt still remained, and he lost no time in taking it off, looping it tightly round one of the bars, and then proceeded to put it into use. He gave another look at the sentry, and found him unchanged, still gazing upon what Robin discovered to be a troop of horsemen winding along the vale beneath the castle.

The man's mind seemed fully occupied by what he was so earnestly watching; and Robin, breathing a short prayer to the Holy Virgin,squeezed himself between the bars, feet first. Lying upon his stomach, he kept firm hold of his belt, lowered himself, steadying his descent with his feet until near the bottom; then he dropped, and alighted on a trapdoor, which instantly, to his alarm, gave forth a hollow sound.

He turned the corner of the tower like lightning, and hid himself behind a buttress, which fortunately happened to be in deep shade. He heard an exclamation from the sentry, and peeping round the corner of the buttress, saw him approach. The man just gave a hasty glance round, but noticed not the belt hanging from the window. He then turned back, and renewed his scrutiny of the party in the vale.

Robin waited till all was still; he then stole from his hiding place, ran swiftly round to the left, according to Maude's direction, and soon found the door named. He opened it, entered, and descended a flight of steps into a small room, so dark he could not distinguish his hand before him. He proceeded cautiously along to find the door through .which he was to pass. After groping about, and stumbling over some furniture, he found it, and entered a passage.

He remembered the injunction to keep to the left, and it led him into some strange dilemmas, for every hollow place let into wall or passage did he grope his way round. He found himself in a long corridor; he proceeded carefully, and then descended stairs, until he thought he should never stop, but continue until he reached the domains of a monarch whose realms are more famed for their warmth than for any

particular advantage they possess. But this idea, although somewhat justified in holding from the depth of his descent, was not realised, for at length he found himself in a stone passage. He still kept to the left, walking in and out, and carefully round every pillar and abutment, heartily wishing architects had never thought of such things.

He was eventually stayed by a flight of stairs leading upwards, and he began to have some shrewd suspicions that he had lost his way. “I shall go walking into the arms of some of the fiery old Baron’s bloodthirsty retainers, if I am not careful,” he muttered; “However, it’s of no use to go back; I have reached so far unmolested, perhaps I shall get to the remainder of my journey as safely — here goes.”

He mounted the stairs lightly and swiftly until he reached the top, but thinking he had another stair to ascend, which was not the case, he brought his foot to the ground with a bang that made the place ring with its noise. He felt the blood rush into his face and ears, and was by no means restored on hearing a voice close to him exclaim, “S’death! Who’s there? What is that?”

He did not see any necessity to answer either question, so, sinking against the wall, he stood perfectly still, scarce breathing. He heard the questions repeated, and likewise had the satisfaction of hearing a sword unsheathed and scrape along the ground in search of him. He hesitated whether to retreat or remain still.

He decided on the latter, but edged himself as close to the wall as he could possibly get; he soon found his resolution a wise one, for he heard the voice mutter, “’Twas some door, I suppose; yet ‘twas strangely close.” Then the stranger, with footsteps as stealthy as his own, proceeded along the very way he himself intended to pursue. This was rather awkward, but Robin instantly determined to follow, though at a respectful distance, as he concluded that the person preceding him might unconsciously show him a way to escape. He followed, but, as though the stranger heard his footsteps, he suddenly stopped. Robin did so also; the stranger went on; so did Robin; again he stopped, Robin doing the like; a pause of a minute of breathless anxiety to Robin ensued.

The stranger proceeded, and Robin followed as cautiously and lightly as he possibly could, but the boards would creak, and the stranger would hear it, for again he came to a dead stand, and muttered: “’Tis very strange, there must be someone on my track.” He remained silent for a few seconds, and then called out in a low voice, “Who is it who thus follows me? Speak, what is thy purpose? If aught human, face me; if otherwise, in the name of the Holy Jesus, state thy reason for thus hovering round my footsteps?”

Robin acknowledged to himself that the stranger could not be reveling in the most agreeable sensations in his state of incertitude; but as our hero felt himself quite as well off as there was a chance of being, in his present situation, he thought he'd better say nothing, and so remained silent. The stranger, who waited a reply in vain, then hurried on, as if impelled by some sudden thought, and Robin, making a shrewd guess at it, followed him with all the speed his caution would permit.

So nimbly did he manage it, that, before he was aware of it, he found himself at the very shoulders of the stranger. He checked himself, or he would have run over him — an act he certainly had no intention of performing. However, he kept close to his elbow, and they reached the end of the passage, and passed through a doorway almost together. Robin had barely glided through, when the stranger closed the door, and fastened it with massive bolts, at the same time giving utterance to a faint laugh, in which Robin, with the greatest goodwill, noiselessly joined, believing that he had quite as good reason to laugh as the other.

The stranger now proceeded with less caution, for his footsteps made a louder ring upon the stone pavement than heretofore; but Robin, for a time, preserved his caution. Suddenly, in spite of every hazard, he felt an irrepressible inclination to let the stranger know he was still followed. He chuckled at the idea — he could not resist it — and he gave utterance to a short cough, suffered his footsteps to sound, and then bounded on one side, awaiting, in complete stillness, the result.

As he expected, the stranger stopped short, evidently in a perplexed state; then he hastily retraced his steps, waving his sword in all directions, but Robin, ensconced behind a pillar, eluded his search, and at length, in a state of desperation, he pursued his path without stopping, closely followed by Robin. The corridor they were pursuing led them into the chapel; the moon was throwing a bright light into it, and our hero saw that he must now be more than usually cautious in his proceedings, or nothing could prevent his being discovered.

He therefore waited until he saw the figure of him he was following emerge into the light: to his surprise, when this had taken place, he perceived that he was habited as a Benedictine monk. It surely was not Tuck? No; there was none of his portly bearing. However Robin thought he would pursue this friar, and see who he was — whether likely to prove a friend or enemy: he did not approve of his wearing a sword; there was nothing priestly in that, and he could only come to the conclusion that he was someone in disguise.

There was also another motive, equally strong inducing him to follow him up, which was, although he saw that it was the chapel into which the

friar had entered, yet he was as lost here as if he had been in the remotest part, for he had no idea whether he was entering by a private passage, or whether ‘twas the public one. The friar had disappeared and he cautiously followed until he got to the corner, and then he peeped round it, and saw a female, partly shrouded in a veil, kneeling at the foot of a tomb, repeating her rosary.

A few paces behind her, with his cowl thrown back, stood the stranger he had followed. He was gazing upon the lady, with an intense desire to speak exhibiting itself by a certain impatience in his manner, but respect for her devotions withheld him. Robin turned from him, although he longed to get a view of his countenance, to the lady. He was struck by the appearance of the light thrown upon her. She was habited in pure white and the moon shining full through the stained window, tinted her with many soft hues

As down she knelt, for Heaven’s grace and boon,
Rose-bloom fell on her hands, together prest,
And on her silver cross soft amethyst

There is something touchingly beautiful in the sight presented by gentle and frail mortality humbling itself in pure sincerity of heart before the Great Architect of the universe. And on this occasion, it was more than usually exquisite — the solemnity of the hour — the solitude of the place — and the solemn stillness reigning around, lending a beauty indescribable, while the profound devotion of that lovely lady made her seem like an angel worshipping the Great Supreme.

Robin gazed on her in long and earnest admiration; she looked so calm, so holily lovely. The stranger still continued a short distance behind her, standing motionless as a statue. Robin began to wonder if he meant well, and determined to stay. He had no weapon; but still he felt he should be some slight protection in case of danger. The lady’s orisons were long and fervent; and while Robin was wondering what would be the result of her discovering the stranger behind, he observed her prepare to rise, having completed her prayers. The voice of the stranger, in a low tone, then rose on the air, uttering the word, “Christabel!”

The lady half shrieked, and turned hastily round, and Robin, with surprise, saw and knew who stood before him, ere the lady, sinking into his arms, murmured, “Allan, dear Allan Clare!”

Chapter 7

And from afar he heard a screaming sound,
As of a dame distressed, who cried for aid,
And fill'd with loud laments the secret shade.
A thicket close beside the grove there stood,
With briars and brambles choaked, and dwarfish wood
From thence the noise, which now approaching near,
With more distinguish'd notes invades his ear;
He rais'd his head, and saw a beauteous maid,
With hair dishevell'd issuing through the shade;
Thus furnished for offence he cross'd the way
Betwixt the graceless villain and his prey.

----- Theodore And Honoria – Dryden

He chose a farm in Deva's vale,
Where his long alleys peep'd upon the main.
In this calm seat he drew the healthful gale,
Here mix'd the chief, the patriot, and the swain,
The happy monarch of his sylvan train;
Here, sided by the guardians of the fold,
He walk'd his rounds, and cheer'd his blest domain!
His days, the days of unstained nature, roll'd,
Replete with peace and joy, like patriarchs of old.

----- Thomson

Upon ascertaining that the spirit of Ritson had passed away, Gilbert descended slowly and sadly to the apartments beneath. He communicated to Margaret the decease of her brother, and in as brief a manner as might be, the story he had learned relative to the parentage and connection of Robin, as well as the gloomier portion relating to the murder of his own sister.

Margaret burst into tears, upon hearing Gilbert's narrative. Wicked as she knew her brother to have been, still he was her mother's child, and she retired to her room, to offer up sincere prayers for the repose of his soul. The worthy priest accompanied Gilbert to the chamber where the miserable Ritson lay stretched in death, and Marian, calling Lance to her side, took her way 'mid the shades of the forest trees.

She felt a heaviness upon her spirits, for which she could not well account. The intelligence of the death of the brother of Margaret, although of a nature to shock, still would not have communicated the feeling — the weight at her heart under which she laboured. She felt an indefinable

dread of something about to happen, accompanied by a strange sensation of desolateness, which she never before remembered to have experienced. It would have been a pleasure to her to weep, and yet she knew not why.

She was an orphan, with no relative in the wide world to cling to but her brother, whom she loved most devotedly.

This was a fact of which she had been painfully aware for a few years, then why should it come upon her now, with all the force as though she had but that moment learned the sad truth? Why should she feel so alone at this moment, when time had materially softened the grief she had endured for the loss of parents whom she had adored with the most perfect enthusiasm? It was a question she could not answer, but the influence of the feeling was on her, like a load of lead upon her brow and bosom.

She wandered on — the thought of her brother, her dear kind Allan, who since he had been left her only support, had never let her feel the loss of their parents, so far as lay in his power to supply their place, who had ever shown her every little kindness and affection which her wants demanded, or his own delicacy deemed she needed. She thought of him, to breathe a blessing on his name and a prayer for his safety, for she knew the errand upon which he had departed was one of danger and difficulty. And although she knew he could not reach the cottage of Gilbert Hood until the sun had sunk below the horizon, still she grew anxious for his return.

With thoughts of her brother, the form of Robin continually intruded upon her vision — a pleasing, but unbidden spectre, who uncalled and unexpected would make his presence palpable. All the while she was speculating upon her brother's safe return, she could not separate the unharmed accompaniment of Robin with him. Did she think of her brother's features, the clear bright eye of Robin also shone brightly on her imagination, and his musical voice and laugh rung in her ear.

She was really glad to hear that he was so well born. She had heard the whole of Gilbert's communication, and hoped that he would be reinstated in his possessions without opposition. There was also a sudden thought arose accompanying that hope, but it gave birth to a blush, a half angry smile, and so was dismissed.

She wandered on, the old dog at her heels. The sun was touching the tree tops, and the bright daylight was merging fast into the softer twilight; the foliage began to assume a rich purple hue. The shades of the huge trees grew longer, more decided, and deeper. No sound, save occasionally a sigh, breathed by the wind through the leaves: there was a

grand solemnity in the scene, peculiarly calculated to act upon the spirits — particularly where there already existed a tendency to sadness. Marian felt her despondency increase, and those recollections bearing the impress of misery upon them were the only ones which now fast thronged upon her.

Her life had not been a long one, truly, but it bore more than its share of the ills which blight and break a young spirit, and she tinctured the future anticipations with the hue of the past, until at length they were too heavy to bear unmovedly. And so, she seated herself beneath a tree amid the young flowers, and placing her face upon her hands and knees, she wept long and deeply.

For some time she remained in this sad mood, until at length the increasing gloom warned her to return to the cottage. For the first time she recollected that she had taken no notice whatever of the way she had come, merely wandering on as her fancy had led her, following the mazes and winding in the intricacies of the forest, without a thought arising respecting her return.

She arose from her seat and looked around her, but without being able to decide among the paths diverging right, left, and before her, which to take for the right. Neither could she, from the position in which she stood, remember the situation of the cottage, that she might at least take some path leading in its direction. There was little time left her for reflection; the sun was dropping rapidly behind the trees, and the forest was growing proportionally dark; she knew it was only left her now to take one, right or wrong, and endeavor to leave the forest, studded as it was, she was well aware, with outlaws and wolves.

With a sort of desperate determination, she chose the path she thought most likely to have been the one she had taken hither, and followed by old Lance, who seemed in no way affected by the alarm she felt, she hurried on with the hope that she might attain some place which would guide her, e’er the sun had quite sunk to his destination.

She hastened on, fancying that she recognised in some of the old trees objects which she had seen as she came, but instantly some new combination of trees would come upon her sight to dispel the illusion, and throw her into greater doubt than ever. Her sadness now gave way to the alarm she naturally experienced in being placed in such an awkward situation, which was by no means lessened on hearing Lance give utterance to a succession of short, low growls.

At the same time, she fancied she heard footsteps behind her; she immediately began to entertain a series of horrible fancies, and accordingly increased her speed. She turned down a pathway which she

was certain she had passed along as she came, by a curious knot of pine trees which grew there; she darted down it, making her walk a run, for she had come to a positive conclusion that there were footsteps coming rapidly after her, and it was no friend or Lance would not have commenced barking so furiously.

To her dissatisfaction, she perceived that this pathway led through a vista of trees, so thick and so short a distance apart, that with the little of the sunlight left, it was almost as dark as though a moonless night had suddenly enshrouded her. Disagreeable as this was, she had no alternative but to proceed, and recommending herself to the protection of the Virgin, she flew along it with all the speed nature had given her. Some parts of the path were so dark that she could scarce see her way, then an opening in the trees would show a sudden gleam of twilight, acquainting her that it was not yet night.

The barks of Lance grew fiercer and more continued, and the alarm this circumstance engendered induced her to use every exertion to keep up her pace. The pathway now began to widen, and she began to hope. Suddenly it diverged into two tracks, one of them she must take, and one of them she did — to find in a very short time that she had chosen the wrong one, for the path which had widened — had been only like a sudden gleam of sunshine on a stormy day, to be as speedily clouded — narrowed and ended in a thicket. Her heart died within her as she discovered this, for she knew she was at the mercy of her pursuer, who, had he intended well, on seeing her fly evidently in alarm, would have called to her in a friendly manner, and offered her assistance to escape from the unfortunate dilemma in which she was placed.

He had observed strict silence, and had kept at a certain distance, probably awed by Lance, who showed no amicable feeling towards him. But who was he? Was it a he? She had not even during her flight turned her head to look; now that no chance of escape existed, she drew a long breath, and resolved to turn boldly round to face the coming danger with as much firmness as she could call into action. Lance was with her, that was something; and she could tell by his demeanour that he would not suffer her to be molested without a sturdy effort on his part to prevent it.

Trying to reassure herself in this way, she stopped and turned resolutely round. She saw a fellow stealing along, with about the same swiftness she had herself used and in the same direction which she had taken. On perceiving that she had stopped, he stopped also, and for a moment hesitated, but it was but for a moment, for he advanced as swiftly as before.

Old Lance, with more courage than politeness, advanced to meet him, with an aspect betokening that, if an acquaintance sprung up between them, it would be dangerous to one of them. So thought the stranger, and conceived that the largest share might fall to his lot, for, as Lance advanced, he checked his own pace, and cried out to Marian to call off the hound.

Marian, with a spirit which the certainty of her danger gave birth to, exclaimed – “I must first learn the purport for which you have followed me, ere I withdraw him!”

“Call off your hound, I tell you,” replied the man, “or it will be all the worse for you. I do not mean to offer you harm. I know well who and what you are, and seek you for a very different purpose.”

“How am I to know this?” demanded the maiden, firmly.

“By learning the ease with which I could have sent a bolt from my crossbow through your brain, had such been my intention,” he answered. “Call off your hound, I tell you!” he shouted, as the dog, moving nearer him, prepared for a spring at his throat.

In the haste of the moment she called to Lance, and the well-tutored hound obeyed the call, by backing, with his eye fixed on and his long fangs displayed to the stranger, until he reached the side of Marian.

Here he stopped, but still kept marvelously on the alert, growling with subdued sound. The man approached until he came within a few feet of Marian, and she saw that he decidedly belonged to that class of persons who gather their income from the involuntary contributions of others. His face, as well as the darkness would permit her to see, was of a villainous turn, peculiarly adapted for a cut-throat. He had a large pair of glaring eyes and a prominent nose, being the only features visible through the profusion of black, matted hair which covered his skull, cheeks, and chin.

His body was encased in a doublet of goat skin, his legs in trunks of deerskin, and shoes rudely constructed from the same materials, covered his feet, while the twisted thongs of deer hide fastening them, wound crosswise up his leg. At his back was slung a crossbow, and at his side a short sword. His arms were bare, and his whole appearance such that Marian would have been overjoyed that moment to have had a hundred miles between them.

However, she would not appear to be alarmed, since she knew it was quite a chance if she escaped, and possibly a firm demeanour might lead the rogue to believe that she had some assistance at hand. She, therefore, when she conceived that the distance was small enough between them, exclaimed –

“Advance no further, but at once tell me your purpose in thus dogging my footsteps! You say you know who and what I am, and seek me for a purpose opposite to offering me harm. What is this purpose?”

“That you shall know anon,” was the reply; “At present you must follow me.”

“Where?”

“You will know all, by-and-bye,” returned he, “quite soon enough, and probably more than will please you!”

“I'll not follow you!” said Marian.

“You won’t.” said the fellow, fiercely. “We shall see that, my dainty maiden. Come, I have no wish to harm you — yet, but you will not like the means I shall take to make you comply, if you come not at once and willingly.”

“I will not move an inch,” said Marian, firmly. “If you dare to offer me the slightest violence, you will bring upon yourself a punishment which will make you rue your ruffianly conduct to a defenceless girl.”

“Ho! ho! ho!” laughed the man scornfully, “‘Twas boldly spoken, but, although I admire your spirit, it will not move me to forego my purpose. I like your looks, my girl, and I have a great mind to make you an offer — and I will too. Listen — you arrived yesterday, at the cottage of a forest keeper, named Gilbert Hood, accompanied by your brother, who has today gone to the Castle of Nottingham, from whence he will never return.”

“Never return!” echoed Marian, interrupting him, alarmedly.

“Never return,” replied the man, “and serve him right too, for a fool — he must needs thrust his head into the lion’s mouth, and then be surprised he has it bit off. No, no, the Baron having got him safely in his power, will not let him out of his clutches very easily. Thus, you see, he has got one of you, and now he wants the other — which is you. I suppose the old tiger has taken a fancy to you, but so have I and if you like to live with me, like a loving wife, in the old wood here, why, you shan’t see anything of the Baron, and you may be as happy as the day is long with me.”

“A dry cave for your lodging, dry leaves for your bed, and the tenderest venison for your food — Why, a queen could not wish for more! What say you, damsel, shall it be so?”

“But my brother,” said Marian, scarce heeding the proposition; the words, ‘He will never return!’ ringing in her ear.

“Oh,” said the fellow, misunderstanding her, “If he escapes, he can live with us, if he likes. He’ll find an outlaw’s life a bonnie one, I warrant, an’ if he don’t, why, let him hang. I doubt not though that is his fate by this time. Come, girl, how is it to be? Which dost thou choose, a young sturdy fellow, or the tough, wrinkled old hog, Fitz Alwine, Baron of Nottingham though he be?”

“How know you my brother is in the Baron’s power?” inquired Marion, still harping on her brother, and tears beginning to find their way into her eyes.

“To Satan with your brother!” roared the outlaw,

“What has he to do with my offer? By St. Dunstan, I’ll no longer give you a choice. It shall be as I wish, you shall live with me, and let the Baron get you out of my paws if he can. That shall be it, my little beauty. Come, I’ll give you the first kiss now,” and he advanced hastily to put his intention into execution, but Marian, awakened to his intent by his last words, sprung back, at the same time almost shrieking – “To him, Lance! To him — his throat, my brave dog! Hold him, Lance!”

It seemed as if Lance had only been waiting for some such exordiums, for ere the three first words had been succeeded by a fourth, he sprung up to the man’s throat. The fellow, in his haste to favour Marian with a salute, had forgotten the dog, but whether his occupation was of that nature that it frequently placed him in similar situations, or whether he was naturally dexterous, we cannot properly determine, but instead of Lance catching him by the throat, he caught Lance by it and flung him off.

The dog was too heavy to throw far, and was too nimble to be disconcerted by such an act, and his feet had scarcely touched the ground when they left it again in a second spring at the outlaw’s windpipe. The man made a bound to avoid it, but Lance just caught his ear.

When Lance gripped, there was no mistake about it. And, albeit, he was an old dog, his teeth were wondrous sharp. He gripped the ear, which not being sufficiently thick to prevent being bitten through, or so tough that it would not easily separate, the consequences were, that the dog being very heavy, and his teeth very sharp, he dropped to the ground with the ear in his mouth. The roar of agony which followed might have been heard from one end of the forest to the other – but it excited no compassionate feeling in Lance, who dropped the ear and was at him again.

It was the outlaw’s turn this time and as Lance flew at him, he leaped with agility to one side, drew his short sword as Lance came again at him, and received him with a tremendous cut on the skull, which laid it bare, and stretched the faithful animal senseless upon the ground.

With a grim smile, despite the torture his wound gave him, the outlaw turned to the spot where Marian had stood, but found she was no longer visible. In the struggle between himself and the dog, she had passed him, and now sought rapidly to regain the path she had lost. With an oath, the fellow followed in pursuit. Marian by no means ran badly, and fear lent her speed but, poor girl, distracted with terror, she turned again into a wrong path, and actually ran away from the house she was endeavouring to find.

The ruffian, who just caught a glimpse of her light garments as she turned down the path, chuckled as he perceived that she had again mistaken her way, for he knew the locality well, slackened his speed in order to bind up his wounds, which were bleeding terribly – being quite assured that he should speedily overtake her in the path she had taken. Nor was he wrong in his conjecture.

He collected hastily a few herbs with which the forest abounded, which bore the credit of possessing healing properties well known to himself and others of his class, who, being out of the way of all doctors, were compelled, in cases of emergency, to doctor themselves. These he bruised together, and laying them on a piece of cloth, applied them to the wounded part, and bound it up.

When this was completed, an operation over which he wasted little time, he departed in search of the lady. For a short time he saw no glimpse of her. “She runs better than I thought for” he muttered, as he went down the alley at the top of his speed. He reached its terminus, which branched off in three directions — he looked hastily down each, but saw nothing of her.

He cursed his stupidity for letting her get so much the start of him as thus to double him. But, though thrown off the scent, it was by no means his intention to give up the chase. He, therefore, deeming it most probable that she had taken the one which looked likeliest to lead to Hood’s cottage, he rushed down it. As he reached a turn, some distance on, he fancied he heard footsteps, light ones, it was true, but he was sure that they were footsteps borne upon the wind, which blew gently in his face. The sun had quite sunk, but the moon was fast rising, and, by its cloudless brilliancy, lighting up the uncovered spots in the forest.

The fellow redoubled his pace, and as he turned a second glade, at a considerable distance he beheld the light dress of Marian fluttering in the night air as she fled. With an exclamation of triumph, he followed in the pursuit, gaining at every stride rapidly upon her.

She saw him as soon as he had caught a glimpse of her, for as she fled, ever and anon she turned her head, and as he had emerged from the pathway into the broad glade lighted by the moon, her quick eyes saw

his odious form. In an instant, the courage which had hitherto kept her silent, and induced her to employ all her energies in an attempt to escape, now forsook her. As the villain approached nearer and nearer, she gave utterance to the most frantic shrieks.

Labouring under an agony of terror, she flew along, although, at each instant, she felt as if she must fall to the ground. Still she kept up her pace; but her shrieks were dreadful – panting, breathless, fainting — nature could do no more. She had striven to her utmost, but in vain; the villain was close upon her – the forest grew dim before her – she began thinking of her brother – of her home – a thousand dim things flitted across her imagination – she stretched her hands wildly up and down – and, at length, with one piercing shriek, in utter helplessness and despair, she fell senseless upon the ground.

How often does it not happen that at the moment when we believe there is no possibility of escape from some deep and crushing misfortune into which we may have fallen – when all hope is gone – when we look to the quarter from which we might expect some assistance, but find it not, there turns up from some unexpected source the means by we are saved!

So was it with the young timid girl, lying fainting upon the ground. There was succour nigh, for which she could not have hoped nor expected. At a short distance from the place where she fell, was a tall, stout forester, a deerkeeper, on his nightly watch to keep the deer from unlawful hands. He was armed for fighting to the teeth, and possessed that sort of dauntless courage which is prompt and cool in all danger, however great, and is your only true courage. He heard the shrieks, and made for the direction from whence they proceeded with all speed, and broke through the thicket close to the spot where lay Marian, just in time to prevent the outlaw laying his rude hand upon her.

“How now!” he shouted, “Hands off, you ugly knave! Back, villain! What, thou black-muzzled varlet! Hunting down this child as a lurcher would a fawn?”

The fellow started on hearing the forester’s voice, as if he had seen an apparition. Yet, although the forester had bade him touch her not, he did not heed him, but stooped with the intention of raising Marian from the ground. The butt end of the forester’s hunting spear, applied with some force to his side, frustrated his intention, by hurling him to the ground, while the tall sturdy forester raised the insensible girl in his arms as if she had been an infant.

“Poor child!” he exclaimed; “Poor little thing, frightened out of its wits by the ugly visage of yon grim brute. Ho, master Devil’s mug! Take my advice and back to your hiding place, or by the holy saints I’ll raise such a clatter with my spear about your hideous pate, I’ll make your eyes flash fire for a month. I will. Off with ye.”

“The girl’s mine,” grunted the outlaw, who had no very strong inclination to attack the forester, every way his superior, and therefore rose from the ground without in any way retaliating the blow which had laid him there.

“Thine! It’s false, thou filthy villain,” said the forester. “I’d as soon credit the bear and fawn, the vulture and cygnet, mating, as you having aught to do with so fair a piece of God’s handywork as this. Harkee, thou fiend’s cub! Unless you decamp at once with all the speed you’re master of, I’ll make a short shrift of you, and treat you to a dance in the air from the nearest oak. I have the thong handy to do it, and most certainly the will to put it in execution. I am quite satisfied that you have been guilty of some foul play. If you are here when this maiden wakes, and she tells me as much, Saint Peter have mercy on you! for I won’t. Troop, my fine fellow! I give you no further warning. Mind that.”

The outlaw did mind it, muttering a choice assemblage of oaths, he slowly departed the way which the forester pointed out with his finger. When he had some short time departed, the honest fellow, who still held Marian, finding that she continued senseless, lifted her gently in his arms, and bore her away. He had not journeyed far when he reached a small spring which ran trickling windingly through a portion of the forest.

He laid her gently down, and with the cool liquid bathed her temples. In a short time he had the satisfaction of perceiving returning animation; breathing a deep sigh, she opened her eyes, and said, faintly, “Where am I?”

“In Sherwood Forest, gentle one,” answered the forester, whose simple mind led him to answer the question literally. On hearing his voice, which sounded strangely in her ears, she endeavoured to rise hastily and disengage herself from his hold, but the effort was vain — she was too weak, and, bursting into tears, besought him to have mercy on her.

“No harm shall come to you, damsel, fear not,” said the forester, gently, “That rogue is far enough off by this time, and if he were here, he should not lay a finger, even of kindness, upon you, unless he’d stretched me as dead as my great, great grandfather at your feet; and before he could manage that he’d pass one of the longest nights he ever did in all his life, that I’ll wager.”

“Come maiden with me. I’ll lead you to our hall. You’ll find succour and welcome in all true heartiness beneath its roof, I’ll warrant you. There be maidens as tender and gentle as thyself, to cheer, weep, or pray with thee, perhaps do all three, most like — it’s in their nature — and you’ll find a race of stout lads to crack a crown in thy behalf, though it were the thickest in Christendom — and, beyond all, an old hale man, who will be a father to thee in thy loneliness, and a friend in thy distress. An open hand,

a warm heart, and a true spirit — gentle, or as the lion, as befits it — hath the old man, although he is my uncle, that's the truth. Let no man, unless he has a stout hand and stouter heart, gainsay it in my presence, or by my *halidame*, [*Common malapropism for 'halidom'* - '*Sacred Honor*'] my staff and his skull should speedily try which was hardest. Come, maiden, it is not far — a slight exertion will bring thee to it."

Alternately consoling and cheering Marian, who had been so overcome by the exertions she had made, as even now to be unconscious of where she was or whither going, the forester led her unresistingly along. Suddenly, as if restored to something like consciousness, she enquired:

"Who are you? What are you? Whither are you taking me? Is this the way to Gilbert Hood's?"

Here were four questions in a breath. The woodsman being a simple man with one tongue, hesitated a moment how to answer, but decided the matter by asking a question without answering one.

"What, my pretty damsel, do you live with Gilbert Hood across the forest, yonder? Are you his child? To think I should have known Merrie Gilbert since I was a rough boy, an' he never to tell me of his bright-eyed daughter; I know of his foster son, young Robin — the sprightly young trickster, always up to some prank — but I heard nothing of you. How close the old boy has been — and so you are a Hood, are you?"

"No!" returned Marian, who was obliged to let the rough forester have his say, for his voice was so full and loud that she stood no chance of making herself heard while he was speaking. "I am no child of his — I have but been a partaker of his hospitality since yesterday. Tonight I strolled in the woods. I lost my way, and that fearful man attacked me. I fled from him, and "

"I know the rest. Well, you must have run some distance, for you are too far to think of returning tonight to Hood's cottage. You must come to my uncle's, and when you are safe there, I will step over to old Gilbert, and let him know all that's taken place."

"You are very kind," replied Marian; "Indeed I heartily thank you."

"No thanks, damsel, no thanks to me — thank the Holy Virgin, not me," said the young man; "Beshrew my gallantry, you asked me some questions which I answered not, let me make up for my fault. You would know who I am, what I am, and whither we are going.'

"Firstly, maiden, look on me; I stand about six feet six inches high, my shoulders you see are broad in proportion — I have an arm and a hand which will knock down an ox or lead a timid damsel to a May dance. I have a leg and foot that shall carry me untired forty English miles in the day, or shall dance as lightly as that of the slimmest youth round the

Maypole: — I am rough and tough, and my heart's as tough as my body and limbs; my name is John Naylor, but in consideration of my trifling size, my honest friends call me Little John*.

I am just twenty-four, an English bowman, yeoman, and deputy forest keeper, damsel!" exclaimed Little John, for we shall use his familiar title. "Lean on me, and fear not to press too heavily, I can with ease bear thrice thy weight at the top of my speed so, there, very well indeed, we shall soon be at the Hall."

So saying, cheering and soothing by turns, with all the kindness his honest nature could infuse into the tone of his voice, they walked slowly on towards — as Little John expressed it — '*the most famous hall in all England*'.

Their path lay through a portion of the wood thickly-studded with huge oaks. Although the moon, which was at the full, shone brightly, still the thickness of the foliage threw a deep gloom over their path among the bright patches of moonlight, making the open glades look as though they were fashioned of polished silver. Again and again, as they passed through the thickets, brakes, and coverts, they would be enshrouded in the shadows of the vast forest trees. But this was to have its end and after passing along a more than usually dark path, they emerged suddenly on the borders of the forest, to behold a sight which, weak, faint, and nervous as Marian still felt, perfectly entranced her.

It was high ground upon which she stood, and the land stretched away beneath her for miles of the most varied and picturesque description. Within a quarter of a mile of where she stood were the straggling cottages of vassals, in number sufficient to constitute a village. The little huts raised their heads humbly amid a sweet profusion of fruit and flower trees, and upon a little eminence stood the small, quiet, neat village church, to which the villagers regularly went to hear mass.

It had its small burial ground attached to it, and the strangely formed yew trees waved their dark branches over the happy ones sleeping beneath the green turf. To the left, upon a rising ground – for it was almost a dell, and quite a vale – where existed this small village of Gamwell, stood the hall. It stood up more proudly than any building in sight, but there was a degree of honesty in its bearing that made you pardon the pride of its appearance.


**The real name of Little John has been variously given. That of Naylor seems to be the best authenticated. Parties claiming to be true descendants were living in the last century.*

A bow belonging to Little John, with the name of Naylor upon it, is still said to be in existence.

The style was rude, partaking of the domestic and military character in its construction, the architecture Anglo-Norman, and was, as we have said of Gilbert Hood's, somewhat in advance of the domestic buildings of the period. Sir Guy had taken down the one in which he was born, and replaced it by another more calculated to unite the comforts and pleasures of a country residence with so much of the military character as the unsettled state of the times made essential.

Like the adjoining buildings, it was surrounded by trees, which, if they took somewhat from its dignity, they added to its homeliness; and this, perhaps, was by far the greater charm. A bright light shone from its windows, showing that its inhabitants were not in a state of repose, if the house – aye, the whole village looked so in the broad moonlight.

"How very beautiful!" exclaimed Marian, as she gazed on the scene before her. "How very beautiful!" she repeated with enthusiasm; "So unexpected and so sweet!"

"So I say, maiden," chimed in John.

"There's a rare bit of English scenery! Let the Normans say what they please of their own land. Where will they beat that, I should like to know?"

"It is indeed worthy being proud of," returned Marian

"Aye, aye," said Little John, delightedly "I was born and bred in it, and hope to die in it. Proud of it, maiden! It's a land to fight and die for! And so says my uncle, Sir Guy. But we must not stand talking here about the outside, bonnie though it be. We must try what the inside of the hall has for you. Let us on, maiden. There is a dew falling, and it will chill your slight frame, if we hasten not to quit it."

Feeling better, though very tired, Marian was able to walk more cheerfully along, and soon were they at the door of the mansion, enduring the clamorous welcome of a score of hounds, whom Little John succeeded in quieting with his voice and staff, and led Marian through a group of wondering serving men to the spacious hall in which Sir Guy, his family, and retainers were about to sup.

Sir Guy was in the act of giving his orders to the carver, who was already flourishing his knife, when Little John, accompanied by his timid companion, passed up the hall, crying out — "My good uncle, I claim your hospitality for a distressed damsel, who would have fallen a sacrifice to a thieving outlaw, but happily I was near to prevent it, and have brought her unto you, until she can be restored to her friends in health and safety."

"The maiden is welcome in the name of St. Julian, be she gentle or simple," returned Sir Guy, in a tone of voice that fell marvellously grateful

on the ear. “Bring her to me, kinsman,” he added, “and let me see who hath excited thy sympathy.”

Little John accordingly led Marian to the head of the table, where was seated old Sir Guy, his wife and two fair daughters. In her flight from the outlaw, she had lost her head gear, and had in her way to the hall been accommodated with a scarf by Little John, which she had wound around her head. She hastily removed this, as she believed that its adornment could not assist any favourable impression her appearance might make upon her beholders. She looked pale from fear and exhaustion, but was not a jot less lovely.

The old knight*, and, indeed, all who gazed upon her were struck by her beauty, and ere a word had left the old knight’s lips, his two daughters were at her side.

He noticed with pleasure their promptness to meet and receive Marian, and said kindly – “I am right glad, my fair maiden, that my honest nephew should have been fortunate enough to render thee assistance when needed. ’Twas like him to do’t when he had the chance, and I am heartily pleased to see that having the chance he has done it. Poor child, you look fatigued and weak. Take some wine and refreshment, it will relieve you”.

But Marian, thanking him, declined it, and begged to retire to a couch, if they would accord her so kind a boon. She had scarce made known her wish, when the youngest daughter, youngest of seven sons, being himself about eighteen years of age.

“Now for the why of your succouring, and the wherefore of your bringing hither that beautiful black-eyed damsel. Your story, sir, your story.”“Aye! The story, the story!” cried the seven sons together, their sonorous tones, accompanied by the baying of a set of deerhounds, formed a tolerably strong demand upon Little John. When silence was obtained, he complied with their request, and finished by observing that he was about to cross the forest to let Gilbert Hood know the cause of the young lady’s absence, in order to prevent any alarm he might labour under by her sudden disappearance.

Will Gamwell, upon hearing this, expressed an earnest desire to accompany him, for he wished tosee his old playmate, Robin. “I haven’t seen him since Christmas”, he said, “and I should like to have a word with bonnie Robin, for he’s after my own heart.”


** Gamwel, of Great Gamwel Hall,*
A noble housekeeper was he,
Aye, as ever broke bread in sweet Nottinghamshire
And a squire of famous degree.

“Not tonight, Will, my boy,” said Sir Guy, “’Tis too late. Robin will be dreaming ere you reach his home, and ‘twould not be friendly to disturb his slumbers tonight, seeing that tomorrow will serve the purpose quite as well.”

“Nay, father,” returned Will, “you mistake Robin. I know him better. If this lady is missed, he will be abroad in the wood, in search of her. When I meet with him, I will tell him he needn’t fear for the maiden’s safety — that she is well bestowed, and then we can try our skill with the bow by moonlight.”

The old knight raised a few more objections; which were all overruled by his son, and, as he did not wish that his boys should be in any degree effeminate, but be able, on any emergency, to pass a night in the woods, he gave his consent to the youth’s departure. Accordingly, with his young companion, Little John once more threaded his way through Sherwood Forest.

Chapter 8

There was but one beloved face on earth,
And that was shining on him; he had look'd
Upon it till it could not pass away
He had no breath, no being, but in hers!

----- Byron

Dearest, best, and brightest, Come away
To the woods and to the fields, Come away
To the wild wood and the plains,
To the pools, when winter rains,
Image all the roof of leaves.

----- Shelley

When, from sentiments of honour and a desire to act justly towards those over whom he may possess temporary power, a man renounces the cherished idols of his bosom, preferring their happiness with the certain forfeiture of his own, he has achieved the greatest victory of which he is capable – a victory over himself.

----- Sherwood

— Madam — hist!
For God's sake! Madam — Madam!
— here's my master,
Was ever heard of such a curst disaster!
They're on the stair just now, and in a crack
Will all be here; –
Fly, Juan, fly! for Heaven's sake, not a word;
The door is open — you may yet slip through
The passage you so often have explored;
Here is the garden key — fly — fly — adieu!
Haste Haste – I hear Alfonso's hurrying feet

----- Byron

Robin Hood did not advance from his covert, although he knew that they were friends before him. As he had staid in the hope of befriending the lady, had she needed it, he thought he might still remain, in order to prevent their being interrupted by any sudden intruders — thus doing them both a service. He also understood at once that it was better that they should not know that they were observed even by him, for it would put a constraint on their words and actions — unpleasing in all respects.

He was anxious to learn how Allan had got freed from his fetters, and how he had obtained that friar's gown. He had a shrewd suspicion that it had been effected through the instrumentality of the pretty Maude. "Well,"

he thought, “if she only contrives to get us safe on the other side of these castle walls, what a number of kisses I'll owe her until the first opportunity of payment arrives.”

The lady now raised her head from Allan’s shoulder, upon which she had suffered it to rest when she sunk into his arms; he observed it, and said –

“Dear Christabel, once again, after an absence of two long dreary years, do I hold you in my arms. Sweet love, this moment well repays me all I have suffered since we parted.”

“And have you suffered for my sake, dear Allan?” murmured the lady.

“Can you doubt it, Christabel?” returned Allan, with warmth. “I loved you passionately ere it was our cruel fate to part; and when you were torn from me — all access to you rudely denied me — almost every hope of ever seeing you again destroyed — think you I could have lived and not have suffered deeply? Believe my affection to be more worthy of you. Can I forget the day on which your father scorned and spurned me — called me beggar, who could ne’er be mate for child of his — and that same day carried you from Huntingdon hither?”

“I stood upon the hill on the outskirts of the city, and watched you until I caught the last glimpse of your person as the winding road hid you from my sight. As your form faded, it seemed as if hope, joy, life itself, were passing away from me. The morning was fresh and clear, yet as mine eyes gazed their last upon you, ‘twas as though the sun had ceased to shine and the air become filled with a thick and heavy mist. Long after you had vanished from my sight did I still gaze on; and when, with a bursting heart, I turned away, I felt as if shut out from the world forever. I wandered among the hills alone, oppressed beyond endurance; and in the fullness of my grief, upon a wide heath-covered down, with no human eye to gaze upon me, I sat me down, God help me! and wept like a weak child.”

“Dear, dear Allan,” murmured Christabel, “I grieve most sincerely that I have been the cause of one pang to you. Heaven knows, could I make each moment of your life a happy hour, how joyfully I would do it.”

“And I know it too, dear Christabel,” returned Allan, fervently; “and be my fate what it may, never will I wrong your sweet kindliness to me, as I hope for happiness.”

“And have you been true to me, dear Allan, and will you be, and love me ever as I love you, Allan?” asked Christabel, with a sweet simplicity.

They had been children together, loving each other from their earliest recollection, and she loved him truly, tenderly, and sincerely. She knew him worthy of her love, and was unacquainted with that false delicacy which, had she possessed it, would have kept her from telling him so much.

“My own Christabel,” was Allan’s reply; “in thought, word, or deed, I have never swerved from you. You have been the dearest, brightest hope in my existence. I have sworn to be true to you; I have been hitherto, and I swear to remain so. I have kept your image unfaded in my heart. It will never have its brightness dimmed by any other object, and as I prove to you, so Heaven help me in my hour of need.”

“Bless you! Heaven bless you, Allan! You need not ask me if I have changed. I could not, if I would. I have loved you since I could lisp your name, and a woman’s love — when she truly loves — is a devotion which knows not, admits not, of change or deviation. My father may separate us, Allan, but he cannot either make me love or wed another.”

Allan murmured his thanks, and pressed the gentle girl to his bosom, while Robin, who could not avoid hearing this colloquy, felt very much as if he should have vastly liked to have been saying all this to Marian, and she to have replied to him, even as Christabel had done to Allan.

“As to my truth, though,” murmured he, “that would have been awkward, because those kisses to Maude would have told something against being exactly true to Marian.” His speculations were interrupted by Allan’s voice questioning the fair girl, who was leaning on him, and looking upon his face with a gaze almost of adoration.

“Dear Christabel, how did you contrive to ascertain the cell to which your stern father commanded me to be dragged? And by what ingenuity did you produce a disguise and an open prison door for me?”

“By merely employing a woman’s wit – it was the only engine at my command – and when put in action, served me effectually, as you have discovered,” said Christabel playfully. “But I must not take upon myself all the credit. I am mainly indebted to my hand-maiden, Maude, a quick-witted, intelligent girl, for my success.”

“I thought so,” muttered Robin.

“She was attending me when I encountered you in my father’s apartment this afternoon and through her tact, I not only learned the situation of your dungeon, but the means by which you might be set free. It seems that your gaoler was one whom her pretty looks had beguiled of his kind thoughts.”

“No doubt,” interpolated Robin, mentally, “I should not be surprised if that wicked-eyed little Maude had not, by her pretty looks, beguiled of their kind thoughts all of the men in the castle, serving men, gaolers, men-at-arms, and all, and by the MASS! A very pleasant style of being beguiled truly.”

“She induced him,” continued Christabel, “to drink, while she sung to him, and the poor man, overjoyed by the grace shown him – a kindness with which Maude tells me she had never before favoured him, or indeed any of the people –”

“Certainly not,” thought Robin, with an inward laugh, “Not by any means.”

—“Swallowed more wine and affectionate looks than his poor head could bear, and becoming intoxicated, he sunk into a sound sleep. Maude obtained the key of your cell, and her confessor happening, fortunately, to be in spiritual attendance upon her, she, in her deep anxiety to minister to my peace of mind as well as to my most earnest wishes, confided to him the strait we were in and he – as she tells me for I have not seen him – is a dear, kind, fatherly saint,”

“Very fatherly,” thought Robin, with another silent laugh.

“Is his name Tuck?” inquired Allan.

“Yes,” said she, eagerly, “It is that. Why do you ask? Do you know him?”

“Slightly,” returned Allan, with a smile.

“And he is a dear old man, I know,” continued Christabel, warmly, “for he lent the habit to Maude, which you now wear. Why do you laugh, Allan? He is so, is he not?”

“I think I could answer your question,” muttered Robin; “I wish you could have seen the dear old man play at quarter staff last night,” he added, with a quiet chuckle.

“Certainly, dear Christabel, for aught I know,” replied Allan.

“Then why do you laugh?” enquired she.

“’Tis nothing — a trifle. This same dear old man is not quite so old as you appear to think him, that t'was all,” replied he.

“He must be very much younger than I imagined, Allan, or you would not have smiled. But no matter, I love him very much for his kindness, and I am sure Maude does,” said Christabel,

“I have no objection to Maud’s being over head and ears in love with him or anyone else, dear Christabel,” said Allan, hesitatingly, “but I had rather you did not love him very much, even though he did lend me his black gown to avoid detection in my escape.”

“I should think so too; quite my idea of the matter,” thought Robin.

Christabel looked for a moment at Allan as if she understood him not, and then, when she did, there was a small pout on the pretty lip, and she murmured reproachfully, “Allan!”

“Forgive me,” said Allan, hastily, “’twas a foolish thought, and unkind of me to utter it.”

“Nay, Allan, I am not angry,” quickly uttered Christabel, fearing she had wounded his feelings by her implied reproach.

“It was selfishness in me, sweet girl” fondly ejaculated Allan; “but I love you so deeply, so intensely, that I — that I-I am ashamed to tell you what I meant in giving utterance to the wish that offended you.”

“Indeed, dear Allan, it did not offend me; but I know what you were going to say, and since you have not the courage, I’ll e’en say it for you – It is that you love me so deeply and intensely that you wish me to love you, and you only, the same. And so I do, Allan, indeed I do, and if I said I loved the friar very much, it was only as I should reverence any of the good old fathers.”

“I shall henceforward call the friar Father Tuck,” laughed Robin, to himself.

“I believe you, love,” said Allan; “Let us talk no more of it.”

“And how is dear Marian, your sweet sister?” asked Christabel, changing the subject at a wish. “We’ll talk of her Allan, for I love her very — very dearly. I may love her ‘very much,’ eh, Allan?”

“A fair retort,” smiled Robin.

Allan laughed, and said, “I love her very much myself.”

“So do I,” thought Robin, rather seriously.

“She came from Huntingdon with me, and is staying at the cottage of a warm-hearted, hospitable forester, near the village of Mansfieldwoodhaus. I induced her to come with me, because — Christabel, because, I say, I induced her to come with me thus far, because---”

“Well, Allan.”

“Because, dear Christabel, I had a faint hope that I — my heart beats as I utter it — might persuade you to leave your stern and cruel father for the home of one who loves you tenderly and truly, who will make his future study that of rendering thee happy, dear Christabel; who will feel it his greatest happiness to know that every coming hour he may be able to show you little kindly acts that will draw from you a cheerful word, — a sweet smile, — or a fond look.”

“An’ thou wilt come, there shall be my sister, Marian, to cheer thee with her merry thoughts and little songs, when you have grown tired of the green-leaved trees, the tender flowers, and the music of the forest birds. Or when the heavy rains, succeeding the sweet sunshine, shall keep thy feet from straying in the cool, calm air, thou shalt set thee down in thy happy home in quiet content, to hear the low-breathed words of a loving heart, or whatever else may please thy fancy. Thou wilt come — wilt thou not? Lend me the aid of thy kind thoughts — plead for me with thyself, sweet Christabel. Come with me – I speak not unadvisedly, nor hastily. I have thought long and deeply upon it. I have considered how short our term is here on earth — we love each other dearly — most dearly, why then should our peace, our hopes, our happiness be trampled on and laid waste by the caprice of another, even though that other be thy father, who, if he profits nothing by our happiness, can gain nothing by our misery?”

“We are suited in taste, person, tone of mind, and in all things essential to constitute a life of rare felicity with each other; come with me, Christabel!”

“If you wish it, it shall be to a forest home, whose pleasant appendages of trees, of fruits, and flowers, whose songbirds, and the old wood to wander through, shall create such ecstacy in thee, as shall perhaps draw the soft tears of too much happiness from thy calm quiet eyes.”

“**Come with me!**”

“It shall be, if it better pleaseth thee, to the bustling city, with its gaieties of all descriptions, each festivity and enjoyment shall be placed in thy power, that thou may’st derive joy and pleasure from them.”

“**Come with me, my own, my fondly loved!**”

“Thou can’st not be happy here. There is none to sympathise with thee, none to cheer and pleasure thee, and all the harsh words and harsher acts of thy proud, selfish sire, to make thee feel more desolate still. Wilt thou not leave this cold, cheerless home, for the hearth of him who adores thee, and whom thou hast so kindly confessed thou lovest? I will be ever, unchangingly affectionate to thee. Thy fondest anticipations shall

not reach, however deep its imaginings, the extent to which my spirit will fly in creating happiness and honour for thee."

"I am lone, even to abject loneliness, without thee. Wilt thou not speak the one kind word that shall make me far happier than it falls to human lot."

"Thou wilt come, wilt thou not, dear Christabel?"

"Speak to me, love! Let me hear thy sweet voice murmur thy consent."

"Say thou wilt come!"

Christabel answered not, but laid her head upon his shoulder, and sobbed audibly. The tears rushed into Allan's eyes, and so they did into Robin's, as the low sob met their ear.

"Ah, but the maiden's won," thought Robin; "The point is gained. A fair journey to thee, thou sweet couple!"

So thought Allan, but the conjectures of both were wrong. Allan would not disturb her gentle ruth, but awaited its passing away in silence. At length she raised her head from his shoulder, and said – "Allan, dear Allan, hear me! I have not the same power of expression given to me that you possess. I am not gifted with the capability of clothing simple thoughts in the earnest and passioned language that you have just uttered, but I feel as deeply, however inadequately my thoughts may find a tongue in my words. Allan, you know I love you truly and sincerely, and by the value you set upon that affection, do not tempt me."

"**I implore you, do not tempt me.**"

"I repeat, I love you; would follow you, work, slave, die for you, cheerfully this instant. I would quit this place, any spot — the world owns not one small spot in which might exist the combination of all that could make life one untiring joy, I would not quit to be with you, dear Allan, even were you in an agony of wretchedness. But Allan, my father is here. Were my father any other but my father, I would not hesitate one second, but he is my father, Allan, and however painful the sacrifice may be personally to me, I cannot leave him — I *cannot* leave him. He is harsh and cross, wayward and violent, but he loves me — I know he does in his heart most tenderly."

"He is alone, quite alone in the world. His hasty temper forbids that his dependents should feel an affection for him, and the same failing has deprived him of all friends. My mother, whom he passionately loved, was taken from him by her Maker when I was a child, a mere infant He has no one to have a kind thought or word for him but me."

“I cannot quit him; I *cannot*!”

“Do not look so, Allan. I cannot bear an unkind, a harsh look from you, it will break my heart. Consider, Allan — reflect, you asked me to plead with myself for you. I ask the same of you. I am his child, Allan, his only child — the only tie that links him to the world, the only thing he loves, and is beloved by, for I do love him, albeit you seem not to understand it. Ask me not to quit him, Allan! Ask me not in such words, and in such a tone, for while you speak thus, I should forget all that honour and self-esteem should make me remember. Tempt me not, I do most earnestly implore you by the love you bear me, do not. I – I cannot quit.” A passionate flood of tears interrupted her, and again, almost in a fainting state, her head made a pillow of his shoulder.

“Poor girl!” muttered Robin, feeling as if he had an egg whole in his throat; “Poor sweet girl! It is a fearful struggle between love and duty.”

It was a fearful struggle between love and duty, and no one there felt it more deeply than did Allan. For a while the feelings struggling in his breast were almost more than he could bear, but by a tremendous effort he so far conquered them as to be able to speak, though in a voice that was rendered hoarse and husky by emotion.

“My own, my proudly loved and honoured Christabel,” said he, “Thy wish is mine; thinkest thou I would suffer my selfishness, whatever the agony I might endure, to weigh an atom in the scale with what thou hast nobly thought thy duty, even to a sacrifice of thy happiness? No, Christabel, even though thy wish, I will not say thy determination, should blight my fondest hopes, make my life a wasted, withered thing — and I say not this with any covert idea of inducing thee to change — I would not have thee lose one jot of thy self-esteem, even for the intense happiness I might receive, didst thou comply with my earnest solicitation to make my home thine.”

“No, my own love! Stay here, more adored, more honoured than thou hast ever been. A change must come, and that speedily, but not in such a guise that in after years thou must ever reproach thyself with having done aught thou hadst a shadow of a doubt was not right. Thou art right, now, sweet Christabel, as thou hast ever been since I have known thee, and I will wait patiently until the time shall arrive, — and it will come, I feel assured — when thou wilt be mine, without having infringed or violated any duty.”

“Dearest Allan!” murmured Christabel, through her sobs and tears, she could articulate no more; and Allan, who could appreciate her thankfulness, although she was unable to express it, pressed her hand fervently, without uttering another word.

At this juncture a small side door, situated in a niche, next to where Robin was hidden, opened suddenly, and Maude appeared, bearing in her hand a lighted taper. She ran hastily forward towards her young mistress, and was closely followed by honest Friar Tuck.

“Oh, my dear lady!” she cried, “such a misfortune! Oh, dear, what’s to be done! We shall all be slaughtered without mercy or shrift! Oh, dear! oh, dear! was there ever such a misfortune?”

“For Heaven’s sake, Maude,” said Christabel, startled by this sudden intrusion; “What has occurred to alarm you thus? Speak, tell me what does it mean?”

“It means, my lady, that we shall be sent into the other world without a single question being asked, whether we are ready or not. I am not ready. I never was ready. I never shall be. I’ll tell the fiery old gentleman so. I'll scream it to him, if he won’t hear me. I’m not going to be cut off in my prime without a word for’t, never believe it.”

“What is all this rambling about? Why do you not speak, girl? Are you mad? What means all this Tuck, cannot you tell me?” said Allan, who addressed Maude first sternly, and then the friar, for a solution of this strange interruption.

“No,” replied Tuck; “I know no more than this. I was seated — no — kneeling.”

“Sitting,” said Maude.

“No, Maude,” answered Tuck; “I was kneeling at my devotions – ”

“At your ale,” interrupted Maude, scornfully; “At your devotions, indeed, you sot.”

“Fair and softly, pretty Maude,” said Tuck, “goes far. You are skittishly inclined tonight, methinks, sweet Maude.”

“Whatever my inclining, you are none of it,” returned Maude, pettishly.

“For mercy’s sake cease this wrangling,” cried Allan, “and let us know the reason of your sudden and alarmed appearance. If there is danger, inform us of what it consists, that we may know how to meet it?”

“Ask Friar Tuck,” returned Maude, throwing up her head with a disdainful toss. “You sought your information of him but now let him answer you.”

“Maude, this is cruel of you,” said Christabel “tell me, I beseech you, what is there to fear?”

“Why this, my lady: your ladyship is aware that I gave Egbert Lanner more wine than his head has strength to bear, and that it accordingly sent him to sleep, from which he was awakened by a message from my lord Baron, who intended to pay that young cavalier at your side a visit. Well, my lady, as Egbert was disturbed before he had had time to sleep off the effects of the wine, he marched into the Baron’s presence exceedingly drunk, my lady; he stuck his arms akimbo, and asked my lord what he wanted with him? At the same time expressing a hope that the tough old dog, meaning my lord the Baron, had got the upper hand of the gout in his shoulder, and fetched him a terrible slap on it.”

“You know, my lady, what an awful temper your father has been in this week past, and today more particularly. But when Egbert hit him this blow, if you had but have seen him — as I did, for I feared some disaster, and followed Egbert into your father's presence — Oh, my lady, if you had seen him, never could you have forgotten him. He was like a savage bull struck in a sore place.”

“He stormed, he raved, he swore such dreadful things, and then ordered Egbert to be thrown into the moat.”

“He snatched the keys from the poor fellow’s girdle first, however, and commanded him to show him which was the key of the dungeon in which they had placed your — that young cavalier. Egbert was almost sobered by his situation, and on looking over them turned quite pale, and said it wasn’t there. Of course it was not, for I had got it. Well, my lady, my lord the Baron turned as white as your veil, and his lips quivered with passion. He instantly ordered lights to be brought to proceed to the dungeon, telling Egbert to prepare for sudden shrift, for if the prisoner was gone he’d hang him at once from the castle walls, and leave him for the crows to peck. Shocking, my lady, was it not?”

“Directly I heard this, I ran off for Friar Tuck, made him run with me to the dungeon, locked the door, and here’s the key; so if that young gentleman wishes to get off in a safe skin he must come at once, before the uproar reaches my father’s ears, else he'll never let him pass the portcullis. There’s not a moment to lose, come, sir, away with you, I’ll lead you direct from here to the castle gates.”

“Fly, dear Allan, quick,” cried Christabel, earnestly; “Tarry not a moment; if my father should discover you, I fear the consequences — for he is so sudden and violent in his anger. Quick, Allan, quick.”

“But you, dear Christabel,” urged he.

“Think not of me, Allan; we shall meet again,” she uttered, hastily, “if not on this earth, at least in Heaven.”

“Our separation shall not be for so long a period, Christabel,” returned Allan, “Unless I die suddenly, we shall shortly meet again, trust me.”

“To be sure,” chimed in Maude, “You’re no true lover else. Pray, sir, if you don’t wish to die suddenly, come away at once.”

“But are you sure your father will let us out?” inquired Friar Tuck.

“Am I sure? To be sure I am sure; he let you in, and if he knows nothing of this affair —which he does not at present, for he has been doing double duty — but I doubt but he will know if you stay much longer – he will let you out again,” said Maude, making a long-winded parenthesis.

“But there were three of us,” suggested the friar.

“Ay,” said Allan, hastily, “Where is Robin Hood?”

“Here!” uttered he, advancing suddenly from his concealment.

There was a slight scream from the two females, and a movement by the two males, as Robin’s voice sounded in the chapel, but the alarm was speedily dissipated on his approach. Maude was one of the first to recover, and greeted him rather more warmly than Friar Tuck felt pleased at observing.

“You have escaped, then,” she cried. “How bold! How clever! But you look and are a forward rogue” — and she gave him a playful tap with her little hand across the cheek. Robin was uncommonly near giving her a kiss, but the presence of the company restrained his affectionate impulse.

“Were you imprisoned, Robin?” asked Allan, in astonishment.

“I’ll answer all your questions when we are safe away. I promise you I have had nearly enough of Nottingham Castle, and, believe me, there is little time to lose if we are to get clear off. The Baron will not be long knocking at your dungeon door ere he discovers your absence, and then his first order will be to prevent all persons quitting the castle, so let us off at once.”

“For myself I care little. I have had, young as I am, many ‘scapes for my life in the green wood, between wild beast, outlaws, and stray arrows, and even were I to be cut off, ‘twould matter little — I have none to grieve for me. But you, Allan, you have your sister and — and — others to grieve for your fall. They are tied to you by feelings and circumstances beyond the common run of human fellowship, and you have therefore no right to be hazardous and careless of your life, when two such beings have a life-interest in you. Come, let us away at once.”

The four looked at the boy who had uttered this, with a feeling something approaching to wonder – and Maude, in the fullness of her approbation, ejaculated, “Bless his heart!”

There was much prudence in what he had uttered, and it was considered advisable to put it into practice, particularly as the tramp of footsteps was heard in the passage leading to the chapel.

“Oh! the Lord have mercy upon us, and forgive us our sins! Here comes your father!” cried Maude.

“Fly, dear Allan, quick, quick!” exclaimed Christabel.

Allan returned Friar Tuck his gown, and he immediately donned it.

“Heaven bless and protect thee, my dearest Christabel,” fervently uttered Allan, embracing her. “Farewell, we meet again shortly, never to part.”

“This way, this way,” cried Maude, holding open the side door, through which Allan, having imprinted a passionate kiss upon the lips of Christabel, darted.

“St. Benedict keep thee, sweet daughter Maude!” said Friar Tuck, about to perform the same kindness for her as he had witnessed Allan bestow on Christabel.

“Fool!” she cried, and pushed him through, “I’m coming with you.”

“The Holy Virgin guide and help thee in thy strait, and bring all happiness to thee, dear lady,” gently uttered Robin, raising the Lady Christabel’s hand gallantly and gracefully to his lips.

“Amen,” she replied.

“Now, my pretty Maude, I am with you,” said Robin, passing his hand round the damsel’s waist, from which she most unceremoniously detached it, and said to her lady –

“To your beads, madam, to your beads and when your father comes, be very much surprised, and know nothing. Kneel, my lady, it will look better; kneel. Oh! the saints keep us, here he is and all his troop!” — and she quickly disappeared through the side door, closing it silently but firmly, as the Baron, at the head of a party of his retainers, entered the usual entry, and found his daughter kneeling at the foot of the tomb, even as Allan had discovered her.

The fugitives kept on at a smart pace through several winding passages. Allan first, having quitted Christabel, now anxious to get clear of the castle, Tuck next, somewhat indignant at the push and cognomen of ‘fool!’ which he had received from Maude in the chapel, and Robin brought up the rear with Maude, of whom, when the winding of the passages hid his friends from sight, he had essayed, but in vain, to steal a kiss.

“You are offended with me, fair Maude,” he said, deprecatingly

“I am,” was the laconic reply.

“How have I been so unfortunate?” he demanded with an affected air of melancholy.

“Oh! Don’t ask me,” she replied, tossing her head. “You need not care. You ‘*have had enough of Nottingham Castle*’, you know.”

“Oh, ho!” thought Robin, “That’s it, is it,” and then said, “Nay, my pretty maiden, I said nearly enough — and so I have — of the castle; but not near enough of you, dear girl.”

“Do you mean that?” she said, stopping and looking him steadfastly in the eyes.

“Do I not?” he replied.

“Oh!” she rejoined, “That alters the case.”

“I knew it did,” said Robin, throwing his arms round her neck, and giving her without the least resistance on her part, a hearty kiss, much to the danger of the destruction of the taper, the only light they had.

“I wish you’d move a little faster,” cried Friar Tuck, suddenly turning back. “Which way are we to go?”

“Straight on,” said Maude, advancing briskly and getting before them all.

“This way, this way” — and she raced swiftly through the intricacies of the passages for some little time, until they came out at the end of one of the wings, a short distance from the keep. She summoned her father, and the four awaited his approach and first words with considerable excitement. It was, however, speedily allayed, for he cried:

“What, returning, cavaliers? I hoped to have had a stoup of wine with you, good Friar Tuck, at least. What, you must go, eh? Well, a fair good even to you, gentle sirs, farewell, friar, we shall see you anon.”

“Even so, my son,” returned Friar Tuck, wishing himself safe out, and surmising, to the best of his belief that he would not see him there anon. The drawbridge was lowered, and Allan passed swiftly over it, as did Friar Tuck, after bidding Maude farewell, and bestowing a benediction on her father.

Robin squeezed her hand, and she, while her father’s head was turned, seized his hand, raised it to her lips, and imprinted a fervent kiss upon it, much to his surprise, and sorrow, if her act was sincere, that he had gone so far in his attention to her.

“We shall meet again,” she uttered, in a low voice.

“I hope so,” replied Robin.

“In the mean time, dear Maude, try and discover where they have placed my bow and arrows. If you can get them away, will you keep them for me?”

“I will, if I die for it,” resumed Maude.

“Your companions await you, sir,” said the warder.

“The Holy Mother’s blessing upon you! Good night,” cried Robin, and darted over the drawbridge. He joined Allan and the friar, and the three kept up a rare pace as they descended the hill, passed through the town, and paused not till they once more found themselves in Sherwood Forest.

Chapter 9

A wary cool old sworder, took
The blows on his cutlass, and then put
His own well in — so well. ere you could look,
His man was floor'd, and helpless at his foot,
With the blood running like a little brook.

----- Byron

What dost mean
By that unearthly look, as tho' a corpse
Stood there and glared upon me? — Powers of grace,
Thou changest more and more! the little light
Thine orbs had left seems gone. — Thy lineaments
Grow sharp! —Their hue, that ashy was before,
Looks ashy now to that! — Thy frame contracts,
Like something that was vanishing – Substance now,
Now air! — My heart is cowed before thee! — Where
'Twas all a conflagration, nothing lives
But freezing horror now.

----- The Bridal

The elder companion of Friar Tuck, whose name was Eldred, or at least he bore that appellation with his brotherhood, had, with the assistance of Gilbert Hood, a good Catholic, completed the rites over the deceased Ritson. A white sheet was thrown over his body, and lights were placed at his head and feet.

The weeping Margaret, his sister, was led from the apartment by her husband, and Father Eldred sat him down to keep watch by the body. The night waxed on apace – the moon was high in the heavens — and Gilbert began to wonder at the prolonged absence of Robin and his guests. He also for the first time missed Marian.

Acting upon his first impulse, he sought his wife's chamber, to which she had retired to pray for the departed soul of her brother, and made inquiries of her respecting his fair guest. The answer, that she had left the cottage for a stroll in the woods added to his uneasiness, and with some considerable alarm he armed himself and left his cottage in search of her.

He began to fear she might have fallen a victim to one of the wolves, with which the forest abounded, or what was perhaps worse, the relentless outrage of one of the numerous outlaws infesting the wood.

Either way there was cause for apprehension, and it was evident something must have befallen her, or she would not have remained abroad alone until so late an hour. Perhaps she had lost her way, and he thought he would try what making the forest echo with his voice might effect, but then he was withheld by the idea that it might only serve, if she was unfortunately in the hands of ruffians, to forewarn them of his approach, and so enable them effectually to screen her from his sight. He knew thoroughly every inlet and outlet, and he resolved to try what a swift and strict scrutiny of each would produce.

Accordingly, he wandered up and down, through brake, covert, thicket, glade, and alley. At length, as he turned into one darker than usual from the thickness and massing of the surrounding foliage, a slight groan struck upon his ear and on his heart at the same moment. His bow was strung, and drawing an arrow from his quiver, ready for instant use, in case of sudden emergency, he advanced to the spot from whence the sound proceeded. He distinguished a form laying upon the ground, he neared it quickly.

It was his dog Lance, lying with little life in him, and a desperate gash in the head. With an exclamation of surprise, mingled somewhat with a foreboding of evil, he knelt down and raised the poor animal's head upon his knee; the creature recognised him, and turned his faint eyes upon his master, feebly wagging his tail, expressive of pleasure at again seeing him.

"Poor old Lance, it is an evil foreboding for me to find you thus. Poor old dog — who was it? What were they, eh?" The dog gave a low growl and tried to raise himself but vainly — he had not the strength to accomplish it.

"Ah! as I expected — some of those marauding, thieving, hell hounds. God help thee, poor maiden! — if thou'rt in their merciless clutches, I shudder to think what thy fate must be — perhaps is. However, I must bestir myself if I wish to be of service to thee. Poor old Lance, I cannot leave thee thus, thy wound is a deep one, but does not appear mortal — we'll try what binding it up will do."

From his pouch he drew some fine buckskin, which it was usual in case of sudden wounds to carry upon the person. He wiped away the coagulated blood, sought for a few herbs, which he found and bruised, then applied them to the wound, bound up his head, lifted him from the place where he was laying to a more *retired* ['*quiet / secluded*'] spot, and laid him there, he trusted, to recover.

The dog seemed to feel his kindness, for he gave a long, low whine, and once more there was a feeble vibration of the tail. Although there was something ludicrous in the appearance of the hound with his head thus bound, yet it had no such effect upon Gilbert, for he looked upon him with the fear of losing one of the staunchest, fleetest most faithful hounds he had ever reared. He was affectionately attached to it. Lance had twice saved his life, and he thought only of its danger as he would that of one of his best and truest friends. And, in truth, Lance had proved himself one.

"By the Holy Virgin!" he muttered, grinding his teeth and clenching his hand instinctively, "If I catch the rogue who has treated thee thus, I'll teach him how to destroy a thoroughbred hound, as if he were a wolf or any other useless beast. Lie there, Lance, lie still, good dog, until I return, and then, if I find thee alive, thou shalt home with me, and I'll try what Lincoln's skill can do for thee. If not, I'll dig thee a grave myself — the bones of one so faithful as thou hast been shalt not bleach in the air while I have strength of arm to turn out a few feet of earth for thee, my good old dog."

A tear gathered itself in his eyelid, and he brushed it hastily away, saying – "I have done that for thee, Lance, I have not for my wife's brother — I have shed a tear over thee, and I am not much used to weeping, I can tell thee. Lie thou there, good dog, I'll be back anon." The hound seemed to understand him, for it gave another low melancholy whine, turned its large expressive eyes upon his master, and then nestled his head between his coiled legs.

"Now, St. Peter throw the fiend's bantling in my path," Gilbert added, "and I'll say an extra *Ave Maria* for the chance I may get to make him dance to the music of a crab tree staff, and no stouter arm than mine to play it."

Muttering thus did Gilbert proceed rapidly along the same path which Marian, in her fright, so swiftly had pursued. As he came to its termination a sudden shade was thrown by some passing figure on the moonlight glade into which he was entering. It appeared to come from the side of a tree of considerable dimensions, and Gilbert, alive to every chance which might throw a clue in his way intending to discover the object of his search, darted round it and ran forcibly against the rough outlaw who had pursued Marian. He was in the very act, hearing approaching footsteps, of peeping round to see the new comer, and ascertain his character and purpose, when he thus suddenly plumped into his arms. The concussion was great, for neither expected anyone was so near, but the worst of the shock was sustain-ed by the outlaw, who, weakened by his recent loss of blood, had not strength to bear Gilbert's stalwart frame, and by a natural consequence, staggered and fell back upon the turf with considerable force.

Gilbert, with some difficulty, saved himself from falling over him, but trod so heavily upon the fellow's extended hand, that he uttered a roar as if he had been wounded in a thousand places at once. Gilbert assisted him to rise, but not to depart, for he favoured him with a scrutiny by no means slight. His inspection anything but satisfied him, and he therefore commenced an examination of him.

"Who are you?" was his first question.

"What's that to you?" was the grumbling reply.

"Much!" returned Gilbert; "I am a forest keeper, and you — I am sorry to be personal — look as like a hang dog, a cut throat, a forest lawbreaker, as one pea resembles another. But answer me faithfully two or three questions I have to make, and I may let you pass scot-free."

"If you do not, why I'll introduce you to the sheriff and the gaol. You have now an opportunity of seeing which you prefer — what I have offered, or a very high gallows in the marketplace of Nottingham."

"There are two words to a bargain," said the outlaw. "First let me know what your questions are and then I'll tell you whether I'll let you take me a-visiting."

"I have no objection at all to do that, but I must first premise," returned Gilbert; "that if you do not do as I wish you, you will not be asked to let me take you a-visiting — you'll come whether you like it or no. These are my questions — first, have you seen aught of a young dark-haired maiden, clothed in a light woollen garment decorated with red ribbons, this evening, in this or any part of the forest?"

The outlaw smiled grimly, and then said, "Well, your next question?"

"That is answered by your devilish grin," uttered Gilbert quickly. "It was a hound's fangs that gave you this wound at the side of your head?" – and he sprung at the fellow, and tore the bandage from his head.

"Hell and fury!" shouted the man, thrown off his guard, "How knew you that? You couldn't know – there were none here but our two selves."

"You have unwittingly confessed, villain!" cried Gilbert, seizing him by the throat, "Tell me, where is the maiden? Speak, ruffian! Monster, Speak! Or, by the grace of Heaven! I'll squeeze every morsel of life out of your damnable carcase — speak!"

Gilbert did not consider, in the paroxysm of his fury, while he compressed with all his strength the windpipe of the unfortunate wretch, that it was not very possible to articulate distinctly, but he began to discover this by observing the sudden expansion of the man's eyes, which were beginning to resemble the markings upon a peacock's tail on a large scale, his face, naturally dark, grew blue, then black, and his tongue was thrust out of his mouth, roving rapidly from right to left. As it was not the intention of Gilbert to utterly kill the fellow, as he should lose all information if he did, he relaxed his hold, and gave him a hurl which sent him staggering back. Gilbert, however, followed him closely.

"Speak," he roared; "Speak, dog! hell-hound! Tell me where is the maiden? Tell me. I know where the hound is, of that hereafter; but tell me what have you done with the maiden?"

The outlaw was a moment ere he recovered his breath; he looked wildly about him, for he did not precisely remember the locality he was in, in consequence of the necklace he had just had fitted on. When, however, a dawning consciousness pointed out to him where he was, and how he had been treated, he, with all the speed he was master of, turned his crossbow from his back to his hands — he had no bolts or he would have shot at once — grasped it with both hands, and made a desperate blow with the butt end of it at Gilbert's head. He was unprepared for it, saw it descending, had barely time to jerk his head on one side, when it alighted upon his shoulder with tremendous force, he staggered, fell to the ground, but regained his feet in a moment.

Gilbert was never without his crab tree staff. He played well at it, and there was a little mixture of pride in his preferring it to any other weapon, when engaged in any sudden strife. He therefore now threw away his bow and grasped his staff firmly, at the same time crying out –

"Now, my fine fellow, see how I'll make you skip. You have never had sore bones yet. I'll beat every bit of life out of you, and hang you after and then I shall not repay half what I owe you. Now, dance, you rogue."

Gilbert made play with his staff by giving the fellow such a whistling rap upon the ear, – the sore ear — that he grinned hideously, but uttered no sound, though his head did. He had only his crossbow to defend himself, and that was of little use, from its unwieldiness, against the light staff used so briskly and smartly by Gilbert.

His only chance to avoid the rapid blows poured upon him was by following his opponent's advice, and leap here and there. He did so, but soon got out of breath, but Gilbert allowed no breathing time — he followed him up, made his staff fly in all directions so dexterously and so

swiftly, that the wretched outlaw never knew where to expect it, until the ring of his bones told him that it had come. He began to have serious thoughts of crying for quarter. It was not possible for human nature to bear this severe handling much longer. Still he thought, “If I can only break his staff, I’ll beat his brains out with the butt end of this. I will, I will.”

He clenched his teeth hard, and in spite of hard knocks, gathered himself up for a blow at the staff, which would shiver it to atoms. At length, a fair opportunity, as he believed, served, and using all his strength, he swang his bow from his back to give it all the force he could, and dealt it at the staff, but it was too long in describing the circle. Gilbert avoided it, and the outlaw, not calculating upon missing, had the pleasure of finding it bury itself in the ground with such tenacity that he could not readily extricate it, and he pulled hard too.

To see how Gilbert belaboured him while this chance was in his power!

“**Quarter!**” roared he; “Have mercy! quarter! quarter!”

But Gilbert was too excited to hear — he rapped away even passionately. At length, the stillness of the man told him it was time to leave off.

“I have beaten the rogue insensible!” he muttered, pausing to recover his breath; “Well, ‘tis not half what he deserves. The Virgin save me, but this is a heavy day for me — a heavy day. I have lost my wife’s brother — but that’s not so much loss either. I learned of a dear sister wronged and foully murdered — the Holy Mother pray for her! My foster son, Robin, in danger, for aught I know, for he ought to have been with me long since — there’s somewhat wrong, or he would. I have lost, or am likely to lose, my good old Lance, the faithful brute – but I have paid for his hurt. And there’s a dear young lady, a guest, lost, violated, and probably murdered, by that limb of the foul fiend.”

“Beshrew me, if ‘twere not an unmanly part, I should like to have another half hour’s drubbing at yonder cub’s carcase, if ‘twere only to put me in better spirits. There let him lie and rot, and his resting place will be a roasting place below. I wish I had the basting of him. Tut, tut, this is childish — wicked, for aught I know — but I cannot help it. I feel as I have never felt — I should like to do something devilish. If a wolf would but cross my path now! — Pshaw! It will not do to think i’ this fashion — I’ll try what a prayer will do” and he drew forth his rosary and commenced repeating it, as he walked slowly away, scarce knowing what direction to take.

He had not gone far ere the outlaw raised his head and peered round. On perceiving that Gilbert had gone, he raised himself and muttered. “I wasn’t fool enough to let you beat me insensible, you forest-keeping slave! And if you have kept your promise of shewing me what sore bones are, I’ll be revenged on you yet for it, deeply and unappeasably. He thinks the girl has fallen my victim. He can’t know otherwise for some time yet, if he knows it at all, for she was carried in the direction of Gamwell. That’s some consolation.”

“I’ll try a better soon, when I’m able to move about a bit. We will see how he will like a lighted torch in his cottage thatch. Tomorrow I shall be as still as a rusted lock, Ah! Oh! how my bones ache! The fiends of hell catch him and roast his marrow slowly out of his bones, for thrashing me thus.”

Muttering fearful oaths, the poor wretch dragged himself to a neighbouring thicket, there to rest for a short time, and then seek out some place where he could more securely secrete himself.

Gilbert pursued his way with a heavy heart. He feared, having been unable to extract aught from the outlaw concerning Marian, that the worst had befallen her. He knew that the fellow was in some way concerned with her fate, by the look of intelligence and the horrid laugh he gave when he had been questioned respecting her. Gilbert also felt satisfied that Lance had given the wound the fellow bore on the side of his head. These were all proofs that she had been in the wretch’s power, and in that event what had become of her? He wandered on, scarce even knowing what he was doing, much less whither he was going, when he heard the sound of approaching footsteps and voices rise on the air.

Grasping his staff firmly, he quickened his step to meet the comers, be they who or what they might. He hoped that they were foes, he fully hoped that they were people with whom he could quarrel. It would go far to satisfy him to beat somebody else, even if he got soundly thrashed himself.

But such an event, however desired, was not this time to gratify him, and he recognised the voice of young Will Gamwell, chaunting a ballad, which Robin had taught him, and Gilbert had taught Robin.

The echoes of the old wood were waked by the following plaintive words

In a sweet little spot, all in a green dell,
There stands a small cot, and in it doth dwell
A maiden so beauteous that no tongue can tell,
Half so well,
Of her charms, and fondly we call her "our belle,"
E'en as I — Woe, woe, for my heart!
Her eyes, like clear skies, are the pearliest blue,
There's no flower lives of such delicate hue;
No tendril, no blossom, no bud ever grew
Half so blue,
And diamonds and pearls start in them —sweet dew!
Her skin is so clear, and her lips are so red,
Her cheeks of such tint they oft shame the rose dead;
And her hair long and fair twines round her small head,
It is said,
Like the vine round the oak, such sweetness it shed,
On my soul! Woe woe, for my heart;
I told my fond love; 'twas in vain that I sighed;
She once gave her heart, but ah, the youth died
While yet in his youth, his beauty and pride;
She denied Me all hope for aye; I would I had died
In that hour!
Woe, woe, for my heart!

It was with a feeling somewhat approaching to vexation that Gilbert heard the voice, more loud than musical, ring in the quiet air. He was in no humour to meet friends.

He knew one of the comers was Will Gamwell, a friend of Robin's. He seemed all of a sudden to take a dislike to him, with his rude ruddy face, which had the hue of health so forcibly and visibly stamped upon it, that he had already, united with his very red hair, attained the cognomen of 'Will Scarlet'.

"Hang his red visage, what does he mean by shouting that little sad ditty in such boisterous terms. A plague on him! Why does he not sing it like Robin, softly and gently?

— But he was a rude cur ever. It is not that I made the ballad and taught Rob how to sing it, but the scarlet dog, the crimson-skinned cub, need'nt – foh! Shame on me! It well becomes me to rail thus at an honest lad, whose only failing is his roughness. I am changing, indeed, to do this."

"Ho! Master Gamwell! What ho! Will Gamwell! How is't that you're abroad in the wood so late?"

“Ho, yoho, hillioh!” returned the young gentleman, making the wood re-echo with the strength of his lungs; “Who knows Will Gamwell, e’er he claps a blue, a brown, a grey, or it may be a green eye on him, eh? Answer me that, good man and true, if you be?”

“He who has once heard Willy Scarlet* sing will never forget it,” returned Gilbert, with a deal of truth. “It needs no near approach, daylight, torchlight, or moonlight, to tell who sings, when Will Gamwell lifts up his voice and chaunts – it is not possible!”

“Ho, ho, ho!” laughed a deep rich voice, but not Will Gamwell’s.

“Approach, and let us see thy make, good stranger,” cried Will, with some asperity, for he felt the satirical vein in Gilbert’s speech.

“Let us see who and what thou art, sir stranger knave. Perhaps my staff may teach thy wit a touch of politeness.”

“Or he may teach thee how a broken crown tastes, Will,” said Little John, for ‘twas he who laughed. “Can’t thou not hear — it is Gilbert Hood who speaks?”

“Oh!” cried Will, and ran forward to meet him.“News, Gilbert Hood!” he shouted; “Good news, man. We have the lady — we’ve got the lady safely and snugly. Barby and Winny have her in their care, she’s at the Hall. Little John found her in the forest.”

“She was running from an outlaw. Alright! Hurrah! Gilbert, where’s Robin? Which way? Anywhere near? He’s out in the wood on the search. Ho, hillioh! Robin, Hood, oh! Ho, Robin, Oh!”

Though ‘tis merry to shoot in the bonny green wood,
With the deer in the glade. and thy yew bow so good;
Yet leave them for me, love —
My own dear Robin Hood
Sing lily oh, hey oh hey, sing lily!


* *William Seadlock, Scarlock, Scathelocke or Scarlet. He has also had the benefit of several names approaching the one by which he is so well known.*

In Skelton’s “Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntingdon,” he introduces Scarlet and Scathlocke as the widow’s sons, the latter being the elder brother, both of one mother, but of different fathers.

Ben Jonson, in an unfinished pastoral, introduces these two personages also, but was probably misled by the old play of “Robin Hood.”

There is no doubt that, whatever the variation of name, but one person is intended. Although Will Scarlet appears to have been the constant companion of Robin Hood, his skill and position is undoubtedly second to that of Little John.

“Peace, peace,” cried Gilbert; “You may spare your lungs their labour. Robin left with two friends for Nottingham this morning. He has not since returned, and I am rather uneasy at his absence.”

“I wish I’d been with him,” cried Will. “Oh, I wish I’d been with him. Why did he not come over for me? I long to go to Nottingham again.”

Oh, have you ever been unto Nottingham’s fair town,
There are sights to knock you up, and ale to knock you down
There the proud old Baron’s castle stands, frowning on the hill,
And dungeons dreary, with ugly jaws enough to make you ill.
With a hey ho, hey ho, derry down, hey ho!

“You don’t expect Robin back tonight? He’ll do as I’d do, if I could, stop a week. Rare doings there, I promise you, Gilbert Hood.”

“You look pale,” said Little John to Gilbert Hood, kindly. “Is it the moonlight only, or some great anxiety, pressing on your mind? Don’t think me inquisitive, but you look so haggard, so fagged, that I cannot help feeling as if I ought to ask you this question.” There was so much sympathy and kindness in the tone of his voice, that Gilbert felt as if he could have burst into tears. He, however, shook it off, and replied —

“I feel the kindness of your question, John, and thank you sincerely for it. I do feel in bad spirits, my wife’s brother died at my house today. I heard of — of — no matter about that — I missed the young lady from my house. I followed, I found my best hound nearly killed.”

“What, Lance?” inquired Will, quickly.

“Yes, even the old dog,” returned Gilbert.

“Who did it?” cried Will; “Describe him to me, and if my father’s seventh son, and that’s me, ever comes across him with this staff, or any other, I’ll play such a quick jig on his bones, as shall make him sing even quicker than he’ll dance, and that won’t be slow measure, I’d have you learn. What! Kill old Lance! Who has been out many a bright merrie morning with Robin and I? If he was my own brother, I’d never forgive him, until I’d beaten him to a mummy, and not then.”

“I have every reason to believe I have beaten him to a mummy,” said Gilbert with a faint smile; “I met the rascal, and raised such a clatter about his ears — ear, I should say, for I’m mistaken if the hound has not taken one from him — that as long as he breathes he’ll remember it. That is, if he ever breathes again, for I left him insensible.”

“Where! Oh, tell me where! That I may have a look at him?” cried Will. “That if ever he gets well, and I meet with him, I may have a bout with him, for old Lance’s sake?”

“Aye,” said Little John, “Lead us to the spot, and I will see if it is the same knave that I drove from that young timid girl tonight. I owe him a rap or two if ever he gets well, and I don’t know if I shan’t bind him, and give him a journey to Nottingham, and then, Will, perhaps you may go with me to see him safely in a certain strong dwelling there.”

“Beautiful, beautiful!”cried Will. “Is it this way?” and he proceeded to drag Gilbert along. They proceeded towards the spot where Gilbert had left the fellow lying, and Will Scarlet took care that the pace should not be a slow one. However, when they reached there he was gone, no vestige of a human being was there.

“He has given us the slip,” cried Will “Never mind, I shall know the spot again, for this is the very place where I have so often met Robin — the old oak and beech tree.”

“What!” exclaimed Gilbert, with a sudden start, “Aye? so it is!” he continued, looking up; “This, then, is the spot!”

“Aye,” said Little John, “’tis a strange place, and I have heard foresters say that it is haunted by a female. One or two of our keepers swear they have seen her too, but no one knows any story about her. It is supposed that it was some lady murdered by outlaws.”

Every word went like a dagger to Gilbert’s heart. Years had he dwelt in this forest, and never heard aught of this. He felt a cold sweat come over him, sudden trembling seized him. At this moment a tremendous gust of wind tore by them — almost a whirlwind — it passed away.

“Almighty Heaven! look there” suddenly cried Little John, pointing to the trunk of the tree. A figure of a female, a thin, pale, misty shadow it was — a ghastly, ghostly thing — stood looking on them.

Franticly, Gilbert fell on his knees, and stretched forth his clenched hands, almost shrieking, “Annie, dear Annie, my murdered sister — speak — tell me what would you?”

The figure smiled faintly, but kindly, pointed to the earth on which she stood, and then became fainter and dimmer, until she passed away, as the mist passes from the earth, leaving no form or substance to tell what had been there. Gilbert fell on his face fainting, and Little John and Will Gamwell stood like statues, almost paralysed with fear at what they had witnessed. For a minute were they thus, when they were unexpectedly startled by a deep groan.

Proceeding from the trees above them, there was a sudden smart rustling of the leaves, a crackling of the branches, and presently the legs, then the body of a man appeared dangling from the tree. Little John

caught him as he fell, and prevented him from coming heavily to the ground. He raised him, and saw that it was the very fellow who had attacked Marian, and whom Gilbert had so lustily thrashed. The poor wretch looked hideous, his face was ashy pale, fearfully ghastly, and the blood trickling from his wound across his cheek looked red to brightness. His eyes flashed and gleamed in a most unearthly manner, and he looked round him, shudderingly, evidently quite deranged. He, too, had seen the mysterious appearance, and the effect upon him had been tremendous. He raised himself to his feet, and said, wildly–

“Why do you glare on me? – It was not I that did the deed – ‘twas not I! – for mercy’s sake take your eyes off me! – do you not see their looks pass through my heart like swords of fire? I did you no wrong — ‘twas Ritson. I only made your marriage a mockery, by acting as the priest. Mercy! Oh, God! Those fixed glazed eyes, they turn me to stone – ice – ice. But now I was fire – raging fire, and now I am cold, stone-cold. Why do you glare so piteously? Have mercy!” he shrieked, and covered his eyes with his hands, while his whole frame shivered intensely. Suddenly he raised them, and glanced hastily round, shudderingly, then started forward as if to escape, but his frame, quite exhausted, could bear no more, and he fell heavily insensible to the ground.

“How strange!” muttered Will, whose mind was of that comfortably obtuse nature, that though it might for a time be startled by any strange out-of-the-way occurrence, was never deeply affected. “How strange,” he added. “Was that a ghost, Little John?” He received no answer.

“Whatever it was, it quickly unearthed that old fox, eh?” and he slightly laughed.

Little John turned quickly round, and said, sternly, “Silence! William Gamwell. What we have this night witnessed is no matter to treat lightly, or to be spoken of with the jesting tongue of a foolish boy.”

“**Silence!**”

Will, thus rebuked, hung his head abashed, but speedily recovered himself, and assisted his cousin to raise Gilbert, who lay without life or motion. “We must leave that poor wretch there,” said Little John, in a smothered tone of voice, until we have borne Gilbert to his cottage. Come, Will, we must carry the old man tenderly and gently.”

“I'll do my best,” said Will and the two proceeded with the old man slowly through the forest, the pale moon showing them their way. As they neared the cottage, a long melancholy howl rose on the air; they both shuddered as they heard it.

“That was old Lance,” said Will, in a low voice.

“And death is in the neighbourhood,” uttered Little John, in a similar tone.

By the time they reached the cottage door, a faint sigh escaped from Gilbert’s lips, evidencing returning animation. They stopped, and placed his feet to the ground, at the same time raising him to an upright position. He opened his eyes, and stared wildly round him, as if in expectation of seeing some object, the sight of which would wither him. After taking the whole circuit in their glance, without witnessing aught, save the trees and forest things looking grey in the broad moonlight, another sigh heaved his breast, but it was one of relief. He looked for a moment steadfastly at Little John, and then bent his gaze upon Will, without uttering a word.

There was something in the expression of his eye which Will did not exactly like. It was staring, even to a glare. The lad looked at the sky and at Gilbert, then at the trees, returning his glance to Gilbert, and still found the old man’s eye, vividly bright, fixed upon his face. He thought he’d laugh, but the mirth died on his lip ere the sound could leave it. He could not even smile beneath such a glance. Besides he recollected that Little John had told him he had seen a matter not to be treated lightly.

However, he could not rest under a feeling as if he was having a hole pierced through his heart with an instrument of ice, that being the sensation which the glance of Gilbert produced. He saw that even his sturdy cousin glanced misgivingly upon the old man, and at length being inwardly assured that it was beyond a possibility for human nature to sustain longer the gaze of that cold grey eye, he determined to break the silence, and said suddenly and abruptly:

“How is it with thee, Gilbert? Art better, man? You look scared. I say, Little John, how he stares, don’t he?”

“Come, Gilbert, man,” said Little John, patting him kindly upon the shoulder, “Look about thee, arouse thee! There are none here but I and Will Scarlet.”

“No,” uttered Will, with an anxious look over his shoulder, “there’s nobody else – I mean – I don’t think there is.”

“Then it was a dream – a waking dream,” said Gilbert, speaking for the first time, in low husky tones. “But, how awful!” He shuddered as he uttered this, and looked rapidly round. Will instinctively following his example, at the same time exclaiming –

“It was no dream, though, Gilbert, I’ll gage my quiver of my best arrows against a headless shaft; unless it be that four people may have the same dream at the same time, with their eyes open, and then –”

“Will, Will, curb that tongue of thine,” uttered Little John, hastily; “It wags with more speed than wisdom. Now, Gilbert, this is thy cottage, enter. A little spirit or strong ale will cheer thee, the forest damps have chilled thee, come!”

At this moment the long wild howl of a hound made the forest echo with its dreary sound. All three started on hearing it. Gilbert shuddered violently; a deep groan burst from his quivering lips, and he buried his face in his hands. His whole frame shook with an excess of emotion. At length it passed away, and he threw up his head with an effort of determination. There was no moisture in his eyes, they were quite dry, and yet the cousins knew he had wept, for they had seen the big tears find their way between his fingers while they had encompassed his features. He spoke, and his voice was as clear and calm as though he had not been under the influence of an intense excitement.

“Friends,” he exclaimed, “You have with me witnessed a vision, to you incomprehensible, to me a startling and fearful evidence, a corroboration of a frightful history, connected with one near and most dear to me. I cannot explain my meaning to you now, some other time will suffice. I have now a favour to ask of you, if the fear of a repetition of what you have seen will not fright you, and you are not cowed to gaze on the face of the dead. I would ask you to assist me now and at once to bury the body of my wife’s brother – dead today – beneath the roots of that tree which showed you the spirit of my – a lost angel.” Here his voice faltered for a moment, but by a strong exertion he mastered it, and continued;

“He lies in my cottage. A worthy priest, now beneath my roof, hath prayed over and for him, hath done all our holy religion commands. It was his dying wish that he should be laid beneath that tree. From what we have seen, it is also the wish of another. I passed my word that it should be done, and, if alone I bear the body, and alone dig the grave”

“Say no more, good Gilbert,” said Little John; “So far as my help may serve, and that of this lad, whose will exceeds oft times his power, we are at thy bidding. The sight of a sainted spirit will not fright one who may look on his conscience with a steady eye. Neither will the face of the dead daunt him who hath sent many *rieving* [‘*plundering*’] rascals to their account, without giving them time for a shrift.”

“I am ready, too,” chimed in Will. “Don’t fear, Gilbert Hood, that I — ‘*lad*’ as Little John calls me, to which I question his right of doing — shall fail you. I can look on the black muzzle of your sturdiest, forest-robbing murdering outlaw without winking an eyelid, or giving an inch. Then why should I care to look on one that can’t hurt me? And as for ghosts, why —”

“We doubt you not,” interrupted Little John suddenly. “You have said enough. Lead on, Gilbert, we will attend thee.”

Gilbert did so, without another word, and they entered the cottage. They mounted the stairs, and saw the body of Ritson, covered with the white cloth, a cross upon his breast, and at his side, in an attitude of austere and deep devotion, knelt father Eldred. The light from the torches threw a red glare around the room, giving somewhat of an unearthly character to the scene.

Patiently, they awaited the termination of the friar’s devotions, and when this time arrived, Gilbert communicated his intention to him.

“What has produced this sudden and hasty resolution, my son?” demanded the father; “Believe me, it doth not appear seemly and certainly most strange. Why is this?”

“Ask me not now, good father,” returned Gilbert; “Believe me, I have a good and sufficient reason, — one which admits not of questioning. Thou shalt know all anon, but not now.”

“As you wish,” said the friar meekly. “Yet must your motive be deep and powerful, to make such sudden interment of importance.”

“It is all powerful!” replied Gilbert.

At this instant the wild howl of the hound again rung sharp and clear through the forest, and then all was still again.

“Heard you that?” hoarsely whispered Gilbert to the friar.

“Even so,” he replied. “Many times this night hath that dog howled wildly, mournfully, and even fearfully. But ‘tis one of those singular coincidences which oft arise without our being able to satisfactorily explain the cause.”

“Ah!” said Will, “But it’s the moon they bay at — it must be, because how is a dog to know when any one is dead — nobody can tell them, you know, unless a ghost –”

“Will!” cried Little John, reprovingly. The boy held his tongue, but wondered how it was that he could say nothing since he’d been out that night, but he must be taken to task for it.

“There are sights and sounds, good father,” said Gilbert, whose determination seemed strengthened by the wail of the hound, “which meet human eyes and ears, incomprehensible it may be to human understanding, but a construction may occasionally be put upon them, and when such is the case, it befits us we should act according to its

dictates. So is it with me tonight. I feel called upon, imperatively, to bury my wife's brother this night, and by God's mercy it shall be done. When you shall know all, you will not challenge the propriety of my action."

"Be it as you deem necessary," returned the friar, who believed, although he was unacquainted with Gilbert's motive, that it was influenced by some very powerful consideration, and therefore made no further objection.

Lincoln was summoned, and a bier was hastily constructed of hunting spears. The old servitor took the body of Ritson upon his shoulders, and bore it to the outside of the cottage door, accompanied by Little John, and the remainder of the party. The corpse was then laid upon its crude coffin, and Gilbert, Little John, Will Gamwell, and Lincoln, each taking the butt end of a spear, forming a handle in their hands, carried the body, while the good priest followed.

Slowly, they went along. The night was cold, the wind had risen, and a mournful voice came from the rustling trees. There was something solemn, even awful, in the little procession. The dull tramp of the feet, uncheered by the sound of human voice, fell heavily and sadly on the ears. They reached the tree, and they laid the body upon the damp grass, beside the outlaw who still lay extended senseless. The branches and leaves of this strange tree waved slowly and moaningly in the night air, giving forth a low sound like a dirge for the dead man. Gilbert, assisted by Little John and Lincoln, cut through a profusion of wild flowers growing at the foot of the tree, and cleared away the earth for a grave. They had not dug very deep ere Little John raised a round substance with his spade, and cried in a startling voice –

"Holy Mother of God! what have we here? A skull, as I am a living man!"

"Ha! give it me!" shouted Gilbert; "It is mine! It is my sister," he shrieked; snatching it violently from Little John, and pressing it, humid and mould-covered as it was, to his lips. He staggered wildly to and fro, and uttered incoherencies in a tone of voice little removed from a scream, and then sunk in a state of insensibility upon the earth. Will Gamwell sprung forward and raised the old man's head upon his knee.

"There's no life in him!" he cried to his cousin.

"Look to him," said Little John, hastily. "Hold him gently and steadily while we complete the task he wished us to perform. Gently, Lincoln, we must see what this means."

"It's the body of a woman," said Lincoln, carefully removing the mould from the remains of Gilbert's ill-fated sister; "These are a woman's garments — aye, she has been foully murdered too. Look, here's a knife sticking in her breast!"

So saying, he raised up the headless trunk, and a thrill of horror run through them as they saw he spoke truly. Even while they were gazing upon it with this feeling, they were startled by a hoarse voice breaking on their ears. They all turned and saw the outlaw on his knees, glaring with looks of hideous distraction upon the body which Lincoln still held.

“Why do you show me this?” he cried. “I did not do it. It was Ritson — it was he — it was he — drag me not to it! Hell and death! I tell you ‘twas not I. Have mercy — let me go!” he shouted, and to their astonishment he shuffled on nearer the body, until he came quite close to it, yet struggling, as if impelled by some unseen power violently against his inclination.

“I implore you,” he continued, “Let me fly. Hell! I cannot bear to see it! I cannot touch it! Damning tortures, drag me not so! I — ‘tis better to die and meet the fiend’s malice at once, than bear this agony. Ha, ha! thus I defeat you — ha, I triumph!”

And, ere a hand could be raised to stay him, he sprung at the body, clutched the knife from it, and buried its rusty blade in his heart. The blood shot out like a fountain from the wound. He drew the knife out, waved it in the air, turned round and round, and fell upon the body of Ritson, dead. This was an occurrence as unlooked for as it was extraordinary, and for a short time suspended all their faculties. Lincoln was the first to break the silence which ensued after this horrid spectacle.

“There’s another grave to make,” he said; “This carrion mustn’t lay with the gentle bird, who has been struck down by the knife of a lawless, heartless villain. Ah, me! I see it now! Here lies my master’s sister — a bright young thing she was.”

“Master John, well do I remember her — here she lies cruelly murdered, and there, beneath the cloth, lies her murderer, a-roasting to his bones, the dog! My master may tell why he would have them lie in one grave — it shall be so. But he should hang on the highest pine in the forest, to bleach in the sun, if I had my will. For the other rogue, he shall have enough mould over him to prevent him defiling the green grass that may grow around, if not over him, but no more. A hang dog. If ‘twere not for spoiling the look of the forest, he should dangle from one of the beechen or oaken arms of this very tree.”

“Peace, old man,” said Father Eldred, “Thou art of an age to know that ‘tis not right to speak ill of those who have passed away.”

“Ah! but father,” observed Will, quickly, “If you speak well of all who die, where is the use of being good while living?”

“A shrewd and a good saying — well said, lad,” uttered Lincoln; “For if you speak well of a rogue when he’s dead, as well as of the good man, where is the gain of being virtuous?”

“My children,” said the friar, “Who shall question the wisdom of the Allwise. It is for Him who framed human laws to judge who infringes them. It is for Him to punish who has made rewards and punishments. It is not for poor weak humanity to rail at those who have done wrong. It is but a weakness, and a wickedness, for they have not the inflicting of the eternal punishment, and, as for the earthly reward, a virtuous man should feel, if he finds it not in his own conscience, it is worthless. He knows not of it after he has quitted this earth, and the good which the knowledge of good actions may do to survivors, is obtained by speaking their praises while they are here, and when they are gone, it is enough for those who have been so weak as to do ill, that their name should not be mentioned.”

“It would show a Christian charity, and the same end be gained. Proceed with your work, my children, the night wanes, and there is one lying senseless here, who needs your care equally — nay, more, perhaps, than those who lay lifeless before you.”

It was with right goodwill Little John worked. They speedily completed the two graves, and the worthy friar, in a clear voice, repeated the prayers for the dead over the bodies, and then they were laid in their respective places, two in one grave, and one alone. The mould was heaped over them, and the bier which had borne Ritson to his grave, served as a litter to convey Gilbert to his cottage.

Chapter 10

And from his lips
A thousand thronging curses burst their way;
He calls his stout allies, and in a line –
----- Somerville
Miranda *—Beseech you, father!*
Prosero *— Hence! hang not on my garments*
Miranda *— Sir, have pity!*
----- The Tempest
Proteus *– I like thee well,*
And will employ thee in some service presently.
Julia *— In what you please; — I will do what I can.*
Proteus *— I hope thou wilt.*
----- Two Gentlemen of Verona

When Robin conjectured that the Baron would not stay long at the door of the dungeon which had confined Allan, ere he discovered the bird had flown, he was perfectly right. That stormy personage, accompanied by a party of his retainers, arrived at the dungeon door, found it fastened, and no key forthcoming, but such an implement was not necessary to enable the persons without to discover who and what was within, for the cell was built nearly circular. It was lit from above, and as it so fell out, the moon happened just to be looking at the grated window, there was just sufficient light to discover, by an inspection through the keyhole, that there was no person there.

“Ha! ha!” laughed the Baron, with a ferocious tone, “Admirable obedience of orders! Of vast service a dungeon and goaler may be made! Ho! ho! By St. Griselda, but my next prisoner shall be stuffed into one of my daughter’s birdcages, and bound with threads — ‘twill keep him, to my thinking, as securely as stone walls and steel locks. Where is Lanner?”

“Here, my lord,” said one of the soldiers; “We brought him along with us in the hurry, for had we left him he might have escaped.”

“An’ if he had, thou shouldst have hung in his place,” roared the Baron. The man inwardly congratulating himself that he had not left Lanner behind, brought him before his wrathful master.

“Now, dog! Now, slave!” continued Fitz Alwine, “Tell me what thou hast done with the key of this door, and by what vile cozening you have suffered the prisoner to escape? Thou seest the door is locked, and the key abstracted. Thou knowest the make of thy prisoner was not small enough to enable him to get through the keyhole, or squeeze through the bars of his grated window. He is not a beetle, to crawl through the crack beneath the door, nor a breath of wind to vanish through the crannies and crevices.”

“My temper is not easily moved, but the Holy Father judge between us, an’ I have not cause for anger in this case. I ask not much in asking where the prisoner is who was entrusted to thy care, and I utter no more than justice in determining that, if he is not speedily discovered, thou shalt supply his place in all things, so far as punishment is concerned. Now, slave, tell me where he is — how and in what way you liberated him. Ha! By the foul fiend! Has any among you been to the warder with orders to prevent any stranger passing? Stand not there like dolts. No answer, I thought so. Idiots! One of you fly, and do’t. Away with you.”

A retainer instantly left his companions, and dashed down the passage at full speed. He took no light with him, all was utter darkness. He knew the path well, but, in his haste, had not remembered a flight of steps. Not, therefore, taking the necessary precautions, he flew down them, head first, struck his temple against the sharp corner of a stone pillar, and, in an instant, with his skull fractured, lay dead upon the ground.

This accident enabled the trio to escape. Had it not occurred, the man would have reached the castle gates first, and effectually prevented their departure, but fate ordained it otherwise.

“May it please you, my lord,” observed the leader of the men, “As we reached this door, I observed a light disappearing at the end of this passage. The persons bearing it must have entered the chapel.”

“And thou stoodst here, quietly, thou inconsiderate ass! And let me waste time and breath, while the rascal is escaping away! On with you, after him, and if you let him slip through your fingers, knaves! you shall — you shall see — you shall see –” Here the Baron was at a loss for a simile which would express the punishment he would favour them with, in case of failure, and finished by saying,

“I cannot think now, but I’ll invent something hideously torturing for all.” So saying, he seized a torch from one of the men, and dashed on. They soon reached the chapel, entered it and found the Lady Christabel standing in an attitude of fear and alarm.

“Ha!” shouted the Baron, and rushed to her. “How’s this, Christabel! Here at this hour! Where’s thy minion, shameless wench? Speak at once, and without falsehood! Why stand ye there like fools?” he roared, as he saw the men stand in a cluster gazing upon him and his daughter.

“Search every nook and cranny; leave no spot undiscovered, quick.” The men spread themselves over the chapel with their torches, while he turned and again questioned his daughter.

“Where is the traitor, Allan?” he cried; “Tell me. I know you are acquainted with the place of his concealment and by the Mass, if I catch him, he shall rue the hour he entered Nottingham Castle. Where is he? Tell me at once, and don’t stand trembling with that white, sanctified face, as if you were a lamb, and I was a wolf, who intended to swallow you. Speak! Where is he?”

“I know not,” returned the affrighted maid, not daring to look the passionate old man in the face. She spoke the truth, she did not know where her lover was, and the old gentleman had also given birth to an apt simile, for he did look very like a wolf about to make a meal of a lamb.

”‘Tis false!” he shouted, “He is here.”

“Indeed he is not,” replied Christabel. “There are none here but your attendants and ourselves.”

“That will speedily be decided,” he exclaimed”.

“For what purpose came you here?”

“To pray at my mother’s tomb,” returned she, with her eyes filled with tears. Her father gazed steadfastly upon her for a moment, and then turned away to the men, who were returning from an unsuccessful search.

“What success?” he demanded.

“We cannot discover either of them,” said one of the men.

“Either of them!” repeated the Baron faintly, who had been consoling himself with the idea that he had at least Robin in his safe possession, and had but little doubt that by making a great show of inflicting punishment upon the youth, he might again get Allan in his power, for he well knew Allan possessed that keen sense of honour to make every effort to free from danger any one whom he might have led into it.

When, therefore, the man made use of the word ‘either’ he experienced a sort of strange misgiving that Robin had also taken wing. He therefore advanced to the man, and laying his hand upon his shoulder with a firm grasp, he repeated “Either! What mean you by either? One only has escaped! Who are you? and what mean you?”

“May it please you, my lord Baron,” returned the man, “My name is Caspar Steinkopf. I was one of the guards upon the ramparts, I had the watch on the eastern wing”

“Ha!” interrupted the Baron, with a roar, and commenced compressing his fingers, “You had the charge of the other prisoner, who was confined in the turret upon the eastern wing of the ramparts.” “Do not tell me that he is escaped, for if you do, I’ll bury the blade of this knife to the haft in your vile carcase, thou worse than dog.”

The man remained silent, the Baron grew white. His lips quivered with rage; he drew his breath short and thick, he tightened his grasp of the man. He drew forth his poinard, and in a voice thick with passion, cried —

“Tell me, has he too escaped? Speak, slave, or this moment is your last,”

“You have said, my lord, if I tell you he has escaped you’ll kill me,” said the man, in a dogged sullen tone, and with a look as if he thought there were two words to say to it.

“And so I will,” groaned the Baron between his teeth.

“Then I’ll hold my tongue,” replied the man, with commendable prudence.

Swift as lightning rose the Baron’s arm, with the intention of putting his deadly threat in execution. The knife gleamed in the air; ere it could descend, a piercing shriek from Christabel arrested its progress.

“Father, father!” she screamed, “Would you desecrate my mother’s tomb by a foul murder?”

The exclamation of Christabel had the desired effect, the Baron hurled the fellow from him, sheathed his knife, and in a cold stern voice bade his daughter retire to her chamber, then turned to his men — “They have both escaped me through thy vile laziness and carelessness, dogs,”

“Now mark me, they cannot be far from hence, probably are already in the warder’s custody. But should they have succeeded in passing him, to horse all of you, and pursue them with all the speed your beasts can make. Their route lies through the forest towards Mansfieldwoodhaus; keep on their track, and you must quickly overtake them. Mind, I take no excuse, you must, I tell you, overtake them, ye being mounted, and they upon foot. Bind them hand and foot, and return with all diligence. Away with ye, I make up by your expertness in the pursuit for your carelessness in suffering them to escape. Away!”

The men instantly quitted the chapel at a rapid pace. At the same moment Maude entered. Immediately Christabel ran towards her, and placed her finger on her lip.

“He is safe,” whispered Maude. Her lady muttered a prayer, and prepared to quit the chapel, closely followed by Maude.

“Ho! stay,” cried the Baron, who overheard her whisper. “Come back: come hither, Maude, a word with you, girl; nearer — d’ye think I am going to eat you?”

“I don’t know,” she replied, affecting great fright, “You look very awful, and open your mouth so wide.”

“Come, come, Jezebel, I know better who I have to deal with,” retorted Fitz Alwine, nodding knowingly. “You are not so easily frightened at a frown, but believe me you shall have something to frighten you if you tell me not at once who is safe. I heard you, hussy. Come, no shuffling, tell me who is safe?”

“I didn’t say anybody was safe,” replied Maude, playing with the end of her long sleeve, and still affecting simplicity and fright. As the Baron felt perfectly assured that she was acting, he began to fume.

“Out upon ye, for a lying jade,” he roared. “With mine own ears I heard thee say ‘He is safe’. Now mark me, girl, your pretended fright and foolery don’t deceive me. I can see you have assisted the knaves to escape – I shall shortly have them tied neck and heels and thrown into the moat –”

“*When* you get them,” interrupted Maude, looking in his face with an air of simplicity, but a most wicked expression playing in the corner of her eves. The Baron ground his teeth, and continued —

“That will be in a few hours, at farthest. Do not flatter yourself that they will elude me so easily. If I discover that you have been an instrument in effecting their escape, woe betide you! — you shall tremble then in right earnest.”

“*What* will you do?” asked Maude, quietly.

The Baron opened his eyes rather wide, and then replied, with a most significant nod of the head, “You shall see.”

“But I should like to know, because I might then be prepared,” she returned, still affecting great simplicity of manner.

“Insolent jade! You shall learn soon enough, never fear. You’ll learn your fate too quick for your peace of mind, I’ll warrant me. You shall know, don’t be afraid,” said the Baron, with an awful frown.

“Oh, but I *am*,” she replied. “But come my lady, you will be chilled if you stay in this damp place.”

“Answer me, jade! ere you depart,” roared the Baron; “Who meant you when you said ‘He is safe’?”

“Since you will have it, my lord, Egbert Lanner is a – a – favourite of mine, and you misunderstood me, for instead of saying ‘he is safe’, I asked ‘is *he* safe?’ – meaning that same Egbert Lanner, whom you promised to throw into the moat. That was all, my lord,” uttered Maude, dropping a curtesy.

“I know you are deceiving me,” he replied; “but beware, I shall soon know all, and then if I discover you to have conspired against me, I’ll fling your knave into the moat, and you after him.”

“Thank ye, my lord,” cried Maude with a laugh and ran after her mistress, who had already quitted the chapel. Swearing a fierce oath, the mighty and puissant noble followed her at a rapid pace.

He was in anything but a pleasant frame of temper: the gout, in the first instance, promoted his native irascibility, secondly was increased by the visit of Allan, his language and conduct, coupled with that shown him by Robin. Their subsequent escape, at a moment when he was consoling himself for the indignities he fancied he had suffered, by the contemplation of the manner in which he purposed punishing them added fuel to the fire – and to crown all, to be bearded by his daughter’s waiting-maid, to be laughed at by one who ought – he thought – to expire with terror at his frown, had the same effect as the rowel of a spur would have when smartly inflicted upon the sore ribs of a fiery steed.

In his rage, he felt an inclination to prance and curvette as the said animal might be supposed to do while under the influence of the goad, but this would have been rather *infra dig* [‘*Demeaning*’], and therefore he did not indulge himself. He determined, however, at least to seek out his daughter and rate her soundly. He might be enabled thus to carry off his pent-up choler as a safety valve carries off the waste steam. Besides, he had been left in the dark.

When his followers had retired to obey his orders, they took their torches with them, and Maude’s little lanthorn was the only light left. When she departed, she took her light with her, and the choleric noble drew a fresh insult from this act, in thus leaving him alone lightless.

As we have said, swearing a fierce oath, he followed Maude at a rapid pace, but she was nimble – her lady had got the start, and kept it. Maude, having something more than an idea that if the old gentle man overtook her, he would beat her, did her best to reach her mistress for the sake of her protection. We have said she was nimble, and that the Lady Christabel had the start of her. It must also be understood that the Baron was sixty, stiff-limbed, and encased in a suit of mail. It may, therefore, be easily supposed that, although he used his best speed, she had much the advantage.

Nothing despairing, however, he trotted on, but not being a bit better acquainted with the path than the unfortunate wight who had lost his life in falling down the flight of steps, and possessing the same idea that the passage was of one level to the end, being also without a light to guide his inexperience, and keeping up his trot, as may be expected, he encountered a similar accident to the poor fellow who had preceded him, but he was not going at the same speed.

When his foot went suddenly down the first step, his brain immediately received the impression of a flight of steps. He instantly used what exertion he could put into force, and leaped out into the darkness with the full hope and expectation that he should turn up somewhere.

It seemed an age to him while describing the distance from one level to the other. The attraction of gravitation was not suspended in his case any more than it is in all others, and of a consequence he came in contact with the ground with a heavy crash. His feet struck the ground, his knees struck his chin, his teeth bit his tongue, his forehead and nose struck a pillar, and his eyes struck fire.

Did the most pious and patient man – we except Job, and perhaps the exception proves the rule – ever bite his tongue by accident, sharply and vigorously, or have his eyes flashed fire from a violent blow of the nose, and not slip out an oath? No – not even the Pope, Heaven save the mark! It cannot, therefore, be supposed that even our testy Baron was very quiet under this dispensation of Providence. He was not stunned, but nearly. His mouth was full of blood, and he sputtered a round of fierce oaths, laying every saint in the calendar under contribution. He rolled over and over, and as he stretched out his hand to assist himself to rise, he laid it upon the cold face of the dead retainer.

For a moment he left it there, in shuddering wonderment, then hastily withdrew it – a cold tremor pervading his frame – he knew it was a human face he had laid his hand upon – that hand was wet – it must be blood. God of Heaven! ‘twas not his daughter Christabel? With the same swiftness with which the thought flashed through his brain, he again drew his hand over the corpse – the habiliments were those of a soldier; besides, there was a stiff beard upon the chin, that decided the question at once – it must be one of his own soldiers. He roared for lights, and was answered by the echo of his own voice from the hollows of that dreary passage. He grew hideously alarmed, and gave another *stentorian* [‘as *loud as a herald*’] roar with a like result.

Then he jumped up, and, in the intense darkness, groped his way along as swiftly as he could. He soon arrived at the corridor leading to the inhabited portion of the castle, and then was not long in making himself heard, or in gathering a party to return to the spot where he had discovered the body. Upon reaching it, it was recognised as one of those

who had kept watch upon the ramparts at the time of Robin's escape, the cause of his death was conjectured from the Baron's accident, and he was borne away to receive the last sad rites preparatory to his interment.

Having directed what he deemed necessary in this affair, the Baron repaired to his daughter's chamber with the peaceful intention of acquainting her that he would rather plunge a poniard in her bosom than see her the wife of Allan Clare. Also, that he purposed at once looking out for a husband for her, and marrying her as soon as the arrangements could be made with the first suitor who suited him, and he had somebody in his eye, with whom he intended communicating, even on the morrow – the audacious conduct of Allan rendering decisive measures necessary.

The escape of the latter had prevented him punishing him bodily, but he chuckled and revelled in the thought that by marrying his daughter to another, he could most exquisitely torture him, whether in or out of his power.

Allan had threatened him, had thrown out dark and mysterious hints of being able — by a word — to crush him, and upon this had proceeded so far as to propose terms, but had been hastily cut short by being consigned to the custody of a party of men-at-arms, and by them to a dungeon. The Baron laughed at his threats — there was but one cause he had for fear, but that he felt assured Allan could not know.

He, therefore, pshaw'd away the little doubts, which, spite of himself, would arise. When he entered the room, he found his daughter seated at a small table, upon which stood a crucifix, a vase of flowers, and a few indicatives of feminine presence. She was gazing steadfastly upon something, which immediately upon her father's entrance, she hid in her bosom. He noticed the act, and coming close to her, said hastily –

"What bauble was it you have just concealed?"

"No bauble," returned Christabel, timidly.

"'Tis false," he cried, raising his voice, "I say 'twas some bauble."

"We hold a difference of opinion, father," said Christabel, essaying a faint smile.

"Do we?" retorted he, with a sneering duck of the head. "'Tis most probable we do, for you to think as I do, would be complimenting my powers of thought to an extent of which I might be wondrous proud!"

"You jest, father!"

"Not when I ask you to tell me what you so hastily concealed on my entrance."

Christabel was silent.

“Christabel!” said the Baron, sternly, “Were that a bauble, a trinket of small import, you would not hesitate to show it me at once without demur. I cannot, therefore, but suppose it is something which you have a powerful motive to conceal. I have a father’s right to question, to know all you do or think, and I will. Tell me — what have you there?”

“A miniature!” replied Christabel, after a slight hesitation, and trembling with apprehension.

“Whose? Whose, I say?” demanded the Baron.

Christabel spoke not. Her father grew a little frantic.

“Whose miniature is it? I have a right to know, and I will!” he cried.

“I cannot tell! I will not tell!” she said, gathering some spirit from the emergency of her situation. “If you have the right as a father to question, I have the right as a free agent to withhold an answer, where my conscience teaches me I have done no wrong!”

“Oh, ho!” laughed the Baron stormily, “Your conscience will always teach you that you have done no wrong when it crosses your pleasure. Mighty fine, truly!”

“You wrong me, father — with me ‘tis a monitor to whose dictates I rigidly adhere!” she returned firmly.

“To be sure, I’m an old rascal, that must be understood,” cried the Baron, in a tone becoming very forte. “But I have an objection, a singular one, perhaps, of not liking to be told so, particularly by my own child. But of that enough. I care not to look on the bauble. ‘Tis the miniature of that audacious knave and vagabond, Allan Clare.”

“Now, mark me, Christabel, I have come to a decision respecting him — if he is once in my power, he dies, without hope or chance of being spared. So much for him! And rather than see you his wife — pah! — I’d fling you from the highest battlements of the castle, but I have no fear of such an event occurring.”

“I intend you to marry immediately— your husband will be Sir Tristram of Goldsborough. He is not young, it is true, but he is younger than I am, and I am not old. Nor is he over handsome. But those are good qualities in a husband. Your jealousy will scarcely be aroused by him — a great point gained in the marriage state, and well worthy of sacrificing a few minor qualities to.”

“He is enormously rich — another great point; has great influence at Court — a greater still. I have made up my mind that you shall marry him. He is willing, and I am delighted at the opportunity of thus aggrandising you, for though I am a Baron and he a knight, his wealth and influence far exceed mine, and I may shortly stand in need of good aid. There are a

few other things which have assisted in deciding me, with which I will not trouble you just now. I send my proposals to him tomorrow. In six days he will answer me in person. On the seventh you shall wed him in the chapel."

"Never!" burst from the lips of the agonized girl. "I will never consent!"

The Baron laughed. "I never thought of asking your consent — no such intention ever crossed my brain," said he, bitterly. "Fool! You have nought to do but obey — you have no alternative!"

A shade passed over her pale features, and her small lips compressed with a sudden determination, as if a thought passed through her mind that there was one.

"I leave you now," he continued; "You can reflect or not as you please, upon what I have said — all you have to do is to obey. Nothing you may say or do can make me alter my determination."

"I would to God my mother were living!" uttered the poor girl, with a sudden passion of tears.

The Baron's brows lowered until they almost touched his cheek bones, then turning suddenly, he hastily quitted the room. He returned to his own chamber; for near an hour he paced it, buried in deep but uneasy thought. Among the many thronging memories that crowded his brain was the recollection of the lonely situation in which his only child had been placed for some years.

Debarred intercourse with her own sex, save her waiting-maid, Maude — and an oath escaped him as her name crossed him — without even the kindness or attention of a parent to cheer her, having lost her mother when so young. And he could not help confessing to himself that he had treated her by no means affectionately. Her portion, he felt, had been a sorry one. He was now in the act of violating her best and dearest feelings, by wedding her to a man she could never love, and separating her forever from one whom she loved, and who returned it devotedly and adoringly.

Although even this reflection affected him strongly, it had no influence as regarded a change in his determination, but he resolved to act with more kindness and tenderness than he had hitherto done, and even with a sudden thought he left his apartment to seek hers, late as it was, and say a few kind words to her. When he gained the door of her room he stopped for a moment, and heard a low sob. It smote him on the heart as the sad sound met his ear, and opening the door quietly, he softly entered. He saw her busily engaged in writing.

Now, be it understood, that writing at that period was a most uncommon accomplishment, even for a Baron's daughter, but she had acquired it in

early days from Allan, who, having been intended for the church, had attained an art then principally confined to the priesthood. The Baron stared on seeing her occupation, and advanced stealthily to the table. She was too intently engaged in her task to notice him, and for a moment he stood and gazed upon the small fair characters traced by her pen in wonderment.

She raised her head, in the act of thought, and saw her father's form standing before her. She shrieked with terror, and clutched at the paper on which she had been writing, but she was too late, her father had secured it. She attempted to fly, but he seized her by the wrist and grasped her firmly. Overcome by fright and agony she sunk to the ground, burying her face in the hand which yet remained unshackled.

With eyes glowing like burning coals did the Baron endeavor to decipher the writing, but in vain, for, as we have said, in those days the art being principally confined to the priesthood, Barons neither read nor wrote. He looked at it, followed every line, every letter, slowly and carefully, and then he could not make it out. He might as well have essayed to decipher a Chaldaic or Parsee manuscript, without having heard or seen the language, as understand what that paper contained. Twenty times did he wish that he had acquired the art, but it was a vain wish, and he felt it so. However, he resolved to be satisfied, and therefore determined to take it to his confessor, who could read it, and would translate it word for word to him. He still held his daughter by the wrist, and he thought she hung very heavily, and very silently withal.

He looked at her, spoke to her, and found she had fainted. He lifted her from the floor, and laid her upon a couch of rude form in the room, and then violently rung a hand bell which stood upon the table. Its summons was speedily obeyed by Maude. As she entered, the Baron said, sternly–

"Jezebel! look to your mistress, she has fainted;" and so passed from the apartment. The girl flew to the Lady Christabel, and used every means to recover her – in a few minutes she succeeded. Christabel gazed wildly round, as if unconscious where she was and then ejaculated — "Oh, Maude!" burst into tears in the arms of her attendant.

"Dear lady, what is the matter?" asked Maude, with a tone of kind interest. "Sweet madam, tell me, perhaps I may assist you!"

As soon as she could recover herself sufficiently to talk, she detailed the whole occurrence to her, concluding by acquainting her that she had written to Allan, and that her father had detected her, seized the letter, and carried it off with him. Maude hesitated little in uttering her sentiments respecting the character of the Baron, and puzzled her brain for a short time in what way to assist her lady. Suddenly she cried — "I have it! A good thought! Quick, quick, madam, sit down and write something like what your father ran away with, and give it me. Be quick!"

“I do not know what to write,” said Christabel, a little abstractedly.

“Anything! A song will do — make haste madam, or I shall be too late to serve you!” cried the impatient Maude.

“Take this,” said Christabel, opening a box. She took from it a written paper and gave it to Maude, who instantly departed to the Baron’s apartment with it. She entered without asking permission, and saw the Baron and his confessor seated together, the Baron was in the act of handing the paper to the confessor.

“How now, jade!” cried the Baron, wrathfully; “What brings you thus into my presence?”

“My lady wants the paper you took away”, she said pertly, and drawing as near to the confessor as she could without exciting suspicion.

“Thou liest, Jezebel, she would not dare send such a message!” roared the Baron, enraged at the interruption.

“Yes she would, and I must take the paper,” she answered, snatching it at once out of the confessor’s hands, ere he could be aware of any such intention and then darted out of the room.

“Ha! ho ah, vile jade!” shouted the Baron, springing after her; “Come back! S’death, I’ll scatter thee to the winds if thou dost not. Ho, hussey! Jade! Jezebel! Come back — restore me that paper, or you shall perish, I swear by Hell and all its fiends!”

But it was not the intention of Maude to escape, she had thrust the note to Allan in the bosom of her dress, while she clutched the paper she had received from Christabel in her hand.

She suffered the Baron to overtake her, seize her, struggle, and eventually to get the paper from her. In his rage he raised his hand to strike her, but she fixed her clear bright eyes full upon him, and he — thinking before he acted — stayed his arm.

“I did my lady’s bidding,” she said calmly.

“Away to your lady!” he roared. “Tell her she shall rue this bitterly.”

Maude turned as if sullenly from the spot, but, when out of his sight, flew joyfully with her prize to detail her success to her fair mistress, who sat waiting her return with a heart beating high with hope and excitement.

The Baron gained his own chamber and placed the counterfeit paper in the confessor’s hands, bidding him read it at once. The old man opened it, placed it near the taper, and read as follows:

Friar Reads to Baron

To mine own sweet love, the fair Christabel

When winter bringeth violets and clothes the earth with snow,

When tender flowers are dreaming, and snowdrops'gin to blow,

When thy beauty bringeth gentle words and kinder looks to thee,

When in gladness thou art smiling, wilt thou cast a thought on me?

Dear love!

"Pshaw!" cried the Baron, interrupting him, "That stuff! There must be some mistake!"

"I give you the literal interpretation of these characters," mildly responded the confessor; There is more, shall I read on?"

"By all means," said the Baron; "There may yet be something to hear. I am satisfied it was no mere lovesick song she was writing, her agitation was too great on discovering me for that. Read on."

The old man, making a slight deferential inclination of the head, continued reading —

When springtime bringeth hyacinths and sweetest scented flow'rs,
When the sunshine cometh laughing through warm and fresh'ning showers,
When the jessamine and rosebud are winning smiles from thee,
When thy heart is full and thrilling, wilt thou cast a thought on me

Sweet love!
When fair summer bringeth joyousness and skies of clear deep blue.
When pale lilies, trees, each spray and flow'r, are gemmed with sparkling dew,
When the calm air, cool and fragrant with sweet breath, kisses thee,
When all is brightness round thee, wilt thou cast a thought on me?
Dear love!

"Pish!" interrupted the Baron, his countenance expressing great annoyance; "I suppose we shall have the round of the seasons. Pah! This love stuff will make me sick. Is there any more?"

"There is another verse, my lord."

“Ah! well, I suppose I must endure it. Read on. I may perhaps gather something from that, if I have failed to do so in the others. Proceed,” growled the Baron, gathering himself up with an air of disgust to hear the remainder. The confessor continued

– *When Autumn* –

“Bah!” interrupted the Earl; “I thought so. By the Mass! The Mass! The whole round of the seasons!” Having finished his interruption. the father again commenced –

When autumn bringeth richest fruits, but also sad decay
When things which were thy summer joy are fading fast away,
When those leaves which were the greenest fall withered from the tree,
When hearts and looks grow cold and false – ah! turn thy thoughts to me,
Sweet love!

“Ah! ‘*turn thy thoughts to me, sweet love!*’” repeated the Baron, in a mimicking tone. “I have been duped, by St. Peter! — but it shall not be for long. I must look to this. Father, I would be alone — good night.

“Peace unto thee, my son, the holy mantle of St. Dunstan be upon thee, and enable thee to unravel the artifices of the weaker sex.” and invoking a blessing upon his head, the old man departed. The Baron gave a grim smile as he left the room, and then began a series of cogitations. Leaving him deeply buried in them, we return to the indefatigable Maude. Ascertaining from her mistress that the billet which her father had detected her writing was intended for Allan Clare, she set about devising means for its speedy arrival at its destination.

She had a foster brother in the castle — a youth about fourteen years old, quick, intelligent, brave, and devoted to her, loving her as heartily as if they were children of the same mother. She sought him out — he had been asleep since six, and it was now ten, a monstrous late hour, at that period, to be up and awake. She aroused him from his pallet, and when sufficiently awake to comprehend her, she said – “Hal, I want you to do me a service — nay, ‘tis one to the Lady Christabel, of greater value than to me.”

“I’ll do’t,” said the lad.

“There is danger in it.”

“So much the better: if there wasn’t any danger, of what value would be the service?” said the boy, bluntly.

“I may trust you, dear Hal?” said Maude, winding her arm round his neck as she sat by his side on the pallet, and fixing her clear dark eyes upon his.

“To the death, Maude, to the death! Or infamy, disgrace, and a dog’s death be my portion,” said he, earnestly.

“I knew, Hal, I might rely on you,” she replied, joyously and even proudly. “You must attire yourself now, get the swiftest nag from the stalls.”

“That’s mine, Maude,” interrupted the lad. “My little nag, ‘*Maude*’. I named her after you, sister — ‘*Flying Maude*’, I call her, for there is none to come near her, I tell you, Maude, she can –”

“Yes, yes,” interrupted Maude in her turn, “I know she’s the best nag in Christendom. Now, dress yourself, and meet me at the keep. Let me see how nimble you can be.”

Maude ran out of the little chamber without waiting a reply. The lad rose and donned his clothes swiftly, and departed to the stables, saddled and bridled his mare, and went to the keep. There he found Maude waiting for him.

“Well done, Hal. Right good speed you have used,” she cried, using a little judicious flattery. “Now, mark me well: When you quit the castle, pass through the town, from thence through the forest till you come to a cottage on the border, near Mansfieldwoodhaus, ‘tis kept by a forester, named Hood. Bid him put this billet in the hands of one Allan Clare — for you will probably reach the cottage before Allan. Tell him ‘tis for no one else, and to give it to no one else, if he would not peril the life of one who can and will do him service.”

“Then give this bow and quiver to his son Robin, and say that he shall speedily learn when the coast is clear that he may again meet one who will be waiting his coming. You understand me, Hal?”

“Yes, well,” was the reply.

“On your way through the forest, be careful to avoid any of the retainers who may be out”

“How! Maude!” exclaimed the boy in surprise.

“Seek for no reason, you shall know the whereof anon. Do as I bid ye — avoid them all or if you should fall into their company without being able to help it, say anything rather than reveal thy errand. Do this, Hal, as you love me and should you overtake three persons, one of whom is Friar Tuck — you know him?”

The boy nodded affirmatively.

“His two companions will be Allan Clare and Robin Hood. The youngest and best looking — at least, but never mind. that — is Robin. Give him the bow, arrows, and my message, and to Allan Clare the missive. If my father asks you, as you pass the drawbridge, what takes you abroad so late, tell him the Lady Christabel is sick and requires a leech, whom you are about to fetch. Do this well, Hal, and I’ll say all the kind sweet things I can in your favour to little bonnie Grace May — make her quite in love with you, and she shall pay all the kisses I owe you.”

“Will you, though? Maude, will you?” asked Hal, energetically, his eyes flashing with delight at the fond anticipation.

“I will, so true as I hope for a kiss from him I love,” cried Maude, laughing, “and that’s an oath nothing should make me break.”

“Then, if it’s possible for mortal to do this, Maude, I’ll do it. I’m only mortal, but a kiss from Grace May, and a kind look from you, Maude, would make me dare anything. Good-bye, God bless you, Maude,” exclaimed he, enthusiastically, and leaning over his horse’s neck, kissed Maude’s cheek, waved his hand, and dashed off on his errand.

“Goodbye, God bless thee, and the Holy Mother speed thee!” said Maude, as she watched his departure. She listened attentively to discover how he would succeed in passing her father; she heard them talk, heard Hal’s voice utter the word ‘leech’, then the drawbridge was lowered, the hoofs of the nag clattered over it, and the noise of the return of the bridge to its resting place caught her ear. She gave utterance to a deep breath, and returned to her mistress.

Chapter 11

Leonato *By my troth, my lord, I cannot tell what to think of it; but that she loves him with as enraged affection, – it is past the infinite of thought.*
Don Pedro *May be she doth counterfeit.*
Claudio *Faith, like enough.*
Leonato *O God! counterfeit! There never was counterfeit of passion came so near the life of passion, as she discovers it.*

Much Ado About Nothing

Miranda *I am your wife, if you will marry me*
If not, I'll die your maid: to be your fellow You may deny me; but I'll be your servant, Whether you will or no.

Tempest

Robin Hood and his two companions used their best speed in threading the forest. The bright moon showed them their path almost as clear as if they had had daylight to guide them. Robin felt merry, the fumes of the ale he had drunk had not vanished, and his spirits, beneath the influence of the potent beverage he had somewhat unsparingly quaffed, were at no inconsiderable height.

His companions could boast of no such lightness of heart. Allan's ill success had much depressed his spirits, and the stout friar, who really felt lovingly inclined towards the fair Maude, was dull and vexed at her recent treatment of him, and the favour she had shown Robin.

"By the Holy Miserere!" muttered he, "I am, to my thinking, a proper man, stout, and straight-limbed, nor ill-favoured i' the *mazzard* [*'Head/Face'*]. Might I judge by favours already received, I am no small favourite with her, yet her conduct today would seem that she cared not a jot for me. Ah! well, if she prefers a slim, beardless boy to me, let her i' faith, beshrew me! I care not to be in rivalry with such as he. If she like him, let her love light on him i' God's name! Yet, perhaps, she did it but to try me. I am a fool to be jealous of such as he."

"Well, jovial Giles, as the pretty Maude calls thee," shouted Robin, with a merry laugh, "Father Tuck, as I shall henceforth call thee, what are thou conning over in that learned brain of thine? Thou art as dull as a homily. Thy name, instead of being jovial Giles, should be woeful Giles."

"It is the province of the favored to laugh and be merry, and of the discomfited and deceived to be sad and dull, Master Robin," returned the friar, with a sneer, "Therefore let me enjoy my humour — I interfere not with thine, child."

“If by receiving kind looks, bright smiles, sweet words, and tender kisses from one of the smartest, prettiest little bodies I ever clapped eyes on,” cried Robin gleefully, “you call being favoured — and I am not going to deny that it is so — why I am especially favoured, and thereby entitled, according to your doctrine, to laugh and be merry. But I do not recognise your right to be sad, for I have yet to learn how you are discomfited and deceived.”

“Have you?” returned the friar drily. “Exercise your wits, boy, if thou’rt not a greater dullard than thou seemest, thou wilt speedily discover it.”

“Nay, then,” retorted Robin, “that am I, for I can see naught to create dullness in thee, unless it be thy constitution, temperament, and such like. Thy sadness can have no relation to your relation, the fair Maude, for you are a monk, you know, and must not regard females with loving eyes. St. Dunstan be thy guard and guide!”

“I tell thee, boy, thou hadst better guide us in the open and direct track, than lead us through these mazes and windings,” exclaimed the friar, rather angrily.

“Thou’rt cross, good Father Tuck,” said Robin, affecting an air of regret. “I have unwittingly offended thee, by our Holy Mother! I am sorry for’t. If the pretty Maude is the occasion of it, I tell thee, frankly, that ere I saw her, my heart was given irrecoverably away.”

The friar seemed delighted to hear this. He looked earnestly in the youth’s face to see whether he might read if he spoke truth, and being satisfied with the scrutiny, he seized him heartily by the hand, and cried —

“No, Robin, I am not offended with thee. Ho! ho! ho! The girl is nought to me, of course not, but that she is pretty, and a kind, merry-hearted damsel. Thou mayst wed her, an’ thou list — but thou’rt sure thou hast given thy heart away?”

“Most sure, most assuredly,” returned he. “And now I’ll tell thee why I brought thee along this path. You know the red-hot old Baron better than I do, and think ye not that, when he has discovered our escape, a score or two of his retainers will not be sent upon our heels? I have, therefore, chosen this path — ‘tis the nearest, and intersects the high road in different parts, being nearly a strait line, while the road is winding. As it is most probable that the fellows dispatched after us will think we have kept the high road for speed sake, they will keep along it, and thus we shall avoid them.”

“An apostle couldn’t have been more shrewd,” replied Tuck, his spirits beginning to mount rapidly. “I do know old fire and bluster well, and shouldn’t wonder to see him head the pursuers in *propria personæ*. Aha!

if I'd but the chance of trouncing his hauberk for him, I'd make him skip as high as Haman was hanged —whoo!" And the ghostly friar twirled his staff, which he had brought with him, in an ecstacy of anticipation.

"You are fortunate in having a weapon," said Robin; "You have some chance of '*clearing your path from briers*', as old Lincoln would say. But friend Allan and I are entirely without and I am loth to confess that, being overtaken and attacked by the Nottingham men-at-arms is not the only thing to be apprehended. This same venerable old wood, dame Sherwood, harbours an ugly quantity of thieving outlaws, from whom there is little to fear while you have a weapon to keep them at bay, but, being defenceless, they will plunder you without remorse or mercy even if you have nothing but a better doublet than their own to lose, and then put their skean beneath your ribs, by way of keeping you quiet after your loss."

"But suppose your doublet worse than theirs, and you have nothing else to lose?" suggested Tuck.

"Then they'll serve you the same for not having anything," he replied.

"Humph!" grunted Tuck; "They'll get nothing from me but hard raps with my staff, and sufficient of them truly as will make 'em more than satisfied, by St. Benedict!"

They proceeded as rapidly as the intricacies and entangled nature of their path would allow, through brake, copse, covert, and underwood. Now treading a broad glade, now creeping through the mazes of a thicket. For two hours had they proceeded in this way, when they emerged from their mazy path into the high road, which Robin said they must pursue for some distance ere they could again branch off. He therefore advised that they should make their way along it at full speed, a proposal which met with the entire concurrence of his companions.

Ere, however, they put this intention into effect, they thought it advisable to reconnoitre a little; and as Robin was best calculated for this, both from his knowledge of the forest ways, and from being the most agile of the party, he, leaving his companions beneath the umbrageous shade of a widely-spreading elm, glided across the road to the opposite side, and disappeared.

Above where they stood, in the direction of Nottingham, the road had a sudden turn, and at this turn was commanded a view of the road for nearly two miles — to this part Robin betook himself, calculating that if no enemy appeared pursuing, he and his companions would have time to proceed along the road, and branch off without being over-taken, even if on the instant of their departure from their concealment, their pursuers reached that part of the road he hoped to find bare.

On arriving at the turn, he threw a scrutinising glance down the road, and was pleased to see no one He was just upon departing to his friends to hurry them forward, when a horseman came in sight, his steed bearing him at a very rapid pace.

For a minute Robin watched him, and finding he was not followed by any others, he turned and made for his friends with all his swiftness. He communicated his discovery to them, announced his determination of stopping the horseman, and persuading him to take Allan behind him as far as the cottage, while Tuck and himself would follow as best they could. Allan, however, firmly resisted this arrangement.

“There is danger,” he said, “and I’ll share it with you. You came with me, and I return not without you.”

“But consider the anxiety your sister and my parents will suffer at our absence,” urged Robin. “By means of this horseman you can reach the cottage an hour before us, and set their minds at rest.”

“No,” persisted Allan; “Through me you have placed your lives in jeopardy. I’ll share the danger — we escape or perish together! Besides, an hour cannot make much difference. If you think it will, why not ride yourself and satisfy them?”

“If I consented to that, who is to guide you through the wood?” asked Robin; “You are quite a stranger, and Friar Tuck knows not the path.”

“I have it!” said the friar; “Let’s stop the fellow, and bid him call and say that we are on our road home.”

“Be it so,” said Allan, “if there is need to accost the horseman at all, which I confess I cannot see, and if you are certain, Robin, that he is unattended.”

“Of that I am satisfied,” returned Robin. “Sherwood has its name, and no horseman, if he had companions, would care to ride on singly. Besides, it is my conviction, that as we heard the tramp of the Baron and his men in the chapel, he could not be very long in discovering, even at the castle gates, that we had but a short time quitted. Therefore, if his fellows were at once sent in pursuit, they must be some distance before us, and indeed that expectation was my reason for avoiding the highway. If we had not, you may be assured, we should by this time have been safely domiciled in the depths of Nottingham Castle. My principal object, therefore, in accosting the coming horseman, and desiring you to ride with him, is that some little assistance may be afforded us, should we chance to alight upon our pursuers.”

“Your object is a good one, I confess,” said Allan, “but, by what you have communicated, you have only strengthened my determination to abide with you.”

“Hist!” said Robin, “There is the clatter of his horse’s feet, here he comes. Tuck, lend me thy staff,” and he snatched it from him, whispering to them to keep close. Ere they were aware of his intention, he sprung out into the highway to meet the comer.

As the rider approached, which he did at a rapid rate, Robin perceived that he was younger than himself, a circumstance he discovered with much pleasure. Advancing then to the middle of the road, he raised the staff, and helloed to him to stop — a challenge which the youth quite disregarded, for he galloped on as swiftly as before, and as Robin had placed himself resolutely in the way, there was every prospect of his being ridden over.

Allan and Tuck, perceiving, as Robin had done, the rider’s youth, disregarded the advice they had received of keeping close, also sprang into the road, and the youth instantly reined in his steed, not that he was cowed at the accession of strength, for he would have dashed through them at all hazards, and have let them caught him if they could, but he perceived the fulfillment of his errand in recognising the form and habit of Friar Tuck.

“Soho, Maude, woho! Friar Tuck, or my eyes are gooseberries,” cried he.

“The same,” replied the friar. “And who may you be?”

“Does your reverence so speedily forget Maude Lindsay’s foster brother, Hal, of the Keep? By the Baron’s beard, if my bonnie little Grace May had forty-thousand brothers, cousins, and relations, and had I once winked eyelid on them, I should know them again, day or night.”

“Ah, Master Hal, is it you, my bold youth? And what brings you and your gallant nag abroad i’ the woods at this hour?” demanded Friar Tuck.

“Nothing less than a missive and a message,” replied the boy. “I have a letter from the Lady Christabel to a cavalier, named Allan Clare.”

“And a message for me,” interrupted Robin, “for you have, I see, my bow and arrows.”

“Where is the missive?” cried Allan, impatiently.

“Ah,” said the boy, “I needn’t ask which is which now, you have settled that question by your questions. My sister Maude said I should know you by your good looks, you — Sir Robin, being the handsomest. I’ faith she

had given me, I thought, a hard task, being, you see, no judge of men's charms, though I confess to some slight skill in damsels'. You have, however, saved me the trouble of a scrutiny —here, Sir Robin, is the bow."

"The missive," again interrupted Allan, in an agony of impatience.

The boy looked at him, and then continued, unheeding him — "and here are the arrows."

"S'death, boy, give me the missive!" cried Allan, "or I'll tear it from thee."

"Give him the missive," said Robin; "My mes-sage will do afterwards."

"As you please," returned the youth.

"Nay, boy, I am hasty," said Allan, appeasingly, "but there is more depends on the billet than you imagine."

"Well," said Hal, "very like, for Maude seemed in a desperate taking about it," and he commenced searching for the note. It was with no little excitement and uneasiness that Allan watched him rummaging his pockets for the letter, but after turning them all out, he said, "Now a plague o' me, I've lost it, cavalier."

In his rage, Allan gave a bitter outcry, and sprang upon the lad, seized him by his neck, dragged him from his horse, and proceeded to shake him. At the same moment, the nag curled up her upper lip and run, open-mouthed, at Allan, but Robin caught the bridle just in time to prevent his inflicting a tremendous bite upon him.

The little fiery animal, however, reared up, threw out her fore paws, pranced, kicked, and nearly threw Robin to the ground. Tuck came to his assistance, and helped to hold her, while her master fought, kicked, and wrestled, somewhat in the same fashion, until Allan, being satisfied with the shaking he had given him, hurled him from him. The boy got up, and from the spirit of resistance he had displayed, Allan fully expected he would return to the attack, but, however, he did not — he turned to his mare, who was kicking up rare antics, wresting her head about in all directions, making tremendous efforts to shake off her captors, and throwing, every second, her heels high in the air. A word, however, from Hal, quieted her in an instant.

"Take your hands from her, good father, and you Sir Robin Hood, she will be quiet. What ho, my Maude! Soho! woho! steady! quiet!" And the animal stood like a statue; the lad then turned to Allan, and said –

"Look you, sir cavalier; I know myself in the wrong, or I'd have tried the strength of your ribs with this blade, for the shaking you have given me. I am sorry for the loss, but in the hurry it couldn't be helped."

“Have you searched your belt?” inquired Robin. A light broke over the boy’s counte-nance on hearing the question, and he rapidly replied —

“I remember me now — ‘twas there I placed it.” He searched, and there he found it. He gave it to Allan, and tossed his cap in the air, crying — “Hurrah for my bonnie Grace May!”

“Now, I'll trouble you for my message,” said Robin, “As it is by word of mouth, I’m not afraid of your having lost it.”

“No,” returned the boy, with a laugh, and delivered Maude’s words to him.

“And what said she for me?” asked Tuck.

“Nothing, good father.”

“Not a word?”

“Not one!”

“Humph!” grunted the friar, with something of a fierce look at Hal and Robin. The latter turned his head aside to conceal his smile, and said –

“My bonnie bow, once again thou’rt mine, and my good arrows too. Now, it must be something more than mortal which stays my path to my home.”

Allan had assayed but in vain to read his mistress’s billet by the moonlight. He communicated his dilemma to Robin, inquiring if he’d the means of lighting a torch. Hal of the Keep had, and he proffered them.

“First,” said Robin, “Let me know what intrusion we may have to fear, ere we make a light to guide our enemies to us. Did any of your people, Master Hal, quit the castle before you?”

“At what time?” demanded Hal.

“Since the moon rose!” returned Robin.

“I cannot say,” he replied “I stretched myself upon my pallet when the castle bell tolled six, and I was awakened from my sleep by Maude, to come here, therefore I cannot tell.”

“That’s unfortunate,” muttered Robin.

“I must have a light,” said Allan.

Taking a few dried leaves, Robin made a heap, and borrowing of Hal a knife — for every weapon had been taken from him at the castle — he cut a slip from a neighbouring pine. With the boy’s flint and steel he struck a

spark upon the leaves. They soon kindled into a blaze, the pine wood was lighted, and Allan read as follows —

Dearest Allan, when you persuaded me so earnestly, so eloquently, and so tenderly, to quit my father's roof for thine, I denied thee, for I truly and sincerely deemed my presence — being the only living creature who bore even a kindly feeling for him — was of some comfort to my father; I felt that I was his sole tie upon earth, and the belief that it was my duty to remain while I could be a solace to him, would have induced me to have sacrificed my dearest happiness, nay, my life. But, dear Allan, judge of my dismay and broken-heartedess, when he, a short time since — since your departure — informed me that he has determined upon my immediately wedding Sir Tristram of Goldsborough, whose hideous form and manners are more than hateful to me. Since my father has resolved to part with me, since he no longer cares to keep me with him — as this unhappy fact proves — I will with thee, dear Allan, with thee and Marian, if you will accept a hand and heart which were ever truly, solely thine. My father sends to the old knight tomorrow; save me, dear Allan, if you still love me save me, or my heart will break. Contrive some means to see Maude in the morning. She will communicate to thee how to act.

Thine in Life or death,

CHRISTABEL

— Oh Allan, this paper has had such a narrow escape of being perused by my father, but through the address of Maude it was saved. The bearer, a faithful youth, will tell thee how to contrive a meeting with Maude. Farewell, God bless and protect thee.

"And I will save thee or perish in the attempt," ejaculated Allan, fervently. "Robin, I must return to Nottingham; this letter tells me the Lady Christabel is to be sacrificed in marriage to an old villain — it must be prevented by carrying off the lady. You can assist me, perhaps know a staunch friend that will join thee. Wilt thou meet me at Nottingham tomorrow?"

"You had better return tonight to the cottage — your sister will be more satisfied at seeing you," returned Robin, "and in the morning, with a few friends, upon whom I or you can well rely, will back with you. Hark the tramp of horses! Away to your covert — 'tis the Baron's retainers. Hal of the Keep, now you can show thyself worthy of thy pretty sister Maude."

"You mean Grace May," said Hal.

“Well, pretty Grace May, and all the kisses she may bestow on thee, by showing a readiness of wit. Remember you have not seen us, and insinuate to the retainers that the Baron expects them back speedily. Do not make it a positive command, or you may get yourself and the Lady Christabel into trouble,”

“I understand,” replied the boy. “May the dear blue eye of sweet Grace never look kindly on me, but I’ll do thy wish neatly! So, Maude, lass,” and he leaped lightly in the saddle, galloping off in the contrary direction to the approaching horsemen. This was not exactly what Robin expected or wished, but it was too late to call — the approaching footsteps were too near. He therefore could only bid his friends lie down far in the thicket, while he threw himself beneath a short stunted hawthorn bush growing by the highway. He glanced in the direction which Hal of the Keep had taken, and could not but admire the speed of his nag.

He had already gained some distance, when Robin beheld him suddenly turn, and come back at a greatly slackened speed. In an instant he comprehended the manœuver, and inwardly applauded it. Almost immediately the clattering of hoofs sounding louder, told him that the expected horsemen were close at hand and looking round he beheld them turning the wind of the highway at a moderate speed, which, however, on their catching sight of Hal on his nag, was much accelerated. The boy also increased his speed, and the party met exactly opposite the spot upon which Robin was lying,

“Who goes there?” shouted the leader of a troop, whom Robin quickly recognised as belonging to Baron Fitz Alwine, from the fashion of their accoutrements.

“Hal of the Keep, of Nottingham Castle,” replied the lad.

“Aha! How came you here at this couch time?”

“And how came you here i’ this hour?” quickly returned Hal. “Do you know the lord Baron is sitting in his chamber expecting ye back an hour agone? By our Lady, I shouldn’t care to stand with you in his presence, when you get back.”

“Was he in a vile humour when you quitted?”

“Oh ho! The errand upon which he dispatched thee ought not to have detained you half as long as you have taken.”

“And we have been nearly to Mansfieldwoodhaus. We have almost had a bootless journey, too. Two of our prisoners have eluded us, but we have one safe,”

“Aye,” said Hal,” Who is that?”

“A youth called Robin Hood.”

Robin started on hearing this, and peered forward as much as he dared, to see whom they had gotten in his place; but the horsemen, of whom there were between twenty and thirty, made such a cluster, that he was prevented.

“Ha!” cried Hal, a little astonished, “I should like to see him; I know Robin Hood by sight, well.”

“Do you?” said the leader. “Bring the prisoner forward,” he continued to one of the men. The man obeyed. Robin looked eagerly, and saw, bound firmly to a horse, his hands pinioned behind him, a youth dressed like himself, but whom the bright moonlight, shining upon his face, discovered to be Will Scarlet!

“That’s not Robin Hood,” cried Hal, with a loud laugh.

“No!” cried the soldier; “Who then? — it is surely the youth who escaped from the castle tonight.”

“No,” returned Hal; “You’re out there, my bold heart, ‘tis not he.”

Will Scarlet muttered something inaudibly, and then said loudly to Hal – “How know you I am not Robin Hood? Your eyes play you false, youngster. I am Robin Hood.”

“There,” said the soldier, a trifle perplexed, “You hear that, Hal, he says he is Robin Hood. Now, none of your tricks, Hal, for the Baron has set his mind on this youth’s recapture, and unless you wish to be woefully punished, you will not mislead us on this point.”

“If he be Robin Hood, then there is two of the same name,” returned the youth. “Where did you find him?”

“Returning from a cottage on the borders of the forest.”

“Who was with him?”

“He was alone.”

“But there ought to have been two others with him,” urged Hal, “and besides, if he was returning from the cottage, how could he be the Robin Hood who escaped from the castle but a short time before you left it? He was not mounted, and you were. Therefore, if he used his best speed in walking, he couldn’t have been much further than this in the time.”

The soldier was certainly perplexed. There, appeared much reason in Hal’s argument.

“Humph!” muttered he. “Pray how knew you there were three quitted the castle? When did your acquaintance with this same Robin Hood commence? And what brings you here at this hour of the night?”

Hal for a moment felt as if he had committed himself and so, just to look about him and recover breath, he met these questions by a question –

“Why, Lambie, when did you borrow the confessor’s gown and office? Three questions in a breath, by the Mass! Lambie, an’ I were a damsel thou should’st not shrive me. Methinks thou would be more playful than pious.”

“Answer my questions,” returned Lambie, with a frown. “I’m not i’ the mood for jesting.”

“Well, good Lambie, I’ve heard my foster father say, short words make the best bargains, and so in a breath, I’ll answer thee all thou askest. You require to know how I learned that three persons had escaped, when my acquaintance commenced with Robin Hood, and why I am here at this hour. Listen to my replies: Firstly, the warder, Secondly, today and Thirdly, a commission for the Lady Christabel. Are you satisfied?”

“What is thy mission?”

“Ho! ho! ho!” laughed Hal, with an affectation of surprise. “As if I should tell thee. Beshrew me, Master Lambie, thou hast indeed borrowed the confessor’s office, if thou expectest that I shall tell thee that. Take care I don’t acquaint my lady what you have dared to ask, and if I do, and she inform my lord the Baron, he will recount it to you in a manner that will render it to you an unpleasant case of telling.”

“Be satisfied, Lambie, with your present mistake, don’t seek to get yourself further in the mire — you have not got Robin Hood, and probably won’t get him tonight. Of course my lord will storm to no small extent, when he learns that you return empty-handed, but I’ll speak a good word for you. Perhaps then you will be saved from becoming crows’ meat — at least for a short time.”

“You? Pish!” said Lambie, with an indignant laugh. “All I know is, I have been sent after Robin Hood and another, whom I cannot discover, this lad says he is Robin Hood, and one of the men with me identifies him. I shall, therefore, take him back with me and as to the other, I must do the best I can to unkennel him.”

“Hurrah for Nottingham!” cried Will Scarlet.

The word was given by the leader to advance, and they proceeded to put his order into execution, when Robin, laying his hand upon the arm of Allan, with a sudden grasp, said, in a low voice —

“As you value your life, and the love of Lady Christabel, lie close,” and ere Allan could make a guess at his intention, he sprung out into the road, and cried to the departing troop to halt. The unexpected summons, as well as his sudden appearance, had the desired effect — the men instantly stopped, returned, and surrounded him.

“What, Robin!” cried Will, recognising him at once, and thrown off his guard by his unlooked-for appearance.

“Ha!” exclaimed the leader of the troop, pouncing on him. “Now, youngster, are you Robin Hood? Say, Hal, is this Robin Hood?” he cried, addressing Hal of the Keep, but the boy was shrewd enough to guess from what had transpired, that there was a desire on the part of both the Lady Christabel, and his foster sister, Maude, this youth should not be retaken, and at the same time, he did not like to say that he was not, in case of its being ultimately discovered, he might have some disagreeable questions put to him which might compromise his promise of secrecy, and the safety of the two ladies. He, therefore, affected jocularity, and replied – “Why, Lambie, how long is’t since you gave me credit for sagacity? Do you take me for a hound that can distinguish by scent, or for a deer, who can tell kine from a hind by a glance. You are not wont to say, ‘Hal, who is this? Hal, who is that?’ ”

“Cease your foolery, boy,” roared Lambie; “You say you know Robin Hood by sight. If you do not tell me at once whether this be he, I’ll beat thee to a jelly.”

“You must first catch me, Lambie. I’m on *Flying Maude*’s back, remember, and your heavy-heeled brute might as well chase a fleet buck as expect to catch Maude? Try it!”

“Speak!” cried Lambie, foaming, “or it shall be worse for thee, Maude or no Maude.”

“What if I say no?”

“Tell me!” shouted Lambie.

“Let him answer for himself,” replied Hal.

“I am Robin Hood,” said our hero, “and this youth,” pointing to Will, “is nought but a friend, whose kindness, in the hope to screen me, led him to declare himself to be me.”

“Yes,” cried one of the retainers, the one who had identified Will as Robin; “That is he — I know his voice now, but the similarity of dress and height, age, and look, made me mistake one for the other. But I know the voice, it is him!”

“I should like to be sure,” muttered Lambie.

“Did you not hear me addressed as Robin by him you have bound for me?”

“So I did,” exclaimed the leader, a new light breaking in upon him. “Then you must be he. Unbind that fool,” he cried to one of the men, “who had such a desire for a stretched windpipe, and put this one in his place.”

Will was soon unbound. Robin sprung to his side and whispered something in his ear, to which Will replied, “Rely on me, back and edge, Robin,” and darted into the covert which concealed Allan and Tuck. Two or three of the men prepared to dismount to follow him, but Lambie prevented them. Will Scarlet not being one whom they had any orders to take, there was no earthly reason why they should not let him go.

This little movement enabled Robin to place his bow and arrows in the hands of Hal, requesting him to preserve them for him, which Hal promised to do. Robin was now bound and placed upon the horse which had as yet borne Will Gamwell, who, in returning with Little John from Gilbert’s cottage after the old man had been restored to animation, had expressed his determination of following the route to Nottingham, with the hopes of meeting Robin Hood. The duty of Little John taking him to another part of the forest, and Will persisting in his determination, pursued his walk alone.

Hearing the trampling of horses’ feet after he had advanced some distance, and the winding of the roadway hiding the coming party from his sight, he immediately imagined it to be Robin Hood returning with his two friends to Mansfieldwoodhaus. He, therefore, at the top of his voice, chaunted Robin’s song. He had barely reached the line

‘*Yet leave them for me, my own dear Robin Hood*’

when he encountered the troop. He was at once surrounded, bound, and mounted, ere he had time to tell who or what he was, the retainer already spoken of declaring that he was the youth who had that evening escaped from the castle. Lambie, feeling satisfied that he had got one of the prisoners safe, then proceeded to the cottage, which a party searched, without discovering the object of whom they were in quest, and they then returned towards Nottingham, until stayed by the occurrences already related.

When the operation of binding Robin was completed, Lambie turned to Hal, and said — “Now, I’ll trouble you for that bow and those arrows.”

“No trouble, I assure you,” returned Hal, with a laugh, “for I don’t mean to give them up. They are placed in my keeping, and keep them I will, until I restore them to the owner.”

“And if aught of evil haps to him, keep them for yourself,” cried Robin.

“Many thanks,” said Hal. “Now I shall consider I have a double right to keep them.”

“You’ll give them to me now, nevertheless,” said Lambie, rather gruffly.

“Oh, no!” said Hal, with a quiet laugh. “But I’ll give you a chance. If you can catch me, you shall have them, and cudgel me into the bargain. So-ho, Maude, now, lass, to your mettle. Good bye, Lambie. So ho!”

Before Lambie was aware of his intention, he gave the nag a sharp switch, and galloped off at a flying speed for Nottingham.

“The fiend, seize him!” roared Lambie, “The dog, I’ll break every bone in his skin for this. Away after him.” Digging his spurs into his steed with such vigour that the poor brute reared with agony, he dashed off, followed by his men, in the same direction.

They were scarce out of sight when the round head of Will bobbed out from beneath the hawthorn bush under which he had concealed himself. He looked carefully and cautiously round, and seeing the coast was clear, he stole from his hiding place, followed by Allan and Tuck.

“Tell me exactly what he said,” exclaimed Allan.

“Why he said these words,” returned Will—

‘*There are two friends in the covert beneath the elm tree to my left. Get to them, keep them there, or they’ll spoil all, but tell them to meet me in Robin’s dell by sunrise, and be thou there with friends to help in case of need, for there will be a gentle one to succour.*’

— And I said I would, and so I will, with our Holy Mother’s assistance. You had better, therefore, come on to Gamwell with me, and I will rouse some of my brothers, with Little John, to assist us. Hurrah! for a tussle.”

“No,” remarked Allan, “I must first on to Hood’s cottage, to set my sister Marian’s mind at ease respecting my safety.”

“Is the lady named Marian, who was staying at Hood’s, your sister?” inquired Will, eagerly.

“Yes,” replied Allan.

“Oh, then, you may spare yourself the trouble of returning to Gilbert Hood, for she is at our house.”

“Your house!” exclaimed Allan in surprise. “How? Impossible!”

“Oh, yes she is,” returned Will; “Come along, as we walk I’ll tell you how she is there. Come along, father.”

“Did Robin say one or two gentle ones to succour?” demanded Tuck, somewhat abstractedly.

“One,” answered Will, “at least he said a gentle one, therefore he could hardly mean a gentle two — ha! ha!” and he laughed heartily at what he believed to be a witty remark. It met with no encouragement, however, for nobody laughed but himself. They proceeded on their way, the friar muttering —

“There was no message for me, there was for him — there was a kiss for him, and none for me. Is this her love? Pish! I’ll be in the dell in the morning. If her lady comes, there is little doubt that she will be there, and then I’ll tell her that I think her, a false, faithless flirt — a – a woman!”

Chapter 12

She hurried at his words, beset with fears,
For there were sleeping dragons all around,
At glorious watch perhaps with ready spears —
Down the wide stairs a darkening way they found;
In all the house was heard no human sound.
A chain-drooped lamp was flickering by each door,
The arras rich with horseman, hawk, and hound,
Fluttered in the besieging wind's uproar;
And the long carpets rose along the dusty floor.
They glide like phantoms into the wide hall;
Like phantoms to the iron porch they glide;
And they are gone.

----- John Keats

Rapidly and silently did the troop pursue their path, bearing Robin in the midst of them. They urged their steeds, jaded by their recent exertions, to the best speed they could make, but they did not catch during their journey one glimpse of Hal. And when they reached the castle keep, the first question demanded by Lambie of the Warder was "Has Hal of the Keep returned?"

"I didn't know he was out," replied the man.

"Didn't know he was out!" pettishly echoed Lambie. "Why, man, I tell you I saw him two hours agone a fair ten miles from this."

"Ah!" said the man, "Then he is not returned, for I have been on guard nigh unto an hour, having relieved Herbert Lindsay, and during my guard I have seen none enter or depart. But ere I relieved Lindsay, a guard arrived, bearing some important message to my lord the Baron, upon which he is at this moment engaged."

"Well," said Lambie, "When Hal returns, detain him till you see me again."

"The boy's as slippery as an eel when his inclination runs contrar' to one's wishes," replied the man.

"Ay, but he's on his nag," rejoined Lambie; "Seize the mare, and you seize him. He'd as soon trust himself in a halter when flung from the ramparts, as trust his nag in anyone's care but his own."

"You say right, good Lambie," cried a voice from an open window above the spot on which the conversation was being carried. "I always tend Maude myself. Aha! I got here an hour before you did, Lambie. I say,

Lambie, you have not the bow nor I the beating, eh? Now, Lambie, take a friend's advice. When you go to the Baron — and he's waiting for you in such a humour! — keep out of arm's way and you'll keep out of harm's way — ha! ha! ha! Good night". and Hal — for it was him — slammed the window as he retired.

Muttering an oath, Lambie ordered his men to dismount. Robin was lifted from his saddle, his legs terribly stiff from having been lashed to the horse's side. He was placed between two men, and marched, attended by Lambie, to the private apartment of the Baron.

On entering, they perceived him busily engaged listening to his confessor, who was reading from some documents which lay before him. Immediately he perceived them, he waved his hand to the friar to be silent, and advanced towards Lambie, with a look terribly portentous of evil – his lips worked as if he were about to utter a passionate denunciation, but he remained silent. Lambie, who judged from the moving lips that his lord was about to give utterance to something, made an effort at good manners and held his tongue. This, although polite, was not politic, as the Baron, being in a monstrous bad temper, was by no means prepared to stand like a fool, without giving or hearing a word. He waited a short time – a very short time – for something from the lips of Lambie.

Nothing came, and then there ran through his mind a rapid succession of associations, connecting Lambie with asses, fools, idiots, and so forth – still nothing came. A worm will turn when trod upon, a gunpowder magazine will explode with a spark; the spark was communicated to the Baron, and, raising his fist, with a full swing, he dashed it into Lambie's face, striking him violently on the bridge of the nose, from which it drew no blood.

It did not, however, fail to produce plenty of water from the eyes, and a gasping for breath. Marry, it is a hard thing to curb one's ire when it is suddenly and viciously aroused, yet Lambie, who, in hastiness of temper was a type of his lordly master, restrained the passion which rushed into his brain and knuckles, and tried to cool himself down by grinding his teeth with such vigour that whatever might have been between them would inevitably have been reduced to powder.

"So please you," at length exclaimed the Baron, in a tone of unpleasant irony, "I am waxing somewhat weary of waiting until it suits you to inform me of the success of your errand. Trust me, gentle sir, I have somewhat of an account of your transactions at other hands, but would rather, if not too great a call on your good nature, hear from your own lips the detail of what has transpired."

"I waited" began Lambia.

“So did I,” interrupted the Baron; “To your story,”

“Has Hal –”

“Has me no has-es,” cried the Baron. “Proceed at once with what you have to say. Idiot, you have wasted time enough, without breaking into more – go on.”

Lambie then related the circumstances already detailed, the Baron heard him to the end in silence, and then said –

“You have omitted one pleasant little matter, which is suffering the rogue I principally wished to take, to escape.”

“Who? I, my lord?”

“Yes, you, my lord! Did you not capture one first, who declared himself Robin Hood? And then did not a second come forth and declare himself to be Robin Hood also?”

“Yes, my-my lord,” stammered Lambie, in confusion, for he had omitted that part of the story.

“Well, most wise and sagacious trooper, your wondrous wit informed you that both of them could not be the one of whom you were in search – it did help thee to that conclusion, but it could not suggest to thee that though both could not be Robin Hood, yet that together they might be the two whom I sent you to capture, thou king of dolts! Thou immeasureable blockhead! And therefore you quietly let him slip through thy fingers, thou ass of long standing! Are thine eyes so sightless, thou beetle! Thou bat! as not to remember the form of him thou hadst in thy custody this day?”

“My lord, I had him not in my custody at all,” said Lambie, rather gloomily. “I had the western wing to guard this afternoon, and was scarce relieved when I attended to your lordship’s summons to the dungeon, from which the prisoner escaped. I did not see either of the prisoners, but I have one of them, and I know this was one that was here today.”

“Indeed,” sneered the Baron, “Bring him forward – let me look upon him.” Robin was thrust rudely forward, and confronted with the noble, who gave a grim smile as his eye lighted upon his youthful prisoner.

“Ay, Ay! This is the young cur that barked so lustily today. This is the foul-mouthed imp of a base-born churl who wagged his filthy tongue in such rude insolence at me erewhile. Now, boy, I have a few questions to put to thee, which I am assured thou canst answer – answer them well and truly, and thou shalt have no need to complain of my clemency. Refuse to answer, or lie in answering them – and - and - and – no matter, but tremble, do you hear?”

“Commence your questions,” returned Robin, coolly.

“How did you escape?”

“By getting out of the dungeon.”

“I could have guessed that, and not have been much puzzled either. By whose connivance, contrivance, and assistance?”

“By my own.”

“Who else?”

“No one.”

“A base lie – I know better. The door must have been unlocked, you could not have squeezed through the keyhole.”

“No, but I did through the bars, passed through an open doorway, down stairs, through sundry chambers, and so got out.”

“Humph! and your companion in flight, how did he escape?”

“I cannot tell.”

“It’s false; you can and shall.”

“I do not know, and therefore cannot tell. We met after I had escaped, and passed from the castle to gether.”

“Indeed! where did you meet?”

“I know scarce anything of this castle, therefore cannot answer the question.”

“Where was the fellow when you were taken?”

“I cannot say; we were not together.”

“Was it he who was mistaken for you?”

“No, most certainly not.”

“What has become of him? Where is he?”

“Who?”

“Who, fool? Who should I mean but Allan Clare?”

“I do not know.”

“Thou’rt yet a greater liar than idiot. I suppose you can guess where he is?”

“I do not indulge myself in guessing. It is not a pastime of mine.”

“But I’ll make it a matter of moment to you,” shouted the Baron, losing, by rapid degrees, his assumed calmness. Every question he demanded meeting with a quiet repulse, he came to the determination that Robin’s powers of fabrication exceeded by far all that he had ever encountered – surpassing, as well as he recollected, his own juvenile capacity in that art.

There was something passionately gnawing and aggravating to him in the position in which Robin stood with regard to himself. He had done nothing which could justify his death. He was but little more than a boy, too, although his manners, language, and actions bore strongly the impress of youthful manhood upon them, and therefore all his harsh conduct seemed like breaking a butterfly on the wheel. He was not a man accustomed to consider this, but in the present instance he did so, and when he had exhausted every question that bore upon the subject, he dismissed the men and consigned the custody of Robin to Lambie, with the strictest injunction to guard him closely and watchfully, observing that if he escaped a second time, nothing could or should save him from a violent death.

“If he escapes from me,” said Lambie, hazarding – a little fearfully — a slight laugh, “I will cheerfully abide by the conditions.”

“Most assuredly you shall,” said the Baron, “Whether you do it cheerfully or not. And now, be gone.”

Lambie obeyed, taking Robin with him.

Accompanied by two retainers, one bearing a torch, they perambulated for some time the intricacies of the castle, gradually descending flight by flight, until at length the cold air which pervaded the places they were passing through told that they had reached a considerable depth. They stopped before a door situated in a gloomy passage. Unlocking it, with a grim smile, Lambie took a torch from him who bore it, and ushered Robin into a wretched cell.

A bundle of straw was thrown into one corner, and Lambie held up the torch to enable Robin the better to survey its wretchedness. The water trickled down the walls, from the excessive dampness of the place. The very torch burnt pale and sickly in the humid air, and Robin shivered as his frame encountered the chill atmosphere of the dungeon.

It was very small, comparatively a box, and as he cast his eyes round he felt a perfect conviction that escape without assistance was utterly hopeless. But he had a strong presumption that there were those who could and would render him aid in his need, and drew fresh hope from suddenly observing the face of Hal of the Keep peeping in the doorway, and, as immediately after giving him a friendly nod, vanish.

“There,” ejaculated Lambie, “There, you may be very comfortable there, if you can make yourself so, and it’s no use giving way to despair. Keep up your spirits, boy, we must die someday you know, and why not tomorrow as well as next week? And dying, after all, is but dying, and so what signifies in what manner you die? You may as well be hung as shot, or die in your bed — it’s all the same in the long run.”

“Very true, sir gaoler,” returned Robin, with a slight sneer, “But there’s a taste i’ these matters. I confess that it would be the same to you to die a dog’s death now as a better at any future time, but I would rather defer mine until I am rather better prepared to meet it. Besides, I should prefer choosing the manner of my departure, if I could — if not, come when and how it may, I shall try to meet it as becomes a man and a Christian.”

Lambie laughed. “As to a Christian,” said he, “that may be all very well, but as to meeting it just now as a man, why that’s another matter. I’ faith, boy, when thy chin has strength enough to bear a beard, then speak of thy manhood.”

“If I had you in the green wood, with nothing but a quarter staff and fair play,” cried Robin, a little angrily, “I would make your thick skull acknowledge my manhood.”

“Pish, boy” returned Lambie, somewhat fiercely. “When I come to thee i' the morning with thy pap, thou wilt cry for thy mammy.”

“She’ll come when I do,” returned Robin, with a proud toss of the head. “But good *Master-manliness-out-manned*, boy as I am, you fear me, or you would not lock me in a dungeon deep i’ the earth, with my arms bound, as if you expected I should run off with the castle and all it contains.”

The taunt had the desired effect. Lambie removed the cords with a savage laugh: “I think of you but as a bird in a cage,” cried he; “You can’t get out unless the door is left open, and I’ll take care that is not done.”

The instant be felt his arms free, Robin gave a rapid glance round at his chance for a sudden escape — there were only three men to prevent him. He had noted every place through which he had passed. Acting upon the impulse of the moment, he darted like an arrow upon the man who held possession of the torch. Like lightning he snatched it from his hand, and dashed it in the face of Lambie, who had sprung after him the moment he observed his movement.

Uttering a cry of agony as the blazing torch came burning and flashing in his eyes, the wretched man put both his hands to his face. At the same moment Robin thrust the torch against the ground and extinguished it. In an instant all was utter darkness. Robin felt that now was his time to

make the effort; accordingly he darted along in the darkness to the end of the passage, pursued by the two men, while Lambie followed, roaring with rage and pain, uttering the fiercest imprecations upon Robin, groping along, his eyes smarting and pouring with water.

When our hero reached the end of the passage, he mounted the stairs which were at the end, flew up them, dashed down the passage at full speed, trusting to outstretched arms to preserve him in case of anything which might be in his way. He heard the voices of the fellows behind him, and he bounded along. He came to another flight of steps; he recollected the locality and expected them. He raced up them, pursued the passage to which they led. Along he ran at his smartest pace. He remembered a turning to the left, another flight of steps, and a long passage; he found the turning — was up the steps and along the passage in an incredible short space of time.

The voices of his pursuers broke now very faintly upon his ears, and cheeringly told him that he had distanced them. He still, however, kept on his speed, hoping to come to some chamber which might have light enough to guide him in his future movements. Suddenly his hands encountered the back of a human being. It was too late, and he at too great a speed to stop. His arms gave a sudden impetus to the person before him, but his speed being greater than that he communicated to the person before him, or the resistance being greater than the impelling power — we will not stop to enquire which — he ran over the impediment, and they both rolled to the ground together.

“Hollo! Who’s that, in the Holy Virgin’s name?” cried the voice of the impediment.

“Ha!” cried the impelling power, rising up quickly, “Is that Hal of the Keep?”

“Yes,” returned the voice.

“And I am Robin Hood. I have just broken from Lambie and the two soldiers — they are in hot pursuit after me.”

“Ho! ho!” chuckled Hal, rising. “Lambie done again! Give me your hand, Robin. Now, I’ll wager they don’t catch you again. Come along — don't speak till I tell you, and don’t be afraid to run along swiftly. I’ll take care that you don’t run against anything. I know my way as well as if it was daylight. Aha! here come the fellows — not a word for your life, and don’t fear to use your legs.”

Firmly grasping Robin’s hand, Hal darted off at full speed, Robin offering no drawback to him.

It is no joke to run at full speed, in utter darkness, along a place with whose locality you are utterly unacquainted, but Robin had essayed it with some success alone, and it was not likely that he would flinch now, when he had the assurance of being conveyed along without the least danger of encountering anything hurtful.

On the pair went running, the silence only broken by the light sound of their feet — and to do them credit, they made very little noise that way — occasionally a word from Hal — '*up*,' '*down*,' '*turn*,' and so forth — conveying the necessary directions without stopping. The voices of the pursuers, which had, after the interruption, gained considerably, had again grown fainter and fainter, until at length they ceased altogether; Still Hal kept on. At last, for all things have an end, he stopped and tapped at a door. It remained a little while unanswered, then a soft low voice enquired who tapped.

"Brother Hal," was the whispered reply.

"Ha!" said the inmate of this room, and drew back a bolt which fastened the door; "What news have you, dear Hal? What have you brought us?"

"Something better than news, Maude, look here!"

A lamp was elevated, and Robin and Maude gazed on each other. The lady nearly screamed, and exclaiming with a voice teeming with emotion — "What! Robin Hood! have you escaped then? Thank heaven!" flung herself on his neck, and burst into tears. Robin felt surprised and pained at this burst of feeling. He had shrewdness enough to detect what it disclosed, and he felt a pang as the thought crossed him, that there was disappointment in store for her. He raised her head from his shoulder and tried to say something, but, in spite of all his endeavours, he could think of nothing. Hal spared him the necessity.

"Why, what a strange girl you are, Maude," he observed. "I thought you would have been so delighted at his escape, and now you are crying, how foolish of you! Hang it, Maude, I don't like to see you cry. Come, look up."

"Aye, Maude," said Robin, finding his tongue, "Look up, smile, and look as you did when I saw you i' the afternoon."

"I shall never look so again," she said mournfully, shaking her head.

"Nay," said Robin, trying to console her, and imprinting a kiss on her forehead, whose coldness almost startled him. He looked more earnestly at her, and found her eyes were swollen, as if from severe weeping. "Come, come, this is unlike you, Maude. What has caused this sudden change in you?" he asked kindly.

“Nothing! Do not ask. I will tell you some other time, not now. I shall be better presently,” she replied, rapidly and evasively. “The Lady Christabel wishes to see you. We had resolved to liberate you, whatever the cost, but you have saved us the trouble. Hal has told us that Allan Clare received my lady’s missive. Is he near? Or what is his message?”

“He gave no message,” returned Robin, “for he was not aware of my intention of returning, until unable to send one. But I can make a shrewd guess that the contents of that letter was a consent of the Lady Christabel’s to join her fortune with that of Allan Clare, for I accidentally overheard a conversation in the chapel touching that circumstance, and likewise Allan Clare, immediately on perusing the missive, stated that he proposed an immediate return to Nottingham. I therefore at once concluded that some fresh ill-usage on the part of her father had induced the lady to alter her previous determination of remaining with him.”

“You are right, so far,” said Maude.

“The unexpected appearance of a friend, who had been seized, bound, and mistaken for me, led to the sudden thought that if I declared myself, and was brought here, I might be enabled, by your assistance, to escape from the castle, and lead the Lady Christabel to Allan. I know every foot of the forest between this and my home, and I warrant to convoy the lady safely.”

“I will to her at once, and communicate all you have said,” exclaimed Maude.“Remain here, quietly, no one will think of looking here for you, and I will soon return. Hal, come with me, I want you yet — you can still serve me.”

“Whatever it may be, Maude, I’ll do’t heart and soul,” said Hal, earnestly.

Maude smiled, and patted his cheek affectionately. She turned to Robin, and saying, “I shall soon be back,” quitted the apartment with her foster brother.

Robin sat him down to speculate.

We have said, that although he was a youth of sixteen, yet he was so much in advance of his age in thoughts, perceptions, and feelings, that he acted and felt as one ten years his superior.

One important reason for this had been the system of education Gilbert Hood had employed in bringing him up. By education, we mean not book learning, but action. He had, from a child, been taught to think and act for himself, and this self-reliance shone out in all his words and deeds. Thus, therefore, his acts, his language, or imaginings, must not be measured by the present youths of sixteen – (save the mark!)

As we have said, Robin sat him down to speculate, and it was upon Maude's conduct. He felt morally sure that she loved him. He drew not this conclusion from the kisses and flirtations which during the day passed between them, but from her act of kissing his hand with such fervour as he quitted the castle gates, and from her recent burst of tears on ascertaining his second escape. His speculations led him to think he had, by his attention to her, induced this feeling to arise, and he much questioned, now it had arisen, whether he was not in duty bound, having been the cause, to return it to the best of his ability.

But there was Marian! 'Twas true he had seen but little of her, but then he had seen no one like her — ah! Not even the Lady Christabel, beautiful as she was. Such an eye, such a smile, and such a musical voice! But, alas! Her station was above his; her brother was mating with a Baron's daughter, and according to Allan's confession, though he and his sister were reduced in circumstances, they came from a noble family.

And what was he, the foster son of a humble forest keeper, of unknown parents, perhaps base born. And the hot blood seemed to scorch his brow and chest as he thought this. Could he aspire to the hand of Marian? The services he might render her brother in saving his life, or helping him to the possession of the Lady Christabel, he proudly resolved should be no stepping stone to her hand, and without an equivalent of that nature, he felt the distance immeasurable. Besides, he had yet to discover that Marian had, or was likely to have caught more than a kindly feeling towards him for favours received. She had looked on him, it was true, with something more than mere friendli-ness as they parted that morning, and the look dwelt in memory, and the slight pressure of the hand seemed still to dwell there as strongly as when given, but his wishes might have exaggerated these trifles.

And most probably nothing more was meant than the sweetness of conduct she exhibited to all. And then Maude, poor Maude! Her weeping face rushed full upon his memory. Ah! Pity is akin to love — but it is not love. Yet for the moment he felt as if he could have clasped her in his embrace, that her head might rest on his bosom, and he soothe and console her.

She was very pretty, a light-hearted, mirthful, joyous piece of nature, a kind-hearted, free-spirited thing, who seemed to light up places by her presence, as the sun does when bursting from gloomy clouds in dull weather. She was in a station equal to his own, there was no disparity in years, for she was but sixteen, although she seemed nearer twenty.

And she loved him

Why, therefore, should he not return it? Why should he not accept the homage of a heart that he knew would cling to him, ‘stead of waiting for one who only might? Yet there was a strange feeling which seemed to measure his affection for Maude into a simple return of kindness, while to Marian it appeared as though he must mingle adoration with the love he bore her, and, unlike his feeling towards Maude, it depended on no return. Kindness begets kindness — such feeling did Maude’s conduct give birth to in his heart, but with Marian he felt to love her ere she had shown even a disposition of kindliness towards him — this was a powerful consideration.

“I would love Maude and wed her, and be to her all she could wish or desire; but — but I cannot — I cannot!” he burst forth. “I cannot govern my inclination.”

He paused, for his quick ear caught the sound of approaching footsteps, by far too heavy to be those either of Maude or Hal. They drew nearer. A small lighted taper had been left with him. He immediately, from a prudential motive, blew it out. He quickly found it was a caution he did right in adopting, for the footsteps stayed at the door.

Presently there was a tapping. Robin did not see the necessity of answering, therefore he remained silent. The knocking again ensued, still no answer was returned to it and again it was resumed, with the addition of being louder and more impatient. Robin remained silent as death. “Maude told me to remain quiet,” thought he, “and quiet I will remain. If I am discovered it shall not be for the noise I make.”

The knocking having been persisted in for some little time longer, at length gave place to the opening of the door. Robin, in blowing out the light had neglected the precaution of fastening the door, and the figure of a man intruded itself into the room. For a moment it remained stationary, then a low voice uttered –“Maude! hist, Maude. S’death! I’ll swear I saw the glimmering of a light through the crevices of the door! Maude, I say, why do you not answer? I know you are here.” and the person immediately commenced groping about the room.

It was a small room, and there were various pieces of furniture decorating it. Robin, consequently, felt rather awkwardly situated, for if he attempted to avoid the stranger, the chances were that he would stumble over something, and his efforts to elude might lead to his discovery. He was seated on a sort of form — a very small edition of those in which school rooms delight — it was just large enough for two. Behind him was a corner of the room, and that completed his knowledge of the locality.

Scarcely knowing how to act, he noiselessly raised himself from his stool, stepped over it, and then lifting it up, backed himself quietly in the corner. The room was too dark to distinguish an object, but he could tell

by the sound of the footsteps, and the heavy breathing of the stranger, at what part of the room he was. Presently he made for the corner which held Robin. Immediately he heard him approach, he raised the form and held it out horizontally.

The stranger's arm just cleared it reaching over it, and our hero, giving it a sharp lunge, it caught the stranger in the chest, and tumbled him flat backwards. He fell heavily, but raised himself so as to sit upright upon the floor, and muttered some smart oaths respecting furniture being stuck carelessly out for honest men to break their necks over.

"Where can Maude be?" he continued, "She ought to be snug in bed. I have felt all over and she is not there. By my halidame! I shall begin to think that Caspar Steinkopf told me somewhat of the truth, although I did dash my fist in his mazzard, for saying my daughter kissed prisoners as freely as her tongue wagged saucy words. The varlet! to dare to speak thus of child of mine. Um! but it's very odd she is'nt here. She cant be waiting on the Lady Christabel at this hour, and if she is'nt, where can she be? Phew! I feel in an infernal heat."

"The girl's a thought too lively, with scarce any but rough boys and ruder men to companion with. By the Holy Mother, if she should have been led astray. Phew! I should be a miserable old villain if I thought so. Ah! by the Mass!"

"I remember Hal told me that the Lady Christabel was ill, and that he was gone for a leech. Ha! ha! I'm glad I thought of that. I will not be ready to think ill of her, even though Caspar Steinkopf should speak slightingly of her. A curse upon him! If I hear him repeat that again, I'll knock every tooth in his head down his throat, and that will be a meal he will not relish."

"If the poor child should have suffered her affection to get the better of her prudence, why the blame is not all hers. She has had no mother to guide her, and I have never supplied the place, therefore, why should I curse her — and in my anger I thought of such a thing — for that which has been produced by my own negligence? No, no! Besides, I remember her mother, a young, fond, foolish, and fond-hearted thing, was, when young, more kind than wise, and perhaps it runs in the family."

He ceased, and sunk into a reverie. A dead silence ensued, which was broken by the light footsteps of Maude swiftly approaching. Her father (for the intruder was Herbert Lindsay) heard her, and raised himself to his feet; he groped for the door, and having found it, walked out, and met his daughter just at the threshold.

"Maude!" he cried, rather loudly and sternly.

“Good heavens!” cried Maude, startled. “Father! Why, in the name of mercy! What brought you here?”

“I have something particular to say to you, girl.”

“Not now, father, in the morning. It is late I am tired and I want to go to bed.”

“But I shall say what I have to say now.”

“You have been drinking, father, tell me in the morning. Good night.”

“No, no, not good night yet — I am not gone, nor am I so easily got rid of. Tell me where have you been at this hour? And why you are not in bed?”

“I have been waiting on the Lady Christabel, who is ill.”

“So Hal told me, or I should not have believed it. But, pray how comes it that you are so free of your kisses to prisoners? Are you not a shameless hussy to kiss strange men as freely as if they were sisters?”

“Kiss strange men, father!” echoed Maude, in surprise; “Who told you such a thing?”

“Who should tell me so but he who saw you!”

“Indeed! and who was that?”

“Why, Caspar Steinkopf !”

“Caspar Steinkopf told you that, did he? Then he tells a gross, wicked falsehood. Confront me with him and tell him also, father, that the next time he endeavours to entice me into wickedness, to basely deceive me and wrong you, not to give utterance to such unmanly lies, if he should meet with a second indignant repulse.”

“Did he do this, did he?” almost roared Herbert Lindsay.

“He did — he did! and threatened me if I scorned him,” cried Maude, bursting into a passionate agony of tears.

“Then the Holy Mother of God have mercy on him hereafter, for none will I have here!” said Herbert, through his clenched teeth. “If I don't measure his hauberk with an ell of stout steel, I am neither father nor man. Good night, Maude! To thy rest, my child. Never heed him. I believe him not, and will trounce him well for his villainy. Good night. Come, dry thy tears —kiss me, girl. God bless thee, and the Holy Virgin keep thee!”

With this benison upon his lips, he staggered away. The noise of his retreating footsteps having ceased, Maude called lightly to Robin, who answered her. She struck a light, and relighted the taper. She turned to him with a sad smile, and said: “My father did not discover you, did he?”

“No,” answered he. “Who is that Caspar Steinkopf — have I seen him?”

“Oh, never think of him! The lady –”

“But, dear Maude, I must. Have I ever seen him, tell me?”

“Yes, he had the charge of you in the cell on the eastern wing of the ramparts.”

“And interrupted us,” said Robin, “when we were — um — talking?”

“Yes,” said she, blushing.

“I know him now, and shall not forget him, nor shall he me, if he remembers aught after our meeting –”

“Do not waste a thought on him, dear Robin. He is unworthy of it. The Lady Christabel waits to see you and ere you go, I wish to — I wish to say a few words to you. I am — very unhappy –” A burst of tears interrupted her.

“What is it, dear Maude? speak!” said Robin kindly. “If there is any way — if there is aught that I can do to serve thee, name it, and see how readily, how cheerfully I will make any effort to accomplish thy wish. We have known each other, Maude, but a few short hours, and yet it seems as if our acquaintance had been one of years. Say how can I serve thee? Think of me as a loving brother. Thou’rt unhappy; what is the cause?”

“My situation in this horrid place. My mother died when I was very young, my father never married again, and are scarce any females in the castle, and none out of it that we know. My mother attended the Lady Christabel’s mother, whose death preceded that of my parent but a month. The Lady Christabel and I were children together, brought up together, and I do believe, notwithstanding the distance of our station, loved each other as sisters. During the time we were resident in Huntingdon, I knew of her youthful love for Allan Clare.”

“I used to contrive walks for them, the means of their being together, and ever since have contrived the transmission of their letters. But although much with the Lady Christabel, and even with all the kindness she has shown me, it has still been but the handmaiden attending the mistress. I have never had the heart to ask her counsel, and have had none of my own sex here but a very few with whom, ugh! I could not mix. There are the Mays, of Nottingham, but it is seldom we meet and I cannot turn for such advice as I need to my father. I am, by nature, of a lively, mirthful disposition, with a head not sufficiently cool to guide the warmth of my heart. If I have ever been merry, and I have had none to be merry with but the retainers, I have usually been insulted by some horrid remark

or vile request. I cannot bear it, indeed I cannot. ‘Tis that which makes me unhappy. The Lady Christabel has resolved to leave her father, Robin. Will you take me with you?”

“Maude!” exclaimed Robin, somewhat surprised.

“Do not refuse me, I implore you,” she urged passionately. “If I stay here I shall become what I shudder to think upon. I feel a horrid foreboding that I must, for I have not strength of mind to destroy myself. Take me with you — do not deny me — I care not in what way, but take me. I know you do not love me. You may press my hand, kiss me, and say you love me, but I know you do not, even short as our intimacy has been. I have discovered that.”

“Today, when you were asked by Tuck to give the health of her you loved, you uttered the name of Marian. Your eyes flashed, your breast heaved, and oh your cheek glowed as you breathed the name. I noted it, and I knew your heart was given away. I therefore look not for your love — do not expect it — do not ask it. All I ask is, remove me from here.”

“You forget, Maude, I am but in my boyhood. I cannot take you to my home. But there is Tuck,” said he. “I am convinced he is attached to you. He has the means of removing you — to make you comfortable.”

“No, no, no!” cried Maude hurriedly, “Not him. He is no better than the rest, perhaps worse, for he used religion as a weapon to overcome my scruples — he would have granted me absolution for sin, he said. No, no, to you only can I appeal. Take me with you, to work, slave, anything rather than to remain here alone. Do not refuse me, on my knees I implore you do not! I care not what I do if you will, be it as a slave, a drudge, even as thy *leman* [‘*mistress*’].”

“God help me! I know not what I say, but all men seem to me to need an equivalent of that nature for a kindness,” and she buried her face in her hands, weeping almost frantically.

“Not I, nor ever will, as I hope for mercy!” said Robin, fervently. “Rise, dear Maude, say not these strange things, you shall go with me, and live with my foster mother, and thou shalt be as a sister — a dear, cherished sister, to me, Maude. And may my right hand fail me in my hour of greatest need, if I do aught of wrong to thee. Come, dry thine eyes, we will forget what has passed, and believe we are brother and sister — there, that is well — smile, so come, dear sister.”

“Heaven bless you!” uttered Maude, feebly, yet fervently, and leant her head upon his bosom, quite overcome by her ruth.

“There, you are well now,” he said, cheeringly. “Come, we will to the Lady Christabel, she waits for us. Have you my bow and arrows, sister?”

“Yes. Hal placed them in my care for you. They are here,” she answered faintly, reaching them, and giving them into his hands.

“That’s a sweet sister,” returned Robin, assuming a gaiety he decidedly did not feel. Come, cannot you say dear brother?”

“Do not speak such kind words to me, Robin,” returned she, in a voice full of emotion, “If you do, I feel as if ‘twill break my heart.”

“You must not give way to such weak thoughts,” he exclaimed. “We shall have need of our best energies to escape from the castle. Come.” so saying, he endeavoured to lead her along.

“For your sake, Robin, I will endeavour to shake off this terrible heaviness, this weakness of heart which oppresses me. I have never felt thus before,” said Maude, parting her curls from her forehead. She drew a long breath, pressed her blanched hand against her bosom, as though to keep down her sorrow, and then, with an effort, but yet somewhat in the old tone, she said, “I must extinguish the light, or it would betray us, were I to carry it;” so saying, she blew it out.

“Now, Robin,” she continued, “Step fearlessly but lightly, a shuffling step may awaken suspicion, and in our path there lies nothing to produce a broken shin — so step lightly, brother.”

“That is well, Maude — sister, I mean. I am glad to hear you talk thus.” And with this kindly feeling in their two young hearts, they stepped lightly forward to the Lady Christabel’s chamber. They entered, and found her awaiting their coming with deep anxiety. She was enveloped in a mantle and hood, like a Benedictine friar. At her side stood Hal, fully equipped for a journey.

“Maude, Maude, why have you tarried thus?” she cried, as her maid entered.

“I have not tarried, sweet lady. It is your impatience which makes the minutes pass so slowly,” returned Maude.

“Good youth,” said the lady, addressing Robin, “You can guide me safely to Allan Clare?”

“Even so, madam,” replied he; “He will meet us at a spot not far from hence.”

“Will he so?” said Christabel. “Heaven be praised! Oh Maude, my heart almost misgives me. I fear I never shall have courage to go through with this undertaking.”

“Think of Sir Tristram, my lady,” said Maude. “When you feel your heart fail you — I’ll warrant it will stir up your courage.”

“That dreadful old man!” said Christabel, with a slight shudder. “Let us away,” and she prepared to depart.

“A moment, if you please, sweet madam and then all will be ready,” cried Maude, and disappeared from the room. In a minute she entered again with a mantle and head gear, saying “Now, madam, let us depart. We have not moment to lose.”

“We! Us!” echoed Christabel in surprise, “Why you surely do not mean to accompany me?”

“I do, most certainly. Do not delay a moment by attempting to dissuade me, dear lady, I am immov-ably determined. Let us away. Run along, Hal.”

Hal obeyed; she followed, taking Christabel by the hand, and Robin brought up the rear.

“I never shall be able to proceed in the dark,” said Christabel.

“Fear not, madam,” said Maude, with a precautionary hush. “All is safe; it is the presence of light we have to fear, but speak not, for Heaven’s sake! — a whisper may betray us.”

Obeying her injunctions, they all, led by Hal, went on in silence. The galleries, corridors, and unoccupied apartments were traversed and passed through uninterruptedly, stairs were descended, passages entered and left behind.

Ultimately a passage was reached, and they had not passed along a great distance ere they were stopped by a door, which upon essaying they discovered to be fast.

This was an unexpected hindrance, a disaster quite unlooked for. What was to be done? Every one had a try at it, then all tried together, but vainly — the door was immoveable.

“Is there no other outlet than this, Hal?” whispered Maude to her foster brother.

“Yes,” he replied; “There is one, but it is much longer, not so safe, and I do not know it so well as this.”

“What are the fastenings of the door?” asked Robin.

“I do not know,” returned Hal. “I never recollect it to have been fastened before.”

“Oh for a light!” cried Robin; “We might then be able to see our difficulty and surmount it.”

“I have the means of getting one,” said Hal; “but sometimes the people are about here at all hours, and a light might draw their attention.”

“It’s worth the hazard,” said Robin; “I have my bow and arrows. If any one saw us, and sought to give an alarm, I would send a shaft through his doublet ere he could accomplish his object!”

“Be it so,” was the reply, and Hal struck a light, they passed it along the fillet, and saw that it was fastened by massive bolts, and fortunately on the side on which they stood. It was soon opened, and they passed quickly through, extinguishing the light.

They had not got far ere they were in the chapel. This was the most dangerous part, for the principal entry to it led from the grand staircase, at which a sentinel was always on guard. A footfall even, at that hour, was sure to he heard by him, and challenged as something unusual. The greatest precaution was therefore necessary, but, as it often occurs, where every effort is made to preserve the completest silence, some little cursed accident is sure to step in and render all the caution useless.

Hal, in his haste to gain the panel through which Maude had conveyed Robin, Allan, and Tuck that evening, tripped along, his toe caught in the corner of a tomb, and precipitated him with a loud ring on the stone floor. He scrambled up like a deer, and crying — “Away! Hide behind the tombs, we shall be discovered!” He disappeared, leaving his companions aghast at this disaster. But there was not time for reflection upon the consequences of this misfortune. Robin hastily pulled the Lady Christabel behind a huge Gothic pillar, but ere Maude could follow their example the light of a torch was suddenly thrown over the chapel, and a voice cried–

“What! My pretty Maude at chapel so late! What penance hath thy director imposed, eh? Midnight prayers? Don’t believe all he says, Maude. It is not all gospel, although I thank him for this, for now I shall have a companion in my watch — eh, Maude?”

So saying, a soldier walked quietly up the entry and reached her side, sticking the torch in one of the ornaments of a tomb. Maude saw there was no chance of escape without rendering the Lady Christabel’s chance also hopeless, and so she did not attempt to fly, but with presence of mind seized the suggestion his speech conveyed.

“And if I have come to night prayers by my confessor’s award, it will not become thee, Caspar Steinkopf, to interrupt them.”

Aha! muttered Robin, “That’s Caspar Steinkopf, is it?” and proceeded to fix an arrow to his bowstring.

“Aye, you say so, but do not think so, bonnie Maude,” said Caspar. “And for my part I think ‘tis folly to throw an advantage away, so we will begin at once with a few of those little favours you so kindly bestowed on the boy we caged today. Ho! ho! ho! Pretty refreshment, truly, I need some of it. Come, Maude, hold up thy pretty lips, lass” and he placed his arms round her waist. She flung them from her indignantly, and with eyes flashing fire, cried:

“Keep off thou churl! Thou dastard! Thy touch to me is poison — ugh! Dare again to repeat thine infamous attempts of this evening, and, by the mother who bore me, I swear you shall not live to make a third insult. What! Because I spurned thee from me as a loathsome thing, even as thou art, thou must to my father, sneaking like a mongrel cur, and utter base lies, to make him curse a child to whom he never before uttered an unkind word. Faugh! I spit upon thee, reptile! Begone, nor defile this holy place with thy, polluted carcase.”

“’Sdeath, thy scorn shall bring its punishment with it. I will have thee in spite of thyself, and make thee a finger scorn after.” And again he attempted to seize her, but she eluded his grasp, saying with intense energy –

“Touch me not, I charge thee, or my screams shall ring through this place with such sound as shall bring the whole of the castle inmates on thee. Stand off, or you, who best know what you have to fear from death, will best understand how you will meet a cleave from crown to *chine* [*‘backbone*’].”

“Were death in thine arms, I’d clasp thee,” cried Caspar, springing on her, and seizing her. She struggled violently, but screamed not, but he had not her a second in his grasp, ere an arrow went crashing through his eye and brain.

With an unearthly shriek he staggered back, spun round in intense agony, and fell dead on the ground.


The Death of Caspar Steinkopf

At the moment that Hal of the Keep had sprung from his hiding place with drawn sword, to assist his foster sister.

Robin and the Lady advanced, and Maude, turning to Robin, exclaimed, “Dearest brother, you have saved me from a fate worse than death!” fainted in his arms. Here was a fresh dilemma; but they were obliged to act without waiting to resolve — they laid her upon the cold

stone flooring, and Robin, running to one of the stone basins, dipped his hands into some Holy Water, crossed himself and then, taking some in the bottom of his hands, after crossing the fainting maiden with it, sprinkled it over her forehead. She was not long recovering, and when able to walk, they proceeded on their way, leaving the body to take care of itself, and to tell what tale it pleased. They passed through the panel, and instead of pursuing the same passage which Maude had led them along previously, they turned abruptly off. The darkness was intense.

"Now I can light the lamp with safety," said Hal. "There are no eyes to watch this path but those whom a particular purpose brings hither, and that's ourselves."

"That torch would be of service which yonder scoundrel brought into the chapel," said Robin.

"So it would. Stay here, and I'll run back and fetch it," cried Hal, and darted off. In a short time he returned with it.

"I was just in time," said he, "for I heard the tramp of the guard coming to relieve. As I closed the panel I heard the challenge, but I'll be bound Caspar will be in no hurry to return it."

"Hush, Hal," said Maude, "Make the distance as short as you can. You are sure you know it?"

"To be sure I do," returned Hal. "Besides, haven't I taken you along it several times, and also –"

"Grace May," suggested Robin.

"Yes!" quickly uttered he.

"Then for Heaven's sake," said Christabel, white with excitement, "pray take us to the end as swiftly as you can!"

"Where does this passage lead to?" inquired Robin.

"These passages," answered Maude, "lead be-neath the hill to the border of the forest."

"Ha!" he exclaimed, "Is it so? That is well. But I prithee bestir thyself, for we shall soon have daylight, and 'twere as well to be in the forest before the sun."

"It shall be done," said Hal decisively, assuming a manly tone and air. He ran on first with a torch, and they followed as swiftly as the rugged path would permit. Occasionally they descended rough steps, then a long passage on an inclined plane. The whole of the cutting, for it was cut out of solid rock, was chill and damp.

The passages, which for years had scarce ever been trodden by human foot, were encrusted with damp mould and mosses. Here almost a pool of stagnant water, there a wet slimy bed of moss and short dank grass. For three quarters of an hour they wended their way along this dreary place, the whole time descending rapidly; at length Hal said–

“Here we are at the bottom; now for it — we shall see if it is our fate to get off undetected.”

“Pray Heaven we may!” said the Lady Christabel.

“Does Hal come with us also?” asked Robin.

“For a short time, yes,” replied Maude; “Have you any objection?”

“Oh no, I am glad of it. I will tell you why presently,” he replied.

“Here is the door,” said Hal. “On the other side it is enshrouded with low hawthorns and stunted trees. Three steps, and we are in the forest.”

The door was gained, opened, and extinguishing the torch, they entered the fresh air. Day was just breaking, and they stopped therefore not a moment in the open way, but sought the friendly shelter of the forest trees. Directly, Robin ascertained the quarter of the forest he was in, he turned to Maude and said – “Maude, I have a request to make which, perhaps, you will be kind enough, as soon as you see its necessity, to comply with. I have agreed to meet Allan Clare at a certain place. As it is some distance from this, and out of the route to Mansfieldwoodhaus, you will accompany your brother to my home at once, and I will with the Lady Christabel to the meeting place agreed on. By doing this you will be enabled to reach my father’s cottage with less fatigue, and prepare him for our coming. We can, with additional speed, proceed on our way, and with less likelihood of being discovered, being two only instead of four.”

“I do not know any way except the highway,” said Hal.

“Ah, but you must not take that, for if any of the Baron’s people are out they will inevitably discover you. No, follow my directions exactly, and you will reach my foster father’s cottage in a far less time, without, in all probability, being discovered. You see this path: follow it, and always keep a single beech tree on your left hand.”

“Swerve not in the least, and you cannot make a mistake. You will ultimately come into an open glade, in the centre of which stands an enormous oak. There is an alley to its left, pursue it, and you will find at its termination Gilbert Hood’s cottage standing before you. Say to my father that I have sent you, and you will meet with a hearty welcome. Will you do this?”

“Whatever you think best, certainly,” returned Maude; “But I would rather accompany you. Still, as you seem to think it most advisable to separate here for a time, it shall be as you wish, and Hal and I will on alone.”

“Thanks, Maude, thanks! It is for the best, or I would not have proposed it,” answered Robin; “Besides, I hope, ere the morning sun has passed its meridian, it will see us again united. We must haste, this spot bears dangerous proximity to the castle, and the sooner we quit its precincts the better.”

Warm and earnest farewells were exchanged between them, and then Maude and her foster brother took the path pointed out by Robin, while he and the Lady Christabel pursued the way to Robin’s dell. Their route lay along the skirts of the forest, in the direction of Nottingham, the castle still being disagreeably in sight. Robin, however, hoped to gain that part of the forest where he should strike into its depths ere there was a chance of their being seen or overtaken in case of a pursuit.

A considerable proportion was accomplished. His heart began to grow lighter, and his step freer, for the most dangerous distance was nearly passed over. He turned to the lady with cheerfulness, and said – “If the chevalier Clare but keeps his appointment as truly as there is every prospect that I shall keep mine, we have no need to fear not meeting. If your courage and strength but serve you, dear lady, an hour and a half hence you shall seat yourself with him beneath a broad oak tree, growing on the banks of the sweetest little stream in Christendom.”

“I pray heaven I may!” ejaculated Christabel. “The desire to escape from such a misery as there was in store for me, had I have remained, will, I am assured, give me strength to accomplish this, to me, very bold effort. Of strength of mind or body I cannot boast. Yet, I trust, the emergency of my situation will enable me to surmount my natural weakness. You shall not, at least, my good friend, have to complain of a deficiency of will on my part — the Holy Virgin make my strength equal to it!”

“Amen!” said Robin. “The will is the herald of the way, and I have little doubt that we shall be successful. I consider myself highly fortunate in possessing my bow and arrows, for, in case of danger, they will prove my trustiest friends. I can hit a small object at a hundred yards, and it will be vastly odd if I cannot line a fellow’s doublet with an arrow, if he comes too close to be agreeable.”

“I hope there will be no necessity,” said Christabel.

“I hope not,” rejoined he, “for then our journey will have no let or hindrance.”

They had now reached the highway from Nottingham to Mansfield, and, as they proceeded to cross it, Robin threw a hasty glance along the road, in the direction of the town, with the hope of seeing a clear space, but in this hope he was disappointed. He uttered an exclamation, and drew an arrow from his quiver; he fitted it to the bow string, and half bent the bow on the impulse of the moment, but Christabel laid her hand upon his arm, and said, “For Heaven’s sake! good youth, what is it you see and fear?”

“Why, lady, my eye detected a horseman in the costume of your good father’s honest retainers, coming in this direction at full gallop. He is hidden now from your sight, by yonder clump of elms. In less than a minute you will have a full view of him, and he of us, if we stay here. If his errand is one which I suspect, I must stop him, even at cost of his life–”

“No, No! Oh no! hurriedly exclaimed she. “One has already fallen – No more bloodshed, it is too horrible.”

“Indeed, lady, I am loth even to think of it,” returned he, “and am even sick of the thought of sending Caspar Steinkopf to his account, rascal as he was. But if this man is allowed to proceed, he will reach my home before Maude and her brother can arrive, and, capturing them, return with them, and be back with a whole swarm of his fellows – probably intercept us. The consequence of which will be that you will be returned to your father, and Allan, Maude, her brother, and I, sent a party of four into the other world together.”

“But is there no way besides spilling blood?” demanded Christabel, anxiously.

“He must not proceed. Ha! here he comes. Behind that tree; for your life, stir not — move not, or you are lost! I must trust to Providence to guide me, and whatever I do, you may be assured I shall do it for the best.”

Christabel did as he desired, and stood trembling with fear and apprehension behind the trunk of a large beech tree growing near. Robin took up his post beside another, and in silence they awaited the horseman’s coming. He drew nearer. The wind brought the clatter of his horse’s hoofs with, to Christabel, horrible distinctness. She drew her mantle close round her, covered her head with her hood, and watched with an agony of excitement and expectation the tree behind which Robin disappeared. No part of him was visible. She could not have believed he could so completely have hidden himself.

On came the horseman, the sound of his horse’s approaching footsteps growing still louder. Still there was no movement from Robin. The minutes seemed as hours. The noise of the stranger’s approach increased with

frightful indications of proximity. She felt choking, her heart palpitated violently, she thought she must dart from her place of concealment, and shriek as she ran. The rattle of the hoofs seemingly denoted the horseman to be on a level with the spot on which she stood, yet she saw him not, nor did he pass. She bit her lip and held her breath convulsively. Where was Robin? Was he still behind the tree? Or was he there at all? He had not deserted her? Oh, heaven! Surely not. If he had it would be death to her. These thoughts crowded through her mind with terrible rapidity. She gazed at the tree screening Robin from her sight, but nothing met her gaze to indicate the presence of aught human. This suspense was horrible, she could not bear it. Her senses seemed failing her. She strove against the weakness vainly, even the idea of swooning in that solitary place, dreadful as it appeared, could not check the sickening sensation of faintness.

Her sight grew dizzy, there was a thronging of sounds in her ears; the place seemed to fly round with her, when suddenly her eye caught something moving by Robin's tree. She pressed her hands to her throat, struggled violently, and, by the greatest exertion, endeavoured to keep herself from swooning. She succeeded, inasmuch as she was restored to a consciousness of Robin's presence, and the excitement of endeavouring to ascertain his intention gave her a species of mastery over this bodily weakness. She watched eagerly and anxiously.

All at once the horseman swept past. A second elapsed, to her seemed almost an hour, then she saw the figure of Robin glide from his hiding place extend his left hand which held the bow, and draw the bow string until the nock of the bow almost touched his ear — twang went the string, and the arrow sped like lightning to its destination. A strange shriek, an unearthly cry, rose on the air, and then all was still.

Robin remained in the position in which he had discharged the arrow, and bent his gaze earnestly in the direction it had flown, while Christabel, sick and fainting, unable to bear the excitement, tottered from the shadow of the tree towards him;

She reached him, placed her hand upon his shoulder. Light as was the touch, he sprang round as he felt it, and then she said "Boy, boy, have you stained your soul with blood? Is he killed?"

“If you mean the horseman, lady, no. But I scarce think his steed will bear another rider. My sight must have failed me if I have missed a vital part, but I fear it not. I saw the poor beast rear like a stricken deer, and heard his death wail. I would his rider were as harmless as he is now. I must ascertain what he is about. We must have none on our track, no, not even an eye to mark our path, which may find an echo in a babbling tongue to set others on, where its owner might singly fear to follow.”

“He whom I have just unhorsed, if used to forest skirmishes, will not sit to weep over his horse’s body. He will crawl through covert and brake in order to discover from whose hand the arrow sped, and should he succeed in his object, we must be the sufferers in all ways. I am satisfied that he is not the only one sent in pursuit, and an alarm from him to any of his companions who may be near, will effectually prevent our escape. There are also several other ways in which his discovery of us would prove distressing.”

“I must, therefore, for our own welfare, use every means for preventing him – I have no doubt I shall succeed. Do you, therefore, dear lady, cheer up your spirits, keep quiet beneath the shade of yon tree, stir not, let not the flutter of your white garments in the wind betray you — the accomplishment of your escape depends upon it.”

“Draw your mantle quite round you, keep close to the trunk of the tree, and you will be safe. For myself, I will find out where this fellow hath bestowed himself, and try if my single arm cannot make a silent tongue. Cheer up, lady, I will soon return, and all will be well.”

“I tremble to be left alone in this desolate place,” timidly uttered Christabel, glancing round apprehensively.

“Fear nothing, sweet lady,” returned he, “If you follow my directions, you have no cause for alarm. Should there be, a cry from you will bring me to your side in an instant,” and he led her to the tree as he concluded. “I pray thee, lady, place faith in me. It doth not, perhaps, become my lips to utter praise of mine own skill, but were even that noble cavalier, Allan Clare, here, he would stand thee in no better stead, Lady, than I – nay, I do well believe he would not be of such service. That I can excel him in the use of the bow I dare assert. That I know the fastnesses of old Sherwood intimately, while he is in utter ignorance of them, will not admit of dispute. I fear no living foe and, lady, I will cheerfully peril my life to lead thee safely to thy destination. Believe, therefore, dear lady, that although Allan Clare be not by your side, you are not the less devotedly guarded and guided.”

“I do place faith in thee, thou brave-hearted youth, but I cannot keep down the terror which oppresses me,” replied the Lady Christabel. “And, though I doubt not thy courage and thy skill, I think I feel that I could bear up more bravely were Allan Clare by my side, to allay, with his cheering

words, the sad forebodings of evil which now so heavily weigh down my spirit."

"Courage, lady, courage!" said Robin, cheeringly, "He is near you, you will soon meet. Fear not, no harm shall reach you while there is a breath of life in this frame. Keep quiet and still, and all will be well."

So saying, he glided from her, and disappeared beneath a group of hawthorn and furze bushes, forming a brake close to a cluster of beech trees. The lady drew her mantle round her, and offering up a prayer for a safe deliverance from this strait, sunk weeping at the foot of the beech tree.

Chapter 13

His eyes did hurl forth sparkles fiery red,
And stared stern on all that him beheld,
As ashes pale of hue, and seeming dead:
And on his dagger still his hand he held,
Trembling, through hasty rage,
When choler in him swell'd
Of his hands he had no government,
Nor car'd for blood in his avengement:
But, when the furious fit was overpast,
His cruel acts he often would repent;
Yet, wilful man he never would forecast,
How many mischiefs would ensue his heedless haste,

----- Spenser

BRABANTIO *It is too true an evil: gone she is;*
Get more tapers!
Raise all my kindred –
Some one way, some another
Do you know
Where we may apprehend her, and –

----- Shakespeare

Smarting with pain, foaming with rage in an agony of half blindness, from the events of the blazing torch dashed in his eyes, Lambie followed his men, as they, not very conversant with the path, pursued Robin.

When he fled from them many were the blows they received by running foul of projections, and many were the oaths and execrations which they uttered in consequence. They kept way well on the track for some time, but at last the two who led the way were at fault, and they halted for Lambie to come up.

Nottingham Castle, at the period of which we are writing, possessed an immense number of subterraneous passages cut through the rocky hill upon which the castle stood, for purpose of escape, should the castle, in any attack, be carried from the town, or for the obtainment of supplies in case of a siege. These passages were very numerous, intersecting each other in all points, some leading to dungeons, others cut like the paths of a labyrinth only for the purpose of bewilderment. A knowledge of their intricacies was possessed by only a few and even those few required the aid of a map to wend them with accuracy.

We said they halted for the approach of Lambie, but it was not until sometime after they had passed the right path, and threaded half a dozen wrong ones, that they did so. They awaited his coming at first a little patiently, making allowances for the painful situation in which Robin's act had placed him, and then, as he did not come, not a little impatiently. One tried a stentorian halloo. He was answered by the reverberating echo of his voice from the dismal vaulted passages. He tried again with a like effect. His companion seconded him with a most vigorous yell, still they met no reply from Lambie.

They yelled together with all the power their lungs enabled them, and they had a suitable echo from the vaults, but none from human voice.

It should be understood that there were horrible and dismal stories afloat among the retainers and servitors of the castle respecting these same passages. The bravest men are occasionally the greatest victims to superstition. Men who will fearlessly face the cannon's mouth, be the first to leap in a breach, or be exposed to the hottest fire of the enemy, without winking an eyelid, who readily and cheerfully volunteer as one of a forlorn hope, fearing nothing human, will yet stand, tremble, and grow pale at the idea of ghosts, haunted places, or aught supernatural.

Thus was it with these two men. In the broad daylight, exposed to foes of their own stamp, they would have fought to the last gasp, nor budged an inch. Yet here, from having heard of ghosts, hobgoblins, and wicked sprites in abundance, they were miserably alarmed, and shouted in concert as loudly and fiercely as was possible.

They were startled at the echo of their own voices, and each moment expected a frightful phantom to start up at their feet, and scare them to death by its hideous distortions. Although they individually felt this excessive alarm, yet they endeavored to keep each other ignorant of it. And one of them, in a voice decidedly tremulous, proposed to retrace their steps in search of Lambie. The other assented, and they set about putting it into effect.

But, instead of accomplishing their object, they wandered about the passages, enduring a succession of cold shudders, as the echo of their footsteps led them ever and anon to believe they were followed by some horrible and fantastic object.

Leaving them in this unpleasant predicament, we return to Lambie. His weak eyes, which still rained water as he proceeded, aided by the darkness, became less painful. Being better acquainted with this road than those who preceded him, he took the right path, fondly believing that his men had been equally fortunate, and hoping that, by the time he overtook them, they would have Robin safely in their clutches.

The reader will perceive that it was a fond but a vain hope. But Lambie was naturally sanguine; and, by the time he had reached the spot where Robin had encountered Hal, he had already, in his mind's eye, seen the youthful captive struggling in the air, suspended from a very high gallows.

Instead of following the path which Hal led Robin, he diverged to the left, and, being partly recovered, increased his speed. The hopes he had formed began to diminish as he neared the body of the castle, for there was no sound or sight meeting his eye or ear betokening the recapture of the fugitive. He went on. He descended the grand staircase. He encountered Caspar Steinkopf, here he ascertained that no one had, for near an hour preceding, passed that way. He immediately conjectured that his men had taken Robin before the Baron, for it never presented itself to his imagination that they had not captured him. Inwardly cursing their stupidity for so unnecessary an exposure of the near escape of the prisoner, he marched to the Baron's apartment. He stopped at the door, and listened in hopes to hear if the men were with his lord, and at the same time ascertain what sort of a reception they were meeting with. He heard the Baron, in rather a hoarse tone, utter, "The purport of this missive is, then, that Sir Tristram is suddenly called to London, and he wishes me to join him there immediately."

"Even on the morrow, my lord" replied a mild voice.

"Um! Why 'tis well, nay better than I had determined. It shall be so!" A silence ensued for a minute, and Lambie was satisfied that the captured and captors were not there. He heartily hoped that they had not yet sought the Baron's presence and, with the desire of preventing them if they intended it, he quitted the spot, and retraced his steps in the direction of the subterranean passages. He had no light, neither cared he to endeavour to obtain one, as it might beget a spirit of inquiry, which he had no desire to raise. In the darkness, therefore went he on, without encountering a solitary item which might create a hope that he should be successful. He reached the dungeon from which Robin had escaped. No soul was near — he hallooed — he was replied to by the echo of his own voice. He concluded that the retainers had visited, and been dismissed the Baron's presence, ere he had reached the apartment. Now it was, however, necessary to be assured of this, and also to ascertain whither the youth had been taken.

He did not like to encounter the Baron, as he had been so decided in his exposed determination of treating him to a sudden death, and he recollected his own consent, if he permitted Robin to escape, to cheerfully abide by the conditions. He hesitated, as these conflicting emotions by turn agitated him, but then he reassured himself, by believing that the men would have fully explained to the Baron how the affair had taken

place, and he trusted that his lord would, when he learned the agony he had suffered from the burning torch, deem it punishment sufficient, and acquaint him with what had been done, and what was to he done with the prisoner.

Arriving at this conclusion, he resolved to seek the Baron, and get through it as well as he could. Once he thought he heard a faint hallo, but as it was not repeated, he believed himself mistaken, never dreaming that his two follow-ers were wandering about like the ghosts of unquiet spirits.

He arrived at the door of the Baron's chamber. All was quiet. Suddenly the idea struck him that his lord might have retired to rest, and if so, he had better attempt to rouse a ravenous tiger than awaken him, particularly under such peculiar circumstances.

He applied his ear to the door, and bending all his faculties to the task, heard the low hum of a voice speaking low and continuously. He suffered this to proceed for some time ere he could raise courage enough to knock at the door. At last he summoned resolution, and gave a faint knock, startled at the same time by the sound which he had himself made. It remained unanswered, and then he began to wonder if there was really anybody within. Tired of waiting, he thought he would softly open the door and look if anyone was there. He put his resolve into execution, and had no sooner done it than he almost franticly wished he had not.

By the table was seated the confessor, bending his head to catch the low-breathed words of the Baron, who was upon his knees, with his front facing the door, in the act of confession. He might have just finished, or he might not, it is hard to say which, but, be it as it may, the visage of Lambie protruding through the partly-opened door met his astonished gaze, and brought him to his feet in an instant. With an expression of sudden anger, he cried —

"How now, varlet! What brings thee here thus rudely and abruptly? Marry! Is the castle thine or mine, that thou obtrudest thine ungainly carcase into my chamber without requesting the accustomed permission? Speak, fool! What is thine errand?"

"I knocked at the door, may it please you my lord," returned Lambie, humbly, "and not receiving an answer, I thought no one was here, and so thought –"

"You would see what you could lay your ungodly claws on?" interrupted the Baron.

"You wrong me, my lord," returned Lambie, with something of the expression of wounded dignity a shoemaker might feel at being called a cobbler.

“I can measure your honesty,” returned the Baron, with a sneer; “nor be troubled with a want of a cloth yard staff, or ell wand!”

“Your lordship cannot call your faithful retainers thieves?” deprecated Lambie.

“My lordship can and will call his faithful retainers whatever it pleases him. I have not to learn the virtues of my faithful retainers. However, as I suppose you did not come here for the purpose of discussing the merits, the virtues, amiability, and general good qualities of the knaves who are of more annoyance than service to me, may I be put in possession of what you did come for?”

This was a question Lambie by no means relished. It at once created a doubt whether the Baron knew of the last half hour’s occurrences, and he was awakened from the train of thoughts and fears it occasioned by a question his lordship put to him, without waiting for an answer to the preceding one.

“What, in the name of all that is hideous,” demanded he, “have you been doing to your mazzard?”

“My mazzard!” echoed Lambie, putting his hand to his face, and feeling he was on tender ground.

“Aye, thy mazzard!” repeated the Baron. “I have long recognised it by its supreme ugliness, but it now exceeds by far all I have ever beheld. Speak, dolt! Into what grimy grease barrel have you thrust it?”

“It was the torch, my lord, as you are probably aware.”

“The torch! What torch?”

“Does not your lordship know?”

“Speak, gull! How should I know? An’ I knew, thou ugly blockhead, should I ask thee?”

Here was the verification of Lambie’s fears. By this it was plain the intelligence of Robin’s escape had not yet reached him. Lambie felt packed up and booked for the next world. He was in a miserable hobble, what could have become of the pursued and pursuers? He was perplexed, and scratched his head vigorously in his strait, quite forgetting the Baron’s question.

He was not long left in forgetfulness. He was roused to consciousness by receiving from a truncheon, which in his sudden passion the Baron snatched up, a blow which filled the room with its sound. A change passed over the features of the poor wretch, and if he looked serious before, he looked now ten times more so. Added to which, he rubbed his head more vigorously than ever.

“Did you hear what I said?” demanded the Baron, with glittering eyes, a red visage, and dilated nostrils.

“Yes — no, my lord!” confusedly returned Lambie, who felt more what he did than heard what he said.

“I will once more ask thee: What made thee bring that atrociously hideous, grinning countenance into my presence? If thou dost not answer me speedily, I will make thy skull so tender with this staff thou shalt not bear to touch it for months to come!”

“I want to know what your lordship purposes doing with the prisoner, the youth captured tonight called Robin Hood!” answered Lambie, quickly, for he saw the staff raised at right angles with his head.

“Let him remain in the dungeon until I have made up my mind as to his disposal!”

“Which dungeon?”asked Lambie, in rather a low tone.

“Which dungeon?” reiterated the Baron; “The one he is in!”

“Which is that?” inquired the retainer in a still lower tone, with an overwhelming conviction that the whole affair would soon out.

“Why, thou incomparable idiot, why dost thou ask me? Thou knowest thou had’st the placing him in a dungeon – keep him in the one where thou hast already confined him!”

“That was where he thrust the torch in my face. Has he returned to it, my lord?” uttered Lambie hesitatingly, casting an anxious glance over his shoulder to see if there was a clear space for retreating, but the door was closed — had been closed by the confessor during his colloquy with the Baron. He was aghast at this discovery.

“*Has he returned!*” repeated the Baron, in somewhat of the faint tone Lambie gave utterance to. And then a thought flashing across his mind, he exclaimed fiercely — “Ha! hell and death! A thousand fiends! — has he again escaped? Villain, is this thy news?” and he sprung upon Lambie with a tremendous oath.

He was like a bulldog, he always made for the throat when attacking. He was successful in this case. He squeezed the poor fellow’s windpipe till there was an expansion of the eyes awful to behold, a gurgling in the throat, a spluttering until it grew beyond endurance, and then the bearer struck down the Baron’s arms as though they had been reeds. He retreated to the corner of the room. The Baron picked up his truncheon, which he had thrown from him a moment or so preceding, and followed Lambie close up into the corner.

“Tell me,” he roared, “All you have got to disclose, quickly, and then prepare for a short shrift and a tall gallows!”

“I could not help it! Indeed, my lord, he thrust the torch into my eyes!”

“Ass! to let him get the torch. Well?”

“Then — as far as I can judge, for I was blinded with pain — he dashed the torch to the ground, and put it out. He darted past, and two men followed close at his heels. I fully expected they had caught him, and brought him before your lordship.”

“No, they did not. If he has escaped, you shall swing for it. Where did be run to?”

“Among the passages beneath the castle.”

“Do the fellows following him know them well?”

“Why, not very well, my lord.”

“St. Benedict, St. Peter, St. Paul keep me! I shall kill this knave out of hand. Thou egregious insufferable block! Thou consummate essence of idiocy! Why didn’t thou not get a torch and go to their assistance? They will miss him and lose themselves, thou hideous gull!” and with that his lordship dealt him such a blow with the oak truncheon over the ear, that there was at once created such a terrific dinging as to effectually shut out all other sound.

Lambie felt very unpleasantly vexed on receiving it. He saw another coming, he gave a brisk leap to avoid it — it came whisking with all the force the Baron could throw into it.

Two consequences ensued from the dexterous jump given by Lambie. First, he leaped backwards without taking into consideration who or what might be behind him. It so occurred that the reverend confessor, who saw an evident indication on the part of the Baron to repeat the very hard and very loud blow with which he had favoured Lambie, deeming it his duty, stepped forward to interfere, at the very moment the retainer leaped back, a violent concussion ensued, and the result was, they both fell heavily to the ground together.

While, if the passionate Baron failed in hitting his servitor, he succeeded in giving a handsome vase, filled with flowers, a tremendous blow, and shivering it to atoms with a frightful crash. The Baron viewed his own act with a feeling somewhat approaching to frenzy. The table upon which it had stood was, with everything upon it, saturated with water. There were a quantity of important papers, which the confessor had been reading to him. He seized them as they were floating away, vowing ten-

fold vengeance upon the unfortunate cause, who, having scrambled to his feet, prepared to make a desperate effort to decamp. As he gained the door, a loud and hasty knocking startled him, and ere a reply was waited for, a retainer entered, who exclaimed, hastily: “My duty and service to you, most honourable lord. A strange affair has just occurred, and I am here to consult with you upon it.”

“What is’t? quick, say at once — no round-about story.”

“Your lordship shall have it in as few words as a story can be told with. A good soldier should act, not talk and as I consider myself –”

“Fool! to your tale!” roared the Baron, interrupting him.

The man bowed, and proceeded with a very quick utterance – “I went to relieve guard at the chapel entry five minutes or ten minutes since. No one challenged me. I knew there ought to be sentinel on duty there, because there always is one — else I shouldn’t have gone to relieve the guard there. Receiving no challenge, I advanced at once to the post — oh oh, thought I, something wrong here — sentry drunk or asleep — began to think what punishment he should receive, but on going to his post found no one there — oh ho, thought I, deserter — aha, I thought –”

“Curse your thoughts!” cried the Baron, foaming; “Come to the point at once, thou prolix dog.”

“Prolix dog!” muttered the man; “I never heard of a hound o’ that name before.”

“Will you proceed, wretch!” yelled the Baron, almost frantic, and flourishing the truncheon in a manner which induced the soldier to continue his story rather hastily.

“I sent,” he continued, “a party of men up the staircase, while with the remainder I searched the chapel, and found stretched upon the ground quite dead –”

“Ha! who?” cried the Baron, with startling energy.

“Caspar Steinkopf. I don't know whether your lordship knows him, but if you don’t, it is all the same — I knew him, he was –”

“How was he killed?” impatiently interrupted the Baron.

“By an arrow through his brain. I extracted it and here it is, my lord” So saying, he presented the bloody arrow. The Baron seized it, and after gazing upon it for a moment, he said –

“Know you any one to whom this arrow belonged?”

“No, my lord,” returned the man.

“With all respect, my lord, that arrow is one of a quiverfull I saw Robin Hood put into the possession of Hal of the Keep tonight,” said Lambie; “I could swear to it by its length and make.”

“Ha!” said his lordship. “Haste, send the boy here. There is something strange in all this.”

“If I mistake not,” interposed the soldier, “I saw Hal with Maude, proceeding towards the Lady Christabel’s apartments.”

“When?” demanded the Baron.

“Not half an hour since.”

“I will look to this myself, bring a torch!” So saying, he left the room, followed by Lambie, while the soldier ran and fetched a torch from some of his men, who were a short distance from the spot. The little Baron trotted on, at a good pace, until he reached his daughter’s apartment. He knocked at it, and waited an instant, no answer was returned. He knocked again. He scarce waited ere he knocked a third time, there was still no answer, and in a paroxysm of rage, he thumped vigorously with both hands, at the door, and then, no one replying, he opened it, poked his head in, then seizing a torch, rushed in from the sitting apartment into the bedroom. They were empty. He bounded back again, and roared in a tremendous voice –

“She is gone! – she has fled! Ha! Death and fury! Lights! Call up the men! Search the castle! Leave not a stone unturned! — Away to the postern! Hell and all its fiends! Am I to be cheated thus? Ha! Send Herbert Lindsay to me. It is his vile Jezebel of a daughter, that witch’s brat, who has concocted all this. He shall answer for it. Lambie, away to the warder, ascertain if any one has recently quitted the castle. Bid a party of the men saddle their steeds, and wait my bidding on the instant. Look how you attend to this, knave, your head may pay the forfeit, else, of your negligence. Away!”

Lambie needed no second command — he was off like a shot. The soldier bringing the news of Caspar’s death was also dispatched to gather a party of men to traverse every part of the castle, with the hope of yet kennelling the fugitives, as a faint idea crossed the Baron that they might be still within its precincts.

How the old gentleman roared, stormed, raved, and swore! He expressed his determination, garnished with round oaths, that if it was proved his daughter had eluded the vigilance of the various sentinels, and succeeded in escaping from his roof, that they should be hanged, every

one of them, as high as Haman had the misfortune to be. He made another strict search of the suite of apartments, which his daughter had occupied, without finding her. He gnashed his teeth, and as he returned to his own sanctum, he revolved every mode of punishment in his mind, to pick out one more terrible than another, which he proposed inflicting on all the delinquents, great and small, who had induced his child to leave her paternal roof.

“I’ll exterminate them all! I’ll sweep them away — there shall not be the ghost of the shadow of one left, who shall say, ‘I helped to deceive her father!’ No, I swear by the Holy Apostles, and my Father’s beard!”he ejaculated through his teeth, as he entered his chamber, and flung himself heavily into a chair. He rested here scarce a second ere he was up and pacing the room with rapid strides. Presently Herbert Lindsay entered.

“Your lordship summoned me hither. I await your pleasure,” said he, quietly standing on the threshold. The Baron leaped at him, and dragged him by the neck into the centre of the room.

“Villain!” he roared, “What has become of my daughter, the Lady Christabel? — answer me quickly! — Speak without equivocation —or you shall not be in this world a couple of minutes longer.”

“Your daughter, my lord, the Lady Christabel!” ejaculated Herbert, reiterating his lord’s words with astonishment: “I do not know.”

“Liar!” shouted the incensed Baron, furiously; “You both know and shall tell, or unshriven, unannealed, you shall instantly be sent to your account.” and out he whipped his broad-bladed dagger, raising it gleamingly in the air. Herbert Lindsay winked not an eyelash, but said quietly and coldly —

“If your lordship will give me to understand what you mean by supposing me to know where my young lady is, and why you do so, I shall most respectfully answer any after question you may put to me. But understand me, my lord, I am, if humble, an honest man, with no more sins than honest men may commit, and no act of my life to blush for. I therefore fear not being suddenly sent to my account, even unshriven, albeit as a good Christian I would rather not do so of the two, had I a choice. And in consequence will tell you, so far as my knowledge serves me, whatever you may demand, not through fear of my life, but out of the duty I owe to you, being my lawful and liege lord.”

The composure of true courage will always have its influence on the hasty ebullition of a passionate temper. The Baron loosened his hold of Lindsay, and said – “You did the warder’s duty tonight. Who passed within these two hours?”

“I have quitted the gate, my lord, two hours agone!”

“Is this so?”

“It is, my lord. I did double duty from two i’ the afternoon until ten, and was then relieved by Michael Walden.”

“Did any one quit the castle gate before you were relieved?”

“Yes, my lord, Hal of the Keep. He told me the Lady Christabel was sick, and he was going to fetch a leech. He returned as I was relieved.”

“Hal the young imp. ‘Twas he who told me that Lambie suffered Allan to escape. A curse on my stupidity, I never thought to ask him what took him abroad so late.”

“To fetch a leech, my lord,” said Herbert.

“**To fetch the devil!**” bellowed the Baron;

“It was to concert some means of escape. Where is he? Send him to me, and thy daughter also, unless she has accompanied my ungrateful girl in her flight and by the Mass! I can well believe she has concocted it all, as well as accompanied her.”

“My daughter Maude do this!” uttered Herbert, surprisingly.

“Aye; that compound of insolence, pertness, wickedness. That Jezebel, whose sauciness, had she not been my daughter’s woman, and herself a female, would have brought her a halter many a time and oft. She has counseled Christabel to rebel, I know it, and once in my power, I’ll make her confess the whole plot, and punish hereafterwards. Send her to me, if you can find her, but I expect it is a bootless errand.”

Lambie at this juncture entered. He looked heated, and panted for breath. “My lord, I have been to the warder,” he cried; “None have passed out, young Hal only has entered, and I have been everywhere to seek for him, but cannot find him. There is a party of men in their saddles at the hall door, awaiting your lordship’s commands.”

“So, it is well. You were at a cottage on the borders, near Mansfield, tonight, Lambie?”

“I was, my lord.”

“If they have passed from the castle by the means I suspect, I doubt not they will there at once, being the nearest rendezvous of the villain who has decoyed my child from me. Do thou with thy men enter it. If they are there bring them back, and every one you find, and burn the hut to the ground. If they should not be there, no matter, burn it the same. Leave not a stick standing —Away!”

Lambie disappeared. Herbert, with a gloomy brow, was about to follow, when Fitz Alwine stayed him.

“Hold!” he cried. “Herbert Lindsay, I must not forget, spite of my passion — and I have had cause for it — that our boyhood was passed together on almost brotherly terms, that you have also thrice saved my life in the midst of fierce strife in the Holy Land, at the imminent hazard of thine own. I owe you something for this. I must also remember that if I love my child, undutiful as she has turned out to be, you must also love yours. If, likewise, she has incited my daughter — or even assisted her to thwart my views, if she has proved wanting in respect in tongue and conduct to me, love for my daughter has been the occasion of it. I will, therefore, if I succeed in recovering her, forgive her what she has done, on that account. But I trust to you for not having a repetition of it; Therefore, think not of what in the violence of my rage I may have uttered respecting Maude — a Jez — a — I mean not to carry it into effect.”

“I thank you, my lord!” said Herbert, moved by this show of kindness, his honest nature little dreaming that the craftiness of his noble master had led him to assume this form of speech for the purpose of carrying into effect an intention which, without Lindsay’s aid, he would have been unable to accomplish. It quickly disclosed itself, though Herbert discovered it not.

“Herbert,” he said, as if almost indifferently, and apparently calling to his recollection whether such a place did exist, “Is there not an outlet through the subterraneous passages leading to the borders of the forest?”

He well knew there was, but was unfamiliar with the means by which to distinguish it from the numerous winding and intersecting pass-ages beneath the castle. He also knew that few in the castle were acquainted with it, and Herbert was one of them. He had, therefore, cunningly devised his speech so as to draw out the required intelligence from him, whose daughter he had inwardly promised, if he caught, to oblige with severe punishment. The bait took.

Herbert felt scandalised at the idea of his daughter having shown a want of respect to the Baron, and that she should have conspired against his peace, by even assenting to the Lady Christabel’s departure under such peculiar circumstances. He, therefore, felt it his bounden duty to assist in their recapture, by every means in his power. Especially as, despite her impropriety, the noble Baron had evinced such extraordinary kindness in speaking of her delinquencies. He, therefore, said readily –

“Aye, my lord, there is, the which I know to a turn. I will guide you that way and if they have attempted it, I warrant me I’ll tread on their heels in a short time.”

“Does your daughter know the path?” interrogated the Baron.

“No, my lord, I should think not.”

“Do you know any one else who does?”

“There's old Michael Walden, Guipert Franklyn, and for that matter, my foster boy, Hal of the Keep, as he is –”

“Ha! That is it,” interrupted Fitz Alwine, quickly. “That young brat has achieved it, then, if they have escaped. Ho, there — a torch! Call some fellows. We will there this instant, as swift as may be. On, on — lead on, Herbert — quick, man!”

Herbert obeyed. A couple of torches were obtain-ed. Six men accompanied them, and they descended through various corridors into the chapel. Here for a moment they were stayed by the sight of the dead body of Steinkopf.

“Steinkopf dead!” exclaimed Herbert, holding a torch so as to examine his features. “I have been saved the task, by the Holy Virgin! But he who has done this shall have my thanks, and the first service I can render him.” he muttered.

“On with you!” shouted the Baron, impatiently. “Let us waste no time loitering over this carrion, they may get clear while we are fooling the minutes here.”

Herbert pressed the spring, the panel already mentioned flew on one side, and they passed through. They traversed the passages, and descended the flights of steps at a swift pace. They had not been long ere a distant hallo broke on their ears.

“Aha!” joyfully cried the Baron, “We have them. Oh, ho! My dainty rebels! Once again mine — mine, aha!”

“That shout comes not from the passage leading to the forest,” said Lindsay. A second hallo broke loudly on their ears, as though the utterer was a trifle distracted. In a second it was repeated, with the assistance of another voice.

“Ah!” said the Baron, “It must be them — on to them!”

“Then have they mistaken the path,” urged Lindsay.

“So much the better, for I have them now in my grasp,” chuckled the Baron.

“Hum!” muttered Lindsay. “If young Hal had the leading of the girls through this maze, he would not mistake, I wager my head. These shouters are none of those we seek, I warrant me!”

“Lead to them,” cried the Baron, impatiently.

“We are leaving the right path,” suggested Lindsey.

“I care not. What matters it to me?” roared the Baron. “I must have the fugitives — lead on!”

“As your lordship wills, I obey”, answered Lindsay, leading on. The shouts redoubled almost frantically and, as the Baron and his followers advanced, the sounds grew louder, until the noise of approaching footsteps coming rapidly towards them rather astonished his lordship, who hardly guessed that the fugitives had a decided wish to run into his arms. His speculations were in another minute set at rest by the appearance of the two retainers, who had lost their way in pursuing Robin. Their features were haggard, pale, and bore evidence of fear and exhaustion. If the Baron had felt some astonishment at anticipating the approach of his daughter and her companions, he decidedly felt a much larger proportion of it upon encountering the two men who joyfully had once more rejoined their fellow beings.

“How now, knaves!” sternly demanded Fitz Alwine, enraged at his disappointment. “How came ye here?”

One of them related, in a few words, the whole history of their disgraceable predicament.

“Heard ye, or saw ye, anyone while here?” demanded the Baron.

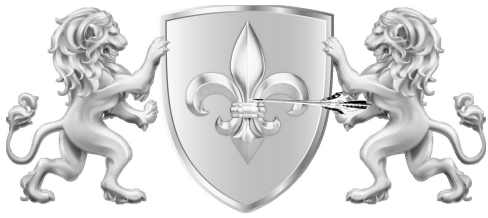
“No, my lord. Once we saw, as we thought, the gleam of a torch,” said one of the men. “We hallooed and ran in the direction, but found we were mistaken. We had a fearful idea we should be left here to starve, and each minute we expected the foul fiend, or some of his impish sprites, at our shoulders. Holy Mary keep us!” and the man crossed himself.

“Pish!” cried the Baron, with disgust. “Lead on quickly, Lindsay, we must make up for lost time.”

Lindsay led on, and without further interruption they gained the terminus of the passage leading to the forest. The door was unbolted and ajar.

“It is as I suspected,” exclaimed Fitz Alwine. “This way have they escaped. Four of you men spread yourselves along the borders as rapidly as you can, and endeavour to trace them, they cannot be far – A hundred merks to him who brings them to me, and fifty to him who brings satisfactory intelligence of their hiding place. Away with you! Lindsay, we will return as we came. See that door securely fastened — so. Now lead the way to my sitting apartment.”

This was done, and then he gave orders for another party of men to arm and saddle their horses. When he was given to understand this was accomplished, he called for his own steed, equipped himself for a journey, mounted his barb, and bidding Herbert Lindsay yet further to satisfy himself that his daughter, or the Lady were not still in the castle, rode off at the head of his men in the direction of Mansfieldwoodhaus.



Chapter 14

That trot became a gallop soon,
In spite of curb and rein.
So stooping down, as needs he must
Who cannot sit upright,
He grasped his mane with both his hands,
And eke with all his might.
His horse, who never in that sort
Had handled been before
What thing upon his back had got,
Did wonder more and more.
So like an arrow swift he flew
Shot by an archer strong,
So did he fly –

----- Cowper

Robin Hood, on leaving the Lady Christabel, had thrown himself beneath a cluster of hawthorn bushes and tall gorse. Many times, when he had been outlying in the wood to shoot deer, had he practised crawling and gliding beneath the stunted heaths and gorse, with the purpose of seeing how silently and near he could approach the timid deer unobservedly. He excelled in this facility, as he did in all in which skillfulness was required. He had now a double motive to put his powers to the test, both as regarded his safety in remaining undiscovered, and of ascertaining unchallenged in what the stranger was employed, and the possibility of passing him unseen, or of rendering him powerless in preventing such an attempt.

He took a wide circuit, with the hope of keeping from popping too unpleasantly suddenly upon him. He gained, as well as he could calculate, the limits of the boundary in which the fellow must be concealed, then commenced narrowing his circle until he got sight of the object of which he was in search. It was the rider of the steed, upon his hands and knees, gazing earnestly in the direction in which Christabel was stationed. He had his head close to the diverging branches, or rather stems, of an ash tree, and appeared quite absorbed in the contemplation of the object upon which he was gazing.

Robin could not ascertain, from the place where he lay, what the object was which appeared to fascinate this fellow so completely, but he came at once to the conclusion that now was the time to strike the blow for his deliverance. He therefore glanced rapidly and scrutinisingly round, looking for anything which might turn to his advantage, even as regarded

a knowledge of the locality. He had no desire to shed blood, ere it was in his power effectually to silence the fellow by sending an arrow through his heart — the accuracy of his aim making such an act fatally sure.

He noticed, in observing the stranger's means of resistance, that his weapons consisted of a short spear resting by his knees, and a quarter staff leaning against the huge trunk of an immense oak. He came to a resolution how to act, and immediately proceeded to act upon it. He crawled upon his breast as near as he dared, then he raised himself up, and noiselessly approached the tree, against which leaned the quarter staff. Of this he possessed himself, and getting quite close to the prostrate fellow, he raised his foot, and giving it a thrust with all his strength against the fellow's posteriors, jerked him forward with such sudden power, that his head forced itself between the stems of the ash, violently, and they closed round his neck, completely imprisoning him, as though he had been held in a vise. It was so unlooked for, so unexpected, on the part of the unhappy horseman, that for a moment, he was paralysed. But it was no situation to remain long silent in, and as he conceived it to be the work of some forest sprite, he gave utterance to such a grievous roar, he made the forest echo for some distance.

Whack came the quarter staff over his back and sides. It was, perhaps, an unfair advantage which Robin took, but he believed that, under the circumstances, he was perfectly justified in applying any means of advantage which might lie in his power to his own particular profit. He therefore laid the staff upon the other with right goodwill, producing a bruise and a yell from every stroke, which, to do them justice, were most vigorously bestowed.

This beating went a long way to satisfy the captured spy that it could be from no source but a devilish one that he received this treatment. He could not see his chastiser — the stems holding his neck with such force that he was utterly prevented. Although he struggled with all the strength he was master of to free himself from this unpleasant embrace, yet he found his strength unequal to the task, and therefore, being unable to do anything else, he gave utterance to a series of roars, interspersed with *Ave Marias* and *Paternosters*, besides exordiums for the discomfiture of evil spirits.

As it would not answer Robin's purpose to suffer him to continue this uproar, he hastily proceeded to put a stop to it. He unclasped the fellow's belt. His steel cap had fallen when his head was thrust between the trees — this Robin picked up, thrust over his face and mouth, and parsing the belt round it and the stems of the tree, buckled him to it. Picking up his spear, which he thought might be useful, and keeping the quarter staff, he went back to the Lady Christabel.

He found her not very implicitly obeying his directions, for she was standing out in the glade, her hands clasped, and gazing distractedly round her. As her eye lighted upon Robin, she looked at him steadfastly, hesitating for a moment whether to fly or approach.

Robin, observing this, said gently – “Sweet lady, fear me not. All again is safe, and for the present, we shall journey on unchallenged.”

“What meant that terrible outcry?” she enquired, tremblingly. “Oh! youth, youth, I have no strength to bear this excitement; I am weak beyond my own imagining.”

“Nay, lady, cheer up! There is no harm done,” said Robin, soothingly; “Let us on quickly, and the danger will soon be over. I was right. This man is one of the Baron’s retainers, and his appearance betokens there are more abroad. Come, lady, come.”

She took his hand, and he led her on. They had to pass the tree to which the fellow was bound, and Robin ascertained on reaching it, that he had committed a grand mistake.

In binding the fellow’s mouth, he had forgotten to bind his hands, and he now perceived the fellow had used them to set his mouth and eyes at liberty, while he was struggling to so separate the ash stems that he might liberate his head. But in that he had not yet succeeded, and our hero determined, if possible, not to give him a chance.

He sprang on him, and seizing his arms, forced them, notwithstanding the other’s struggles to the contrary, behind him, and then used the belt to fasten them. This accomplished, he tore a twig from the tree, and thrusting the cap to its former place, fastened it with the *withe* [‘*band, fetter*’]. He then rejoined the Lady Christabel, and they proceeded on their way, avoiding the highway, and threading their route through the old forest.

The reader can understand that the old wood now contained nearly the whole of the *dramatis persona* as yet included in this history. It has just been stated that the Lady Christabel and Robin were taking their way ‘*beneath the forest solitude*’, in the direction of Robin’s dell, the Baron had dispatched one of his retainers the direct road to Mansfieldwoodhaus — he was one of the men who had been well thrashed at Hood’s the night preceding. This fellow knew the path well, and had been sent on first, with the idea that if he had taken that path, he might detain them until Lambie, who was following with a troop, should arrive, and make them prisoners. With his success the reader has just been made acquainted.

The irascible father, accompanied by a score or so of retainers had also thrown himself into the pursuit. He had chosen a somewhat circuitous route, and spread his men rather widely, with a certain conviction that his cunningly-devised scheme for the capture of the fugitives would succeed.

Leaving him in full gallop, cogitating what he'd say to his daughter when he caught her, what he'd do to Maude, Hal, and Robin when he had made them prisoners, and how high he'd hang Allan when he had him in his power, we proceed to lift the curtain hiding the remaining actors in this ballet of action, and show that Allan, accompanied by Little John, Friar Tuck, Will and his six stalwart brothers, were speeding to Robin's dell, while Maude and Hal were wending their wearied footsteps towards Hood's cottage.

The two latter personages followed Robin's directions implicitly, and with all prudent speed, but his absence had a material effect upon Maude. While in his company, or acting in her mistress' service, she was bold and light of heart. She would have gone treble the distance she was then pursuing, nor wasted a second thought upon it. Now she was sad.

Over-excitement had left its consequent depression, and even though her foster brother, Hal, was with her, and used all his powers to cheer her, it was to little purpose: the way seemed long and toilsome, her imagination had already converted one mile into four, and she asked with a kind of faltering voice, conveying an idea that she would receive an answer which would consign her almost to despair –

"How far have we got to go?"

"Oh! no distance, Maude, only a step or so. A short ten miles will cover it."

"A what?" she faintly articulated.

"Nay, nonsense, Maude, 'tis not far for a morning's ramble, and particularly when we are doing the Lady Christabel a service. Come, throw off this sad humour, Maude. It's unlike you to be so very dull; I should like to know what has made you so. Ah, Master Steinkopf had something to do with it, I know."

A slight shudder passed over Maude's frame.

"I tell you, foster sister," continued he, "I am Robin Hood's friend, heart, soul, hand, and body, for sending that rogue headlong to his father the devil. There's only one thing – I'd rather have done it myself. The iron-hearted villain, the filthy, sneaking cur! Were there no screech owl birds of his own tribe, that he must be ruffling the feathers of a gentle dove like thee? When I saw the scoundrel seize thee so roughly, I felt as if I was red hot – as if I had been plunged in boiling water!"

"Ah," said Maude, with something of a smile illumining her pale features, "If it had been Grace May?"

“Why, look you, Maude,” returned he, rather excitedly and very earnestly, “I’d do anything in the world for you – a wrong to you is a deep one to me. But with Grace May it’s a crime nothing can repair but extermination. If Steinkopf had done so to her, I’d not only have destroyed him, but I’d here found out if he had any relations – I wouldn’t care how distant – and have treated them to a taste of the same retaliation for their relationship – I would! The ban of the accursed cling to him – a foul –”

“Hush! Hal, peace!” interposed Maude. “We speak of him no more, he has paid for his unmanliness with his life.”

“And so he has, Maude. Thanks to – Hark! There are footsteps; who comes here. Ha, Mass! ‘tis Tuck, Maude, and that cavalier the Lady Christabel was to meet. Ho, sirs, well met!”

Hal was correct. It was Allan and their party on their way to meet Robin at the dell. They quickened their steps as their eyes encountered the forms of Hal and his sister, and very soon they formed one party.

Many questions were asked, and Maude, as briefly as she could, detailed the past events to the impatient Allan.


Reunion In The Forest

It was then agreed that they should all proceed at once, as quickly as they could, to meet Robin and his fair charge – Maude most resolutely persisting in making one of the party, in spite of all the suggestions as to the prudence of her proceeding on to Gamwell Hall, and preparing for her mistress’ arrival there, as well as its being a path in which she was not likely to be discovered.

She proved an obstinate little puss in this affair, and would have her own way. When Allan and his companions found this to be the case, they considerately yielded the point and she accompanied them.

Friar Tuck endeavoured to make himself very amiable to her. He smiled, he talked less boisterously than usual, he grew witty and all to no purpose. There was a marked change in her demeanour to him; she treated him gently but coolly. There was kindness in it, yet it was of that nature which repelled familiarity, preserving respect at the expense of affectionateness.

How quickly he detected it! He made several earnest efforts to set it aside in vain, and then his heart failed him. He talked less; at length he ceased, and was silent and thoughtful, Maude being scarcely less so.

But there was another one who strove to make himself agreeable, one who, after he had gazed a few minutes upon her, smoothed his hair down, altered the set of his cap, and glanced at his attire to discover a stray disorder – who should it be but our friend Will Scarlet.

There was a style of beauty in Maude's features which perfectly corresponded with his ideas of feminine loveliness. She had an oval face rather small, bright dark eyes, dwelling in long eyelids bordered with a deep fringe of silken hair. They were laughing eyes to a turn, would laugh outright ere the lips could accomplish a smile. And yet, too, they were rare lips! To behold them was like looking on rich and tempting fruit. You were sure to think of your own mouth, and do your best to make a close friendship between them. Her nose was long – not too long – thin, and slightly curved, peculiarly adapted to the shape of her face. And then she had beautiful dark hair.

This collection of charms was set upon a figure of most pleasing proportion: slim, without appearing thin, rather above the common height, without appearing tall — a figure which would draw from an observer who possessed the taste to form a judgment, an exclamation respecting its perfect completeness. Will Scarlet possessed sufficient taste to satisfy himself that Maude was one of the prettiest girls he had ever clapped eyes on. He thought that he would, therefore, cultivate her acquaintance.

No one could challenge him with bashfulness – he did not know what it meant. He according hesitated not in addressing her, nor felt at a loss how to commence. "You know Robin Hood?" said he.

"I do," she replied.

"And you like him, I am sure?"

"I do indeed," she replied with a faint smile, and then continued, "You know him well, probably you have known him long. How lives he in your liking?"

"Why maiden, even as my right hand, which I would rather lose than his friendship. He has the truest aim of anyone who can wield a bow in the country, and his heart's as true as his aim. The boldest and the gentlest spirit, has the most to be proud of, and is the humblest of his merits. Robin Hood for my friend, and I defy all the world beside."

"You are very earnest in your praise!"

"And utter truth, as I am one of God's created things!"

"You have reason to believe, Maude, that the Baron will discover Christabel's flight soon after her departure?" asked Allan, interrupting the conversation.

“Yes,” replied Maude, “for it was rumoured this evening in the castle, that my lord the Baron had received a summons to London. With all dispatch, he was to have started early this morning, and I know he purposed taking my lady with him. He will, therefore, if he is not already, be soon aware of her absence, but not of the route she has taken. Pray Heaven she may rejoin us, without being discovered and dragged back by her father. I almost dread it, for as soon as he finds she has gone, he will dispatch the people round in all directions.”

“Hark!” cried Little John, “There’s the tramp of, horses rising on the wind — a troop is coming this way. If they be of the Baron’s retainers we had better give them a wide path, and if they be not, no harm can come of our keeping out of sight. Follow me quickly, lads, here’s a covert at hand will hold us all snug and quietly, and if any prying knave among the comers should pop his eye upon our covert, and be in haste to proclaim it to his companions, why we must send him to his home, short of his nose. In with you, friends! Here they come, and, marry, at a huge pace, too. Ha! What means this!”

Well might Little John have given utterance to that exclamation, for, on turning his eye down the pathway, he saw a horseman come at a tremendous pace, followed by four others at the top of their speed. Upon the back of the first horse was rested, or rather squatted, a rider who had evidently lost all control over his steed.

He had lost his cap, and his hair streamed in the wind as he flew along, ‘*grinning horribly a ghastly smile*’ of horror and terror at his situation. He soon reached the spot which contained our little party, and as he dashed by, Little John saw that the horse had an arrow sticking in his neck.

He was past in an instant, and his followers also.

“Heaven deliver us, it was the Baron! It is the Baron! The Baron Fitz Alwine!” ejaculated Maude, Hal, and Allan, in a breath.

“That should have been one of young Robin’s arrows. Will, did you see it?” said Little John.

“It looked like it,” returned Will, “as well as I could gather from the hasty sight I caught of it. It was of the length and thinness of his make.”

“If such is the case, then mischief is abroad,” said Little John. “Robin and the lady are in some strait, he is not the lad to throw his weapons away in sport when he has need of them in earnest. We must on and do our best for him. I know a path which will lead on to the dell, quietly and secretly, if we ourselves are not indiscreet. So, Master Will, use your discretion if you’d serve your friend, bridle your tongue, no snatches of ballads nor use of your bow and quiver until we stand in need of their service. Follow me.”

Concluding thus, Little John stole stealthily from his hiding place, and leading through an entangled copse, closely followed by his little band, was soon lost to sight amidst the profusion of forest things.

Poor Baron Fitz Alwine! Hot, hasty, impetuous Baron Fitz Alwine! What a series of disasters had he suddenly encountered. His temper, naturally violent, had for a short time previous to his becoming acquainted with Allan's intention of paying him a visit, been in a kind of lull, a species of quiescence arising from an entire harmony of circumstances arising at the time by some strange coincidence.

It was but the calm which precedes a storm, for when that intelligence reached him, he began to swell, grow angry, and break up the existing pause.

He, however, determined to purchase a renewal of his quiet by the most effectual means within his power: a determination which developed itself by his employing Ritson, then in his service under the name of Taillefer, to kill Allan ere he could reach Nottingham, and bade him employ another, if necessary to assist him, which Ritson did, in the person of the same outlaw who was buried with him beneath the oak and beech tree. To make assurance doubly sure, he dispatched a party of men, soon after Ritson had departed on his vile mission, to aid him, but the scheme, though conceived so as to make its execution almost certain, turned out an undoubted failure. Ere he knew this, however, the morning commenced by giving him the racking pains of the gout in his shoulder. In the midst of a paroxysm of the disorder, in walked — to his undisguised astonishment — Allan!

From this point onward, as the reader knows, he had met with nothing but defeats, disappointments, and discomfiture. These successive annoyances, added to pain and want of rest, had made him really in a burning fever. He had arrived at that frame of mind, that state of fury, which produced a settled determination to consign to death, without a hope of mitigation, any one of the fugitives, except his child, who might fall into his power. And, also, the stern resolve to scour every foot of the forest, rather than not track them to their hiding place, even if he spent a week in the search; and the consequence of this determination was that he was led into fresh disasters.

Poor old Baron, of cayenne composition! He little expected what would shortly befall him. In his pursuit, he had, by chance, taken a route, which in its circle comprehended his daughter and Robin. A disagreeable fact for the latter, of which he became aware by first hearing the tramp of horses, and then by cautiously advancing beneath the underwood, beholding the Baron reining in his steed. He heard him dispatch the greater portion of

the men in different directions, while he, with four of them, purposed staying just where he was, until they should bring him an account of their good or ill success.

It so happened, unfortunately for our hero and his fair companion, that the spot Fitz Alwine had chosen commanded every outlet in the direction he wished to pursue. Unless, therefore, he could, by any stratagem, induce him to quit his favourable position, he would either be inevitably discovered, or he must retrace his steps, and take a longer and by no means safer way.

The Lady Christabel, who was timid to a fault, he had been compelled to quit for the purpose of making his present discovery, and fearing that her alarm might lead her into some indiscreet act which would disclose their proximity to her father and retainers, he returned to the spot where he had left her. It was with no very agreeable sensation that he perceived, just as he arrived, two of the men dispatched in search of him, having dismounted, beating the bushes and gorse close by the clump of furze and hawthorn which concealed him and Christabel. They approached nearer and nearer, narrowing at every step the distance between them.

Robin saw that a few steps more and they must be discovered. There was one alternative, which was by shooting them both, and on the impulse which the necessity for employing that alternative produced, he strung an arrow, but Christabel clasped her hands, and whispered that she would rather be discovered than be the cause of more bloodshed. He held his hand, and said it should be as she desired, although, at the same time, he felt assured that if they were discovered, his share of life would be a small one. He knew that the lady would be treated with respect and care by these men, if they captured her.

Therefore, if he had the chance of escape, he might leave her and shift for himself, with a good grace. As discovery seemed inevitable, he determined to give them a chase, and communicated his intention to her, at the same time observing, he would not leave her until the last moment. He was, however, spared the necessity, for one of the fellows, who stood within three feet of him, said:

“It’s of no use our wasting our time here, we shan’t find them crouching like snakes in the grass. If they are anywhere, it’s in some of the glades nearer the open pathway than this. Besides, I care not how soon I get my horse out of this rough road — I shall have my head off with a blow from some of these low branches. Come along!”

His companion did as he was requested, and they disappeared in the depths of a thicket, leaving those of whom they were in search just at the precise instant that they were almost within their grasp. Robin did not

think it advisable to remain in the same place long, so, leading forth Christabel, he renewed his journey, still gliding from bush to bush, and tree to tree. The very great danger they were in of being discovered rendered such precaution necessary.

It was a matter of peculiar annoyance to him that the Baron would keep in the position he had assumed, for, unless he departed, and left the coast clear, it was utterly impossible to proceed without detection.

When Robin had arrived with his charge as far as he durst, he paused to consider what line of conduct to pursue. He was but a short distance from the place of meeting, and, once past this glade, he had little doubt of performing the remainder of the journey undetected. He could see his pursuers, although they saw him not. He perceived the old Baron trotting up and down the glade, peering here and there to catch a glimpse of anything in the shape of those he sought, but he quitted not the glade. The truth was, he gave Robin the credit of being expert in the use of the bow, and rather too ready with it. Steinkopf's death had given him an unpleasant proof of this, and he, therefore, thought it quite as well to keep where he was, and let his men be the seekers, and, he hoped, the finders.

His steed was one of rare mettle. It pranced and curvetted, threw up its head and champed the bit, with the proud air of perfect blood. Robin had been thinking of doing the very thing the Baron had given him credit for, but hesitated, for though he believed he should be doing Christabel a favour by sending her father into the other world, it struck him she might not like the manner of doing it. And as he watched him riding up and down with such an evident intention of remaining there for a long time, he wished all sorts of things, the least of which was, that his horse would run away with him.

Then suddenly the thought struck him that such an event might be produced by very simple means, and accordingly, after the Baron had galloped to the end of the glade and was half way back, doing his best to beguile the time, an arrow from Robin's bow pierced his steed's neck, delivered just with strength enough to insert itself firmly without proving fatal at once. As Robin expected, the horse reared and plunged violently the moment he received it, and very nearly unhorsed his rider. He then bounded madly forward at the top of his speed to the affright of the startled and dismayed Baron, who uttered a shout of terror as the unexpected event occurred.

He tried to rein in the stricken steed, but all such efforts were futile. His four retainers, who witnessed the sudden flight of the horse, and heard the shout of their lord, without being near enough to decipher the cause,

had nothing left them to do but, after performing a stare of wonder, to gallop after him in pursuit. This was exactly what Robin wished. He took advantage of it to cross the glade, and in a short time had led Christabel to the side of the small stream, and there they seated themselves beneath the shade of the old oak tree at the appointed spot.

In the meanwhile, away flew the horse which bore the Baron, dashing through glades, tearing through coverts, brakes, and thickets — now grazing the Baron's legs against the trunks of trees, then putting his head in danger of a blow from a straggling branch. They came to a deep hollow, where the small stream had widened into a sheet of water, something more than a large pond.

Slash plunged the steed through it, throwing up a sheet of foam, which succeeded in soaking the Baron, and nearly depriving him of his breath. But how firmly he kept his seat! He clung convulsively to the pommel of the saddle and the rein, with an energy which seemed to defy all attempts to unseat him. The stream was left behind; a thicket was dashed through, and he left his cap upon a twig as he passed.

They arrived in the highway, flew by Allan and his party, and the Baron began to think the horse meant to keep on forever. As, however, he had no ambition to do so likewise, he entertained serious opinions of throwing himself off, and cast his eyes anxiously on either side, to see for a soft place to accomplish it. But it happened that every spot appeared to be exceedingly rugged, and he deferred attempting until a better opportunity offered.

Presently he became aware that his horse was taking a deliberate aim at an oak tree, which, among other peculiarities, had a branch shooting straight out, rather low, and bearing an extraordinary resemblance to a candelabrum, placed horizontally. He looked at it, as he approached, with an eye of misgiving, and prepared to make a low bob, in strong hope to pass under without collision.

Unfortunately, beneath the tree lay the extended trunk of an oak, felled in some storm of wind. The horse, who noticed not the extended arm, did the trunk and, upon reaching it, leaped high over it with such a sudden bound that he jerked the Baron out of his saddle. The branch, catching him beneath the chin, left him suspended in a grievous state, Absalom-like, roaring for help.

His steed, who stayed for nothing, kept on and the Baron's retainers, who were not exactly '*blithe and gay*,' but had a decidedly large share of stupidity, instead of attempting to rescue their lord from his unfortunate dilemma, kept on at full speed after the flying steed, leaving him like a ripe plum, ready to drop to the ground.

This, indeed, his first impulse was to attempt, but the height was too great to hazard it rashly. He did not like jumping — he had bruised himself the night before in such an attempt, and he thought that it would be perhaps advisable to ascertain if there were not easier and safer modes of descent.

While agitating this, and his arms beginning to ache with his weight, to his intense horror and dismay, a wolf marched out from beneath a quantity of gorse, and trotted deliberately up to the tree from which he was hanging. He broke out all over in a cold sweat, his eyes rolled, his teeth chattered; he gave utterance to a lamentable yell, which had not the effect of disturbing the wolf, who licked his chops, and seemed to be thinking about an early dinner. He raised himself on his hind legs, but could not reach high enough. He therefore took a spring, and his nose just reached the Baron's toes.

The affrighted Fitz Alvine uttered a roar, and convulsively jerked up his legs, but he could not keep them up. They would come down, and immediately they did so, the wolf took a second spring, but up went the legs again with agonised action, and down dropped the wolf. The legs lowered, and the wolf, who appeared not to dislike this species of cherrybob, was up again.

And the Baron performed his part; but he felt this could not long continue. His arms were aching even to agony, the strength was leaving his wrists, hands, and, like *Bob Acres*' courage. [*Famous 19th century, fictional coward*]

was fast oozing out of his finger ends.

He made several desperate efforts to throw his legs over the branch from which he was suspended, in order to obtain a seat *à la cheval*, but in this he was doomed to be disappointed.

He unfortunately had lived too luxuriously, and had succeeded in getting rather an extensive portion of stomach. It seemed that every addition to the stomach had caused a subtraction from his legs. He himself wondered how the deuce they could have grown so short, and he came to this knowledge, too, at a time when such a discovery was peculiarly and painfully awkward.

Bringing his toes anywhere near his hands he found quite out of the question and again he was obliged to become a perpendicular line. The wolf, who had quietly awaited the result of the Baron's exertions to place himself beyond his reach, no sooner beheld an attack on the feet practicable, than he attempted it, and succeeded in getting a tolerable nibble at his toes. Fortunately for Fitz Alwine, his legs and feet were

enclosed in mail, and therefore comparatively safe from the brute's fangs; and now an event happened which produced a change in the state of things — the Baron was utterly exhausted.

He felt that he must drop — nothing could prevent him. He grew dizzy; the forest trees appeared to perform an Indian whirl. He muttered *Ave Marias*; began at last to think of other things. Suddenly his hands released their hold from the branch – down he dropped with tremendous force, falling upon the wolf, burying him in the act, and dislocating his neck at the same time, thus killing his foe without being conscious of such an agreeable circumstance, for his own head came in contact with the trunk of the oak lying upon the ground, and added to the insensibility which fear and exhaustion had tended to produce.

Chapter 15

COMUS *I knew each lane, and every alley green,*
Dingle, or bushy dell of this wild wood:
And every bosky bourn from side to side,
My daily walks and ancient neighbourhood.
I can conduct you, lady, to a low
But loyal cottage, where you may be safe
Till further quest.
LADY *Shepherd, I take thy word.*
And trust thy honest offered courtesy.
----- Milton

His limbs with horror shake,
And as he grinds his teeth, what noise they make!
How glare his angry eyes, and yet he's not awake.
See! what cold drops upon his forehead stand,
And how he clenches that broad bony hand.
----- Crabbe

Upon the struggling roots of the '*brave old oak*', on the margin of the small cool stream in Robin's dell, was seated the Lady Christabel and by her side, resting upon the spear obtained from his entrapped foe, stood Robin Hood. Here they awaited the coming of Allan and his friends, patiently, yet anxiously. Robin sought in all ways to beguile the time. In the best manner he was able, he related the little sad history which gave the name to the dell they were seated in, and he pointed out the tree beneath whose shade slept the brother of his foster father.

He spoke of many things, ad at last the conversation turned on Marian. How earnest, how kind and fond, were the praises Christabel bestowed on her! And with what undivided attention Robin's ears drank in every word she uttered respecting her. At first he thought it strange, that when a pause occurred in the conversation, although he had fifty questions to ask her, not one would find its way from his mouth, and his heart all the while beat with extraordinary violence. There was one thing he wished to discover, and for the life of him he knew not how to broach the subject.

That the brother of Marian had given his heart away, he had living evidence before him. But had the sister — had Marian followed the brother's example, and bestowed her love upon some youth equally deserving it, as Christabel was of Allan's? His heart sickened as he thought such might be the case, and then all hope for him must vanish, for what chance had he, he thought, a rough child of the forest, to attempt

to rival some well-favoured, accomplished, happy villain in her affections. Then he fancied he might try what accomplishment there was, he would be glad to know, he could not make his own, if he attempted it, and for her sake too!

'Marry,' thought he, 'There are few manly acquirements which I do not possess. I can play the quarter staff, use the sword, bend a bow, and hit my mark with any archer in the world. I can angle a trout, or fly a hawk, or falcon, with the best. I will foot it, race, or wrestle, and fear not the first fall. I can stride a steed, or walk a distance, and it must be something more than a short one to tire me. There are many other sports, also, I would cry second to none in. In what, then, can this fellow excel me?'

'Is it in person, forsooth? By my halidame, I may not show so well-turned a limb, but it shall be as straight and as strong as any he hath. And for my face, why, that is God's handiwork, and I think not of it. He may be handsomer and pleasanter to gaze upon than I am, but he is not truer to his trust, or honester in heart and purpose, the Holy Mother be my judge!' He concluded with earnestness; and then he laughed impatiently at himself for indulging in such reflections.

If she loved another, what had his own personal qualifications to do with the matter? Had she really given her young heart away, truly and sincerely, why, his personal charms, had they excelled those of Apollo himself, could not have had the slightest influence in producing a change, and, therefore, it was idle to indulge in such imaginings — but did she love another? Ah! He turned to Christabel, and said in rather a hesitating voice – "It must have been a task of some pain to the gentle sister of Allan Clare to have quitted her nearest and dearest friend, and undertake a journey fraught, if not with danger, at least, with difficulty and toil."

"She is unfortunate — or, perhaps, for that matter, fortunate — in not having any but her brother and myself."

"I could scarce imagine one so fair, so faultlessly beautiful, should not possess a friend — an earned and devoted one, such as you, lady, find in her brother." The Lady Christabel understood his meaning instantaneously, and blushed, but she would not appear to do so, and therefore quietly replied—

"Strange as it may appear, she hath not, so far at least, as my knowledge serves me;" and then, having said this, she changed the subject. Robin had no objection. He was quite satisfied with the result of his questioning, and easily suffered his conversation to be led into another channel. The sun now began to peep over the tops of the trees, plainly showing that an hour had elapsed since the sun rose, and, as yet, there was no sign of Allan, Scarlet, nor any of the party. Robin grew impatient, and began to fear some unpleasant circumstances were the cause of the delay.

Suddenly a voice broke on his ear, a loud, clear halloo rang through the air; it startled both him and the lady. He at first conjectured this might proceed from his friends, and was about to respond to it; but a moment's reflection told him that Will Scarlet and Little John, both knowing the path well, were unlikely, under existing events, to be too free with their lungs, when secrecy was so much to be desired, and therefore he waited to see what might follow. The shout was repeated much nearer, with the addition of a man on horseback breaking through the intricacies of the straggling trees, and dashing across the dell.

Robin had barely time to place Christabel and himself behind the tree, when the fellow reined up his steed, and repeated his stentorian call. It was shortly answered by the appearance of two of his companions, mounted and habited like himself, riding leisurely in the direction in which he stood.

They were three of the Baron's people upon the scout for the fugitives. The two, upon perceiving their companion, quickened their pace and joined him; they held a short conversation, and then dispersed in different directions. As soon as they were gone, Robin turned to Christabel, and said, "Lady, this is no place for us; there is too much daylight, and it is too near the castle to rest here securely. We must on. If our friends should come after we have left, they will ascertain that we have been here and proceeded, by my leaving an arrow pointing in the direction we have taken — a common method with us forest folks, and one which Will Scarlet or Little John will easily recognise and understand."

"I trust myself entirely to your guidance; I am sure you do all for the best, and have little doubt and every hope that we shall yet escape."

"Whatever can be done to insure it, dear lady, shall be, rest assured. If you can only keep up your spirits and courage, and so surmount bodily fatigue for another hour, I shall hope to be able to obtain a point from which I can guide you to my father's cottage with a certainty of proceeding unmolested and undiscovered."

"I will do my best," answered Christabel, with a faint smile.

"Many thanks," exclaimed Robin. "And now, lady, our path is beset with difficulties, which will require the exercise of the soundest discretion and coolest judgment to overcome. We must, therefore, be silent, and I must entreat of you, lady, to follow my directions implicitly and upon the instant, for we shall have no time for consideration when the necessity for action arrives."

Christabel promised to obey his counsel, and after having ascertained that no impediments at present existed to prevent their departure, Robin led the lady forth and with all their speed they crossed the dell, which

having accomplished in safety, they glided beneath the underwood, now through thickets and coverts, and then resting beneath the widely spread branches of an elm or oak, as occasion served.

Robin chose the route least likely to be under the surveillance of their pursuers, and in so doing, passed the party he was in hopes of meeting. Allan and his friends had been detained by the presence of a party of retainers in a glade through which they desired to pass, and deeming it the wiser plan, for the sake of the lady of whom they were in search to escort back to Gamwell Hall, to succeed first in getting her into their possession, and then, if necessary, to fight their way back. They suffered these men to stay in the glade, and then depart, without in any way molesting them.

Albeit, Will Scarlet and one or two of his brothers were very desirous of having a bout, but Little John, pointing out the necessity of not bringing a greater number upon their back than they could hope successfully to cope with, they restrained their ardour, and awaited the departure of these men with all the patience they could muster. This event occurring, they succeeded in gaining Robin's dell, not a very long while after Robin and the lady had quitted it. Thus, both acting for the best, they had accomplished that which they were striving to avoid, and so missed each other at the very time they were using their best efforts to effect a meeting.

Christabel exerted herself to the utmost of her ability to assist Robin in his task, and although she began to feel faint and weary from her efforts, she strove to conceal it. Robin could not but perceive it, and did all he could to lighten her path, remove difficulties, and cheer her, by telling her any little circumstance which took place in their favour. And so they went on, he beginning fondly to anticipate a successful termination to their journey, when an event occurred which had a most material influence upon it. Having quitted the mazes of a deep thicket, they reached an open glade. This they passed swiftly along.

As they were about to dive into the recesses of a covert of young trees and underwood, they were stayed by the sight of the body of a man stretched lifeless upon the ground by the side of an extended oak. No sooner did Christabel catch a sight of it, than she uttered a piercing shriek, and exclaimed — "Merciful Heaven, it is my father! Dead! Dead!" and she prostrated herself upon the body, while Robin stared aghast at this discovery. In an instant he attributed this unfortunate catastrophe to himself, in having shot the horse, and so, through its throwing its rider, had been the cause of his death.

“Holy Virgin!” he muttered, “This is unfortunate. Is he dead or only stunned?” he added, as he looked close to the Baron.

There was a graze upon the forehead, from which the blood was slowly trickling. “I did not that,” said he as it caught his eye. “He has struck himself against this fallen tree, and is but stunned. Lady — Lady Christabel, look up, madam. He is not hurt!” he cried, bending over her, and making a gentle effort to raise her.

“Lady, there is nought to fear — but our discovery! Let us away, he is only in a faint. Holy Mother, she has swooned!”

“This is an awkward predicament, truly. What’s to be done — we must not stay here. Ah! he revives!” he muttered, as the Baron began to stretch forth his hands and give utterance to strange ramblings.

“This will never do — Lady — Lady! By Heaven! She is as senseless as the old tiger was a moment since — I must carry her away,” and he tried to lift her up, but the Baron, who began to have a dim sense of the wolf’s presence, and imagining that the weight of his daughter was that of the animal, clutched tight hold of her drapery, and re-solved to sell his life dearly. He thereupon began to struggle, to rend and rive, to mutter oaths and *Ave Marias* in a breath, much to the admiration and astonishment of Robin.

“No, no, vile monster, ravenous wretch, not this time!” he roared; “I have still some strength left in my old bones — no, no. Huh!” he shouted; “What, another? Then I am lost! *Pater noster qui es in cœlis, sanctificeter nomen tuum*, – oh, oh!”

He struggled violently with his eyes shut, and what he conceived to be another of the tribe, was Robin, who seeing the attack the old fellow made upon his daughter, thought it highly necessary he should interfere, and therefore, knelt upon the old man, and seized his arms, hoping the lady would shortly recover, even while he held him.

But she still lay without life or motion and the Baron, surprised at this silence, for no growl, met his ear, and his arms when extended, were quietly held there, began to wonder whether he was the victim of beasts of prey or not. He essayed a lunge, and Robin met it by pressing his knee

upon his neck, and muttered something in as gruff a voice as he could assume, which Fitz Alvine's fright conjured into the growl of a ferocious, blood-thirsty wolf. He groaned in spirit.

"Oh, my time has come! Oh, if I escape with life, I'll cause a mass to be offered up every day for three years, I'll give a new altar to the Convent of St. Benedict. Oh,

Libera nos quæsamus Domine, ab omnibus malis, præteritis, præsentibus, et futuritis, &c. ['*et cetera*']"

and then he gave another lunge, which met with the like treatment from Robin, who was growing very uneasy that the lady would remain this long while in her swoon.

"*Domine exaudi orationem meam*," contin-ued the Baron, "*mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*." Here he strove to strike his breast, an act which Robin would on no account permit, and as the Baron was shouting all this in a voice more forte than Robin deemed essential for his own welfare, he bade him be silent.

On hearing a voice, the Baron pricked up his ears and thought for a moment. He kept silent; yet, as he never recollected hearing wolves speak, or having heard that they ever did so, he thought he'd just open his eyes — he did it as soon as think it and it was with no small surprise he saw Robin Hood's face within two feet of his own, while extended upon his chest lay his daughter.

This was a sight which restored him to his senses. No sooner was he fully conscious of it, than he commenced shouting and struggling to get up; roaring, chuckling, and swearing, in a breath, that he had the fugitives once more safe within his grasp.

Robin bade him be quiet in a voice which, from contention, speedily became as loud as the Baron's, and thus they engaged in struggling and shouting until our hero fully expected to have the whole forest about his ears. It was evidently of little use to continue struggling there, for the Baron had rolled, and turned, and struggled, until he had disengaged himself from his daughter's body; and then Robin sprang up, and passed his bow from his shoulder to his hand, strung an arrow, and to the horror of the Baron, took a deliberate aim at his head as he raised himself to his feet.

"Ha, aha!"cried he, in an agony of terror, "Coward, would you — an unarmed man?" and he darted behind a tree; in his haste his toe caught in one of the straggling roots, and threw him with some violence sprawling upon the ground, but fright lent him aid, and he scrambled up again in a moment, and ensconced himself behind the trunk of the oak, from a branch of which he had so short a time since been suspended.

As soon as he had attained his position, Robin yelled out to him –"Keep you there; show but a limb, a portion of one, the tip of your nose, aye, an eyelash, and an arrow shall quiver through it."

The Baron shook his fist out, and in a second an arrow tore the flesh into strips, and broke two of the fingers. A yell of agony burst from him; he roared and danced with pain, swearing horribly.

"Keep close," cried Robin, in a loud voice, "or, by the Holy Virgin! Your neck, instead of your hand, shall taste my skill."

The Baron let loose a round of anathemas, but he kept close — did not even attempt to peep round, his imagination placing Robin with extended bow and arrow, ready to take advantage of any such act; but our hero was not so employed, he raised the lady, placed her upon his shoulder, and commenced to retreat, but he had scarcely attempted it, when suddenly there was a tremendous shout from the Baron, and the four retainers who had left him hanging, came galloping up to the spot, having failed in their efforts to recover the Baron's steed.

"Ha! Knaves!" shouted their lord, "Upon him, that is he and my daughter, seize them!" In the excitement of the moment, he quitted his covert, and pointed the couple out to his men. To place Christabel upon the ground, to fit an arrow, and aim at the Baron, was but the work of an instant to Robin. "Keep off, villains," he cried with all his energy, "Keep off, or by the Almighty Power I send this arrow quivering through the Baron's heart!"

The words were hardly uttered when the Baron darted behind his tree, crying out to the men to advance.

"Hold off!" exclaimed Robin, "'tis certain death to one of you if you advance one footstep. Let me depart with this lady in peace, and I will not harm you, but offer to prevent me, and your blood be upon your own heads."

"Upon him, knaves, rascals, cowards!" roared the Baron, still keeping very close, "The ruffian has already shot me in the hand. Why do you loiter, villains?"

But the 'villains' did not like advancing, with the exception of one, who laughed, and said — "The young cock crows loudly; put down your bow, boy, and surrender quietly." He dismount-ed with the intention of seizing him.

"I warn you keep off — to let me depart in peace," cried Robin, with intense excitement; "If you offer to stay me, by finger or foot, I swear by the Holy Mother! Your life shall pay forfeit."

The man gave a disregarding laugh, and advanced; it was the last laugh he ever gave – the next instant he was seen to leap quivering in the air, and fall to the earth, with an arrow through his heart. The men gave an unconscious shout as they witnessed it, and turned their looks again upon Robin; he was ready with another arrow, and his eyes gleamed like balls of fire.

“Your blood upon your own heads!” he shouted; “Which is he will stay me now?”

“Upon him, dogs!” bellowed the Baron. “Out upon ye, curs! Because one of your mates is scratched, fear ye that boy? Upon him, nor leave the degrading task to me!”

As the men could easily see the scratch was too deep to heal; as they also saw that Robin’s aim was fatally true, they hesitated in advancing, but they all dismounted, and that was doing something. Besides, their horses were of no use just now, for if they attempted to ride Robin down, they might also kill the Lady Christabel, an event which they were aware was not at all the Baron’s wish or intention. Therefore, they dismounted, and thought about advancing in a body with their spears leveled, but there was the bow distended, bearing death in its very aspect, and they hesitated.

Suddenly, there was a great clattering of hoofs, which increased, and then a party of retainers, twelve in number, with our old acquaintance, Lambie, for their leader, burst into the glade, and galloped up to the party, who gave a joyful shout of recognition. The Baron again took heart, and left his tree, seeking the shelter of his troops, by whom he was surrounded.

Immediately they recognised him, Lambie was very eager to unburthen his success, so much so, that on seeing his lord, he was so engrossed by what he had to communicate, that he did not notice the position of Robin,

“My lord Baron!” he cried, “We could not find my lady or the others, but we burnt the place down.”

“Tell me of this anon. Look you there!” impatiently interrupted the Baron; “Look how that young forest whelp keeps my hounds at bay! There is my daughter with him; bring her carefully to me, and take him prisoner.”

Lambie turned, and then saw Robin.

“Ah! my young nimble-legged colt, we have you again — eh? I have been to your stall to find you, and put a torch in the roof.”

“There’s not a stick standing, and your dam caught an arrow in her side, which has sent her to-”

He interrupted himself by uttering a frightful shriek. The shaft which was extended on Robin's bow, was discharged by him as he heard this distracting intelligence, and it found its home in Lambie's throat. The wretched retainer tumbled from his horse, and fell beneath its feet a corpse.

The men seemed paralysed by the sudden death of their leader, and Robin, who was in frenzy of excitement from the intelligence he had just heard, resolved to perish rather than suffer the author of this wrong to gain a triumph to which he was looking with eager, anxious expectation. Taking advantage of the irresolute conduct of his foes, he suddenly slung his bow across his shoulder, re-exerted his utmost strength, and raising the senseless form of the Lady Christabel, threw her across his shoulder and dashed into a thicket.

This act restored the men to consciousness. A shout from the Baron of rage and surprise quickened the pace of several of them, who had dismounted and followed in pursuit. It was now that Robin felt the full value of a knowledge of the forest's intricacies, for what he lost in speed, in having to bear the weight of Christabel, he gained by a knowledge of his path. He kept on at a swift pace, avoiding those places where the path was entangled by briars and thick clusters of young trees; at the same time choosing those which offered a facility of passage, combined with the advantage of being encompassed by shrubs and trees sufficient to screen those who pursued the path without impeding their progress.

Still the odds were against him; he had so short a start of his pursuers, that even that circumstance would have told to his disadvantage, had he been unencumbered, but, so he was situated, his chances of escape were very few. Of this he was perfectly aware, and rightly attached to it its full importance and amount of danger. He, however, maddened by Lambie's words, powerfully excited by seeing his hopes of successful flight dashed from his lips, at a moment when he believed he was safe, resolutely determined to make every effort, in spite of all hazards, to carry his point. Under the influence of these feelings Christabel seemed scarce any weight; it was only in doubling as he fled that he found the inconvenience of his burthen.

But he kept on bravely — he knew if he was captured his life would be taken, if it was only to retaliate Lambie's death; He therefore resolved to persevere to the last, and if then the worse came to the worst, to sell his life as dearly as he could. He heard the shouts of the men in pursuit, could hear them tear the branches aside as they dashed after him, could hear the pattering of a man's feet close behind him, even fancied he heard his hard breathing, — yet he neither stopped nor flagged — he was light and swift of foot, and he tested his powers to their fullest extent.

It was not possible, however, for human nature to sustain much longer this excessive exertion; and this disagreeable fact presented itself to him with greater force when he ascertained that Christabel was being restored to animation. The fellow on his track appeared fast gaining upon him; his shoulders were aching, his breath spent, Christabel uttering feeble moans; and there appeared nothing now for him to attempt — as he felt he could not continue the flight — but to turn and face his pursuers, and endeavour to keep them at bay until they stretched him upon the greensward, lifeless.

Every step he took, the distance between him and his pursuer was being lessened, so he deemed it advisable to stop and get the most favourable position he could. Had he been alone he would not have feared — even doubted making his escape — would have glided from tree to tree, covert to covert, discharging an arrow when an opportunity offered to send it with advantage. But having Christabel in his charge, and sternly resolving rather to die than quit her, his determination being strengthened by the dreadful tidings of the burning of his foster father's cottage, and the murder of his foster mother, he could not avail himself of capabilities which, under other circumstances, he might have successfully applied. He had now no alternative, but to act in the best manner his situation would permit of — to resolve with speed, and act as quickly.

Having then come to the knowledge that he could proceed but a short distance farther with his burthen, he cast his eyes from side to side in search of a favourable spot to cover him and his companion, and at the same time, enable him to make use of his bow and arrows.

Perhaps it is here necessary. that the reader should understand, that, at the period of which we write, the feuds and petty warfare carried on between nobles whose estates joined, and who often sought a pretext to quarrel on some telling question of trespass, in order that the stronger party might possess himself of his neighbour's property — rendered bloodshed a matter of small account, and its frequency contributed still more to lessen the abhorrence which might be supposed to be created by its presence. Incursions, inroads, sudden descents of bands of marauders in the night, ravages, and the fearful enormities which were constantly transpiring — although Henry II made strong efforts to put a stop to them — induced every male member of a family who had aught to lose, or indeed who might at any time be placed in jeopardy, to apply himself to the use of arms, and to seek the destruction of his foe as the best means of avoiding the danger, or preventing its repetition.

Thus, when one man caused another's death by killing him during any encounter as foes, skirmish, flight — it was thought of no more import than killing an animal in a hunt. It was, in truth, the policy to teach this to the youth of the male sex.

Robin Hood had the same ideas inculcated in him by Lincoln, his foster father's serving man; He was made to believe the best and surest way to clear his path of *'brambles and briars*' — to use old Lincoln's language – was to root them out, and then they were not likely to grow again. To kill his enemy, ere he had the chance of doing the same to him. The great barbarism of the time counselled this reasoning; and this will account for Robin Hood's readiness – though yet a boy — to use his weapons to slay his foe.

It was a custom of the period, which the unsettled times made necessary, and as such treated lightly; the reader will, therefore, easily perceive, that Robin Hood, brought up in a situation where he was likely to be an actor in these frightful scenes, would naturally — as he had been taught — think the destruction of an enemy a meritorious action, and still possess the best attributes of a kindly nature. This digression has been made, in order that our hero may not lay under the odium of being deemed sanguinary in his nature, but rather a follower in his emergency of a disgusting custom, which, though it is painful to contemplate, is yet far from being obsolete.

But to our story: Robin having espied a spot, which appeared to be as likely a place to serve his purpose as any he might chance to meet, resolved at once to avail himself of it. An elm tree, whose trunk was of tremendous dimensions, stood before him. It was flanked by a thicket or copse, crowded with young trees of all species, thickly interspersed with under-wood, shrubs, and tall gorse. Directly he saw it, he thought if he could but keep it until Christabel, restored to life, could, by his directions, work her way through, they might yet escape, and he be at the same time enabled to repay, with fearful interest, the outrage upon Gilbert Hood's cottage. He gained the tree; beneath it he gently laid his scarce breathing charge, and then prepared himself to meet his nimblest pursuer, who came bounding on with a shout of anticipated triumph, to seize the boy who had defeated, as yet, all efforts made to capture him. But Robin was ready with his bow extended, and as the retainer came leaping, he discharged the arrow, and the stricken man bounded several feet in agony, and then fell, with a tremendous oath, mortally wounded. He was closely followed by another of the band, who immediately upon seeing the fate of his companion in arms, sought the shelter of a tree's stem, with a prudence and sagacity by no means to be despised. There he ensconced himself, determining to await the arrival of his following friends, and then hold a council how to capture the fugitives.

For be it understood they were none of them such very expert marksmen as to insure, if they fired at Robin, killing him, without also running very great risk of doing the same to Christabel, and their orders were to capture the pair without harming the lady. Most of them were

armed with crossbows, which they were unable, from the reason just given, to use, and our hero took care not to let them come near enough to use their spears. He saw the fellow obtain the cover of the tree with some misgiving, and witnessed the arrival of two or three others, who at the call of their fellow soldier, also sought the cover. He surmised instantly that, if they had any sagacity, they would do their best to surround him, which, from the nature of the ground, was possible, without his being able to prevent them. The Baron now, with a quantity of the men, appeared and never did any one feel a more longing inclination to gratify some pleasant desire than did Robin to send an arrow to the old man's heart.

"For the Lady Christabel's sake," he muttered, "I will hold my hand, but if he has caused my father's cottage to be destroyed, and with it any of their lives, no consideration shall induce me to spare him, if an opportunity place him in my power. Holy Virgin forgive me! But this is bloody work and I, who ne'er before took human life, have had my fill today already, and yet it seems as if it is not to stop here. But cost it what it may, I will escape, if it is to be accomplished — if not, I will not fall unrevenged."

His attention was suddenly drawn to the Lady Christabel, who had awakened from her long swoon, and now demanded, in faint accents, to what place she had been brought. By Robin's assistance she arose, and would, had he not prevented her, have walked from the trunk of the tree towards the spot which contained her father and his bold men, who were doing their best to keep from exposing themselves to the aim of Robin, which experience had told them was terribly accurate.

But our hero, who rather sought to escape by stratagem, and to husband his weapons, by not wasting an arrow until he was sure it would tell with effect, was racking his brain how to commence a retrograde motion without its being discovered. Christabel was enveloped in a black mantle and hood, similar to those worn by Benedictine monks, and he thought this might tell in their favour.

"My dear lady," he said, "A short distance from hence are hidden your father and a body of men. They are aware we are here, and have not the courage to make a rush to capture us, for they know one life will be forfeited if they attempt it, but if we remain we must be inevitably taken. At the same time, our chance of escape rests on our quitting this spot without being discovered. It may be done, I believe, with caution, backed by a good heart and hope in the Holy Mother, but you must commence the retreat, which I am satisfied you can accomplish unnoticed, by drawing your black mantle completely round you, shrinking down, and gliding beneath the brushwood. I will follow you as soon as I can find I may do so without affecting our safe departure, and I do yet trust we shall join your friends in safety. So, courage, sweet lady, for you have need of it, and all will yet be well."

“Oh, no, no, it is impossible,” muttered Christabel, whom fright, fatigue, and the swoon had rendered so weak that all power seemed taken from her, and she wept without being able to restrain her tears, from sheer exhaustion, bodily and mental.

“I cannot proceed,” she continued, sobbing; “Let my father take me back, since it must be so. I have no strength to help myself; I have no courage; this continued state of terror and anxiety will kill me before I can get free from this dreary forest. I am not used to this exertion; I have scarce ever been from my chamber, and want strength of mind to support me. No, good youth, do you fly, save yourself — think not of me, I can die here; you have done all to save me that could be done, for which my earnest thanks are thine. Fly, and Heaven bless you for your exertions in my favour! Leave me to my fate. Delay not, good youth; each moment endangers thy life. Fear not, I shall not long be in my father’s power, my heart will soon break; it is broken — Heaven help me!” she concluded in a tone so woe-begone and spiritless, that it went to Robin’s heart.

“It will help you, dear lady,” said he, soothingly “It will help you; do not doubt it; be not cast down. I will not leave you until you are torn from me, or till I place you in Allan’s hands!”

“Oh!” burst forth Christabel, in a passion of tears, “Allan, Allan, why are you not with me?”

At this moment a sound rose in the air as of the prolonged howl of a wolf; and Christabel was startled by Robin returning the cry with intense energy, and then breaking out in a joyous tone —

“Cheer up, sweet lady, help is at hand; our friends are near; we shall yet escape, trust me. You see Heaven will not desert us, for at your wish Allan is but a short distance from us. I will let our friends know we are in danger, and need their speedy assistance.”

He raised his hands to his mouth, and produced an imitation of the frightened screech of a heron pursued by a falcon, with a clearness and accuracy which was amazing. It was responded to ere the sound had died from his lips, and he cried “Bonnie Will Scarlet, you’re a friend in need. Now, lady, were the number behind that tree thrice its amount, I would keep them in check till our friends come to our assistance, I warrant me. Your father’s retainers will make a sally ere our friends appear, and I must be prepared to meet it. Can you not glide gently beneath the gorse behind us, and remain there out of the way of a stray bolt, for the dogs may grow desperate, and treat us to a taste of their weapons. Fear not to make the trial, lady, help is at hand.”

Poor Christabel's heart beat almost to suffication, but her hope of yet escaping, and the cheering news Robin had conveyed, lent a degree of courage to her sufficient to put in practice his advice. Enshrouding herself in her mantle, she glided beneath the underwood and gorse, but not without a thrilling horror of snakes and reptiles mixing itself up with her conflicting emotions. But that idea was not without its utility, for as she felt no desire to arouse any sleeping reptile, she made her way with a degree of caution which perfectly coincided with Robin's wishes, for it was less likely to draw the attention of the enemy.

At the same time he prepared to distract it, if any unfortunate accident might occur to call it that way. He suddenly bobbed out from behind the tree to the front, and gave a shout which made the glade ring. In an instant, he was back to his place, and at the same moment a bolt from a cross bow struck the tree. He answered it by a shrill laugh of scorn.

Then he saw one of the men spring from his covert, utter a wild cry, toss his arms high in the air, turn madly round, and fall upon the ground bereft of life.

"Here come my friends!" he muttered; "That's a good beginning for our side."

He saw several men dart from the tree which had sheltered them from him and gain others, while several arrows followed them ineffectually.

"That's wasting weapons," be muttered again.

He saw an arrow fly across the glade, and from behind the tree which, had already rent forth several, there issued our friend the Baron, pushing before him, as a sort of screen, one of his men, who already had an arrow sticking in his shoulder. There appeared a very evident, indeed a very strong, reluctance in the retainer to be placed in this situation, consequently there was a considerable amount of struggling, which ended in both coming to the ground, at the precise instant an arrow was on its road to pay them a visit, but which, however, in consequence of their sudden fall, just cleared them.

Perhaps the Baron thought it unwise to lie there still, and counterfeit death, as his soldier did, so he jumped up and trotted off at full speed, calling for a reinforcement most lustily. He was encased in mail, which was unfortunate, for it prevented him running as speedily as he might otherwise have done; and it was fortunate, because the arrows, for which, during his progress, he formed a tolerable target, found no resting place on his person. He was shot at all the way he went, and he was hit, but not wounded. It helped him on his journey, as a spur might a horse, it served to quicken his speed without much damaging him. Presently he was lost to sight.

Then there was a sudden shout, and Little John, with his seven cousins, Allan, and Tuck, emerged from their concealment, divided and dashed full speed at the different places holding the soldiers in cover, unkenneled them, and a smart fight commenced, at close quarters, with spears, staffs, cross bows, and weapons which came most readily to hand in the sudden melée. But it was of short duration, for Little John's party were the strongest in numbers, as well as the readiest at the use of their weapons, and the men opposed to them quickly found it to be the case. They threw down their arms with one accord, and called for quarter. This was granted, and they were bound as soon as it could be accomplished.

It was then, when Robin saw there was nought to be feared from a stray arrow, he gave a joyful shout, and darted after the Lady Christabel, who followed his directions, and disappeared in the underwood. But she had not attended closely to his request; for, instead of stopping, she went on, looking anxiously right and left, expecting to see the gleaming eyes of a wolf or snake in every nook near her, until almost all other feelings became absorbed in this. Robin easily followed the track she had made, and not finding her so near as he expect-ed, he called loudly to her, but received no answer. He increased his speed and voice, and was startled by hearing a loud shriek.

He dashed on, almost franticly, and broke into an open way, just in time to see Christabel lifted on to a swift horse by a mounted retainer, placed before him, and then carried off at full gallop. An arrow was strung to his bow in an instant, but he stayed his hand just as he was about to discharge it. He reflected that if he shot the retainer, the horse would continue his pace, and Christabel be endangered by its unguided progress, and he could not insure, in the position they were to him, hitting the horse in a vital part;

There was one chance, and he resolved, at all hazard; to attempt it.

The forest, at this part, was so covered with thickets, stunted trees, brushwood, copse, underwood, etc., that it was only by circuitous routes a horseman could make a road. He glanced his eyes round the place, he had been in this quarter of the forest so many times, that he knew every inch of ground. He remembered that the way the horseman had chosen was winding, difficult, and so rough in parts that he could not proceed at full speed along it, while there were narrow parts for those on foot, intersecting the wider path.

His hope was, therefore, that he might, by proceeding along one of these narrow paths, intercept the horseman, and do the best circumstances might offer to rescue the lady from the clutches of her captor. He

flew at the top of his speed to put his resolve into action, leaping over heaths and hawthorn bushes, treading the gorse down to keep as straight a path as he could, without showing one symptom of flagging or noticing any obstruction as a difficulty. To think that at the very moment he was assured of having fulfilled his task, it was rendered as doubtful as ever, was maddening to him, and still further determined him to persevere to the last in every effort to accomplish his object.

The path he had chosen was shorter by a fourth to a point which the horseman must pass in pursuing the road he had taken, and as the impediments were greater than those Robin had to surmount, our hero succeeded in reaching the spot as the horseman was working his way with all the speed the road would permit of, up to the same place. Robin drew two arrows from his quiver, kept one in his hand, and the other was placed ready to fire the moment he could use it to advantage.

That moment came, and he used it with terrific effect, the arrow went quivering into the broad chest of the coming horse with such tremendous force, that it was half buried in the poor beast. With a mad plunge it bounded in the air, staggered, drew up its legs, and fell with a deep groan. Its rider, disengaging himself as speedily as he was able, lifted Christabel, and then turned to see from what quarter the death-blow had come, but it was also to meet his own. Robin's second arrow did its work upon him, and placed Christabel once more in his power. This time he was destined to be more successful, and his trembling charge, half dead with fright, was again led by him to meet their friends.

In answer to his enquiries of the cause of her falling into her late captor's hand's, she could scarce give utterance to her words, to such a state of agitation and nervous excitement had she been reduced. But he gathered that, upon her issuing from the copse which he had counseled her to pursue, she encountered this retainer, who recognised her instantly, seized her, lifted her upon his horse, and galloped off. The exertion it required to relate this, somewhat restored her, and enabled her in turn to question Robin how he had succeeded in rescuing her, for being almost in a swoon while borne away, she saw nothing, heard nothing, knew nothing, but that she was once again with a friend. In reply to her interrogatories, Robin evaded the truth, and merely said —

"By the assistance of the Holy Mother, and my own good fortune."

He found the path much longer in returning than it had appeared in coming, but it was passed over, and he at length gained the place where he had left his friends, but saw nothing of them. He still deemed it advisable to keep hidden, and without quitting the copse, he gave the same cry Will Scarlet had given some time previous, and had the

satisfaction of hearing it answered, and of seeing Will himself dart from a short distance, and come running towards him, followed closely by Allan, Little John, leading Maude by the hand, the six Gamwells, and Tuck bringing up the rear. Robin led forth Christabel; With a cry of joy Allen extended his arms as he rushed towards her, and with scarce the power to articulate his name, she sunk weeping on his breast, powerless as an infant, and entirely overcome by exertions, exaggerated by apprehensions. It was painful to witness the passion of tears she gave way to, and how she clung to Allan as if they were to separate that moment forever.

No one spoke, but scarce one there felt unmoved at the sight. Maude came up to Robin, and placed both her hands in his. She smiled, but her lips quivered, and a large tear, stealing from the eyelid, rolled like a pearl down her cheeks. Robin pressed her hands, and spoke huskily. he longed to ask about home — and then he knew she could not have been there. Perhaps some of the others knew the miserable tidings. He looked round, and disengaging his hand from Maude, he beckoned Little John, who answered the summons, and Robin said to him:

“Little John, did you see my father Gilbert Hood, ere you commenced your journey this morning? Or have you heard aught which you like not to tell me?”

“Nay, Robin, there has been a few strange things happen in thy absence, which you will learn in good time; but there was nought of harm to either father or mother up to an hour or so before daybreak, at which time I quitted them,” replied Little John.

“Nor since, I hope, Robin,” remarked Will Scarlet, not having the least objection to get near to Maude. “Why do you ask that?”

“Because, in coming here, I had a skirmish with the Baron and his people –”

“What, the old boy we drew bow at as he trotted down the glade a little while ago?” interrupted Will Scarlet.

“The same,” continued Robin, “And one of them told me he had fired my father’s cottage, left not a stick standing, and my mother he had shot with an arrow.”

“And your answer was one of your cloth yard shafts, I hope, Robin? ” said Little John.

“Aye,” returned he, “and ‘n faith my answer stuck in his throat — too poor a revenge if he spoke truth; but he could not, I would not believe it. I — I must know, and having safely delivered my charge, I will to home at once. So, sister Maude, for home!”

“That your sister?” asked Will with surprise; “I never knew you had a sister before.”

“Neither had I, but I have one now, you see,” replied Robin, with a faint smile.

“I wish my sisters were as nice,” said he.

Robin looked at Maude and laughed, but she did not return it.

“Where is Hal?” he enquired. “He has not surely left you, and returned to Nottingham, although Grace May does live there?”

“Oh, no,” replied Maude, “He was here a short time since. I thought he was still –”

A horse’s footsteps now drew their attention, and Robin’s question was answered by the appearance of Hal galloping down the glade on the back of a spirited steed. He drew up to them and cried —

“See what I have found! If I haven’t fought I have filched. When you marched off those fellows with their hands bound behind them, and all fastened together in a line, I followed to see if they had any friends at hand, or if I could see anything of the Baron, and I met with this fine fellow of a horse fastened to a tree, so I begged leave to borrow him without asking anybody’s concent, as I thought he might be useful — and here we are. I only wish I had flying Maude as well.”

“Hal, you are a useful friend,” said Robin.

“Ho, ho,” cried Hal, on seeing him, “You have got here safely with the Lady Christabel — Hurrah!” and up went his cap.

It was proposed that as Christabel was so weak and faint, she should ride to Gamwell, that being the safest place, that Allan should accompany her, and the rest should, proceed on foot, Little John, Will, and his brothers, to Gamwell; and Robin, Maude, Hal, and Tuck, to Gilbert Hood’s cottage, albeit, Will Scarlet made most strenuous exertions to induce Maude to visit Gamwell Hall first, if it was only to wait upon the Lady Christabel, a proposal which Christabel seconded, and Maude being appealed to, gave a reluctant assent that it should be as they wished. When it was finally arranged, Allan came to Robin Hood, and taking his hand, said —

“Robin Hood, you have done me a service nor gold nor words can repay; You have several times this night risked your life in my service; my more than brother, my dear friend, I pray earnestly and sincerely at some time I may be enabled to show you how I appreciate your conduct to a stranger, one who has no claim on your kindness, one who from the first

was your debtor as a partaker of your hospitality, whose life and that of one most dear to him, even his sister Marian, was held sacred beneath your father's roof against the attack of evil-minded ruffians. Robin, my heart, my soul, are in my words when I say I thank you deeply and sincerely for the Lady Christabel, whom you have successfully led through toils and dangers. She feels your services as deeply as I do, and renders her thanks with equal earnestness and sincerity."

Robin returned the warm pressure of his hand, but could say nothing in reply; he raised the hand which Christabel offered him respectfully to his lips, and then turned the subject by advising their speedy departure, and giving special directions which path to take; but Will Scarlet disagreed with him, advised them to keep in the direct road to Mansfieldwoodhaus, and when they came to a certain point which he described, turn off to Gamwell — it was the nearest and most direct.

"But not the safest," suggested Robin; "You forget the lady is to go." He was, however overruled. Well-armed, Allan, with Christabel seated before him, started off upon the steed at a good speed for Gamwell.

Chapter 16

My lady she is all woe-begone,
And the tears fall from her eyne;
And aye she laments the deadly feud
Between her house and thine.
* * * * *
He mounted himself on a steed so tall,
And her on a fair palfraye,
And slung his bugle about his neck,
And roundly they rode away.

----- The Child of Elle

Then fayntinge in a deadly swoune,
And with a deep felte sighe
That burst her gentle heart in twayne,
Faire Christabel did die.

----- Sir Cauline

It is not too much to say that the heart of Christabel beat with tumultuous rapture when she found herself seated with Allan — even in his arms. The change from the difficulties and dangers she had encountered in her progress to this meeting, to the comparative safety of being with him whom she now, having quitted her father and her home, loved dearer than ever, whom she clung to as her only stay on earth, was certainly very great, and received much of the intensity of its pleasure from the previous perils and mental anxiety. She wound her arms fondly round his neck, and gazed in his eyes with looks of profoundest happiness, sighing in the very fullness of her bliss. Allan pressed her to his bosom, and returned her gaze with rapturous delight.

"My own beloved Christabel! Mine, now and forever! Not the whole world in arms shall again separate us," he ejaculated, in the full tones of earnest feeling.

"I fervently trust not, dearest Allan. I have taken a step perhaps reprehensible, and for which, were it not for the full reliance I place in thee and thy dear sister, I should painfully feel to be a dereliction from maidenly delicacy — from that bright position which every maiden should maintain pure and unstained. But I do place my entire faith in thee. And to save myself a fate worse to me than death itself, I have thus committed what may be deemed a grievous error, and abandoned the last tie who should have preserved, for the sake of his own high-priced honour, my station inviolate. For thee, Allan — for thy dear sake, have I done this, and in doing so, I fear to think I may have lowered myself not alone in my own esteem, but in that of thine and thy dear sister's –"

“Christabel!”

“Hear me, Allan! I cannot but feel that it is, great as my strait, an unmaidenly effort to render null the cruel purpose of my father; and dearly as I love thee — dearly, as I do truly believe that thou lovest me — yet I have strangely painful misgivings that, in thy soul, thou dolt think so too, and in later times may wish thou hadst rather won me in thine own gallant way, than I should thus alone, undowered, friendless, homeless, have thrown myself in thine arms.”

“Christabel! An’ thou would’st not alloy the deep happiness which now is mine, thou wilt not speak thus — think thus. How should I look upon the step which thou hast taken, but as the greatest boon with which mortal was ever dowered? What should I deem it, but the highest, proudest, and priceless gift of a generous and loving soul, the self-sacrifice of a peerless heart to make painless the happiness of one so little worthy of so rich a prize.”

“Allan!”

“In truth it is so, beloved Christabel. Mine is all the gain — thou the large-souled donor. In our early communion thou did’st ever make me thy dear debtor for kindness, which was as an unflawed gem; and when we have in later and less happier times held difficult and infrequent correspondence, thine was the peril, thine the pain of unmerited anger and reproach which accidental discovery brought thee, borne by thee patiently, uncomplainingly, and for me. And now in this last moment of sorrow, of threatened immolation, of revilings and harsh treatment, encountered through me, and borne for my sake, thou dost crown the immeasurable value of thy previous treasures showered upon me, by giving thyself in all trustfulness, in all innocence of thy priceless value, to me.”

“Should I not feel, beloved Christabel, thou having done so much for me, that I am all unworthy of the prize thus made mine, but I will study to deserve it, I cannot fail to estimate and appreciate it at its full value, for I hold it measureless; and I were worse than the basest ingrate that ever made earth recoil at his presence I did not feel the obligation, I, trembling with too much joy, so happily bend under.”

“I know only that I love thee, Allan, and in the firmest, trust in thy truthfulness, I give myself to thee; but thy sister–”

“Dearest Christabel, full well dost thou know her. Tell me, from thy childhood, when as two dear sisters thy wishes and thy acts went hand in hand until thou did’st last see her, hast thou had one cloud pass over the serenity of thy friendship?”

“No, Allan.”

“Has she shown thee any one point in her character which is not as pellucid as on unstained spring?”

“No, Allan.”

“Hath she ever turned a cool or indifferent gaze upon thee, pained thee by a restrained speech, or ever given thee cause to think that thou didst not reign paramount in her heart of hearts, even as thou dost in mine?”

“No, dear Allan; but it is her unblemished heart, her own spotless high sense of perfect purity, which I fear will cause her to condemn the path which I have chosen.”

“And which completes my happiness — that which is her nearest and dearest object on earth. Dearest Christabel, doubt not Marian; she is, as thou hast kindly said, high soul’d, with a mind on which the shadow of taint never fell, and therefore, she will read so rightly, so truly, the motives which hath impelled thee to seek in my arms the happiness and protection which thy parent, strangely regardless of the treasure he possessed, sought so pertinaciously to cast away and destroy. Marian will receive thee, my beloved, with open arms, a heart more open still, and she will enshrine thee there upon the altar of her earthly reverence for things virtuous, noble, and stainless.”

“Might I think thus, I should be so happy, Allan!”

“Thou may’st, be assured, nor suffer one doubt to intrude upon thy happiest wishes. She hath ever loved thee most tenderly, and when she learns that you have complied with my earnest prayer, made to thee in the chapel of the castle, — a prayer, the purpose of which she was well acquainted with, having accompanied me hither in the journey with this sole object, she will worship thee as do I now, and will ever.”

“Dear, dear Allan, I fear the prospective happiness is too great to be realised.”

“I will make untiring efforts to stay aught which may appear to darken a felicity I look forward to as an earthly realization of the paradise we are taught to believe will be ours hereafter.”

“Should my father discover the spot in which we may hereafter dwell, he may send a body of retainers to drag me from you.”

“Christabel, you will then be my wife,” ejaculated Allan, in a proud tone. “I too, shall have men-at-arms to restrain him. I have, too, access to the ear of King Henry, and hold possession of a secret which would make thy father, bold, stern, obstinate, and ruthless as he is, cower to the earth in fear and mortification were I to disclose it.”

“This will I not do, unless his own bad deeds compel me to an act as painful to myself aswithering in its effects to him. We are, however, dearest Christabel, too young in our happiness to suffer it to be alloyed by gloomy forebodings of the future; let us look to the brightest side, and when the evil cometh, be prepared to withstand its brunt with as bold a front as becometh one who hath heard of fear and never yet felt its influence.”

“And yet I would my happiness be without a shadow to lessen its sunshine, could I be assured that he would not step in to mar our peace.”

“An’ thou hast no dearer ties than kin and home to this land, none have I. We would seek some fairer clime. I have heard of islands in the sunny south stretching far out into eternal sunshine, bounded by a blue sea of spotless hue, where the skies are ever fair, and the flowers and trees and fruits are in richest profusion, and of rare beauty and excellence. I am told that it contains all the sweet varieties of upland and meadow, resplendently green in its fertility with the luscious vine; and there are streams, chrystal and pure in their nature, meandering through the open places, wandering and winding through the green woods, and falling in picturesque natural cascades down the hills, leaping, gurgling, and glittering as they fall from rock to rock, and warbling milder music as they ripple and murmur over the pebbly bed and beneath the bending trees, which watchfully throw a shadow over them, keeping them cool and fragrant for the parched lips of the thirsty wayfarer.”

“In this land there are no feuds, no strife, no turmoil. The people are quiet and kind, and as serene as the skies which without cloud ever smile upon them.”

“Hast thou seen this most beautiful land?”

“I have not, but with its bearings I am acquainted, and can soon obtain such information that we might gain it without much toil or fatiguing travel.”

“Oh, Allan! we should be so happy there.”

“And you will leave England and live there — Christabel?”

“With thee Allan, anywhere! But — but —you have painted this land in such glowing colours, and — and — I think I am not made for scenes of strife. My coward heart rebels and pants with an agony worse, if possible, than death, when I am placed in any peril. I am all unequal where I should be most firm. It is my nature to shrink from danger, and I fear, dear Allan, no schooling will much improve me, and therefore I believe, that in this bright land you speak of, I should, in being far removed from all danger of attack, be supremely happy.”

“And so shalt thou be, while I have the power to effect it; and thus when we are wedded, we will, with my dear sister Marian, bid a long adieu to the land which has given us birth, never more returning to its trials or troubles until we can be satisfied that our peace here will be uninterrupted.”

And with her glowing eyes suffused in tears, her voice trembling with emotion, she looked into his eyes, as she reclined her head upon his shoulder and murmured —

“We shall be so — so happy, Allan!”

And he replied, “So very, very happy — Christabel!”

Her warm breath played upon his features as her very beautiful face was upturned close to his own and in earnest of what he had said and what he felt, he imprinted a long and passionate kiss of the purest bliss upon her soft, sweet lips.

No power could rob them of the intense happiness of that moment — that, at least, was sacred, but, alas! It was not fated long to endure; the joy — calm, soft, quiet, and yet ecstatic — which they experienced in picturing the future, was all towards the realization of the bright imaginings of the future they were yet permitted to receive.

A large bird flew croaking out of a thicket which they passed, darted close to the head of the high-mettled steed which bore them, uttering its hoarse cry, startling him from the swift but easy canter in which he was proceeding. He shied, and then broke into a swift gallop, which roused Allan from the delicious trance into which he had fallen, and compelled him to exercise the skill which be amply possessed to control the rapid and erratic movements of the frightened animal.

His strong hand and perfect knowledge soon obtained the mastery, and the horse, once more under control, proceeded at a rapid pace, but not with that care and self comfort which he had before displayed.

As soon as Christabel had somewhat recovered the state of alarm into which this incident had precipitated her, she, clinging nervously to Allen, enquired —

“What bird was that, Allen, that flew thus strangely and unexpectedly across our path?”

“On owl, dearest.”

“An owl,” she repeated, with a slight shudder, “It is a bird of ill omen; it is strange that thus, in the broad daylight, it should, with its evil-toned whoop, dart so directly across our path.”

“My dearest Christabel, suffer not your fears thus to obtain mastery over your better sense. You have been so accustomed to the solitary apartments of the gloomy castle, without friend or companion, that you have permitted idle superstitions to have an undue influence over a mind, which, in its true healthy tone, would discard these trifles with derision.”

“Yet, Allan, it was strange, and its note so mournful. I fear it bodes no good.”

“Nor evil either, Christabel. It had roosted in some low tree near the roadside and was both suddenly and unexpectedly disturbed. Its own fears induced it to seek some safer shelter, and thus it crossed our path. Nothing more, love, believe me.”

“Hark! Allan!” cried Christabel, with a startling quickness, having barely listened to his explanation in the sudden apprehensions which this little incident had occasioned, and whose sense of danger it had wakened and quickened to a considerable extent. “Hark!” she repeated, clinging tightly to him.

“What dost thou hear, love?” asked Allan, gazing earnestly upon her with some strange fear crossing him that the events of the morning been too powerful for her, and touched her brain.

“Listen!” she cried, “There is the tramp of horses’ feet, either following or approaching. We are lost!”

On the instant Allan reined in his horse, and brought him to a stand, and immediately detected the truth of Christabel’s assertion — There was the tramp of horses, not of few, but of many. They were riding hard.

Upon the impulse of the moment, he clapped spurs to his steed, with the intention of plunging into the depths of the nearest thicket, which would conceal them until the horsemen passed. Even as the horse obeyed the impatient call, the ominous owl which had before disconcerted them once more flew out with a wild unearthly cry, full in the face of the affrighted steed. Christabel shrieked, and the horse leaped back, shrinking on to his haunches, then with a mad plunge and bound into the air, he turned his head, sprung forward, and at the top of his speed flew down the roadway in the very direction which it had been the intention of Allen to avoid.

In vain he pulled with all his strength at the rein; the beast caught the bit firmly in his teeth, and Allan’s efforts were for the moment powerless.

He, however, was not thus to be defeated. He tugged right and left with desperate energy, and succeeded in once more obtaining command over the bit, but without being sufficiently fortunate to turn him from the roadway into the deep shadows of the broad trees before they were full in sight of the band of approaching horsemen.

Allan perceived at once his only chance was to keep swiftly on. To turn and flee would be to draw the attention of the armed mounted men, and bring them in pursuit; while there was a chance that if he kept his steed progressing at the mad rate at which he was then galloping, he might fly past them without detection. Whispering a few words of consolation in the ear of his terrified companion, he goaded his steed on to renewed exertions, and gazed anxiously forward to endeavour to ascertain the intentions of the coming horsemen. He knew that if they opened a path for him either right or left, the chances of escape were in his favour; if not, a desperate effort, single-handed against fearful odds, was the terrible and almost hopeless alternative.

On he flew, and as he drew nearer, it was with a knitted brow and firmly set teeth, he observed the troop detecting his approach spread themselves across the road with the obvious purpose of intercepting him. He fastened his cap firmly on his brow, drew his sword, and bidding Christabel have hope in him, and fear not the danger at hand, he prepared himself for the encounter, muttering a prayer to the Holy Virgin, that in this hour of dire need she would not abandon him.

The attire of the troops now in immediate proximity disclosed them to be retainers of the Baron Fitz Alwine, and with it all hope of passing undetected vanished.

Still Allan urged on his steed, and heeded not the loud shouts which were uttered to him to rein in, to dash through the body with irresistible impetuosity, and if his steed withstood the shock of a collision and still kept on, to endeavour to achieve an escape, was the object at which he aimed, and right gallantly did he attempt it.

Cheering the steed forward with his voice, urging him with his armed heels, waving his sword with the determination of cutting down all opposition, he rushed furiously on, and in a few seconds he was in the midst of those whom he too well knew he should find relentless enemies.

The shock was tremendous. A stalwart fellow, mounted upon a strong steed, placed himself in the way, to block up and prevent his further progress. Crash came the steed of Allan, bearing him and his yet more precious burden in terrific contact with him. Horse and rider were rolled in the dust in an instant, and the steed of Allan, controlled by a powerful arm, to which desperation had lent an almost superhuman strength, sustained him on his feet; albeit, he staggered with the recoil, and groaned with the violence of the shock he had received.

An impatient arm was stretched forward to seize the bridle of the checked steed, but, swift as a gleam of lightning, the sword of Allan flashed in the bright sunlight, descended, and smote the limb from the

trunk as though it had been a blade of grass. Unheeding the yell of agony which followed his blow, he buried his spurs once more into the already gored sides of his steed, and urged him to renew his speed. Rearing with fierce pain, with a wild snort the horse plunged forward madly, and a few leaps placed him clear of the formidable barrier which had just intercepted him.

At sight of the open way Allan uttered a cry of joy, and with words quivering with intensity, incited the noble beast to attain his utmost speed; and bravely did the high-blooded animal respond to his cries, for speedily he placed a wide space between him and his foes — but, alas! not for long. For a moment the troop had been electrified; the sight of an approaching horseman, flying at frantic speed, had surprised them; a nearer approach gave them a shrewd surmise as to who were the fugitives, and they at once resolved to stop and capture them. They knew, as the Lady Christabel was the maiden accompanying the youth, that every care was necessary to prevent injuring her, although they must obtain possession of her. They knew the slightest hurt received by her would be repaid with most unreasonably usurious interest by her father, and they had, therefore, much caution to exercise.

Allan, however, by the plan he pursued, com-pletely upset their intention, as well as one of their men, and was almost out of their reach before they could collect their small modicum of senses scattered by the tremendous concussion.

A loud cry was given by the leader to follow in pursuit, and as the mettle of the flying steed seemed superior to any they could boast among them, orders were given to bring him down with the crossbow. A shower of bolts were dispatched, and, unfortunately, with fatal effect. The gallant animal received one in a vital part, and, with a wild cry, leaped into the air, and fell with considerable violence upon the ground, dead.

Allan quickly disengaged himself from the steed, and lifted the fair Christabel from the ground, holding her firmly to his breast, while, with flashing eyes and glittering sword, he awaited the coming attack of the vociferous and excited troopers. Christabel had swooned. Her face, deathly pale, lay upon his shoulder motionless. It seemed as though the remorseless King of Terrors had anticipated Nature, and now had claimed her as his own.

Allen gave one hasty glance towards the furious troopers rapidly drawing upon him, reading his doom in their fierce gestures. He turned his eyes upon Christabel, and they suddenly filled with water. He imprinted a passionate kiss upon her forehead, and muttered “The last on earth! We shall meet in Heaven, Christabel, never — never more to part!”

Again he kissed her cold lips, and then cried with a firm voice — “Now fate, do thy worst! I am prepared for all!”

In another instant he was surrounded. He fought fiercely; but a blow struck by a powerful ruffian, with the butt-end of his crossbow, inflicted a frightful gash in his forehead, and precipitated him senseless to the earth. The Lady Christabel was torn from his arms — placed, as tenderly as they knew how to accomplish such a feat, in the arms of the leader — and with loud shouts of triumph they galloped gleefully towards Nottingham, leaving Allan stretched, as they imagined, dead, upon the earth, his red blood commingling with and staining the pure green grass and flowers.

Chapter 17

Ghost *Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder.*
Hamlet *Murder?*
Ghost *Murder most foul, as in the best it is;*
But this most foul, strange, and unnatural.
Hamlet *Haste me to know it, that I with wings as swift*
As meditation, or the thoughts of love,
May sweep to my revenge.
Ghost *I find thee apt;*
And duller shouldst thou be than the fat weed
That rots itself in ease on Lethe's wharf,
Wouldst thou not stir in this.

----- Hamlet

Getting their weapons ready in case of further interference, and placing Maude in the centre of the party for safety, Robin Hood and his little body of friends set out on their march and when they arrived at the point where they were to separate, Hal exclaimed —

"If Maude is going over to Gamwell, I shall go too. I am very much obliged to you, Robin Hood, for your good natured offer, but where Maude goes, I go."

"As you will, by all means," returned Robin; "I think you are quite right, and I like you all the better for your resolve."

"Your description of Gamwell to me this morning," said Tuck to Little John, "has fired my imagination to such a degree, I shall not be happy till I pay you a visit. I think I shall go on there now with you."

"Aha! do," cried Will Scarlet. "We'll show you sport, Sir Friar, rare fun, and Robin will come over, of course. We'll kick up the duet, won't we, Robin?"

"I must home first, so I'll bid you all fare-well here and hurry on, for I am anxious to know whether that villain spoke truth."

"You're not going alone, Robin," cried Will.

"Yes," he replied; "Your path lies a different way to mine."

"No, I'll be hanged if it does," answered Will. "I'll go with you and see that all is right at your cottage, then I can soon run up to the Hall after I have left you. You're not going to be left by all, while Will Gamwell has a limb to accompany you."

"You're a good fellow, Will," said Robin, "and I accept your offer with thanks."

“It was kind of thee, Will,” said Little John, in a pleased tone, “but Sir Guy will be calling for thee; so I will go with Robin, for in case of need, I may stand in better stead than thou, who hast not the strength to do thy will justice.”

But Will persisted in declaring he would go, until Little John said he would be the fittest to lead Maude, and introduce her to the family. It quieted him. He thought so too — he liked the task — and he gave way to Little John’s proposition.

They arrived at the spot at which they were to part, and just at the turn saw the body of a man extended lifeless upon the ground. They advanced hastily, and, to their horrified astonishment, discovered it to be Allan Clare! He was quite senseless — a deep gash was upon his forehead, from which the blood had flowed copiously.

There were marks upon the ground, as if a severe struggle had taken place. The ground was torn by horses’ feet, but there was no trace of Christabel. They searched all round, not a vestige which could give a clue to her fate was to be seen.

Hasty efforts were made to restore Allan to life. Tuck, who knew a little of surgery, and Little John, as much as a familiar acquaintance with accidents of this nature had taught remedies of the simplest description, both exercised their knowledge in endeavouring to re-animate the senseless form of their late companion. They succeeded in bringing him back to life, but he was so faint from loss of blood that he could not articulate a sentence. It was resolved, as his sister was at Gamwell, and as the intention had been previously to proceed there, to carry him thither at once, as speedily and as gently as they could. A litter of boughs was therefore immediately constructed, and the ill-fated youth placed upon it.

Robin’s apprehensions had been increased to a considerable extent by this sad occurrence, and he determined now to hasten to his home with all the speed he could make. Little John, intending still to accompany him, as there were quite sufficient to carry Allan without his aid, and his presence not being by necessity required, there was no need of making a change in the arrangements. The six Gamwells bore the litter; Will, with Maude, Tuck, and Hal, followed; and with hearts which but a short time previous had been light and joyous, were now sad and cheerless, they proceeded on their way to Gamwell Hall.

Robin kept on towards Hood’s cottage at a pace which seemed to defy all appearance of fatigue or bodily labour, although the exertions of the previous day and night were sufficient to have wearied and exhausted even an iron constitution. The fact was that incidents of startling interest had arisen one upon the other’s heels, involving them in such a vast

amount of excitement, that the continual exercise of his mental faculties had superseded the fatigue which, under quieter circumstances, he must have inevitably felt.

Little John, by no means a slow pedestrian, found he had his work to do to keep by Robin's side, and could not help remarking it — not that he complained of it, but that he did not think Robin could have endured, with such an apparent absence of exhaustion, such incessant exertion. Robin smiled when he heard this, and said — "The time may come when you shall have good reason to wonder how much my body shall minister to my will."

"'Tis very like, too," thoughtfully replied Little John. "A man's limbs will work wonders when his heart's set upon doing a certain thing."

In less than an hour they turned into the alley leading to Hood's cottage, and it was then they experienced a fatal confirmation of Lambie's words — a large body of smoke was rolling over the trees, and the place was filled with the smell of burning wood. Uttering a cry of anguish, Robin rushed along, followed by Little John, and came suddenly upon the dismal sight of Gilbert Hood kneeling by the side of his wife Margaret, who lay dead, with an arrow sticking in her breast, the cottage still burning, but reduced to a shell, completed the miserable picture.

"Father!" burst forth Robin, "Father!" He could articulate no more, but his voice fell upon the ear of Gilbert with intense effect. The old man bounded up, extended his arms, caught Robin in his embrace, and folded him to his breast convulsively. The large tears gushed from his eyes, and in a voice choked with agony, muttered, almost inaudibly, "My boy — my child! — thou, too, art not taken from me — I thank God for this mercy — I thank God!"

He then became silent from excess of emotion, and a considerable time elapsed ere he could utter a word; At length, dashing the tears from his eyes, he said, in a voice firmer than could have been expected —

"Robin Hood, hear me, mark my words, and if thou think'st I have done my duty by thee, since thou hast been in my care, thou wilt aid me when thou hast power to revenge this bitter stroke of fortune upon him who has caused it."

"Thou art rightful heir to the Earldom of Huntingdon — nay, start not, 'tis so, anon I will explain how, during thy absence, I became possessed of this knowledge — and while there is life in this old frame, it shall be used to serve thee, to see thee reinstated in thy rights. But, look there, Robin," he continued, pointing to the body of Margaret, "Look there, stretched dead, murdered by a ruffian's hand, lies she who loved thee tenderly and truly, even as the child of her bosom –"

“She did! She did!” interrupted Robin, mournfully.

“There was no thought, no act of hers, which could better thee, when she knew not whom thou wert, but she would do cheerfully, delightedly. Hadst thou been ten times her child, she could not have loved thee better. At our hearth thou sat, as the hearth of thine home — once a happy home — look at it now, a desert, a waste. Oh God! Oh God! what have I done to deserve this frightful dispensation! Look you, Robin, if ever you loved her, that was mother to thee, in thy infancy, thy sickness, in thy health”

“If thou feelest aught of affection for me, who have looked on thee, since heaven sent thee to me, as my dearly beloved child, you will aid me in having a full and bitter revenge on those who have destroyed my happiness — put the brand to my roof — murdered the dearest, kindest being God ever created — made my life one desolation. You will, Robin! You will!”

“I will — I will!” cried Robin, with startling energy, and, throwing himself upon his knee, by the side of Margaret, continued — “And here I swear to inflict a bitter revenge upon him who has caused this desolation! So Heaven help me, as I keep my word!”

“I join in this oath as well!” exclaimed Little John, upraising his right arm, and extending his open palm to the bright blue sky above him. “In danger, in safety, weal or woe, with heart and hand, sword and bow, I swear to aid thee to the fullest extent my body and will shall let me. So be the Holy Mother’s blessing or curse upon me, as I do truly keep mine oath!”

“I have already sworn this,” said Gilbert. “When I laid her dead — for she died as soon as struck — beneath this tree, I raised my hands to Heaven and swore, while life was mine, to repay to the last item the debt I owed to the villain who has thus blighted my worldly happiness. Gratefully do I thank thee for thy acquiescence to my wishes!”

Little John proposed they should carry the body of Margaret to Gamwell to be there interred, and for a time to take up their residence at the Hall until something was devised for the future.

This was agreed to, they, however, awaited the return of Lincoln, who had gone to Mansfield to show Father Eldred the path, and was absent during the devastation.

When he arrived they bore the body between them to Gamwell, where they were kindly and hospitably received, and in a few days, the remains of Margaret were laid in the ground, and the grass and flowers soon began to wave in the wind over her grave.

End of Book One