

NUTBROWN  
ROGER  
AND I

J.H.YOXALL



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“SAY YOUR LAST PRAYER, OR TAKE THE VOW!”

# NUTBROWN ROGER AND I

A Romance of the Highway

BY

J. H. YOXALL

Author of "The Lonely Pyramid" &c.

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# The Boys' and Girls' Bookshelf

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# Nutbrown Roger and I

*MONDAY*

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## CHAPTER I

### I am Struck and Shot At

“Thwack!” came the crutch-stick down upon my shoulders, as I ruefully sat at my books in the rectory study.

It was a sunny afternoon, and the fragrant June air blew in through the half-open window of the grimy little room. I bent over my book in a dull and sullen humour. With all my heart I longed for the hay, the bird-song, and the freedom of the pleasant meadows outside. I was not in the mood for books, and besides, I was painfully hungry. “*Tweet!*” whistled a bob-tailed sparrow, hopping along the window-sill, looking in at me with sidelong head. “*Tweet, tweet!*” Away it flew, and I yearned to follow it. But my task-master, a frail old man in a shabby garb of black, stood over me, ebony staff in hand. It was my grand-uncle, the Rector of Beolea.



I looked hopelessly up at his hooked nose, set mouth, and keen sneering eyes. There was no pity in that hard old face.

"Tell me the accusative plural of *custos*, fool, I say!" cried my uncle.

"*Cus—cust—custo*," I stammered.

"Accusative plural, ass!" my uncle shouted, raising his hard black staff.

"*Cust—cust—oh, custard, custard*, sir," I cried, my thoughts on dinner bent.

"Dolt! Idiot!" hissed the lean old man, shaking and whitening with rage. He seized his wool-white wig by the pigtail and dashed it on the dusty floor; and down, down, down upon my back came the heavy crutch-stick, thwack, thwack, thwack again.

I was miserable, I was hungry, I was smarting and aching; I could bear it no longer. I wrenched the stick from the trembling old hands and sent it whizzing through the window. Then, ashamed of what I had done, I would have begged forgiveness, but, struck with horror at the words which frothed from the old man's lips, as, bald and livid, he made towards me with claw-like hands outspread, I broke away from him and rushed from the dingy little room.

Down the flight of dirty oaken steps I sprang, into the spacious dirty hall. Snatching my hat from its hook in the greasy wainscoting, I rushed through the unkempt garden, leapt its low wall, and alighted on the hilly glebe meadow.

And as my feet rebounded from the turf I heard the report of a firelock, and the whistle of shots around me. I turned and saw my grand-uncle raging at the study window, a smoking musket in his hands. In fear and horror I ran down the meadow for my life.

Over the meadow, down the hill, and along the Roman road that formed the highway there, I ran, and ran. Not till two good miles lay between me and my terrible old guardian did I pause; and only then because Nathan, the stable-boy from Beolea Grange, drew his horse across the path and stopped me.

“What be up with ’ee, Maister Henry?” asked the big lumbering lad. “What’s th’ matter? Be th’ keeper arter ’ee?”

The keeper, indeed! Scared and excited as I was I took the suggestion for an insult.

“I’m not a poacher, fellow!” I answered angrily, in my stupid pride. “I’m the old squire’s great-grandson. Gentlefolk do not poach.”

“Highly-tighty now, my young maister,” retorted Nathan, in a huff. “Gentlefolks doan’t wear them kind o’ rags, nayther,” and he pointed a scornful finger at my torn and rusty attire. “Highly-tighty, young gentlemun, I begs yer pardin. Th’ old rector’s thy uncle, I knows it, an’ a nice kind o’ nunkey he be, th’ old miser. Reg’lar old hunks! Thee’st got no call to boast on un, now; he treats thee bad enow. ’Tis th’ talk o’ Beolea.”

Mute and angry I tried to pass the big lad and pursue

my way, but again he pulled the horse he was leading, a slender swathed-up racer, across my path.

“Lookee here, now, Maister Harry, what’s th’ matter with thee?” Nathan said, with a clumsy kindness in his tone. “Summat’s put ’ee out; thee never spoke to Nathan like o’ that afore. Me an’ you was allays friends, me an’ you was. Friendly-like, now, what be th’ matter?” and he held out his big red hand.

I grasped it, but remained silent. Nathan coughed and shuffled, spat out the straw he was chewing, and shouted a needless “Who-a, then!” to his patiently standing steed.

“Lookee, now, Maister Harry,” he said at last. “I’m bound thee’st had a bad upset with th’ old rector. An’ I’m nation sure thee be runnin’ away from whoam! Bain’t ’ee, now, bain’t ’ee?” and he placed his left hand on my shoulder.

I winced, for he touched a bruise. “That’s it, Nathan, I’m running away from home. Home! not much of a home!” I said bitterly. “I won’t be starved and thrashed and stormed at any longer. He beat me again to-day—that’s three times in a week—because I made a fault in my Latin.”

“Never mind, never mind, now,” said Nathan soothingly. “Latin, now, Latin! Laws, what a scholard thee bee’st, Maister Harry! They never larned *me* much Latin, now,” said Nathan, trying to look wise and chewing a fresh straw.

“Well, he beat me like a dog, and then he—” *tried to*

*shoot me* I was going to say, but I paused, and left that out, for the honour of the family. . . . “So I’ve left him, and I’m off to sea like my father! and—and that’s all,” I went on when I had gulped down my tears.

There was silence for a time as I turned my head aside and kicked at a stone in the gravelly road. An ancient rook was resting on the arm of an ash-tree in the hedge, and its black coat and beak reminded me of my grand-uncle. “Caw, Caw!” remarked the hoary bird, in what seemed to me a sneering tone. I picked up the pebble and jerked it at the black old fellow. “Caw—aw,” he croaked as he lazily flew away. “*You’ll come to no good, you’ll come to no good!*” was what his cawing seemed to me to say.

“Won’t I?” thought I. “I’ll go as cabin-boy and come back admiral.”

“Well, good-bye to you, Nathan,” I said. “You’re not to say a word of this in Beolea, mind you,” and I was moving on again.

But Nathan held fast to my shoulder. “Laws, Maister Harry, you bain’t gooin’ off like o’ that now, surely! Why, where’s your stick an’ bundle?”

“Stick and bundle?” said I inquiringly.

“Stick an’ bundle. Them as runs off to sea allays has a stick an’ bundle. Robison Crusey, now, he ’ad a stick an’ bundle.”

In spite of my heavy heart I laughed at the good simple fellow’s idea. “And what must I have in the

bundle, Nathan?"

"Why, bread-an'-beacon, to be sure, an' a clean shirt, an' a Bible, an' a han'ful o' sixpennies. Them's what Caleb th' wheelwright's son had when *he* run away, an' he said he was just like Robison Crusey. Not as ever I knew that Robison Crusey, mind 'ee. I'm bound he didn't live in these parts; anyhow, he warn't a Beolea chap."

"Well, I haven't a stick or a bundle, Nathan; I must manage without."

"*Must* have 'em, I tell 'ee. Hold the rein a minute, Maister Harry." In a trice he had cut a hazel sapling from the hedge, and he was trimming it neatly when he suddenly paused.

"P'raps you ain't got no shut-knife, nayther?" he said dubiously. "Must have a shut-knife; Robison, he 'ad a shut-knife. Well, thee shalt ha' mine—nay now, thee *shalt* ha' un, thee shalt."

"An' 'ere's a bundle 'ankercher," he went on, untwisting the red kerchief from his throat. "Hast got any sixpennies? Noa, of coorse thee hasn't. Old passon gi'es 'ee moor kicks than ha'pence."

So saying the good fellow felt in all his pockets, collected from them two penny-pieces and a farthing, and dropped the coins into the kerchief, while I protested in vain.

"An' here's a hunk o' bread-an'-beacon," he said, producing it from a pocket. "On'y I hain't got a fresh shirt here, an' this un ain't clean."

He tied up the small bundle, thrust the stick through it, placed the stick across my shoulder, slapped me thrice on my smarting back, took the rein, and slowly moved away.

“Wish ’ee luck, Maister Harry. Good luck to ’ee, an’ don’t forget Nathan.”

“Forget you! that I never will!” I murmured, with a queer lump in my throat, as I turned and trudged down the road to Redwych.

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## CHAPTER II

### I am Whipped Up

The moment I was out of sight of Nathan I sat down on a heap of gravel by the roadside and began to devour the great hunch of bacon-and-bread.

I was ravenous; hunger had been plaguing me for hours. Only a sorry breakfast had been given me, and dinner had been withheld until I should perfectly know my lesson. With what a relish, then, I ate the coarse bread, the fat and “reesty” bacon! But it was a heavy meal for a lad of fourteen, accustomed to meagre if more dainty fare, and I felt very sleepy after it. As by this time the afternoon was glaring and sultry, the heat and my weariness combined with the meal to invite me to nap. Tying up my diminished bundle, I made a pillow of it, and

nestling into the warm and yielding sandy gravel, in five minutes I was fast asleep.

Five minutes afterwards—as it seemed to me—I was roused by the touch of a whiplash on my ill-defended shins. Dazed and startled I sat up, rubbing my eyes and blinking. By the length of the shadows on the yellow road I could tell that I had slept for hours.

“Why, it must be five o’clock and after!” I was thinking, when “*swish*” came the whiplash, gently curling round my legs again.

“Is the boy deaf? Is the boy dumb? Is the boy a fool? Now then, boy, now then, boy, what are you doing there—hey, boy, hey?” was barked at me in sharp, quick tones.

The words came from a short, stout, funny-looking old gentleman, sitting in a ramshackle old gig, drawn by a fat sleepy-looking old pony.

“Pills and powders! what do you mean by it—hey, boy, hey? Sleeping on a gravel-heap in the bare sun! Catch your young death of sunstroke! Come off it; come off it this instant, young dog! Up you jump, or I’ll tickle those ragged breeches of yours with whip-cord, hey!” said the short, stout, funny-looking gentleman in short, sharp barks, with a warning flick of the lash in the air around my head.

I did not hesitate. I jumped up, shouldered my stick and my pitiful little bundle, and stood silent and watchful, with my feet in the ditch by the side of the road.

“Is the boy deaf? Is the boy dumb, I say?” barked the

old gentleman. "Is the boy a fool, hey? Hasn't the young dog a tongue? Lungs and lancets! but I'll make him speak!"

"*Flick, flack!*" went the warning whip again.

"Who are you, boy? and what's your business, boy? and where on earth are you going to—hey, boy, hey?"

"I am going to—to—to Redwych first, sir," I answered, with a puzzled look at this queer old man.

His short stout form was clad in a plain broad-skirted coat of blue with gold buttons, and he wore a long buff waistcoat, whitish knee-breeches, black gaiters, and heavy shoes. Above all this was a round rosy face set in high collars, curly black wig, and a broad beaver hat. The rosy round face with its blue eyes and hundred wrinkles smiled down at me, and the kindly-looking mouth barked out:

"Going to Redwych, hey? Then why on earth don't you jump in and ride, boy, hey? Don't stand there looking like a waxwork! In with you, or——" and "flick" went the whip.

"Your bark is worse than your bite," thought I, and I climbed into the gig.

"*Kee-e-up, Paregoric!*" called out the old gentleman.

Instantly the fat old pony woke out of his nap and started off at a most astonishing trot.

"That's the way, my beauty!" cried the old gentleman, dropping the whip into its socket.

"Didn't think he could go like that, did you, boy?"



*Kee-e-up*, my Paregoric!”

“Soon be in Redwych now, boy,” said the queer old fellow, when we had silently ridden a mile. “Ever been there before, boy, hey?” he questioned, with a sharp sideway look.

“Yes, once or twice, Doctor Arbuthnot,” was my unguarded answer.

“Hum, hum! Knows my name, hey? Seen me before, boy—hey, boy, hey?”

“Once, sir. I saw you come to the ostler’s broken leg at the ‘Solway Arms’.”

“Hum, hum! And what may your name be, young sir? And where do you hail from, hey?”

I stammered, and then paused. The doctor looked me up and down, scanning my face and hands and shabby dress.

“I—I would rather not tell, sir,” I said at last.

“Hum, hum! You won’t say? Then I must get to know elsewhere, boy—hey, boy, hey?”

Not another word was spoken, and presently we drove into Redwych town.

The little place lay straggling on the summit of a little hill. Past tiny cottages, tiny shops, and tiny blooming gardens, we drove up to the Green, the open grassy space around the tiny church. The doctor pulled up Paregoric outside that ancient hostelry, the “Fox-and-Goose”.

“Out we get, boy, and in we go,” he said, and we entered the great inn-kitchen.

A blast of noisy singing met us at the door. I knew the ballad, it was of a famous robber-captain and his deeds.

“He-e cock’d a pistil an’ he draw’d a knife,  
An’ he blow’d on a whistle shrill,  
An’ four-and-twenty robber-men  
Come a-troopin’ o’er th’ hill.”

It ceased as we entered the kitchen.

“Good d’en to you, men,” said the doctor. “You’re merry betimes, hey? ’Tis hardly seven by the clock. But don’t let me spoil sport. I’m gone in a moment. Does any of you yeomen know this young sir by name? that’s what I want to know. I found him on the Beolea road, *and I think he is running away from his home.*”

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## CHAPTER III

### The Bow Street Runners

The kitchen of the “Fox-and-Goose” was a vast apartment, low and broad, with smeary walls and smoky ceiling. Clumsy chairs and tables stood about on the sanded floor, and a huge settle flanked the cavernous fireplace. Here nearly a dozen smock-frocked farmers were celebrating the close of market-day as we entered.

“Does anybody here know this young spark, I say?” the doctor repeated, as he glanced around.

“Iss, sir, I knows un,” slowly answered Yeoman

Burcott of the Bridge Farm, setting down his tankard with a rap and staring into it. "He be th' old rector's gran'-nephew, he be; he's a horphin."

Doctor Arbuthnot looked at me in surprise. "Is that true, my boy, hey?" he said.

I held up my head. "Yes, sir," I answered; "my name is Harry Hugh Solway."

"Why, then, I knew your grandfather and your grand-uncles well, my lad!" cried the doctor, patting my sore shoulder. "Fine old Hugh! the grandest gentleman in the country-side. We must be good friends for his sake, Harry. Ah, the Grange and I have been strangers since poor old Hugh went away. Hum, hum! Going home at all to-night, Farmer Burcott; hey, man, hey?"

"Iss, sir; that I be," said the jolly old yeoman, with a grin. "In 'bout half an hour," he added, after measuring with his eye the contents of the brown flagon at his elbow.

"Well, if you *do* get home this side morning," said the doctor significantly, "just call at Beolea and let the rector know I've caught the runaway, and to-morrow I'll drive him back. Hum, hum! Yes, that's all, Farmer Burcott. Good d'en to ye, yeomen; good d'en. Come, Harry, you'll sleep in my house to-night," and the old gentleman took my hand and waddled towards the door.

But the red-armed landlady met us as she entered with jugs of fresh ale. With a sideway movement of her head she nodded towards the ingle-nook under the chimney-breast. There, in the light of a handful of fire,

two men in riding-coats and top-boots were sitting. They were men of coarse tanned features and heavy build, but they had not the rustic air. "Who are they, then, Dame Ricketts, hey?" muttered the doctor, in response to the nod.

"Just come from Lunnon, sir," whispered the dame. "Them's the Bow Street runners, come to catch th' highwayman—the Nutbrown, as they calls him."

"Hum, hum! Man-hunters, hey?" growled the doctor, turning as he spoke. Still holding my hand he advanced to the ingle-nook.

"Your fellow-servant of the law, gentlemen," he said, glaring through his spectacles at the men in top-boots. "I wish you success. When you have caught your bird come to me for a warrant. I am a justice of the peace—Gregory Arbuthnot, doctor of medicine, at your service. My house is on the other side of the Green."

The men rose and touched their hats. "Sarvint to you, sir. Tony Jarvis from Bow Street, at your service, sir; my pardner, Jeff, sir," said the bigger man in a husky voice. "'Fraid we shan't cotch the feller in a 'urry, sir. Queer sort o' cove; kind o' hamatoor, Jeff calls 'im."

"Hey? An amateur, hey? You mean he doesn't do much business, I suppose?"

"Bizness, sir? Not 'e! Yer reglar bizness 'ighwayman goes at hanythin'—coaches, shays, charyots, mounted gents, hanythin'—till 'e gets caught. But this 'ere Nutbrown, as they calls 'im, wot's 'e do? Stops the mail,

it's true, but 'e don't rob nothin' but th' bags. Leaves hall th' hold gents' tickers an' hall th' hold wimmen's silk pusses hintact, sir—*hintact*, as Jeff calls it, *hintact*. Won't dirty 'is blessed fives with rhino or joolery; blow me if 'e will.

“An' then, sir, wot's 'e do?” went on Mr. Tony Jarvis in tones of dire disgust. “Why, th' very next day coachee finds hall them letter-bags hall a-lyin' hout hon the 'igh-road permiskous like, hall the bloomin' letters safe hin 'em, compus menty, sir—*hintact*. Nice kind o' 'ightobyman 'e is, ain't 'e? Dick Turpin wouldn't ha' hownded 'im, blow me hif 'e would!” and Mr. Jarvis sank into his chair with an indignant snort.

“Yer see, sir, Tony, 'e 'as a kind o' prefesshnal pride about this, sir,” said the other man in apologetic tones. “It reglar 'urts Tony to be sent down to outlandish parts after a hamatoor. It's like as if yerself was sent for to physic a hass, yer see, sir. You'll hexcuse Tony's manners, sir; 'e don't mean nothin'. But 'e hain't 'ad no breedin', Tony hain't, an' 'is manners is rough. Yer'll hexcuse 'im, I 'ope.”

“All right, my man,” answered the doctor, smiling. “Catch the highwayman, that's the important thing. Whether he robs or not, he has put his neck in danger for even *stopping* the coach, you know. Good night to you, good night; come, Harry!” and amidst a chorus of “good nights” we quitted the “Fox-and-Goose”.

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## CHAPTER IV

### At Echo Corner

“This is young Harry Solway, Hepzibah,” said the doctor to his old housekeeper as we entered the big red house. “Go and wash, Harry, while I feed my Paregoric. You knew his grandfather well—Harry’s, not Paregoric’s, I mean—didn’t you, Hepzibah?”

“Yes, truly, sir,” said the wizened dame, dropping a curtsy. “Bless your heart, young sir, th’ master and Mr. Hugh was like brothers born,” she added, when the doctor had left us. “Ay, sure, I was still-room maid at the Grange for many a year. A fine man was Mr. Hugh. But you don’t much feature him, I’m thinking, sir.”

“But, Mrs. Hepzibah, Mr. Hugh was *not* my grandfather,” I said. “My mother always told me my grandfather’s name was Harry. I was named after him, and after my grand-uncle Hugh too.”

“Oh, no, sir, begging your pardon,” the old lady insisted. “Mr. Harry’s son never was wed. He ran away from th’ old squire an’ got drowned at sea. It was Mrs. Hugh as must have had a son in furrin parts. Mr. Hugh’s son must ha’ bin *your* father.”

Hepzibah seemed so sure of what she was saying that I let the matter pass. I knew I was right; but I thought it did not much matter. And yet on that point depended all my fortunes.

An hour later, after a substantial meal, the kind old doctor passed into his surgery, and I was left in the big dusky dining-room alone. Neglecting the books which the doctor had chosen for me, to occupy the time I went to the window and looked out. Half a dozen lads were cricketing on the Green; I longed to be out with them and free.

Tawny hues were in the sky behind the little church. As I gazed into the deeps of that splendid sunset my longing for freedom grew intense. Something in the sky seemed to beckon me out of doors, to invite me to flee and wander. The prospect of returning to my uncle on the morrow was not to be borne. I felt, as lonely I stood there, like a lark with the cage-door open. "And why should I stay?" thought I. "Good-bye, kind old man," I whispered, turning towards the surgery door. "Good-bye; you are kind, but I must go."

Stealthily I stepped into the hall; my hat, my stick, and my wee bundle lay on a table; the house door stood ajar. I took up my poor belongings and fled. Stooping, I passed under the surgery window, and three minutes later I was running down the hill towards the road to Brassingham.

At the foot of the winding hill I passed the turnpike cottage. The gateman scowled at me as I passed, and stood with his hand above his eyes to watch me as I went towards the sunset. And lest he should suspect me I dropped into a walk, and steadily footed it forward along

the road to Brassingham.

The road to Brassingham runs between fields and farmsteads, a long straight stretch of white highway, fringed with luxuriant hedges. It runs with a gentle ascent for more than a mile before it takes a bend. Idly and leisurely I strolled along it, planning my schemes for the future. I would foot it to Brassingham, the big busy town a baker's dozen of miles away. At Brassingham I would find work of some sort, and there I would stay until I had earned money to carry me to London or some other port. And from the port I would sail in a man-o'-war as cabin-boy, to fight the French and return as admiral. Then, in a coach-and-six, with flags above it, I—Admiral Solway—would return to Beolea and strike my uncle and Nathan dumb with awe!

Thus dreaming, on I went, and the night shadows deepened around me. The sun lost its last clutch on the far-off hills, and sank behind them; the moon came up, a plate of silver; the evening breeze blew cool. I came to Echo Corner, and I paused. The corner was a triangle of grass at the parting of the ways. Two roads lay before me there; which was the road to Brassingham?

I leant against a milestone and considered the matter. There was no finger-post to guide my choice. Well, I would wait for some passer-by to advise me.

The corner was well named. The patch of grass there was a perfect nest of echoes. At that turfy spot each neighbouring sound was repeated. Twice over I heard



each bay of the hounds at the nearest farmstead; the babble of the little stream hard by was doubled to my ear; and doubled was each bleat of the sheep in the fields around me.

But as I leant there, dreamily listening for the echo of some wayfarer's footfall, my ear was caught by quite another sound; it was the sound of wheels and of horsemen coming along the road from Redwych.

To the runaway that noise seemed full of alarm. It *might* be merely the wheels and hoofs of farmers' gigs or roadsters homeward bound from the "Fox-and-Goose". But then it might be the doctor driving in pursuit of me! I ran back to the bend and stared down the straight white road.

There, less than half a mile away, I saw a pony and gig and a brace of horsemen coming quickly on. At once I knew that the pony was Paregoric, and that the gig contained the doctor; but who were the horsemen riding at his side? The Bow Street runners, of course, thought I; the doctor in his anxiety was setting the thief-takers on my track. Oh, shame and terror! "Let me hide, let me hide!" was my cry.

I turned and ran round the corner, looking about me for some place of hiding. But I saw none, and the noise of my pursuers echoed near and more near. Gripping my stick and bundle tightly, I began to run. But as I crossed the turfy triangle I was on a sudden aware of a strange horseman in my path. He seemed to have sprung up from

the highway in a moment and silently, like a ghost. But it was no phantom; in an instant I knew him for the Nutbrown Highwayman.

Brown he was from head to heel; brown from the lace of his flat tricornered hat to the spurs in his boots of undyed leather. Brown, a rich chestnut brown, was the beautiful creature he was riding. Brown, a russet brown, was the surtout, brown the long, embroidered vest, and brown the buckskin breeches that he wore. Brown were the hands; brown the curling hair; brown, too, below the brown velvet mask, was the face, brown as the face of the "Nutbrown Maid" in the ballad.

Yes, it was he, the marvel of the country-side, the Nutbrown Highwayman; but as to that, or how so noiselessly he had approached that resonant haunt of echoes, I wasted no time in wondering. The brown eyes smiled kindly through the mask, the pleasant lips were smiling. I laid my trembling hand on the pommel of the saddle, and "Oh, sir!" I cried—for I felt myself to be his hunted companion in danger—"Oh, sir!" cried I, "the runners are out after us! You can hear them close at hand."

Even as I spoke I heard a "*Kee-e-up*, Paregoric!" and round the bend came the doctor, whip in hand, with the runners riding near him. "Hum, hum! Must look like a rogue on the way to jail!" I heard him mutter ere he saw me.

The moon shone full; there was no concealment.

“Seize the young dog!” roared the doctor.

“Surrender, rogue!” yelled the runners to the highwayman.

“*Jump!*” cried the Nutbrown, offering me his hand and foot.

I grasped the hand, pressed the foot with my own, sprang, and in a trice was seated in front of him.

“Bess!” cried he, and at the word the beautiful brown mare under us rose at the hedge like a bird.

It was all the work of an instant. A cry of concern from the doctor, an oath from the runners; they spur forward, their pistols are out, and just as the doctor screams “Hold!” they fire.

As the report of the pistols rang in my ears I felt a dull blow on my forehead. “Shot! shot!” I cried, and then I knew no more.

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## CHAPTER V

### The Abbey Chapel

And yet I had not been shot after all; the bullets had whizzed past us harmlessly. When I fingered my forehead I felt in vain for blood or a wound; I only found a lumpy bruise.

The blow which had stunned me was a blow from the brown mare’s skull as she suddenly rose at the hedge.

She threw her head back, I held mine low; and the two came sharply into contact. When the stun of it had passed away I found myself still on the highwayman's saddle, upheld in his strong right arm.

Twice that day then, by kind fortune or ill aim, I had escaped the perils of powder and shot. And there I was, delivered into a highwayman's keeping, on the back of a highwayman's Bess! Was ever boy so fortunate before! thought I.

But mixed up with a boy's pride in romantic adventures and narrow escapes was some anxiety as to how these strange experiences of mine were to end. What was to happen to me next? Here was I in the power of a noted highwayman; how would he treat me? Would he be cruel, or false, or kind?

Instinctively I turned my head to scan my companion. He met my glance with a smile.

"Better now, my boy?" he said. "Not shot at all, you see. Remember in future to keep your head up at a jump."

"But are *you* shot, sir?" I asked.

"Oh no. I think the bullet to hit me is not yet cast."

"But where are the runners and the doctor?"

"A couple of miles away. Was the old gentleman a doctor? So much the better; we may have left him work to do."

"Did you shoot the runners, then?" I asked, with a shiver of horror all down my spine.

“Oh no, no need for that. The first man bungled at the hedge, and was thrown, his mate stopped to pick him up, I presume, and the doctor would wait to mend the broken bones, if there are any.”

“Then you don’t think they are coming after us?”

“No fear of that, boy; and if they come they will never find us here.”

It was true, I thought, as I looked around me. The bonny brown mare was stepping daintily through the mazes of a dense little wood. Close and high the underbush grew around us, and all, save the moon-silvered tops of the elms, was dark and impenetrable to the eye. Forty Bow Street runners might have hunted for us there in vain.

“Never fear, boy,” laughed the highwayman. “I don’t know what they were after you for, but you may snap your fingers at them now.”

“I won’t fear, sir,” I said. “I trust myself to you.”

The highwayman held me in a tighter grasp. “That is well, my boy,” said he. “Trust to me; I’ll care for you. I need a companion, and you must let me be your friend.”

“A highwayman my friend!” thought I.

“What would my great-grandfather the haughty squire have said to *that*?”

Presently we came into a narrow winding lane, and rode between high red banks half covered with holly, gorse, and briar. And at the end of the lane we came into view of a wide expanse of watered meadowland, like a

common intersected with brooks. Here and there the green level of it was broken by huge grassy mounds like giant graves.

“Why,” I exclaimed, “these must be the Abbey meadows!”

“Hush!” muttered my companion; “not a word now.” And silently we struck out from the wood towards the half-ruined, half-forgotten little Abbey Chapel.

Ancient was that tiny edifice, the sole standing remnant of a mighty abbey which once adorned those pleasant watered meads. Chancel and cloister, nave and transept, chapter-house and refectory, all the glories of the stately monastery, were passed away. Carven stone and marble pavement lay buried under the grassy mounds around us. Time and warfare had ruined the fine old Cistercian priory and had laid it low. All that was left of it above ground was its gatehouse, and for generations the gatehouse had been known by the name of the Abbey Chapel. Long it had served as a place of worship; but since the church was built at Redwyche the chapel had fallen into disuse, neglect, and decay.

Towards this relic of past glories the brown mare was carrying us gently. It stood in a little graveyard surrounded with hedges of holly and privet. The good mare lifted the loose gate aside with her teeth and entered the enclosure. Dismounting, we passed into the chapel and the brown mare followed us, her nose under her master’s arm.

With flint and steel the highwayman struck a spark into his pocket tinder-box, blew the spark into a tiny flame, and lit a rush-light in a shaded lanthorn. The gleam of the candle showed me a place of rotting pews, dilapidated windows, decaying plaster, and cobwebbed beams. Upon the cracked old lettered gravestones that formed the uneven floor two boxes lay, and a mattress.

“To bed, Brown Bess!” said her master; and at once the beautiful creature stretched herself on the straw that was strewn in a corner.

“Now for supper,” said my companion. From a carved oak pew that served as cupboard he took out food and drink. We ate, and fed the good Bess with corn and oatmeal-water. Then my highwayman lit a cigar, threw himself on a mattress, and smiled at me as I sat opposite to him on a box.

“Now let us talk,” he said. “Call me Roger; what shall I call you? I suppose you have run away from school?”

I told him my name and where I came from. “From Beolea!” he cried. “Then you must know Beolea Grange? That is well, vastly well. You can help me, Harry, for ’tis Beolea Grange that brings me here.”

Then I told him all my story, and why I was a runaway; how my father, Harry Solway, had been harshly treated by his grandfather, the old squire; how he had run away to sea; how he had married my poor mother at Barcelona; how he was drowned off Pernambuco; how my mother, with scarce a word of English in her head, had

brought me to Beolea, a child of nine years old; how she had died as she reached the rectory; and how my grand-uncle Anthony had hated and ill-used me ever since.

Roger had pityingly listened to my story until I came to my uncle's question in Latin and my reply; and then he laughed out loud and long.

"Custard!" he cried. "Vastly good, Harry; vastly good! Accusative plural of *custos*! Why, you've seen 'em; you've seen 'em to-night, and run from 'em too. *Custos*, *custodes*; *custodes*, the guardians, the constables, the Bow Street runners—don't you see?"

*Custodes*! Of course it was. "But this is strange," thought I. "A highwayman know Latin! What manner of highwayman is this?"

I stared at him as he lay there in the candlelight. There was nothing of the vulgar robber about him, I thought; if ever a man bore the stamp of gentleness and breeding, it was he.

He smiled. "You wonder to find me so learned," he said. "I'm not the sort of man you expected in a highwayman, I suppose? Ah, Harry, there are strange ups and downs in life! Come, you shall know all about me.

"But not to-night, not to-night," he went on. "'Tis ten o'clock and after. Dare you share the mattress and rugs with the Nutbrown Highwayman? Ah, that is right, my boy; believe me, I'm not so brown as I'm painted."



# TUESDAY

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## CHAPTER VI

### My Idle Morning

When, after a restless night of dreams, I awoke with the eight o'clock sun staring in at me through the broken east window, I found myself on the mattress alone. The highwayman had departed, and Brown Bess was vanished from her straw.

As I looked around me in sleepy bewilderment my eyes fell on a folded scrap of paper lying on the larger box. A message was pencilled on the paper:

*"I shall be back by sundown," it said. "Food and books you will find in the pew. Have no fear, but on no account stir out of the chapel until I return. Beware the custodes!"*

"I shall be back *by sundown*," I repeated. "Then I have a whole day to myself before me. Hurrah! No books, no lessons, no work no duties of any kind. What fun! And I haven't even the trouble of dressing myself this morning! Hurrah! Yet I must wash, though."

A pail of water was at hand, with towel and soap. I washed and breakfasted, and then prepared to enjoy my fine, long, idle day.

But I found it not so enjoyable as I expected. Surely something had happened to the sun, I thought, so slowly, slowly it crept across the big east window. The minutes and hours had never passed so tardily before.

I took out Nathan's shut-knife and cut my initials, H. H. S., with a circle round them, on the door of a pew; I performed acrobatic tumbles on the mattress; I sung the half-dozen ballads that I knew; I watched the sparrows at the window, and counted the fluttering ivy-leaves that fringed the arch. And the time crept wearily, wearily on.

I went to shake up Brown Bess's bed for her, but stopped myself in the act. "No, that would be work," I thought. "No work to-day for Harry Solway." And the time crept wearily, wearily on.

I lay down on the mattress, rolled a rug into a pillow, and tried to sleep; but sleep refused to visit me; the closer I shut my eyes the wider awake was I. Then I tried to lie quite still, and do and think just nothing at all; but that I found to be impossible. So I lay musing as to what the rector would say when Doctor Arbuthnot told him that the highwayman had kidnapped me; and what Nathan would think when he heard of it; and what could be Roger's business with Beolea Grange; and what would become of me if Roger were caught; and who this highwayman that did not rob could be. And the time crept wearily, wearily on.

I jumped up and went to the pew for a book to read, but stopped myself in the act. "No, no; books are

lessons,” thought I. “No books to-day for Harry Solway. This is my fine, long, idle morning.”

Long! How long, eternally long it was! I imitated the cries of all the birds and beasts that I knew; I whistled my six tunes over and over. Then I tried to dance to my own whistling; then I tried again to sleep; then I hunted the little chapel all over, and counted all the holes and cracks in the floor. And the time crept wearily, wearily on.

That morning in spite of myself I learned the useful lesson—that the idle are the least happy, that the best way to pass time pleasantly is to use it industriously, and that what the idle think to be play is often harder work than work itself. Sheer tedium at last compelled me to do something useful; so I shook up the mare’s bedding, arranged the mattress and the rugs, emptied the pail out under the door, folded the towel, put away the soap, swept the floor with a wisp of straw, and arranged the contents of the cupboard-pew. And in doing this last I looked at the books on the seat.

There were three of them—a tall folio of the plays of Shakespeare, a volume of Plato in Greek, and a book I had never heard of, which at once attracted me. It was entitled:

**“The Holy War, made by King Shaddai upon Diabolus for the Regaining of Mansoul, the Metropolis of the Universe: by John Bunyan, tinker.”**

**["The Holy War, made up by King Shaddai upon Diabolus for the Regaining of Mansoul, the Metropolis of the Universe: by John Bunyan, tinker."]**

Soon I was deep in *The Holy War*. It was a story of captains and armies and battles and sieges—a delightful book for a boy—so that the time flew swiftly on as I read and read and read.

Three hours at least had slipped away by the time I had finished the book; meanwhile the sun had rounded to the southern windows, and hunger told me that dinner-time was come.

I set down the book and went to the cupboard. There, like the queen in the parlour, I made a meal of bread-and-honey; and then I looked round for a drink.

There was wine in the bottles that stood in a row on the cool floor under the seat of a pew, but wine I had never learned to drink. Water, however, there was none; and the more I saw there was none, the more I thirsted for it.

Now, a little spring gushed up in the graveyard, just inside the gateway; I knew, for I had noticed it the night before. Yet, "*On no account stir out of the chapel*," said Roger's note; and what was I to do?

"Oh, he means, 'Don't stir out of the enclosure!'" I easily persuaded myself, thirst helping me. "He would never wish me to stop here with a parching mouth." So taking the silver cup that Roger used for his wine, I

passed out into the burial-ground.

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## CHAPTER VII

### I Disobey Orders

Warm and sunny was the afternoon, clear and high the sky, fresh the gently-moving air. The grass waved long and lush around the ancient gravestones, and the fringed moon-daisies shone in the grass like stars. Mosses and tufted rushes grew upon and about the broken font into which the sweet spring water fell. I dipped the silver cup again and again.

Then I arose and turned towards the chapel. But I halted, and faltered in my purpose; the spell of that lovely afternoon was strong upon me, I *could not* enter my prison again.

From the gateway the meadow sloped gently down to a winding little river. I could see the sparkle of the water, and hear the twitter of the birds in the bushes fringing the banks; the wood behind me, too, was choral with song. Bees buzzed, butterflies danced, a blue-green dragonfly flashed its clashing wings. All was life, freedom, gaiety; should I alone be captive, furtive, dull?

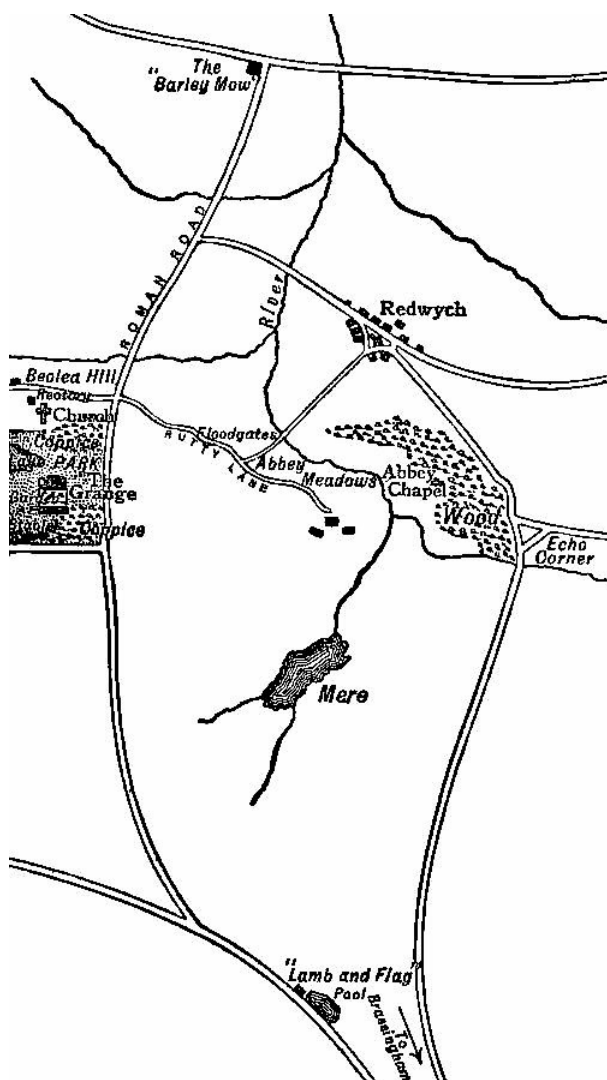
I forgot my orders, I forgot the danger; I pushed the gate aside and crossed to the skirt of the wood.

In that green hiding-place I stood, exulting in my

freedom and gazing at the pastoral scene before me. Five miles away the low hills of Beolea rose against the speckless sky; I could see the small Norman church, the gabled rectory, and, half hidden in its woody park, the Grange. Behind me the wood hid Redwych and its hill, but to the front the open fields, chequered and undulating, spread mile on mile away to Brassingham.

Glad in my freedom I wandered along the edge of the covert, moving towards the east. The wood was alive with beast and bird. Rabbits blinked at me from the doorways of their burrows. "*Sippet, sippet, sippet, slam, slam, siwiddy!*" sang a goldfinch; "*sippet, sippet, kurr, hurootle, chay!*" From the boughs of a hawthorn a blue-winged jay screamed his harsh cry, a shriek like the ripping of calico; "*cleck, cleck,*" cried a reddish yellow stoat as I crossed him, hunting along a rabbit-run for his dinner. Wood-pigeons cooed, blackbirds whistled, woodpeckers tapped, squirrels hunted each other from tree to tree; the grass was alive with insects and crawling grubs.

Deeper and deeper into the wood I went, without a thought of danger. But ere I had strolled a mile I had cause to wish myself safe back in the Abbey Chapel again.



A crackling sound in front of me, and voices from but a little distance, fell on my ear. Shrinking down into a clump of bracken I hid my head behind the broad trunk of an oak, and with all my eyes and ears I watched and listened.

Nearer and nearer came the sounds, and on a sudden my heart leapt into my mouth; for, riding down the wood-

path towards me came the runners—the *custodes* who had tracked me down the night before!

They came from the direction of Beolea, and must have been returning from the Grange; for as they passed me in my hiding-place I heard Mr. Jeff say to his comrade: “Forty guineas hextrer reward, Tony! Cotch ’im or kill ’im, men, says the Captin! There’s sommat deep hin that, Tony. Wot’s the flash sportin’ cove got special agin the Nutbrown, I’d like ter know. Sommat’s hup, I’ll bet a rummer o’ grog. Sommat deep’s hup, Tony; blow me tight else.”

I held my breath as they passed within a yard of me, and bitterly I reproached myself when I remembered that the path would lead them near the chapel, and that I had left the gate ajar! They would notice the gate and discover all, I thought. “All through your disobedience, boy,” Roger would say. And if they caught him would they hang me too? For I knew that a highwayman’s end was a gibbet and chains at a four-cross-roads.

Writhing with remorse I clenched my fist and thumped my forgetful head. But presently I grew calm and hopeful. Perhaps after all the men would never notice the gate. At any rate the wisest thing for me to do would be to keep away from the chapel awhile.

So when the last retreating sound was silent I rose from the bracken and skulked away. A couple of hundred yards farther down the glade my path quitted the wood and passed into a narrow deep rushy trench which had



once formed the moat of the abbey. Waterless now, its hollow ran for half a mile in a zigzag line towards Beolea. Then the mossy pathway left me out on the open meadow, just where the little river curved in to meet the moat. And at this point the footpath from Redwych to Beolea crossed the water by a wooden bridge that hung on the side of the floodgates there.

The floodgates were huge moss-greened timber doors that pent up the stream except when it was dangerously brimming. And under the hanging bridge, at the foot of the huge doors, lay the Floodgate Hole, a gloomy pool of depth unknown.

The Floodgate Hole was rumoured to be the lair of giant pike with teeth and fins like sharks, and the lads of Beolea shunned it as a dangerous spot. But I was a swimmer, and often I had longed to dare the mysteries of the pool. Chance had now brought me the opportunity. Stripping, and springing on the shaky handrail of the bridge, I joined my palms, arched my body, and plunged into the water.

Down, down, down I went, ten feet through sunny air, fifteen feet through sunless icy fluid. Slowly, and by successive jerks, I rose to the surface; and as I felt my body brushed by slimy sides and fins: "The sharks!" I spluttered, and dashed away with the side-stroke.

Lower down the stream a water-rat crossed in front of me, swimming to its hole in the marly bank. Hard by a trout leapt out of the water, and a swirl behind it told me

an otter was in pursuit. Tiny reddish shrews were frolicking under the bank where I climbed from the stream; "*Skeep, skeep,*" sang a snipe as he rose with cork-screwy flight from the sedges; a jewelled snake was sunning itself on the burnt-up grass on the bank. Farther down I saw a kingfisher flash, like a shaft of rainbow, and I caught the silver gleam of swans among their cygnets, like frigates in convoy of smacks. Next moment a hawk swooped over the water, and a moor-hen quickly dived. Lonely and wild was that region of the little river, and I might have stayed there long in safety, basking and drying in the sun. Yet the thought of my unprotected garments roused me, and I ran back along the curving bank.

But as I reached the bridge I met with an awkward surprise. For there on the grass beneath the alders was Nathan, sitting on my clothes.

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## CHAPTER VIII

### "Be you a Highway-boy?"

Yes, it was Nathan. Vexed and confounded, I would have turned and hidden, but it was too late; I had been seen.

"Servint, Maister Harry; servint, sir," said the stable-boy, with a grin. "Here be your cloes; I'm a-keepin' of 'em safe for 'ee, I'm a-keepin' of 'em safe, sir. Not as

how I 'spected it," Nathan went calmly on. "Up at Redwych this arternoon they was a-sayin' as how th' Nutbrown had a-kiddynapped 'ee, Maister Harry. But when I gets here and sees these 'ere garmints here, says I 'Them's Harry Solway's, them is. *He* ain't kiddynapped, not he; he's havin' a swim, he is; or mayhaps he's drowned." Nathan was going off into heavy jokes about running away to sea in a floodgate hole and so forth, but I sternly cut him short.

"Oh, no jokes; don't try to be funny, Nathan. Look here, who told you the highwayman had kidnapped me, eh?"

"Why, th' saddler on th' Green, he tell'd me fust, Maister Harry; but welly<sup>[1]</sup> all Red'ych tell'd me arter that."

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[1] Welly = nearly.

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"And now, I suppose, 'welly' all Beolea will hear that you've seen me in the Abbey meadows," I said angrily.

"Laws now, Maister Harry," said the stable-boy in a reproachful tone. "Nathan's not the chap to wag his tongue when he'd oughter hold un."

"Well, then, you're not to breathe a single word about me to anybody; mind you, Nathan Bott. Put a padlock on your mouth, or we'll never be friends any more. Why, I

might be hung in chains at the bottom of Beolea Hill if you're a tell-tale, Nathan."

Nathan stared at me with saucer eyes. "*Be you a highway-boy, then, Maister Harry?*" he whispered. "Laws, I wain't speak a word. I'd never sleep in my bed o' night if thee wast a-hanging at bottom o' th' hill."

"It's a promise, then, Nathan?"

Nathan held up his right fore-finger and licked it elaborately. "You see this wet," he said solemnly, and rubbing his finger on his smock, "You see this dry," he added, and went on to make me understand that he would kill himself rather than betray me.

So I shook him by the hand to seal the bargain, and then began to dress. All the while I was buttoning and tying, Nathan was plying me with questions.

Wasn't th' Nutbrown a nation bad un, now? And didn't he feed his mare on beef-steak and brandy? Was he Turpin, or was he Tom King? Didn't he leap a turnpike and a miller's wain? How many folk had he murdered? Was I reg'lar apprenticed to th' highway business? Did I think there might be a chance for Nathan? Wouldn't th' Nutbrown want a lad to groom his mare, now? And so forth.

"See here, Nathan Bott," said I. "It's no use asking questions. I shan't give you any answer. I daren't. I must be off; I ought not to be here now. But you be here to-night at ten o'clock, and then, perhaps—*perhaps*—I'll have something to say to you. Good-bye, and *mind!*" I

said significantly, holding up a finger and wetting it. “*Mind!*” and away I ran into the moat. I waited there to watch that Nathan did not follow me and spy on me; and presently, as I saw him cross the bridge and pursue the footpath to Beolea, I re-entered the wood.

Down the long leafy glades I wandered aimlessly, and when I came into a bosky part of the copse where the shadows were deep and the long round cushion-grass spread a carpet, I laid myself down. And there the slumbrous influence of my long swim came upon me, and I lost my sense of hunger in dreamless sleep.

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## CHAPTER IX

### Jack and Jill

It must have been seven o’clock at least when I awoke and made my way towards the Abbey Chapel. Stealthily I went, in fear of surprises and perils, yet it was with a shock of astonishment that I paused at the gateway and found that the gate was closed!

What could that mean? I had certainly left the gate open. I peered between the bars of it at the chapel; all seemed quiet and unchanged, no sign of danger was visible. But my eye fell on the font that caught the little spring inside. I knew I had left the silver drinking-cup in the basin. Well, *the silver cup was gone!*

Trembling I stood at the gateway, wishing from the bottom of my heart that I had obeyed the wish of Roger, and never stirred out of the chapel at all. What was to be done? I felt sure that the *custodes* were hidden in the chapel, lying in wait for Roger and me. And yet I dared not slink away to hide, for somehow Roger must be warned.

Then I remembered to have read that soldiery would always reconnoitre a place of peril before attacking it. Here was *my* place of peril to reconnoitre. So I stole away round to the eastern hedge, crawled beneath its prickles into the graveyard, and crossed to the end of the chapel.

And as I stood there, under the low east window, my fears were all confirmed. I became aware of certain strange sounds inside the building. I heard the rattle of a chain, the stamp of hoofs, and a queer gibbering noise—an eerie uncanny chattering like nothing I had ever heard before. At that moment I remembered, with a cold thrill, that the Abbey Chapel was said to be haunted.

Even as I was so thinking, the sharp rattle of the chain sounded above my head, and looking up I saw an impish hairy little monster clinging inside the broken window-frame, and grinning, gibbering, and making faces at me in the most fiendish and affrighting fashion. And before I had time to move away from the window, *smash* went the glass, *rattle* went the chain, and out came that horrible hairy imp headlong, rough-and-tumble, on to my neck and

shoulders.

Shrieking, I tore myself from the clutch of the fearful thing that was clawing at me, and I rushed full speed towards the gate. But as I rounded the corner of the building out from the porch sprang a tall fair gentleman, clad in red; and pistol in hand he advanced to seize me.

I stopped, I stared, I stammered, I broke into a stupid laugh, I heaved a sigh of relief. For the tall fair gentleman in red was none other than Roger, the Nutbrown Highwayman!

Gone was the sunburnt hue from the face and hands, gone was the russet garb; yet the features, the figure, the voice, and the gallant bearing were unchanged.

“So it is you, Harry,” said this tall fair Roger, the same yet not the same; and “Here, Jacko, Jacko!” he called, as round the corner came the hairy little monster, leaping and dragging his chain.

I gave another stupid laugh. “I have read about monkeys,” I said in excuse for my cowardice; “but I never saw one before, sir.”

“*Sir!*” said my friend the highwayman. “*Sir!* That means you are ashamed of breaking out of bounds, I suppose, Harry; I told you to call me Roger. Yes,” he continued, “it is merely a monkey. What did you think it was? I bought him at Brassingham Fair to-day—he’ll be better than a watch-dog—and I bought something else there for you. I’m not sure now that you deserve it, Harry; but look here,” and he led the way into the chapel.

Bess turned her ear and whinnied as we entered. The stamp of her hoof was echoed by another, and in the dusky light I could see that she had lost part of her bedding, and that stabled in the opposite corner of the chapel was the bonniest little black pony in the world.

“She is yours,” said Roger, as I patted the glossy flanks of the dainty cherry-black mare. “She’s a Welshman, thirteen hands high, no vice, a clever jumper, thoroughly broken in, and all that. I bought her from a show in the fair, and Jacko with her. He is Jack and she is Jill. They are inseparable friends, and the broken-down showman broke down again when he parted with them. Here, Jack, Jack!” and he fastened the chain to a pew.

I gazed enraptured at my beautiful Jill. Never had I hoped, even in dreams, to own such a pony. Barebacked steeds of any kind, cart-horse, cob, and donkey, had I ridden; but never such an one, so compact, so cleanly built, so bonny as Jill. She had the brightest black eye, the silkiest mane, the smoothest coat that every pony boasted. And she was fully equipped; saddle, stirrups, and bridle were all complete and new; and when I dipped my hands into the holsters I found there—what?—two dainty pistols, a silver powder-flask, and silver case of bullets.

“Oh, no more thanks!” laughed Roger, cutting short my protestations. “I’m bent on making a highwayman of you, you see. The pony is yours as she stands. Take care of your neck and help me; that will be thanks enough.”



As we sat at our meal I learned that Roger had risen at five that morning, had washed the brown stain from his face and hands, had donned his silver-laced red suit, and, leaving me sleeping, had ridden away to Brassingham on my behalf. I was to be his companion, he said, and he had bought me Jill, so that we could ride together. He had work for me to do for him at Beolea.

“And now, young runaway,” he said more seriously, “it seems that neither the rectory nor the chapel can hold you. What have you been doing with yourself all day? I closed the gate and brought away the cup to scare and punish you.”

I told him the story of the day, and when I came to the arrangement I had made with Nathan, “That’s the only sensible thing you have done to-day, Harry Solway,” said he. “You shall meet the lad, of course; and when you meet him you shall ask him two short questions for me. Now for your first lesson in riding Jill.”

He told me to go up to my pony, to pat her, to comb her mane with my fingers, to speak to her soothingly, and to feed her with crumbs and sugar out of my palm. Then to whisper her name in her ear and gently lead her outside the gate.

“Now to mount her,” said Roger, as out in the moonlit meadow I stood at my pony’s head. “No, don’t force it,” he went on. “Hold the rein in your hand loosely; stand quite still beside her; place your hand on her neck; quietly lift your foot to the stirrup—no, no, try again,” he

said, as my pony winced away from me.

“Never mount by stealth,” he went on. “A horse must understand that he is to be ridden, that he can’t escape it any way. Never let him think you are doing it by trick, or he’ll be tricky too. Now, gently, quietly, calmly. Ah, vastly well, vastly well, Harry!” he cried, as he saw me firmly seat myself, Jill standing like an ebony statue all the while. “Now whisper ‘Go!’ into her left ear, and then look out!”

I bent my head and whispered the word in her trembling, fluttering ear. In an instant we were off, off, off! Away she went, my Jill, covering the ground with an easy, supple stride. Away, away! the whole circuit of the meadow. Away, around, and back again to the spot where Roger waited with an approving word.

“Now for a jump, Harry. That bush yonder, can you clear it?”

Could we clear it! My jet-black Jill went over it with the easy curving rise of a swallow.

“Bravo, Harry! Bravo, Jill!” cried Roger. “Brown Bess and the Nutbrown will have no cause to be ashamed of you.”

“And now,” he added, looking at his watch, “’tis time to start for your meeting with Nathan. Ask him two questions. First, *Is there a young lady living in hiding at the Grange?* Second, *When is the visitor expected there?* How will you go, Harry—ride or walk?”

There was no need to answer such a question. “Go!” I

whispered in the fluttering ear, and away we shot across the meadow.

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## CHAPTER X

### Question and Answer

A pack of clouds was hunting the moon through the sky, and the Floodgate bridge lay deep in shadow. I watched in vain for the stable-boy's appearance. I had come to the tryst too soon.

Too impatient to wait, I led my Jill over the rickety bridge, set her at the stiles in the meadows beyond, and presently arrived at the end of the footpath way, in a deep and rutty lane that led to the foot of Beolea Hill.

As I walked Jill along this narrow, uneven by-way I heard the turret-clock at the Grange stables chime ten thin, sharp strokes upon the calm air, and turning into the highway I quickly came in sight of the Grange itself.

With pride and chagrin I gazed at the home of the Solways. It was an irregular pile, built at different dates and in different styles, partly of reddish stone, partly of orange brick-banded and criss-crossed with oak. The lake in front of it flashed silver in the moonlight; the surrounding park ran down to a low wall at the highway's edge, and the long wall was flanked at either end by a coppice of red-trunked fir trees.

For more than two centuries the Solways had dwelt at the Grange. But at the death of the old squire the estate had passed to his second son, the rector, the Reverend Anthony Solway, A.M., Honorary Canon of Marlcester. The rector stayed himself in the rectory, and strangers dwelt at the Grange. For the last four years it had been leased to Captain Crawley, a sporting man of poor repute. The rector hated the Grange; I loved it. He and I were the last of the Solways; would the home of the Solways ever descend to me? There was now no entail; the rector could will it as he chose. But I had struggled with him and run from home; he would never forgive it; the Grange would never be willed to me.

As, musing thus, I waited in the shadow of the nearer coppice, a sound of melody was heard among the firs. A voice that any listening crow might envy was croaking an old country ditty:

“Have ’ee seen my love, my love, my love,  
Have ’ee seen my love waitin’ for me,  
He-e wears a green coat an’ a pair o’ blue britches,  
A hump on his back an’ a patch on his knee.”

“You’re a laggard, Nathan Bott!” I cried as the singer strode across the stile out of the coppice. The stable-boy gave a start of surprise.

“Be that thee, Maister Harry?” he whispered, and then his eye fell on Jill. Without a word he scanned her over, tested and examined her in a knowing horsey way. “Her be a booty, Maister Harry, sure enow,” he said. “Now,

wheer did th' Nutbrown steal un? Think if I was stable-lad for un he'd steal the like for me?"

"No doubt he'll do something for you, Nathan, if you serve him well. He wants you for the present merely to answer two questions, and then to hold your tongue."

"Got pistils, too!" said Nathan, still busy with Jill. "Pistils, now," he went on in an awed and respectful tone, as he felt in the holsters. "Pistils. *And* bullets. *And* powder. Be 'em loaded?"

"No," I answered. "I only got them an hour or two ago. But about these questions, Nathan. Tell me, is there a young lady kept hidden anywhere at the Grange?"

The stable-boy scratched his head, and looked embarrassed. "We 'as to keep secrets up at th' Grange, y' know," said he. "Racing stables is allays full o' secrets."

"But I'll tell 'ee, I'll tell 'ee," he went on. "Theer bain't no young lady yonder, not as I knows on. But old Jummy the third groom, *he* swears to me, private, in his liquor, as how theer's *some un* theer, kep' prison-like, back o' the Grange—have bin a three-week."

"*Ah!*" said I. "Thank you, Nathan. Now, tell me when the visitor is expected at the Grange?"

"T'morrow night; th' capt'n 'spects un t'morrow night. I knows it for sure, 'cos I be to fetch un. Old Jummy's main bad with rhumatiz, an' I'm to meet un with th' one-hoss shay, at th' 'Barley Mow', wheer th' coach'll drop un."

"At th' 'Barley Mow', to-morrow night," I said.

“Thank you, Nathan. I think that is all. I’ll see you again before long. But meantime, mum’s the word.”

Nathan licked his finger. “You see this wet,” he began; but I stopped him.

“Hark!” I muttered.

A vehicle was crossing the park. I heard the crunch of the gravel under the wheels, and the voice of the driver.

“Good-bye, Nathan,” I said hastily. “Off you go. You mustn’t be seen here with me, you know.”

And just as the stable-boy’s leggings disappeared over the stile into the coppice, I heard again a “*Kee-e-up*, Paregoric!” and saw the doctor’s gig emerging from the park into the road.

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## CHAPTER XI

### “Stand and Deliver!”

As the queer little gig came bowling along towards me, I reined my pony farther into the shadow of the firs. The gloom around me hid me, and the doctor drove tranquilly on, unconscious of my presence near him, and so near.

He had scarcely passed the foot of Beolea Hill, however, ere, with a sudden resolution, I turned Jill’s head into the roadway and walked her after the gig. A mile or so farther on I set her to gallop, shot a hundred

yards ahead of Paregoric, turned, came galloping back to the gig, and suddenly reined-up beside the doctor.

“Stand and deliver, sir!” I cried, with a laugh, and levelled a gleaming pistol at the old gentleman’s head.

The doctor dropped the reins.

“Hey, what, hey, you villain!” he cried, blinking at me in the uncertain light. “Hey?”

“Your money or your life!” I shouted, pulling out the other pistol.

“Hey, hey? I’ll blow your few brains out, you rascal you!” jerked the doctor, producing a blunderbuss from under the gig-seat, and turning its bell-shaped mouth towards me.

I lowered my pistols.

“What, Doctor Arbuthnot,” I said, “don’t you know me?”

“Hey, hey? Know you? Know you for a rogue! Why—why—*so it’s you*, young dog, is it? Galen! what do you mean by this? Stopping an honest gentleman on the king’s highway. Why, ’tis a hanging matter! Stand off! Stand away, young dog, stand away!”

“Oh, drop that blunderbuss, sir,” laughed I. “’Tis a dangerous weapon to the shooter. Lower it, sir, I beg you. I only did this for a joke. See,” and I dropped the pistols into the holsters.

“Hum, hum! Joke me no jokes. Don’t like such jokes, boy. I keep this ready for you jokers, you see,” said the doctor, lowering his loaded trumpet. “Lucky for you I

didn't fire, boy; she's safe to kill at three yards.

"But what do you mean by it, boy, hey? What! a full-fledged knight of the road already? Shame on you, Harry! Ah, ah! evil communications corrupt good children. Know a boy by the company he keeps. Ah! it's all true, all true. This is what your runaway habits have brought you to, boy. Mark my words, you'll come to be hanged. You begin well, 'pon honour. Where did you steal that little black horse from, I'd like to know?"

"I don't steal, sir," I said proudly. "The pony was a gift."

"A gift, hey? And whose? Tell me that."

"My friend the highwayman gave it me," I answered lightly.

"Hey, *hey*? Your *friend* the highwayman! Shame on you, Harry Solway, a boy of birth and breeding! A highwayman your *friend*!"

"A boy of birth, perhaps, sir," I said bitterly. "But as to breeding, my uncle bred me like a clown."

"Tut, tut, boy, tut!" replied the doctor peevishly. "I saw your grand-uncle about you only to-night. He tells me you are stupid and stubborn; and really, boy, it would so seem. You run away from home; you risk your life on a gravel-heap in the sun; you run away from me, your grandfather's closest friend; you run away from the officers of the law, and you consort with a pack of thieves. Ah! boy, what would your grandsire, fine old Hugh, have said to you, hey?"



“But, Doctor Arbuthnot, you mistake,” I said. “Hugh Solway was my grand-uncle. My grandfather’s name was Harry, and so was my father’s too.”

That seemed to me a very simple thing to say, but it produced a strange effect on the doctor. It seemed to surprise him more than “Stand and deliver!” or the pistols had done.

“Harry Solway your grandfather, boy!” he gasped. “Why, then, the Grange belongs to—Why, Anthony has no right. You’re the real—Oh! but it’s rubbish you tell me, boy; your grandfather’s name was Hugh.”

I persisted; the doctor persisted.

“At any rate your grandfather was a Solway,” he said at last; “and a Solway would die of shame to think a Solway could herd with a common thief.”

“He is not a common thief,” I answered hotly. “He is a gentleman, and I’m proud to be his friend.”

“Hum, hum! A monstrous fine gentleman, no doubt, no doubt. But your fine gentleman friend’s a highwayman, ain’t he—hey, boy, hey?”

“Why, sir, he’s a very honest highwayman.”

“Lungs and lancets! Rhubarb and squills! An honest highwayman! The boy must be mad! Yes, yes; softening of the brain, I see,” said the doctor, peering at my forehead pityingly.

“I am not mad, doctor; and I say he’s honest.”

“Hum, hum! Honest is as honest does. Stops the coach, boy, don’t he? Stops the coach?”

“Yes, but he doesn’t rob it,” was my answer.

At this the doctor lost all patience. “Then flay me! what in thunder does he stop it for?” he yelled at the height of his voice. “Lookee here, young sir,” he continued, “you’re going insane very fast; I can see it in your eyebrows. I can’t stop here, catching my death of cold, all night; so you just be off to the rectory and get into bed, and to-morrow I’ll drive up and bleed you. *Kee-e-up*, Paregoric.”

But Paregoric was soundly gone to sleep, and, whilst the doctor was wakening him, swiftly round the bend of the road before us came a stout, florid, elderly man, richly dressed in blue and gold, riding a magnificent roan. It was Captain Crawley of the Grange, riding home on his favourite hunter.

The doctor paused, and let Paregoric go to sleep again. “Ah, ha! well met, sir, well met!” he cried. “A word with you, Captain Crawley; one word.”

The captain pulled up his roan amidst a splutter of gravel, and stared at us with a surly, arrogant air. “Well, sir, your business?” he growled.

“I have but just now left the Grange,” said the doctor. “During your absence this evening—dining out, I presume?—the—ah—the young lady was seized with a faintness.”

The captain glared at the doctor, and uttered a military oath.

“Oh! she is better now; do not concern yourself, my

dear sir," the doctor went on blandly. "Fortunately I was near at hand, at the rectory, and your servants called in my aid. If you will send to my surgery the first thing to-morrow morning I will have a mixture ready; and on Thursday—let me see, yes, this is Tuesday—on Thursday I'll call at the Grange and see."

A burst of rage from Captain Crawley cut the doctor short. "Dare to set foot in my house again, and my dogs shall hound you," he thundered. "What have you to do with the young lady? There is no young lady. You lie, you meddling pill-dealing old quack!"

Boiling with fury, the doctor rose in his gig. "Quack, sir! quack!" he roared. "By the Lord Harry, sir, I'd have you know who does you the honour to address you! Quack! I am Gregory Arbuthnot, Esquire and Armiger, Justice of the Peace, Doctor of Medicine of the Faculty of Edinburgh, and a better gentleman than yourself, sir—a better gentleman than yourself! If I were two years younger I'd horsewhip you, sir—horsewhip you like a cur. But you shall hear from me; I'll have you out and shoot you like a dog! Good night to you—good night to you!" foamed the old doctor. "Quack! *pill-dealer!* By the Lord Harry! QUACK!"

He lashed at Paregoric as if Paregoric were the captain. The fat old pony woke up, gave a snort, broke into a sudden trot, and carried the wrathful old gentleman round the corner.

At once the captain turned his ire on me. "What are

you staring at, fool?" he thundered. "What's your business here? why, it's the Rectory brat, is it? You're the runaway, are you? Well, I'll crop your wings; I'll shut you under lock and key."

He moved his horse towards me as he spoke, and tried to clutch my rein. But Jill sidled away out of his reach. He cursed me, and clutched again and again.

"Pull up, rascal, pull up, or I'll clap you in jail for thieving that pony!" he thundered.

"I do not steal," I answered. "I don't steal horses, Captain Crawley, nor money—nor yet *young ladies*."

That shot told on the captain. With his worst oath he demanded to know what I knew about *that*; and when I refused to answer he set the big hunter right at me, with intent to ride me down. But nimbly Jill sprang aside, and a moment later she was carrying me at top speed down the highway, back towards the Grange.

"Stop thief!" yelled the captain after me, as he set spurs to his roan and galloped after Jill.

"Now show your mettle, bonny girl," I murmured in the fluttering ear, and truly she did her best.

Swift she was, but the tall hunter was swifter. At the foot of Beolea Hill I looked back; the captain was barely thirty strides behind me. "I shall be caught, I shall be caught!" was my internal cry. But an idea suddenly came to my aid.

Quick as the thought itself I pulled out a pistol. "Stand off, sir!" I cried, as I swerved Jill right round.

“Stand off, or you’re a dead man!”

The captain was rogue, but not coward. He rode at me as though the weapon in my hand was a toy.

What happened next was all the work of a moment. I levelled the pistol without aim or thought of aim. Was it not empty, and a mere show? With a curse the captain rode at me, I say; and at that moment the pistol cracked! I had pulled the trigger unconsciously, and it *was* loaded after all!

The big roan stopped in his stride, reared, pawed the air, and then plunged headlong, with a sickening thud, on the beaten road. The bullet had sped to the good steed’s heart.

The captain had been thrown to the turf at the wayside. He lay there silently in a heap. My heart beat violently as I rode up to him. Had I killed both horse and man?

But the next moment the captain stumbled to his feet, unhurt, and snatched at my rein again. Jill winced away, turned, threw up her heels in the captain’s face, and the next moment was away like an arrow down the rutty lane.

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## CHAPTER XII

### The Highwayman’s Story

It was close on midnight when I neared the Abbey

Chapel once more. My ride was gloomy; a mist shrouded the fields by the river, and the moon was blurred by cloud. As sleepily I rode through the last meadow I felt a sudden stop and jolt, and the next instant I was somersaulting through the air over Jill's shoulder.

I alighted on the turf spreadeagle fashion, arms and legs outsprawled. Happily I was unhurt and so was Jill. She stood there trembling and sweating, but steadfast as a rock. I could not at first account for her sudden halt in her canter; but feeling down her forelegs I found both hoofs and pasterns entangled in a mass of fine cordage. "Poachers!" thought I. It was a folded draw-net.

"Quiet, Jill, good girl!" I muttered, fondling and patting the startled little mare. "Quiet, then, my beauty!" *Ay, and quiet, too, myself!* The owners of that net would be somewhere near, I knew; and unless I was cautious they might discover me and the secret of the chapel.

Stealthily, a yard or two at a time, I led my pony over the meadow, listening at every pause. Nothing was to be seen or heard till we crossed to the graveyard gateway. But as I listened there, a muttering from among the tombstones met my ear:

*"Sithee, now, Jake, I told 'ee! 'Tis a candle, sure enow."*

*"Iss, right enow—a corpse-candle, though!"*

*"Co'ps-candles, fool! I nivver b'lieved 'em, un' I shan't now, Jake."*

*"Please thyself. Iverybody knows th' old place be*

*haunted. Ax thy granny else."*

*"Ax my granny! Nay, I'm gooin' to see."*

Breathless I stood by the side of Jill in the shadow near the gate. The door of the porch stood ajar, and the light of Roger's lantern outlined the arch and the door. I heard the rustling of the grass as the two intruders crept on hands and knees towards the tell-tale gleam; I saw their bent figures black for a moment against the upright band of light in the porch. The foremost fellow placed his knee on the step and laid his eye to a chink in the iron-bound door. My heart beat fast; in another moment he would spy the Nutbrown in his lair!

But that instant I heard the sharp jar of a chain, a jabber, an oath, and a scream of fear. Jacko had sprung out at the intruders, as the night before he had sprung at me.

*"Jake, Jake, it's true enow!"* yelled the terrified poacher, as he felt the claws and tail and the horn-like ears of the hairy Jacko. *"Jake!"* he shrieked, *"the old un's got me! Help, Jake, help!"*

But Jake had crashed through the hedge and was off at full speed to Redwych.

*"Ho-ha-haowgh!"* yelled the tortured fellow, as he tumbled along towards the gateway.

*"Gr-r-rr!"* chuckled Jacko gleefully, tearing at his captive's hair.

I dared not rush to the rescue, I dared not let myself be seen. But just as the poor fellow appeared in the

gateway Jill shrilly neighed, and the ape sprang, chuckling, on to her saddle. With a glance of horror at the coal-black steed and her demon rider, the scared man burst yelling into the meadow and ran for his life.

I laughed as I followed Jill and her chattering jockey into the chapel. There stood Roger on guard, pistol in hand, the lantern behind him, and his open Shakespeare on the floor.

“Poachers on the spy, Roger, that was all,” I said. “Jacko settled their business. You shall have a lump of sugar, Jacko. Poachers, that was all. Jacko scared ’em out of their five wits; they’ll not come spying here again.”

“But suppose they raise the neighbourhood after us?” said Roger.

“They daren’t; they would betray themselves. And everybody at Redwych thinks the place is haunted. That is why you have lived here so long undisturbed. Besides, the fellow never saw you,” I went on. “Oh, all that is unimportant, thanks to Jacko. The main thing is that I’ve seen the stable-boy and found out——”

“What?” burst in Roger.

“That there *is* a young lady kept hidden at the Grange.”

“Ah!” cried my friend the highwayman, in a proud sad tone. “My Marjorie, Harry! My Marjorie!”

He paced the aisle with agitated steps while I told him the events of my night excursion.

“Ill! ill!” he cried, “Marjorie ill! and I powerless to aid



her! . . . But all this is a mystery to you, Harry," he added, with a faint smile. "Come, you shall hear the story.

"The lady at the Grange is Marjorie Vane, my betrothed," he began. "Our wedding day was fixed; we were the happiest of lovers. But the widow, her mother, suddenly died; and by the will—a mad arrangement—Crawley became my Marjorie's guardian. He and her father had been friends. Ill! my Marjorie ill!"

"But she's better now," I interrupted. "The doctor said so. As for Crawley, I've shot his horse for him already." And I thought with sorrow of the gallant roan.

"The first thing that Crawley did," said Roger, pausing in his pacing up and down, "was to refuse me leave to marry her; the next to shut her up so that I could not reach her. He had his own rascally designs on her fortune; he meant to marry her to one of his gambling friends, and share the spoil. I met him in Pall Mall and horsewhipped him like a cur. Next day we fought a duel; I left him for dead on the grass in Hyde Park. He did not die, but I had to flee the country. Hyde Park is a royal park, and the king was furious against me. It was either exile or a prison for me. I fled to Belgium.

"For six months I lived at Ghent," went on my friend, throwing himself on the mattress, his head between his hands. "A few weeks ago I heard for the first time from Marjorie. The captain was well again, she said, and planning to marry her to Beamish, one of his black-leg friends. She was a prisoner in London, and powerless to

escape.

“At once I took ship and returned in disguise to London. I found Crawley’s house shut up, and learned that he had brought Marjorie to the Grange. So I came down here, still by stealth, of course; and to conceal my real purpose I took the part of a highwayman, dressing myself to suit the colour of my bonny Bess. And I took this chapel, found by accident, for a hiding-place.”

“And a fine hiding-place it is,” said I; “especially with Jacko to guard it. Here, Jacko, here’s your sugar.”

“So that is why I am an amateur Turpin, Harry,” Roger continued. “That is why I stop the coach to read Crawley’s letters. Yes, I’m the Nutbrown, Harry; but, believe me, I’m an honest gentleman.”

“I do believe you, Roger!” I cried, jumping up and taking his hand. “I’m proud to be your friend, and so I told the doctor.”

“Thanks, my boy, thanks!” said Roger, with emotion. “Now, as to my plans. I learn from Crawley’s letters that this fellow Beamish is to arrive at the Grange in a day or two, to be married to Marjorie in spite of her resistance. I expect that kind uncle of yours will be paid to perform the ceremony. But we’ll stop it, Harry, we’ll stop it, if we have to storm the Grange to carry her off.”

“Beamish is the visitor they expect to-morrow night, then?” said I. “Can’t we stop the chaise this side the ‘Barley Mow’ and kidnap Mr. Beamish?”

“Something of that sort, Harry,” said Roger, with a

smile. “At any rate we’ll have a serious talk with him.  
But now to bed.”

# *WEDNESDAY*

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## CHAPTER XIII

### The Vow of Mr. Beamish

The sun was low and the shadows gaunt next evening when we rode forth on our highwayman errand. Roger wore his russet disguise again, and I was bravely clad in a new suit brought for me on Jill's back from Brassingham. Picture me now in a black-braided surtout, black breeches, black leggings, and a black hat with a sable cockade. And all that afternoon I had been busy making myself a black mask out of a foot of velvet and a yard of wire.

Stealthily we rode, through the covering wood, along the sheltering moat, by hedgerow, lane, and field-path. Dusk came on early, and unseen, unheard, we reached at length the road from the "Barley Mow" to Beolea.

Just at the angle where the road forks off to Redwych there stands a clump of young beech and birch. In the shadow of this clump we dismounted, tightened the girths, looked to the priming of our pistols, and donned our velvet masks. A pretty pair of rogues we looked, with the black and brown vizors hiding the face from brow to nostril. Our eyes gleamed at each other's through the

spectacle-holes, and we burst into a mutual laugh. And yet it seemed no joke to me, for I felt myself about to play the highwayman in earnest.

We took one other precaution. I don't remember if Sixteen-stringed Jack, or Jerry Abershaw, or Spence Broughton, or any other famous knight of the road ever muffled his horse's feet; but Roger did so. Pads of thick leather drawn over the hoof deadened the sound of Bess's shoes on the road. That was why I never heard him approach Echo Corner on the Monday night. The pads were an invention of Roger's; and all the afternoon he had been at work on a set of them for Jill.

In utter quiet, therefore, we walked our nags towards the "Barley Mow". That old inn was about a couple of miles away from us, and we expected soon to meet the chaise. Indeed at the second rise in the road it came in view, only a furlong or so away. Nathan, dressed in Jummy's blue livery, sat on the box of a clumsy yellow chaise, steering a skittish grey horse along the uneven road. A narrow moonlit track lay white along the avenue of elms and shadow; and down that silver track the chaise was slowly advancing.

So stealthy was our swift approach, so noiseless were the padded hoofs, and so intent was Nathan on his driving, that before he dreamed of danger we were upon him. He gave a great jerk to the reins and shrank back on his cushion, as "Pull up!" I shouted, and laid the cold nozzle of a pistol behind his ear.

“Ha-yow!” he roared, as he felt the steel. “Don’t kill a poor chap, Mr. Nutbrown; don’t ’ee now. I’ll pull up. Whoa-a, Bacca!”

But the sudden jerk and the startled yell had been too much for the skittish Bacchus. He flung up his head, gave a buck, and jibbed right across the road: the wheels dragged in a rut and the chaise fell over on its side with a sudden ungentle stoppage. “Crunch, *crash!*” it went, and the grey was flung upon his flank, beneath the shaft.

As for Nathan, he shot heels over head into a soft and watery ditch that drained the hedge bottom.

Inside the chaise Mr. Beamish was struggling to his feet, and swearing. “Curse you, driver, you fool!” he shouted, thrusting head and shoulders through the window of the uppermost door. “Curse you, driver! I’ll kick the

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“Highwaymen, by George!” he muttered, as for the first time his eye fell on our masked appearance. A moment later the mouth of a horse-pistol was turned towards us through the window; smoke puffed out of it, and a bullet went pinging past my ear.

“Missed, by George!” yelled Mr. Beamish, and he seized a second weapon. But ere he could discharge it the Nutbrown was upon him. Bending from the saddle and seizing Mr. Beamish by the neck, Roger dragged him up out of the chaise, through the window, kicked the pistol from his hand, and flung him sprawling on the road.

“Look after the driver! I’ll attend to this fellow. Now,

sir,” continued Roger, raising his hat, “give me the favour of five minutes’ conversation with you. Your purse and valuables are safe; I do not rob sharpers.”

“Thankee kindly, Mr. Nutbrown,” Nathan spluttered as, dismounting, I helped him out of the muddy ditch.

“Drat that Bacca!” he gasped, as he wiped the slime from his eyes. “Drat that Bacca! I be welly drowneded.”

I laughed. “You’re a beauty now, Nathan,” I chuckled. Nathan cleared the mud from his eyes, and stared.

“Crack me now, who’d a thought it of ’ee!” he cried indignantly. “I took ’ee for the Nutbrown. I’d ha’ stopped ’ithout any pistils. It warn’t kind of ’ee, Maister Harry,” he went on. “Look at I, now! I be welly drowneded. Sithee,” and he ruefully glared at his bespattered livery. “Them be Jummy’s things. Old Jummy’ll just go ravin’ mad when a sees ’em. *Whoo-a!*” he roared at Bacchus, who was struggling to rise. “*Whoa-a*, thou jibbin’ brute! Jummy’ll cut ’ee to ribbins, once I get ’ee whoam.”

I ran to the grey’s head and sat on it; Nathan plumped down on the grey’s neck. And there we sat talking to each other, Jill standing like a carving in solid jet the while.

“But laws, now, this ain’t no lark now, be it, now? Ain’t it fine?” chuckled Nathan, choking back a huge guffaw, and noiselessly smiting himself on the knee in high but suppressed enjoyment. “Thou’rt a rare ’un, Maister Harry! This be better fun than Red’ych Fair! Crack me, th’ captin’ll cuss fro’ now to Chrissmuss!”

“Harkee!” he went on, nearly suffocating himself in

suppressing a huge chuckle. "Ain't th' Nutbrown a-givin' it he *fine*! 'E's a hawty chap, th' stranger. Goo it, Mr. Nutbrown! Take th' starchness out on un. Ain't he a-gettin' it *fine*, Maister Harry! Harkee!"

A dozen yards away the interview between Roger and Beamish was proceeding. "Useless bragging, Mr. Larry Beamish," the calm grave voice of Roger said. "I know your name and your history; and although you are quick with your firearms, I know you for a coward! I am a highwayman, 'tis true; but to hang me, as you threaten, you must take me. *Silence*, sir!" he thundered, as oaths and insults came from Beamish's white lips. "You are here in my power; your life is in my hand. On one condition I will spare it.

"Listen," Roger went on, his hand on Beamish's throat. "I am here on the part of the gentleman betrothed to Miss Vane; and by the moon above us, unless you take the oath I offer you, I shoot you like a weasel."

The last words were uttered with an ominous click of the pistol-lock to strengthen them.

"Down on your knees, sir, and say your last prayer or take the vow." A look of stern determination was visible on Roger's face. The fashionably dressed, perfumed, laced, and powdered Beamish shrank before it. A pallor yellowed his raffish face, he lost his jaunty air; he faltered, muttered, and dropped upon his knees in the dirty road. "After me, sir," said Roger icily; and the vow began.



“On pain of death I swear——”

“*On pain of death I swear——*” echoed Beamish sullenly.

“To quit all pretensions——”

“*To quit all pretensions——*”

“To the hand of Miss Marjorie Vane——”

“*To the hand of Miss Marjorie Vane——*”

“Crack me if it ain’t like th’ passon an’ old Tommy Lowes th’ clerk,” chuckled Nathan, tears of laughter in his eyes.

“I forfeit my life——”

“*I forfeit my life——*”

“Unless I avoid her presence——”

“*Unless I avoid her presence——*”

“And refuse to sully her hand in marriage——”

“*And refuse to sully her hand in marriage,*” muttered Mr. Beamish, getting up, for the vow was done.

“Now, sir, you must keep that pledge better than you pay your gambling debts,” said Roger. “Break your bond in the least particular, and expect no mercy. When we have left you, you are free to depart. I bid you good night, Mr. Beamish; good night, and a good memory too.”

“Come,” said Roger to me. “Not a word about me,” I whispered to Nathan. We lifted our hats ceremoniously, and galloped away.

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## CHAPTER XIV

# Belsize of Castle Thirsk

“Do you expect that gambling fellow to keep his vow?” I asked, as we rode through the Floodgate meadow.

Roger mused for a minute before he answered. Then he told me that at any rate Beamish was too much scared to pester Miss Vane for a while at least; and all that Roger wanted was to gain a little time. “Give me but two days more,” he cried, “and I’ll have my Marjorie out of her prison, even though I have to blow up the Grange with gunpowder to do it.”

He spoke no further, but rode on with his chin on his breast, sunk in thought, and silently we let Bess and Jill thread their own path through the mounds and gaps of the Abbey meadows.

“Roger, *look!* There’s a light in the chapel!” Above the hedge of the burial-ground the roof and the lancet heads of the windows could be seen from where we rode. Green upon tile and buttress lay the moonbeams; but from the windows came the yellow gleam of a lamp or candle burning within!

“Had, then, the poachers really seen us, and betrayed us? Or could it be,” I asked myself, “could it be, after all, that the ancient place was haunted.”

The hoofs fell silently on the turf as we guided Bess and Jill to the side of the graveyard; noiselessly we dismounted, and noiselessly crept beneath the hedge.

“Mount on my shoulders,” whispered Roger, when we stood beside the northern wall of the chapel. Hiding myself from view, I mounted, and peered through the grimy broken panes. A chain was rattled among the rafters as I climbed, and I heard the chatter of Jacko up aloft.

The yellow glow which lit the upper portion of the chapel came from a horn lantern that stood on the floor near our bed. A blunderbuss was lying by it, and on the smaller box a short stout man was seated, his back towards me. I stared at the short stout man for more than a minute. Hatless and wigless he sat there, and a knotted handkerchief was slipping off his bald and shining pate. Then I tapped the window; the intruder turned, saw my face, and shook his fist; whilst Jacko joyously rattled his chain.

“All right, Roger!” I cried. “It is only Doctor Arbuthnot!”

“A very good d’en to you, sir,” I said, as I led Jill into the chapel. “A fine scare you gave us with your lantern.”

“Hey? What! No peace for the wicked, Harry. Thought I was a thief-catcher, hey? Gave you a turn, did I, hey? Serve you right, young scamp, serves you right. But who is this gentleman, Harry?”

“This, sir, is my friend the Nutbrown Highwayman.” The Nutbrown Highwayman bowed with grave courtesy, removing his mask.

“Hum, hum! Knew that afore, knew that afore. (Hum,

hum! Monstrous fine mare, monstrous fine gentleman,” the doctor muttered to himself.) “Haven’t you another name, sir, and an honest?” he said to Roger.

“My name is Roger Belsize, at your service, sir,” was the stately reply.

“Hum, hum! Belsize, hey? (Gentleman every inch of him!) Belsize, Belsize? Any relation to the Belsizes of Castle Thirsk; hey, sir?”

“I am the Earl of Thirsk himself, if that be any credential,” said Roger, with a smile.

The doctor gave a gasp, and sat down suddenly on the mattress. “Phew!” he said, taking his handkerchief from his head, and fanning himself with it. “Phew! It’s very warm.” Then: “What, sir!” he burst out, “a peer of the realm a highwayman! Pills and powders! Am I mad, or are you lying, or is the world topsy-turvy and every nobleman a thief! The Earl of Thirsk, hey? Did *you* know of this, you young rascal; hey, boy, hey?” and the doctor turned fiercely upon me.

I know of it, indeed! I was as much amazed as the doctor. My friend the highwayman a lord!

“Oh, come, sir, come; your proofs,” jerked the doctor. “I’m an old fool, no doubt, hey? But I am not in my dotage yet. Your proofs, sir, if you have any?”

“My proofs must be this signet and my story, my dear sir,” said Roger, taking a ring from his finger. “You know the Belsize arms, I suppose? My only other proof is my story. As a friend of Harry’s, will you hear it? . . .”

“By the Lord Harry, I believe you, I believe you, my lord!” cried the old gentleman, as the recital ended. “By Galen, I believe you, my Lord of Thirsk!” he repeated, getting up and shaking hands with Roger and me, and offering his snuff-box over and over again.

“But what about Marjorie’s health, doctor; what of that?” asked Roger anxiously.

“Well, well; I warrant her better, and by this time herself again. A sweet young gentlewoman, sir; a pearl. Pale, when I saw her, pale; but lovely and gracious as was my own mother. Oh, never fear, I warrant her hale again, the dear lady. A gem, sir; a female gem. I sent her this morning a tonic medicine, my best prescription, one famous in the faculty, although *I* say it. By the same messenger I sent that vulgar fellow a challenge. I offered him terms of three shots; he with his pistols, I with my blunderbuss yonder. Hum, hum! the fellow’s no gentleman, sir; no gentleman. He refuses the duel—sends me word back he never fights apothecaries! Apothecaries! Confound his insolence! Called me a—a quack, sir, t’other night! By the Lord Harry, a *quack*!” and the old gentleman stamped angrily about the aisle, rubbing his perspiring pate with his snuffy handkerchief.

“Where are your hat and wig, sir?” I inquired.

“Hey? Hat and wig? Catch my death of cold, I expect. Hat and wig? That nasty little beast of yours knows all about ’em. Got loose, jumped on my head, carried ’em off. He’d have carried me off too if I hadn’t doused him

well with snuff. Hear him sneezing? Your—what-d’ye-call-um, I mean—your Barbary ape yonder,” and the doctor jerked his thumb towards the rafters.

I laughed. Up among the beams sat Jacko, the hat on his head and shoulders, the wig in his claws, and his chain hanging down like a second tail.

“Here, you little thief!” I cried, jumping up and seizing the tip of the chain. “What, you turned highwayman too? Here they are, doctor.”

“Hum, hum! Wig spoiled, of course. Ugh-h, you little beast!”

“Doctor Arbuthnot, I am anxious to learn in what way you discovered our retreat, here,” said Roger, handing a glass of wine.

“Hey, hey? Through Jelliman the poacher, of course, my lord—well, Mr. Roger, then, if you insist, sir,” said the old gentleman, smacking his lips. “A very good wine, very fine Madeiry indeed, sir. Hum, hum! Jelliman, the poacher. Came to my surgery—the man you nearly killed here last night, you know. Came to my surgery this morning; wanted his neck strapped up. Hole in it; very bad case indeed. Nearly a case of erysipelas, I can tell you. Murderous little imp of yours! I’d like to have the boning of him! Want another skeleton for my drawing-room.”

Roger laughed.

“Do you want to be boned, Jacko?” I chuckled, as I tied the grinning little rascal to a pew-door.

“And I’d very much like to bone Crawley too,” said the doctor.

“Oh, *I’ve* paid him off, doctor,” I said. “I’ve shot his hunter under him—the poor roan.”

The doctor gasped. “Shot his hunter? You young dog! You’ll shoot yourself into jail some day!”

“I paid him off for insulting you, sir.”

“Hum, hum! Pay the fellow off myself, thank you, boy. Hum, hum!”

“But did the poacher tell you Harry and I were here?” asked Roger.

“Oh, Jelliman? Not he, not he; never saw ye. Told me a rigmarole about corpse-candles, little devils, ghosts, and a black horse, and what not. ‘It’s that young dog, Harry Solway!’ thinks I. ‘But what nails the lad must have!’ *He, he!* So I came down here on the sly, you see. Wanted to talk to the lad about his grandfather, for one thing; wanted to get him out of *your* bad company, my lord—*he, he!*—for another. Got my lantern, loaded my blunderbuss; left my purse and timepiece at home—*he, he!*—left my valuables at home; came down here; waited for ye. Hum, hum!”

“I’m vastly glad you came, sir,” answered Roger; “though you gave us a fright. I think we can help you to settle accounts with Crawley; and you can help us both. Unless my suspicions are mistaken, our friend Harry, here, has been wronged out of his inheritance.”

“Hum, hum! *If* Henry Solway was his grandfather,

then he certainly has,” said the old gentleman, in a doubtful tone. “I’ve been talking to Hepzibah, my housekeeper, about it. It may be so; but I don’t see how we can prove it if it be true. You see, Henry’s only son Harry ran away to sea, and was never heard of. When the old squire died the property passed to Anthony, the rector—the second son, d’ye see? If Harry the runaway to sea had been living, the property would have been his; if he had a son it would be the son’s. Harry, here, makes out that he’s that son; but the rector gave out that he was *Hugh’s* grandson, not Henry’s. Hugh was the youngest, the third, of the brothers. Hugh went away many a year ago, and died in Virginia—too much tobacco, I suppose.”

“Well, sir,” I said, “my mother told me that my father’s name was Harry, that my grandfather’s name was Harry, and that my father ran away from the Grange to sea.”

“Hum, hum! Perhaps Hugh had a son called Harry too, d’ye see? But if your story is correct, then the old miser Anthony has cheated you out of the Grange, and half the parish of Beolea. But where are your proofs, boy, hey?”

“We must *find* your proofs for you, Harry,” said Roger.

“Hum, hum! That’s another job on our hands. Plenty to do, my lord. Come, we must work our brains; we must plot, we must plan.”

“Another glass of wine, doctor; and then we’ll see you safe home,” said Roger. “We can do our plotting as we



walk.”

By the time we reached the turnpike at the foot of Redwych Hill our plans were laid, and we said good-bye to the doctor. But before we separated a single slow melancholy note from the bell of the church on the Green came floating out upon the air.

“What can that mean, at midnight?” whispered Roger.

Motionless, we listened. There came a second toll; a minute passed, a third stroke sounded; another minute, and another toll.

“The passing-bell at midnight!” murmured the doctor. “It can only mean one thing. It means the king is dead!” and he reverently lifted his hat.

Roger bared his head. “The poor old king!” he said. “But—I am selfish—it is no unpleasant sound to me. If the king is dead, then I am no more a banished man!”

# THURSDAY

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## CHAPTER XV

### In the Grange Garden

“Nine!” counted Roger, as the last thin stroke rang from the bell in the turret-clock at the stables of the Grange.

It was Thursday night. Another long hot day had sleepily ticked itself into the past; and night, with a somewhat murky sky, was come, to shade us in our new adventure.

Hidden under the end of the stables, we were awaiting the coming of the doctor. Bess and Jill were tied among the firs in the spinney, where we could easily find them again; our pistols were in our pockets; and Roger wore a suit as black and not easily visible as my own. Nothing was now wanting but the appearance of our confederate, the doctor.

The sound of that ninth stroke had hardly died from the ear when a rattle of wheels on the highway, and a “Kee-e-up, Paregoric!” announced the punctual old gentleman’s approach. We watched the queer little equipage turn into the drive, pass the empty lodge, and roll towards the front of the mansion. “*Now!*” Roger

whispered, and we stole out of the shadow of the stables and hurried across the angle of greensward that lay between the coppice, the stables-end, and the garden wall.

“Remember, Harry!” Roger muttered, as we halted at a stout wooden door in the wall. “Remember the plan! While the doctor keeps them busy in front of the house I shall be searching at the back, and you will keep watch here. The moment the doctor drives off, or gets into danger, you must let me know.”

“Click!” went the catch of the door, Roger slipped into the garden, and I was left at my sentinel post—alone. But I did not wait there a minute; stealthily I crept along in the shadow of the wall, cautiously I stole along to the end of the Grange. At the corner I halted, under a projecting window, and peered round to the front of the house.

There, on the gravel sweep, at the foot of the portico steps, was the gig, the doctor sitting stiffly in it, and Paregoric already asleep between the shafts.

“Come to see my patient, of course, fellow,” I heard the old gentleman say to a liveried servant who stood on the steps. “Go, tell your master at once.”

With a surly mutter the lackey disappeared, and the doctor waited, whistling “Lillibulero-lero-lero”, and flicking the gravel with his whip.

“There now, what did I tell yer, now?” said the footman returning. “Captin Crawley says: ‘Order the old fool off,’ says he.”

“Hum, hum!” growled the doctor to himself. “Knew I’d get some insult or other. I *am* an old fool, too, or I’d be snug a-bed by this time, minding my own business.”

“Master says ‘Be off!’ I tell yer,” cried the grinning footman. “Don’t want no med’cine here!”

“Silence, flunkey!” roared the old gentleman. “Respect your betters, man! Tell your master I said I’d come on Thursday, and I’m come on Thursday. I’m come to see my patient, and I mean to see my patient; and he’d better let me see my patient, or I’ll—I’ll——”

“Pizen us all, I s’pose,” jeered the man in livery. His laugh was changed into a sudden howl, for the doctor slashed him round the silken calves.

“Howgh, howgh!” roared the fellow, dancing on the steps and rubbing his legs. “I’ll fetch the capting to yer, I will. Hittin’ a pore chap like that! Capting! Capting!” yelled the fellow, running up into the hall. “Capting! Capting Crawley, sir! He’s a hoss-whipping I, he is! Capting! Capting!”

The window under which I stood was suddenly flung open, and the captain’s head and shoulders issued from it, amidst a volley of oaths. I shrank against the wall, out of sight in the black shadow.

“Trespassing again, old quack!” roared Captain Crawley. “Off with you! Off with you this minute! Quick, you rascally old poacher, or I’ll clap you in jail!”

“Hey-day!” returned the doctor. “Poacher! Quack! You mistake me. I am Gregory Arbuthnot, doctor of

medicine and justice of the peace! And I'm more likely to see you in jail than go there myself, you swindling bully!"

"Fore George, the fellow's cursed insolent," remarked Mr. Beamish, as, wine-glass in hand, he came to the window.

"Don't bandy words with me, *Mister* Gregory Arbuthnot, apothecary, and all the rest of it!" thundered the captain. "You trespass on my park, and you batter my servants, do you? Now don't make me come out to you! Be off while you can with a whole skin!"

"Come out if you dare, *Mister* Crawley, card-sharper, and all the rest of it!" roared the doctor. "Come out and settle our quarrel, at ten paces and the word, like a man. But you daren't, you know, you dastard!"

Bellowing with rage the captain shut the casement with a slam, rushed down into the hall, and appeared under the portico. "Here, Warren, Sampson, Smith!" he shouted. The butler, the whipped footman, and the page came running up from the servants' hall. "Here, pull the old fool out of his shandrydan and kick him out of the park!"

I could not but laugh at the doctor; his jolly round face was purple with rage. "Come on, you—you hirelings!" he roared, as he seized his blunderbuss and stood up in the gig with his back to Paregoric. At the sight of that bulky weapon the men-servants paused aghast.

"Come on, I tell you, master and men!" cried the

doctor, waving his firearm in the air. "Come on, and——"

What else he might have said was drowned. A sudden blaze was followed by a loud report; the blunderbuss had discharged itself unexpectedly. The slugs and nails which loaded it were scattered harmlessly into the air, but the recoil and kick of the discharge took effect on the doctor. He was knocked backward upon the floor of his gig.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Crawley. "That settles him! Turn out the dogs and chevy him off the place!"

But the report of the blunderbuss and the shock of the doctor's tumble had startled Paregoric out of his nap. Off he dashed at a gallop, dragging the gig and the doctor bump, bump, over the turf. "Whoh, Paregoric!" the doctor cried in vain.

The last I saw of the dear old gentleman that night was his gaitered legs waving in the air, as he struggled to regain his seat and the reins. "WHO-OH, PAREGORIC!" he roared; but away went pony, away went gig, away went doctor across the park, round a clump of hawthorns, and out of sight, while just at that moment a brace of tawny hounds came baying and leaping round to the front of the house.

I did not wait for an interview with the mastiffs, but like a hare I coursed back to the door in the wall, rushed into the garden, and closed the door behind me.

It was a fine old pleasaunce, the garden at the Grange; a place of shady walks, of box trees trimmed into shapes of beast and bird, of spreading fruit trees, of fragrant

herb-beds, and of flower parterres. But I did not stop to pluck a posy; along the paths I ran, and ever as I hurried on I looked for Roger.

The garden spread up to a terrace, granite-walled, and above the terrace rose the dark irregular rear of the mansion. Overhead I saw a half-lit chamber window shine, the only spot of light in all the ivy-hung facade. Below the lit window Roger stood. The window-lattice was open, but bars crossed the casement inside, and behind the bars I saw the beautiful sad face of Mistress Marjorie Vane.

"Time to be off, Harry?" Roger queried, as I touched his sleeve.

"Time to be off, I fear. 'Tis all over in the front; Paregoric has bolted with the doctor, and the dogs are loose. Did you not hear the uproar?"

"I heard nothing but this lady's voice, my boy," said Roger. "Marjorie, this is Harry Solway, the highwayman's friend."

"And mine, I trust," said the beautiful lips that smiled down on me, while the white hand waved a greeting. Bowing, I swept the turf with my hat-feather. A few parting words were murmured, while I stood aside; hands were kissed to each other. "Till to-morrow night!" cried Roger, and off we ran to the garden door.

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## CHAPTER XVI

# Mastiffs and Man-traps

Gliding out into the park we fastened the gate behind us, and with that all risk of discovery seemed to have passed away.

“We must be here again to-morrow night, Harry,” exulted Roger. “I reached Marjorie a file for those bars. Eight o’clock to-morrow night, Harry, and you shall lend me Jill to carry my sweetheart off.”

Carefully we trod, and noiselessly we entered the coppice, yet the quick senses of Bess and Jill were aware of our coming, and a loud neigh of welcome shrilled through the firs. The noise defeated all our precautions, for the next minute, on our left, we heard a mastiff bay.

“Discovered!” cried Roger angrily. We doubled our pace, but the barking sounded nearer and nearer.

“Seize ’em! TEAR ’EM, good dog, TEAR ’EM! At ’em, WORRIER! at ’em, then!” The cry came from our rear, in somewhat tremulous tones; I thought I recognized the voice of Sampson, the whipped footman. A still nearer bay was the response, and we could hear the great dogs crashing through the bushes. Suddenly they appeared in the gloomy glade before us; their eyes shone redly, we heard their teeth gnash savagely as they sprang towards us. I am not much of a coward, but I confess I wavered in my run.

Pressed together in the narrow path the immense dun-coloured brutes came on. Another moment, and they



would have leapt upon us. But "*piff-paff!*" A double flash, a double report; the hounds rolled bleeding on the fir-cones, and, pocketing his smoking pistols, Roger seized my hand and ran.

Yet pursuit was ended; a distant crashing told us that Sampson the brave was hurrying out of danger. "'Twas a pity, poor brutes!" muttered Roger; "but it had to be done. No more hope of concealing our visit, Harry."

"And no dogs to deal with to-morrow night, Roger."

Five minutes later we had ridden out of the spinney and leapt into the road.

Slowly we jogged homewards by the Mere, a roundabout route. The night air was mild and fragrant, and for the very pleasure of it, after our long day indoors, we prolonged our ride. Cantering through the marshes, we roused the water-fowl from their sedgy roosts. Disturbed in his fishing, a heron winged away, with his peculiar flapping flight. "*Chit, chit, titter, chitter,*" shrilled the leather-wing bats as they fluttered in spirals round our heads. A huge white owl, like a flying ghost, sailed silently past us; a mouse was squeaking in its claws. Thrush and blackbird were on their nests, but a nightingale was awake in the dingle. "*Thring, thring, thring, koo-urr,*" sang the slim brown bird, as it swayed on a swinging briar: "*Jug, jug-tereau, tereau, tereau!*"

It was eleven o'clock by Roger's watch when we neared our haunt at the chapel; we rode into the graveyard with a sense of being at home again. Tired, and slightly

sleepy, I pushed forward and entered first, and the next moment I was struggling in a sturdy grasp.

“Caught! *caught!*” I managed to yell as I twisted and twined. I could utter no more, for a hot horny hand was crushed over my mouth, and a grip was on my throat. But dimly, as I struggled inside the porch, I saw a man rush out of it—Jarvis the runner! I saw him claw at Roger’s rein. I saw Brown Bess—good mare!—I saw her stamp her hoof hard down on the runner’s foot. I heard an anguished oath from Jarvis as he dropped the rein. Then I saw the gleam of his pistol, and heard its useless snap. “Away, Roger!” I managed to shout, tearing at the hand that gagged me. Then I felt a fierce blow from a knuckly fist on my temple, and knew no more.

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## CHAPTER XVII

### Alas, poor Jacko!

When I came to myself again I was lying on Bess’s straw, with a sore and aching head. Jill, tied in her corner, was turning her head towards me, and piteously whinnying. On the larger box stood a couple of bottles of Roger’s Madeira, and the lit lantern; on the smaller box was squatted Mr. Jeff. Lying on the mattress was Mr. Tony Jarvis, his boot off, and a wet blue-spotted neckerchief bound on his swollen foot; whilst, hanging

from a rafter over my head was Jacko, poor little ape, strangled and lifeless. He hung by his own chain, his body turning round and round like a joint on a spit.

It must have been quite an hour before I returned to full consciousness and comprehension of all this. Mr. Jeff was the man who had seized me, and whose fist had raised the bruised lump on my temple. Well, I looked at Mr. Jeff, and half forgave him for it all. From the roots of his stubbly hair to the tip of his shaven chin Mr. Jeff's face was striped with red and purpling scratches. There were scratches of latitude, and scratches of longitude, with zigzag scratches in between. "*I must have done that, in my struggles,*" I thought. "No wonder he used his fist to me."

"Foot easier now, Tony?" asked Mr. Jeff, as he gingerly fingered his scarified nose.

"Hurts like blazes!" grunted Mr. Jarvis. "How's yer ugly mug?"

"Smarts like blazes," Mr. Jeff replied. "But hugly mug yerself! It ain't no hugly mug, not natural; when natural it's a mug as 'ave bin much admired."

"Hugliest mug *I* hever see, hany'ow," snarled Mr. Jarvis.

"It hain't a sweet picter not *now*, I knows it. But stash yer nasty remarks, Tony Jarvis; 'twarn't *me* as smashed yer hugly foot."

For a few minutes Mr. Jeff hugged his anger and fingered his scratches. But he was a good-natured little

man. “‘Ave another swig, pardner,” he presently said, himself tossing off another cup of Roger’s wine. “Rare fine tippie this, Tony?”

“Gosh me, it oughter be,” grunted Jarvis. “It’s about hall we’ll get hout o’ *this* job, drot it! ’And a chap the cup, then, selfish! It’s about hall a chap’ll get.”

“Yer’ll hes-cuse *me*, Tony,” remarked Mr. Jeff, in a tone elaborately polite. “Yer’ll hes-cuse me, pardner; there’s the young ’un here safe enuff.”

“Shut yer mug, stoopid!” growled the implacable Tony. “There hain’t no forty guineas hextrer reward for the young ’un, is there, yer hugly fool?”

Mr. Jeff’s good humour vanished. “Fool yerself—an’ hugly fool, yer fool!” he cried. “It ain’t no sort o’ good breedin’ to call yer pardner a hugly fool! Yer in a black bad temper, Tony Jarvis, an’ I don’t speak to yer hany more till yer hout hof it! Don’t arsk *me* to wet the rag on yer hugly foot hany more! I’m a-goin’ ter amoose myself sing’lar, I am. Don’t yer speak ter me!”

And with that Mr. Jeff turned his back on the other, relit his pipe, poured himself more Madeira, and beguiled the time with a song. It went to the tune of “Villikins and his Dinah”, sung in a quick and merry measure:

“Ho, it’s hof a young damsel  
As hin Vestminster did dwell;  
Hall a-growin’ an’ a-blowin’  
Wos the posies she did sell;  
From the hold hancient Habbey  
To the ’Oss-guards did she pace;  
Hall a-growin’ an’ a-blowin’  
Wos the roses hon ’er face!”

Thus Mr. Jeff, getting up to dance in the manner fashionable at Whitechapel; and

“Hall a-growin’ an’ a-blowin’  
Wos the roses hon ’er face!”

pipied Mr. Jarvis in chorus.

“Bravvoar!” cried Jeff, turning round and beaming on his partner. “Bravvoar! yer hout of it, Tony. Never mind yer foot. ’Ang care, says we!”

And, whilst Mr. Jarvis tapped the time on the stem of his clay tobacco-pipe, Mr. Jeff resumed his warbling:

“Though this luvly young damsel  
Wos a foundlin’, ’tis true,  
And ’er parents wos a myst’ry,  
Yet ’er blood, hit was blue;  
For one day by the ’Oss-guards  
A general hup an’ says,  
‘Yer my long-lost little darter,  
Ho, come to my hembrace!”

“You’re a very nice singer, Mr. Jeff,” said I, when the chorus was ended.

Mr. Jeff looked round. “Why, it’s the young ’un—it’s the Markis of Beolea himself, come to agin!” he said,

bringing the light towards me. "Evenin', Markis, evenin'. Yes, it *are* a pretty voice, as yer says, Markis, an' thankee; it 'ave bin wery much hadmired. Nasty lump on yer fore'ead, Markis. Now, how did yer 'appen to come to get *that*?"

"And how did you happen to come to get these scratches on your nose, Mr. Jeff?"

Mr. Jeff felt his face all over before he answered me. "Reglar map o' Hurope, ain't it?" he said. "Expects I'm a houtside picter for a penny show! 'Twas that dratted himp of yourn, o' coorse. Wot's th' Nutbrown want keepin' a hape? Jerry Abershaw, nor none o' them, never kep' hany hapes—nasty little scrattin' himps o' the pit!

"Paid 'im horf, though," chuckled Jeff, jerking his thumb towards where above me the little bowed body was slowly twisting, joint and spit. "Paid 'im horf. 'E'll never scrat hany more."

"'Twas a cowardly thing to do!" I cried. "The little chap was only defending his master's house. You're a cruel fellow, Mr. Jeff. My pony, there, has more heart than you. Look at her! She and Jack were old friends."

Jill was turning a bright moist eye and a fluttering ear towards the hairy little body that hung so limply from the beam.

"Dead, Jill, dead!" I said, and was answered by a long shrill neigh.

"As considerin' as how it were that foorius little beast as let us on the lay, you needn't make a fuss about 'im,"

growled Jarvis.

“How was that?” I exclaimed. “How could Jacko betray us?”

“How wos it?” said Jarvis disdainfully. “Simple enuff for a babby in arms to see! Jeff and me goes to the barber’s this mornin’: gets shaved, sits an’ listens.”

“Hespectin’ to pick hup idears,” said Jeff.

“*Hexpectin’* to pick hup hidears, o’ coorse,” said Jarvis, with a glare. “Hin comes a poachin’ feller; shaver cuts ’is ’air.”

“Cuts it wery close, yer know,” said Jeff.

“Lookie ’ere, ’Ector Jeff. Who’s a-givin’ this hevidence, me or you?” stormed Jarvis. “Shaver cuts ’is ’air, then. ‘Ho!’ cries the poachin’ feller, an’ hups an’ dances like mad. ‘Has I cut yer skin?’ says the shaver. ‘No,’ says the poacher; ‘but yer cut precious close to that ’ere wound.’

“‘Wot wound?’ says the shaver.

“‘That wound wheer th’ himp bit me t’other night.’

“‘Himp! What himp?’ says the shaver. And then all the story come hout.”

“Ah, ’twas enuff for me, that—eh, Tony?” broke in Mr. Jeff. “‘Himp!’ says I. ‘Himp, Tony! There ain’t no himps. I puts it to yer. Did yer ever see a himp, Tony? Himp!’ says I. ‘Himp, and black hoss, and cops-candles! That’s the Nutbrown, Tony,’ says I. Down we comes an’ hinspecks. Hinspecks, an’ lays a trap for the Nutbrown an’ the Markis. *Catches* the Markis!” added Jeff, with a

grin.

“Gosh that mare!” said Mr. Jarvis, looking down at his foot. “I don’t think much o’ yer pal, young fellar. A-ridin’ horf gay, an’ a-leavin’ ’is pal to the gallers.”

“GALLOWES!” I cried. “You don’t mean to say I’m in danger of the *gallows*?”

“Take it cool, Markis; take it cool, my lad,” said Jeff. “Dooty’s dooty. We’re friendly with you now in a hunperfesshnal way, yer know; but ter-morrow we takes you to a Jay Pea. Yer ain’t no himp nor no hape, Markis; but yer’ll be precious lucky hif yer don’t swing like that hup there,” and he jerked his head towards Jacko.

“But—but—I’m not a highwayman,” I protested.

“Not a ’ighwayman, Markis, not a ’ighwayman; though ye’ve done pretty well for a boy. I pities yer; but dooty’s dooty, and lor’s lor.”

“But ’ave a good night’s rest while yer can, Markis,” Jeff went on. “Tony an’ me’s stoppin’ ’ere t’night ’cos’ o’ Tony’s foot. Yer’ll hes-cuse me tyin’ yer hup. Lie on yer straw, now, an’ snore.” He presently extinguished the light, and I was left to my own miserable thoughts.



# *FRIDAY*

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## CHAPTER XVIII

### A Wasted Opportunity

I dropped asleep at last, after worrying myself for hours about the prospect of my death by hanging. My sleep was brief, but it rested me and cheered me. I awoke at dawn, and, like bats and owls of night, my thoughts of gibbet and jail fled away. "Hang me, will they?" muttered I. "Not this time, Mr. Jarvis. I'll escape; the doctor and Roger will help me."

Roger! What had become of Roger? He had left me calmly, without a single blow in my defence. Perhaps he might never return to me. Ah, well, I would help myself.

I began to strain at the cord which bound my wrists; it stretched a little, but the knots were tightened.

Then I began to gnaw the cord. Lying on my back I held my wrist to my teeth; ten minutes of that exhausted me without the severing of a single strand.

A single yellow gleam, the first of the sun, struck the eastern window and woke the birds in the ivy. Reflected, that sunbeam fell upon the chapel floor; it touched and lit a small dark object lying there amidst scattered straws. That small dark object I had searched for in my pockets

in vain. It was Nathan's shut-knife; it must have fallen there the night before as I struggled with Mr. Jeff.

I stopped my gnawing, and rolled myself along the floor to that precious bit of cutlery. Holding the buckhorn haft in my teeth I pulled the blade open, and moving my wrists up and down, I sawed the cord against the steel. Five minutes later I had cut myself entirely free.

I could have escaped from the chapel that instant had I chosen to leave my Jill behind; but that was not to be thought of. Noiselessly, at my whisper, she rose from her straw, and noiselessly I unloosed her bridle. But as she felt herself free she gave a shake and a stamp of satisfaction; and, just as I flung the door aside, my shoulder was seized, a knee was crooked under mine, and I found myself lying on the floor. Jeff stood over me with one of my own pistols in his hand.

"Hah! hexcape, would yer?" frowned Mr. Jeff. "Not this time, my bold *Tur-pin*. Tony, 'ere's the Markis a-wantin' to leave us; don't happeciate our society, though we reg'lar dotes on 'is. Not even a-sayin' good-bye. Wheer's yer manners, Markis, eh?"

"Stow that gab, Jeff! Blow 'is young brains out if 'e stirs!" growled Mr. Jarvis sleepily.

"We'd 'a got hup early to ha' seen yer depart, Markis, if yer'd on'y let us know; but we raly couldn't let yer go 'ithout yer breakfust. Here, Tony, hold that barker," Jeff continued, handing his mate the pistol and reclosing the door. "Set theer, Tony, while I gets th' grub. Talk to th'

Markis kind-like, an' persvade 'im to stop." And while Jarvis menaced me with my own pistol, Jeff rummaged in Roger's cupboard for my breakfast. I sat there, a prisoner and a guest at home.

"It's no use, Tony," said Mr. Jeff an hour later, when we had all three made a meal, and the morning pipe was perfuming the chapel. "Yer too much of a nobleman to walk, Tony, that's the ticket. Yer'll 'ave to keep the Markis comp'ny while I fetches the 'osses from the 'Fox-an'-Goose'. But fust I puts the Markis wheer ye can talk easily, like a couple o' haristocrats should." And having corded me down to the big box, Mr. Jeff pocketed Nathan's shut-knife and departed for the horses.

I had missed my golden opportunity of escape. Mr. Jarvis was not the pleasantest of companions, but he was surely the most watchful of guards. He kept the pistol bore confronting me, and his finger on the lock. I passed an hour of torture on that stool, for I dared not move in the least; and glad I was when Jeff returned with the horses. Half an hour later they took me away, with my feet tied by a cord under Jill's belly, riding with them a prisoner into Redwych town, my head in shame hung low.

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## CHAPTER XIX

"In the Name of the Law"

Quite a little crowd of townsfolk followed or ran beside us as we rode up the hill and along the Green. The man with the scratched face, the man with the tied-up foot, and the boy bound to his pony, were as interesting to the Redwych folk as a wandering acrobat or a dancing bear.

Happily, we soon drew rein at our destination, Doctor Arbuthnot's; and Jeff helped Jarvis and myself into the surgery, a little shed of a place joined on to the big red house.

"Hum, hum! What's it mean, hey?" jerked the doctor as, fresh from his bedroom, he came in through the inner door.

"Pair o' hoperations, sir," said Mr. Jeff, taking off his hat. "P'raps yer'll doctor Tony's foot fust, sir. Bad kick with a 'oss; can't properly walk."

Hum-hum-ing and hey-ing the doctor bathed, fomented, anointed, and bandaged the hurt foot. All the while he never said a word to me, or even looked in my direction.

Ashamed and glum, I sat on a rush-bottomed chair and pretended a deep interest in a pestle-and-mortar.

"Half a crown!" snapped the doctor, as he finished the work. "Anything else, hey?" and he pocketed the coin with a glare at the wall over my head.

"Now for yer hugly mug," growled Jarvis.

"Could yer do hanythin' to this picter o' mine, sir?" asked Jeff.

“Rough scratches, man,” said the doctor. “Cat, hey?”

“No, sir; himp of a hape. . . .”

I laughed out loud as Jeff turned his face towards me. Let me describe Mr. Jeff’s appearance as he left the doctor’s hands. First there was a strip of black court-plaister running the full length of Jeff’s long nose; a short strip crossed it at the bridge, and a long strip ran under the nostrils. Then there were three strips, like broad wrinkles, across the brow, and a long wide strip from jaw to jaw, under the chin.

Jarvis grunted with laughter, and the doctor himself was grimly chuckling.

“Half a crown, man, and cheap at the price, hey? Thanks: anything more?” he barked, as he dabbed a round black patch on the tip of Mr. Jeff’s red nose.

“Yes, yer worship.” Jarvis answered the question. “Hin the name o’ the lor’, sir, Georgius Rex. Yer a Jay Pea, sir, I b’lieve?”

“A justice of the peace, if that’s what you mean. What then, hey?”

“Well, sir, we’ve come as yer told us to, t’other night at the ‘Fox’. We’ve cotch’d this young ’igh-toby-er, and we wants ’is committal.”

“Then you won’t get it, you won’t get it from me, man!” snapped the doctor, getting up and ambling round the room. “I promised you a warrant for a man, not for a boy. A lad, a mere lad; hum, hum! Why, *it’s Harry Solway*, the young squire of Beolea!” exclaimed the old

gentleman, pretending surprise and sudden recognition.

He bowed and I bowed, and we ceremoniously took each other by the hand. "Some mistake, Mr. Jarvis, some mistake," the doctor went on. "Some mistake; you really don't expect me to believe that young Squire Harry, here, is your Nutbrown Highwayman, hey?"

"No, but 'e's next door to it, an' yer knows it," said Jarvis gruffly. "Yer was hout yerself cotchin' 'im t'other night, yer was."

"Hum, hum!" muttered the doctor, with a serious look. "But really, you don't think of jail for this young gentleman, do ye? His ancestors have been lords of the manor for ages, and he'll be lord of the manor himself in his turn."

"Mebbe, sir, mebbe. But dooty's dooty. Our dooty wos to catch 'im, an' your dooty is to commit 'im. As Bow Street hofficers we hexpects yer to do yer dooty as a Jay Pea."

"By Galen, then, I won't!" stormed the doctor, thumping his fist on the table and making the bottles dance. "I won't do my duty, then! And it isn't my duty! The king's dead, and there'll be a new commission of the peace—and—and I wouldn't do my duty if it *was* my duty—and you may go hang, man, you may go hang!"

"Ere, let me do the bizness, Tony," interposed Mr. Jeff. "Yer don't know 'ow ter talk to a gent, Tony, yer don't. Now, yer honour," and Jeff fumbled in the skirt of his coat, producing his staff of office—a bar of turned

and painted wood, with a strap at one end and a gilt crown at the other. "Hin the name o' the *lor*, sir," and he held the staff in front of his plaistered face.

"Law me no law!" the doctor began, but he burst into a roar of laughter. The spectacle Mr. Jeff presented was too comical for his gravity, and the doctor laughed and laughed again.

"Oh, come, men, come!" he gasped, rubbing his spectacles and offering his snuff-box. "Come, let the young scapegrace go! Come and talk over it at breakfast. Will you breakfast with me, Mr. Jarvis, hey?" and the doctor gave a hospitable wave of the hand towards the inner door.

"Don't care if I do," muttered Jarvis, and he limped in front of us into the doctor's dining-room, Jeff bringing up the rear.

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## CHAPTER XX

### A Hunt for Jay Peas

For nearly an hour the artful old doctor plied the runners with beef and ale, in the vain hope of winning my release; Jarvis was inflexible.

"Then yer worship won't give us the committal hafter hall?" said Jeff, as he rose from the table.

"I won't," said the doctor.

“Then, savin’ yer presence, sir, blow me! but we’ll find a Jay Pea as will.”

“Not a magistrate in all the country-side will commit a Solway,” said the doctor.

“Then we’ll take ’im to Brassing’am, wheer they won’t think so pertickular much of a Solway—eh, Tony?”

But Jarvis gruffly interposed. “Looke, ’Ector Jeff,” said he, “that’s all very fine about takin’ the culprit to Brassin’am, but look at this foot! I ain’t in a state to ride all them miles, har I, stoopid? We’ll try the next Jay Pea fust.”

“The next Jay Pea, as you call it, is the Reverend Anthony Solway, the lad’s own uncle,” said the doctor, with a smile. “Of course you won’t get a committal there, men.”

Mr. Jeff looked keenly at his mate. “*Hah!*” he said. “The rich reverent gent’s ’is hunkle; eh, Tony? Well, if so be as the reverent gent’ll hexercise ’is summary joorisdiction, and *hif* so be as the reverent gent dismisses the case——”

“An’ remembers the reward, Jeff.”

“An’ *hif* so be as the reverent gent remembers the reward, as you say, Tony, why then this young lord o’ the manor, ’e goes free, an’ ’e gives us a guinea to drink ’is ’elth; eh, Markis?”

“A guinea a-piece, Jeff,” said Jarvis.

“A-piece, as you say, Tony.”

The doctor breathed hard, and stared at me. I could



tell that he was puzzling his kind old head as to what reception these proposals would meet from the rector. Myself, I had very little hope.

“Well, come along then, gentlemen,” said the doctor at length. “My gig is ready, and I’ll drive with you as far as Beolea.”

It was noon by the dial over the church porch when we rode past the lych-gate and turned up the narrow drive through the rectory garden. All up the Beolea Hill I had hung my head with shame, and especially with dread of meeting Nathan. But when I entered the rectory study once more, and saw my uncle’s sneering smile, and heard him wish me a sarcastic welcome home, I hung my head no longer. I lifted it, and looked my guardian so fairly in the face that he shifted his gaze to my companions.

“Ah! my dear Doctor Arbuthnot. Still troubling yourself about this naughty nephew of mine,” began the rector, in his silkiest tones. “A thousand thanks for bringing him home. But who are these gentlemen?” Hat in hand, Messieurs Jeff and Jarvis were standing in the doorway.

“What can I do for you?” went on the bland and silvery voice.

“I’ll thankee for a cheer, sir,” growled Jarvis, dropping into the nearest seat. “Drot this foot. *You* speak, Jeff.”

The rector looked around him with a face of amiable wonderment. To have seen him then none would have thought him the man to beat a boy and cheat an orphan.

“Mr.—a—Mr. Jeff, I think you said?” went on my uncle, in a sweetly questioning tone.

Mr. Jeff stepped forward with a ducking bow. “Ector Jeff, your reverence; *hat* your service. Hin the name o’ the lor!” and he flourished his official staff. “From Bow Street, sir.”

At those words my uncle’s face turned pale; his fingers trembled, his crutch-stick fell from them, and he sunk into his chair, a-quake with fear.

“Yer reverence har a Jay Pea, I presume.”

At these words the rector’s face regained its usual colour. “Yes, yes, Mr. Jeff,” he said, drawing a long breath of relief. “What then, what then?”

(“He thought the runners were come for *himself*, Harry,” the observant doctor whispered in my ear.)

“Hin the name o’ the lor, sir! ’Ere’s this ’arum-scarum young spark ’as bin a-harummin’-an’-a-scarummin’ half hover the country, sir, on a black pony, in co-hoperation with a himp—a himp of a hape an’ the Nutbrown, a-stoppin’ chays and honorable gents just like a Turpin born, sir. Me an’ my pardner, Tony Jarvis, sir, ’ave harrested this young ’arum-scarummer, an’——”

“*Arrested!*” broke in my uncle, lifting his hands and eyes. “A Solway *arrested!* Oh, Harry! Oh, my poor misguided ward!”

“An’ by rights we arsks yer reverence for ’is commitment,” went on Mr. Jeff. “But, as considerin’ yer reverence’s feelin’s as a huncle, an’ yer reverence’s

position in the county, sir, we feels disposed to let 'im haff with a caution——”

“For a considerashin,” put in Jarvis.

“*For* a considerashun, o’ coorse. Say a paltry few guineas instead o’ the reward for cotchin’ ’im, yer reverence.”

The rector leant back in his chair, gave a sigh, and hid his eyes with his hands. “Oh, doctor, doctor!” he murmured. “You should have spared me this. A magistrate and a priest, how can *I* bribe? What, what am I to do?”

“Do, hey? Buy the lad off, of course!” snapped the doctor.

“Impossible; it is against justice and my principles to bribe.”

“*Honly* forty guineas, yer reverence,” said Jeff.

My uncle rose. “Forty guineas! Nonsense, men!” he almost screamed. “*Forty* guineas! Nonsense! I am poor, and it is against my principles.”

“Against your principles to give anything!” stormed the doctor. “What, you unnatural old miser, you’ll see your flesh and blood in prison, or on the gallows, rather than pay a beggarly forty pound! Why, by the lord Harry, *it’s the lad’s own money after all!*”

Those words took fell effect on the rector; he staggered, paled, and pressed his hands above his heart; his face became distorted with an expression of mixed hate and fear.

“His—own—money!” he gasped. “What money? Oh, you—you mean that he’s my natural heir?”

“No, sir,” I burst out. “He means that your swindling is found out!”

With a growl of rage the rector sprang towards me, his ebony staff upraised. Over went the table, my neck was seized in the tearing fingers, and *thwack, thwack, thwack* came the old familiar blows upon me, once again. The doctor pulled me away and dragged me out of the room.

“Hum, hum! Serves you right, Harry,” he muttered. “That’s not a proper way to speak to your uncle. Besides, you can’t prove it true.

“It is, though,” he murmured to himself.

Mr. Jeff had followed me out into the hall; Mr. Jarvis remained in the study with the rector for a while. Half an hour passed ere he came hobbling downstairs. We followed him into the garden.

“Ad a hinterview with the hold reverent gent, Jeff,” he said. “Wot’s ’is terms, d’ye think?” and he drew his mate aside. Whispers took place between them, in which I caught the words “hung—hundred guineas” and “fifty guineas—safe in jail”. What these whispers meant was clear enough to me. My uncle was bribing, not to save me from prison, but to ensure my going thither.

“Hall right,” Mr. Jeff said aloud, and I heard the ring of coins in Jarvis’s pocket. “Nice affectshernate kind o’ huncle ’e is! Mount, you young lord o’ th’ manor! We’re a-goin’ to find another Jay Pea.”

“Hey, hey? Who is that?” jerked the doctor, in anxious tones.

“Hold reverent gent reckermends the capting,” said Jarvis.

“No no, men!” cried the doctor eagerly. “Never trouble; I’ll pay you the reward myself! Come back to my house and you shall have your forty guineas in gold.”

“Wouldn’t ’ave it in di’ments now,” growled Jarvis. “Yer should ha’ spoke afore, sir.”

“Fifty guineas, sixty guineas—come, men, sixty guineas down!”

“It’s no mortal use, yer honour,” murmured Mr. Jeff respectfully. “It’s hall hup ’ith the young chap now. ’Is huncle won’t back ’im; actyally pays Jarvis to get ’im safe in quod.”

“Seventy, eighty—eighty guineas!” cried the doctor. How high in this strange auction the kind old gentleman would have bidden I cannot tell, for Mr. Jarvis interposed. With severe and incorruptible majesty he demanded to know what the doctor meant by it.

“A-bribin’ the lor!” cried Mr. Jarvis indignantly. “A-bribin’ the runners hof the lor! Stash it!” and he rode away down the hill.

We followed. I was clearly bound for jail. Crawley would be glad to pay off scores against me; and the runners watched me too closely for escape. A cord ran from Jill’s bit to Mr. Jeff’s wrist, and loaded pistols rested in his holsters.

Yes, I was bound for jail alone. Where was Roger, my highwayman friend? Why had he left me so strangely? Why had I ever trusted in a knight of the road? Such were my meditations as we rode towards the Grange in search of Captain Crawley, Jay Pea.

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## CHAPTER XXI

### The Fall of Mr. Sampson

“Hin the name o’ the lor!” said Mr. Jeff, presenting arms with his staff to Sampson, the footman at the Grange.

Arrayed in a flaring livery Mr. Sampson was lounging under the portico, and staring—insolently at the doctor, curiously at the runners and myself.

“Georgius Rex,” said Jeff. “We wants to see the capting.”

“Yer carn’t, then, Plaister-face,” said the impudent lackey.

“Plaister-face yerself, my fine feller!” returned Mr. Jeff. “It’s the lor, I tell yer. The *lor* ain’t a trifle. Tell ’im the lor wants ’im, d’ye ’ear?”

“Speshal orders,” said the footman. “Master’s partic’lar busy engaged.”

“Wot’s ’e doin’ of, then, drot yer?” growled Jarvis impatiently, lifting his foot from the stirrup for ease.

“Sithee!” cried Sampson. “*That* be wot he’s a-doin’ of.” Through the open corner window, under which I stood the night before, a pack of playing-cards came flying, flung by an angry hand; an oath accompanied them.

“A-gamblin’ igh, eh?” said Jeff, with a knowing wink.

“‘Evans ’igh,” said he. “Captin’ and Beamish Esquire. Bin at it thirteen hour continyus; played all night conseckitive; played all mornin’; playin’ now. ’Evans ’ard.”

“Hecarty, I reckon?” said Jeff. “Hecarty are a fashinatin’ game. Tony an’ me plays it frequent. Penny stakes?”

“Penny stakes!” cried Sampson. “*Penny* stakes! Haw! haw! that’s a good ’un, that is. Captin’ plays guineas unvaryble, of course. Penny stakes! Haw! haw!”

“Shet up, yer brayin’ jackass!” Jarvis growled. “Wot’re yer larfin’ at? Fetch yer master, or we’ll take *yer* too.”

“Sithee!” cried Sampson, “if it’s to send the old fool there to jail”—the doctor glared at him—“the captin’’ll come quick enough. I’ll tell ’un. Sarve the old reskil right! Lashin’ a pore chap on the calfs.”

Nodding his head Mr. Sampson disappeared into the hall. Two minutes later he reappeared on the scene. He reappeared at the corner window. He came through the corner window. He was helped through the corner window; kicked through it by the captain, whose privacy

he disturbed.

Out came Mr. Sampson, neck and crop; and plump on the gravel he fell. The doctor chuckled and the window was slammed to with an oath.

“Reckon the capting’s a-losin’, Tony. Yer returned by the short cut, young feller,” Mr. Jeff went on, addressing the footman as he rose from the gravel. “Hany message? Who’s the Plaister-face now, my fine chap?” The lackey’s face was cut by the gravel, and his nose was bleeding. Holding his handkerchief to his face he scrambled up the steps.

“Capting says: ‘Go hang yerselves!’—an’ so says I,” and with that Mr. Sampson disappeared.

Mr. Jeff looked at Mr. Jarvis; Mr. Jarvis glared at Mr. Jeff.

“Hall hup, Tony.”

“Not even a glass o’ liquor, Jeff.”

“We’ll ’ave to take ’im to Brassin’am, Tony.”

“You’d much better let him come with me,” said the doctor.

“See yer blow’d fust,” Jarvis growled. “We’ll find a Jay Pea as *will* do the trick, if we ’as to ’unt to John o’ Groat’s for wun.”

“Reg’lar bulldog, yer honour, is Tony,” murmured Jeff. “Pint o’ prefesshnal honour with Tony now, yer see, sir. Ye’ll hes-cuse ’is manners.”

“Come along, Claude Dooval, joonior,” he said aloud, jerking the cord.



“Come along, young jail-bird,” growled Jarvis.

“Good-bye, dear doctor. If I live I’ll never forget your kindness,” I faltered, tears starting to my eyes.

“Good-bye, hey? Not at all, Harry; I’m coming with you,” and the old gentleman blew his nose with a noise like a foghorn, to hide his emotion. “*Kee-e-UP*, Paregoric,” and soon all four of us were journeying along the Brassingham road.

At the first bend in the road I came in sight of that which least of all I wished to see. It was Nathan Bott! He was coming towards us, walking his swathed-up racehorse along the grassy margin of the highway.

“All roun’ my hat I wears a green willer,”

the stable-boy was singing as he walked. “Kup, then, Yellowboy!” he interjected, as the racer sank a hoof in a molehill and slightly stumbled. A scared partridge whirled out of a gorse bush near the molehill, and Nathan stooped to examine the nest.

“All roun’ me hat I wears a green willer,”

he repeated as he stooped.

“All roun’ me head for th’ sakes o’ she;  
An’ I lays at nights on a thorny piller,  
A-wonderin’ what’ll th’ end o’ me be!”

“Ay, what?” thought I, with downcast heart and hung-down head. The sight of Nathan and the words of his ditty brought the facts of my position home to me.

Bitterly I regretted the act that made me a runaway;

bitterly I regretted the hour in which I sought a highwayman's protection. "A poor protection, or I shouldn't be here," thought I. And now I was to reap the rewards of my folly. I had glorified the highwayman, as boyish imagination often does; yet what was a highwayman but a thief? "It is too late to be wise now," I muttered. I seemed to see at the end of the road before me a court of justice, a prisoner's cell, and a felon's fate!

"They digg'd a deep grave by the weepin' willer,"

warbled Nathan, unconscious of my approach.

"They digg'd un under th' sheddin' yew;  
They sung a sad song by th'—"

He suddenly saw us, and broke off. Without a word I rode past him, my eyes on Jill's mane. Without a word he let me pass. Stock-still he stood, checking the fretting Yellowboy; stock-still he stood till we reached the next turn in the road.

Then, hollowing his hands around his mouth: "Good-bye, Maister Harry, good-bye!" he cried, in such a voice of sadness that tears burst from my eyes. I did not look back, but, "Good-bye!" I called to him; and the next moment Jill had carried me round the corner, out of Nathan's sight.

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## CHAPTER XXII

## “The Lamb-and-Flag” at Durston

At four o'clock that afternoon we were only eight miles of the thirteen on our way to Brassingham. For two hours and more we had jogged along at walking pace, to suit the ease of Mr. Jarvis's foot. Jill fretted at the rein; she was longing for a gallop.

I fretted too; I longed for the journey to be ended. Those two hours to me had been two hours of drawn-out torture. Each slow step only brought me nearer to prison, nearer to a shameful fate. For all the doctor's pleadings and promisings had been in vain. Nothing could move the implacable Jarvis.

At last the good old gentleman had despaired, and, turning his grumble on me: “Where's your Belsize of Castle Thirsk *now*?” he had demanded, as if I could possibly know. “Where's your fine friend the lordly highwayman, now he's wanted, hey? Hum, hum! Runs away like Ponto when the cat spits! Evades, and leaves you to suffer for him! A rogue, my poor Harry; believe he's a common rogue—by Galen, I do!”

I did not answer the doctor. A dull half-dead feeling was on me. I rode on listlessly without a word.

Our two hours' journey from Beolea to Durston had been uneventful. We had paused at the “Bell Inn” at Kinkford, and again at the “Saracen's Head” a mile farther on. At each hostelry Jeff and Jarvis had drained a

tankard of ale or cider, or both; and at the “Saracen’s Head” the doctor and I had tried to swallow a meal of bread and cheese.

Passing the eighth milestone we rode into the straggling hamlet of Durston, five miles from Brassingham; and we reined-up in front of that ancient house of entertainment for man and beast, the “Lamb-and-Flag”. The walls and tiles of the old hostel were green with ivy, moss, and house-leek; little windows with diamond-shaped panes peeped out of the leafery here and there; and a broad low porch opened on the highway. Opposite the inn a big oak reared itself, and from the lowest arm of the tree the inn-sign was displayed—a lamb, on a field vert, the red cross pennon of the Crusaders flying in the background, the flagstaff held in the shoulder-of-lamb.

We had pulled up near the edge of a large pond that lapped the end of the inn and the side of the road to Brassingham. The water sparkled with a myriad ripples under the sunshine of that torrid afternoon. I turned my eyes from the dazzling sparkles, and looked at the village. Three chubby children were quarrelling outside a cottage, pigs were snorting in the adjacent sty, a horseman was riding slowly down the dusty highway, and a few rooks were jabbering in the elms beyond the pool.

“It’s gashly ’ot,” Mr. Jeff remarked, as he dismounted and stretched his legs. “Dry, Tony? Name your tipples,” and he handed the end of the cord to Mr. Jarvis.

“‘Arf-an’-’arf,” said Jarvis.

“‘Hanythin’ for yer honour?” said Jeff to the doctor.

“If I need anything I will get it myself, man,” was the stiff reply.

“*Hall* right, Starchy,” muttered Jeff. “Like a drink, young Turpin?” I shook my head, and Mr. Jeff made his way towards the porch of the “Lamb-and-Flag”.

“Lan’lord! lan’lord!” we heard him call. But the day was hot, and the landlord—the stout old landlord—was shut in his snugery and fast asleep. “Keep a hold o’ that cord, Tony,” shouted Jeff, as he disappeared under the rose-hung porch.

The day was hot, so hot that thirsty Jill pushed forward into the pool, and, standing knee-deep, set herself to drink. Paregoric and the horses followed her, and there was a rushing sound of suction as the water ran up the long, parched throats.

The day was hot. Lazily I looked up the Brassingham road. The rooks were encircling the elms, the pigs were squealing, the urchins were fighting, the horseman was less than a hundred yards away.

How came a common fellow in a dirty smock-frock and a billicock hat to be riding a fine brown horse, I idly wondered. But for the white star on its forehead and its three white stockings the stranger’s steed might have been sister to Bess herself. Good Brown Bess! speckless brown mare! Ah, I should never gallop my Jill across a meadow beside her again! I looked at the smock-frocked

fellow with envy. *He* was free!

The sun was hot; Mr. Jarvis was thirsty. "Drot that Jeff!" he growled. "'E's 'avin' 'is hown pint fust."

The sun was hot; the doctor wiped his perspiring baldness under his wig, and copiously took snuff. "Hot, Harry?" he asked, with a faint smile. "Soon be cooler, hey?"

"It will be cool enough *in prison*," thought I as I looked up the road again. The pigs and the children were at peace; the man in the shabby hat and dirty smock-frock was close at hand. By this time Jill had ceased to drink; lifting her head from the water, she snuffed the air loudly, flickered her ears, and gave a low whinny. But Paregoric did not heed; he was sound asleep.

Phew! the sun was fiercely hot! "Har yer comin', 'Ector Jeff?" the thirsty Tony bellowed. "Jeff! Jeff! Har yer com——"

Mr. Jarvis never completed that word; the next instant he was splashing and spluttering middle-deep in the pond. The man in the dirty smock-frock and slouched hat had pushed his horse between us, had seized Mr. Jarvis by the leg, and had flung him off the saddle, splash, splatter, headlong into that muddy pool.

"Pills and powders!" yelled the doctor.

"Quick, Harry!" said the man in the smock-frock. My heart gave a bound; the man in the smock-frock was Roger, and the mare with the star and stockings of white paint *was* Brown Bess after all. Jill had recognized her in

spite of the paint, and had whinnied to her.

“Quick, Harry!” Roger cried, I say. The cord hung loose; Mr. Jeff was snug inside the inn; Mr. Jarvis, swearing half a dozen different oaths at once, was struggling in the mud a couple of yards away; the moment was propitious. I touched my pony’s ear, and, instant, we were off together, Bess and Jill, Roger and I, again galloping free along the Brassingham road.

“*Zip!*” came a bullet after us, striking the road, and falling short.

I turned in my saddle as we galloped, galloped—and looked back.

There was Mr. Jarvis, mud from head to heel, dripping like a water-spaniel. Empty pistol in hand, he was striving to mount with his lame leg foremost.

There was Mr. Jeff, racing out of the “Lamb-and-Flag”, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand as he scampered towards his partner.

There was the fat old landlord puffing after Jeff, and gasping out a demand for the ale-money.

There was the fine old doctor, standing up in his gig, hatless and wigless, the sun smiting and gilding his shiny baldness as he stamped and cheered and waved and hurrayed us on.

The road took a turn; we leapt the quickset hedge; we saw them no longer.

“Hurrah, hurrah!” cried I. “I’m free—*free*—FREE, Roger! free!”

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## CHAPTER XXIII

### Roger Himself Again

Evening had come; Doctor Arbuthnot was driving homewards alone in the cool of it. The “Lamb-and-Flag”, at which he had feasted alone in great glee, lay five miles behind him, and he was well on his way to Beolea. Unguided, Paregoric trotted on, napping as he went. Unguided, for the doctor’s jolly round face was wrinkled into lines of second thought, and care.

“Hum, hum! Vastly fine, Mr. Belsize of Castle Thirsk. Monstrous fine, my lord. Never see Harry any more, I suppose; poor lad! Well, well, I wash my hands of the whole business. *Kee-e-up*, Paregoric!”

Unheeding and unhastening, Paregoric ambled on. The reins lay loose on his crupper, and the whip stood harmless in the socket.

“Galen! How the boy galloped! How Jarvis dripped! How Jeff raged! How they becalled each other! And no wonder! ’twas vastly irritating; ’twould have angered even a calm-tempered man like myself.”

(At that, a couple of silent listeners, riding hidden on the other side of the hedge, gave a laugh, half aloud.)

“Hum, hum! Threatened to arrest *me*, did they? Confound their impudence! Called me an accomplice. Well, I suppose I was one, hey? Anyhow, never more glad



in my life than when the young dog got safely off. Vastly good, Mr. Belsize of Thirsk! Couldn't have done it neater myself!

"Where's the poor lad now, I wonder? Riding for his life, of course. Doesn't know the runners went off straight to Brassingham. Said they'd get a warrant and return. Let 'em; let 'em get fifty warrants. Must catch their hares afore they jug 'em—jug 'em!—ah, *stone-jug* 'em, hey? Hah, hah! *Stone-jug* 'em, he, he! Vastly good, Gregory, vastly good, he, he!"

Loud as the doctor laughed at his own joke the hidden listeners laughed louder. So that suddenly there came a shout of wrath, surprise, and pleasure from the doctor; and simultaneously Paregoric gave a startled swerve, and came to a halt.

For the last few minutes Roger and I had been jogging along behind the hedge, beside the musing and muttering old doctor. Since we left him at the "Lamb-and-Flag" we had ridden a circuitous route, and six or seven miles of copse and meadows had brought us back to the Beolea road again. Into it we leapt, to the surprise and delight of the dear old doctor.

Enraptured he jumped from the gig, dragged me laughing from my saddle, and positively hugged me in his joy. I saw the glitter of tears in the kind old eyes.

"But to you, my lord, I owe apologies," he said, as Roger flung the smock-frock and slouch hat into a ditch, and looked himself again.

“Why so, doctor?” said Roger, holding out his hand.

“I doubted you, sir; I doubted your faith to Harry, and I doubted your rank.”

“Oh, oh! The latter is unpardonable, dear doctor. And you, Harry; what have *you* to say?”

“I doubted you too, Roger,” I muttered.

“Ah, well, never mind all that, my boy. Things looked dark against me, I know. But I left you caught in the chapel, because there was no chance of rescuing you there; and all to-day Bess and I, disguised, have been hovering about you, waiting for the opportunity that came at Durston. At the worst I should never have left you to go to prison. I would have yielded myself in your place.”

“Hum, hum! Narrow shave that at Durston. Too narrow to be easy, hey? But come, come, my lord; you ought not to be *here*, running back into danger. You ought to be off on your way to Yorkshire now, Harry and you. This is perilous ground.”

Roger laughed. “Boldness is sometimes the only means of safety, doctor. I’ll be off with Harry to Yorkshire to-night, but we must take Miss Vane with us, you know.”

“Lungs and lancets! and I had forgotten that sweet young gentlewoman. Very well, you shall take her too; I’ll help to rescue her.”

And so, talking and planning the rescue, we jogged along towards Beolea.

We rode into the park by the back door, so to speak.

A lane ran off from the highway on the Brassingham side of the estate, and a rough gate opened from this lane into the park.

Crossing in the rear of the stables, we reached the fir coppice unobserved. We drew the gig amongst the trees, tied up Paregoric, Bess, and Jill, and left them with a feed of corn and chaff apiece, shared out from Paregoric's nose-bag.

It was now near eight o'clock, and lanky shadows barred our pathway as we threaded the coppice glades. We came out near the stables, skirted the wall, and reached the garden door unobserved. We peeped into the garden; nothing stirred. We trod the walks; all was silence and calm. There was no breeze, and even the shrubs were motionless.

"Strange!" Roger muttered, as we halted in the middle of the garden by the fountain. "This utter quiet seems uncanny. Is the place deserted, doctor? Is it possible that Crawley has decamped, and taken Marjorie with him?"

"Oh no," returned the doctor. "The lackeys are drunk or asleep, I expect; and the maids are gadding. A lazy loose set they are, well worthy of their master."

"Hark!" I said. A halloo came from the stables. It was repeated, and I knew the voice for Nathan's. A minute or two later we saw the big lad running towards us.

Reaching us, he seized my hand and shook it hard and long, his face beaming with joy. "Did th' Nutbrown resky 'ee?" he whispered. But the doctor cut his exclamations

short.

“What does it mean; what’s it mean, boy? Hey, boy, hey? Where are all the servant folks, hey?”

“All th’ men be down at th’ ‘Solway Arms’ fuddlin’, an’ th’ maids be a-gaddin’ an’ a-gossipin’ in th’ lanes. They allays does it when the captin’s got a big gamble on. Captin’s cardin’ it yet, him an’ th’ gent as you play’d th’ passon and clerk with, Mr. Nutbrown,” and Nathan touched his hat, staring at Roger with wonder and awe.

“Now is your time, then, my lord, hey?” But Roger was already on the terrace, under his lady’s window, singing the call.

“Green-Sleeves is my only joy,”

sang he, and the next moment the beautiful face of Marjorie appeared behind the bars.

Tears stood in Marjorie’s eyes. “The bars are not half filed through yet, Roger,” she said. “I have been watched all day, until an hour ago the maid left me.”

An expression of disappointment broke from Roger’s lips. He looked keenly about him. “What door is that, boy?” he said, pointing to a low portal half hidden in the ivy.

“It’s th’ backstairs door, I b’lieve, Lord Nutbrown,” said Nathan; “but I’m afeard it y’ent open, sir.”

Roger shook the handle fiercely. A rusted inner bolt gave way at the jar of his attack, and the door creakingly yielded.

“Let me lead, let me lead,” said the doctor; “I know the way. Many’s the time that I and fine old Hugh have slunk in here in the small hours.”

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## CHAPTER XXIV

# The End of the Gambling Bout

When we came out from that dark cobwebby and mouse-haunted stairway, the doctor, Roger, and I (for Nathan was left below, outside on guard), we found ourselves on the broad main landing that tops the flight of marble steps from the hall. Stealthily we trod, and cautiously we looked and listened, but not a soul was to be heard or seen.

“Hum, hum! The place is indeed deserted,” whispered the doctor. “Now, you must let me take the command. I know the house—you don’t. Here is the post of danger. You and Harry to guard it, hey? I’ll mount to the fair lady’s chamber, and you shall keep us a safe path down.”

Roger with a nod assented. Drawing a rapier from a trophy of arms that hung against the wall, he poised and bent and sprung the long lithe blade, then stood with it on guard. Fingering one of Roger’s pistols (for Jeff and Jarvis had kept my own), I took my place beside him.

“Now I’m off, hey?” said the doctor. To our left the stairs were continued, but with winding oak instead of marble; and up the next flight the doctor would in a moment have been moving, had not Roger swiftly seized his arm and pulled him back. He pulled us both, the doctor and I, both back into the shadow, and put his finger on his lip.

We listened. Footsteps, slow and cautious footsteps, were audible above us; someone was stealthily descending the stairs.

Creak, crick-crack, the footfall came nearer; and presently footman Sampson appeared upon the landing. Stooping and tiptoeing he crossed it like a cat on the prowl.

On our right a doorway pierced the wall at the head of the marble stair. Heavy velvet curtains hung over the opening. Here Sampson halted, drew aside a curtain, and thrust in his prying head.

Now that the thick hanging was pushed aside a strange fitful noise became audible. The noise was slight but sharp; it came to us from some inner chamber, passing through the ante-room and the parted hangings.

Cat-like, Mr. Sampson twisted his body between the curtains; they fell together behind him, and the slight sharp slapping noise was no longer heard. And just at that moment a patter of feet sounded on the stairs above us, and “*Roger! Roger!*” was softly called. We looked upwards; Marjorie Vane was tripping down to find us.

*"Why do you wait? Is not Sampson gone?"* she murmured. Out we sprang from our hiding, and Roger raised a warning hand to wave her back. The doctor hissed a *"Hush-h-h!"*

But it was too late; the lackey had heard the noise. He ran out of the ante-room upon the landing, and there he saw us—Marjorie, Roger, all!

A moment the fellow stood voiceless with astonishment, then slowly opened his mouth to give an alarm. But the doctor rushed fiercely at him, bent on paying off old scores, and fright checked the coward's cry.

"Wretch!" the doctor snapped, "call me an old fool now!" At the sight of the furious old gentleman running at him, with fists clenched and kicking feet, the footman turned tail, and, just as his flying foot was set on the topmost step, the doctor dealt him a thrust that sent him thumping down the marble stair. Rolling out upon the tiled floor of the hall, he sprawled upon his stomach and roared for aid. "Smith! Dick! Warren!" he called; but Smith, Dick, and Warren were down at the "Solway Arms", and Sampson lay and moaned in vain.

"Ah, let me go to him, poor man!" said Marjorie pityingly.

"No, no!" said the doctor. "Don't waste your pity there, dear young lady. The fellow's not much hurt or he couldn't make that noise."

"Then let us go, quick!" said Marjorie, clasping

Roger's arm.

"One moment," said the doctor, drawing the curtains in the doorway aside. "Listen!"

That strange short slapping sound was still proceeding from the inner room—not even the yells of Sampson arrested it a moment. "Still at it. At it still, the fools!" muttered the doctor; for the sound was the sound of the slapping down of playing-cards upon mahogany, and the inner room was Crawley's den with the corner window.

"Poor fools! poor fools!" the doctor muttered, as voices were raised within in dispute. Then we heard two cards descend, the latter with a triumphant slap upon the table. There was a curse and an exulting laugh. "That makes fourteen thousand odd you owe me," said the voice of Mr. Beamish.

"Phew!" whispered the doctor. "Fourteen thousand pounds! The captain hasn't half the money!"

"Double or quits—my revenge!" we heard the captain roar.

"Done!" cried Beamish, and the slapping sound again began. Below in the hall there was silence; Sampson was listening too.

Suddenly there came a snarling cry. "Swindler!" the captain screamed, "*I saw you slip that card!*"

"Liar!" shouted Beamish, and we heard the uproar of a struggle. Coins fell tinkling on the oaken floor, papers were torn, a table fell, with the crash of broken glass.

More oaths, more cries; then the sharp crack of a



pistol-shot, and a shriek, a thud, a groan.

“Murder, by Galen!” the doctor shouted, and he rushed into the ante-room. But Roger was there before him. “Stay here, Marjorie,” her lover cried as he left her. I followed him, and even Sampson came running up the steps.

Roger dashed at the inner door. It swung open, broken from its latch, and lamplight came streaming through the aperture.

What a sight was there! Coins, counters, cards, scraps of paper, and broken bottles and glasses lay, ankle deep almost, in the middle of the floor; a table had fallen amidst all this upon its side, and huddled across the table legs lay Beamish, bleeding from the mouth, a bullet in his chest. The doctor hurried to the wounded man and stooped to tend him.

But the murderer! Crouched at the farther side of the room he glared at us astounded! What a face, what eyes he lifted to our gaze! Unwashed, sickly, pallid, wine-stained, Cain-branded was that ugly visage. The wig had fallen to the floor, and sparse iron-grey hair stood straggling round the quaking skull. “Belsize of Thirsk!” the murderer hissed as Roger sprang to arrest him, and in a moment the second pistol was levelled at Roger’s head.

Quick was the aim, quick the discharge; but Roger’s blade was quicker. Even as the trigger moved the rapier pierced the pistol-arm at the shoulder. The bullet sped, the report resounded, and the doctor and I rushed forward

to succour our friend or to seize our foe.

The smoke cleared off, and the lamplight showed us Roger erect, unhurt. The rapier-thrust had saved him; the diverted bullet was buried in the wall.

The smoke cleared off, I say, and again the rapier flashed with threatening gesture. But the next instant, amidst a crash of glass, the room was plunged in darkness. Crawley had dashed the lamp to the floor, and, bursting through the corner window, had half leapt, half fallen to the path below.

We sprang to the window. Outside the early moonlight reigned, with calm and silence. On the gravel beneath us lay a huddled mass. It was the murderer's bulky carcass. There he lay, his head bent under his breast—dead, with a broken neck!

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## CHAPTER XXV

### The Squire of Beolea

“Beamish will live, I think,” said the doctor an hour later, coming out under the portico to Roger and myself. “The bleeding has ceased, and I have found the bullet.”

“Already!” exclaimed Roger.

“Hey? Here it is,” and the doctor handed us the flattened lead. “The fellow is well nursed, and I’ve left him asleep.”

“Then Crawley wasn’t a murderer after all, sir,” said I.

“Hum, hum! I wouldn’t say so, Harry. More than one guest has strangely disappeared since that dead villain occupied the Grange. There, there! I mustn’t use hard names, hey? He’ll never call me a quack again.”

The last hour had been a busy time for everybody. Roger and I had carried the wounded Beamish to a bedchamber, and had left him in charge of the doctor, with sweet brave Marjorie as nurse. By that time Sampson had returned from the “Solway Arms” with the rest of the still sober men-servants. They stared and muttered when they found their late master dead on the drive, and Roger in command and possession of the place.

But, sword and pistol in hand, he quelled the mutterers. “I am the Earl of Thirsk,” he said. “The captain wounded Mr. Beamish, and broke his own neck in escaping. For the present you will obey my orders. Take up the body, four of you,” and the corpse was borne to the ice-house, a shed in the bank of the lake.

The waiting-maids were sent to attend on Marjorie, and aid the nursing; Sampson was set to guard the contents of the room with the corner window; Nathan was dispatched to stable Paregoric, Bess, and Jill; and Roger and I were free to wait on the portico steps for the doctor.

I looked with admiration at Roger as we waited there. He held himself like a proud and happy man. And well he might do. Marjorie was free, the ban of exile was broken,

the Nutbrown Highwayman was a shadow of the past, and the Earl of Thirsk was Earl of Thirsk again.

But as for me, poor Harry Solway! disinherited, hunted by the law, homeless—all the shame and the smart of our highwaymanry seemed to have fallen upon poor me!

It was while I was thus thinking that the doctor came out to us with the bullet. “Hum, hum! We must visit the rectory. We must let the rector know he has lost his tenant. As a magistrate he must seal up the property and what not, for the coroner and the lawyers. Dare you go, Harry, dare you go with us, hey?” said the old gentleman, descending the steps.

*Dare* I go, indeed! Was I a coward? The short cut to the rectory lay through the park and the graveyard. Beautiful in the moonlight stood the grey old church; the beams lay green on the mossy roof, and silvern on the grinning gargoyles of the tower. From the shimmering mist that lapped the mounded turf the tombstones stood out like rocks in foam. A fresh breeze fluttered the aspens.

“Hist!” whispered the doctor. “There’s the man we want.” As we stood, unseen, in the shadow, a slight, stooping, sable figure passed into the little vestry.

“What was that under his cloak?” I whispered.

“A lantern. Look!” said Roger, as the lancet window near the half-shut vestry door was lit by a feeble gleam.

“Hum, hum! Mischief’s afoot, I vow,” the doctor muttered, and stepping to the lighted window he peeped

in. *“Here, quiet and quick!”*

We bent our foreheads to the dim green panes. The lantern light that filtered through them showed us the bent black figure of the rector, busy in the little room. His back was turned towards us; we could see and notice, unnoticed and unseen.

On the table in front of him the Reverend Anthony Solway had placed a bulky book, the parish register, and he was hastily turning its leaves. Page by page he searched it over. Suddenly he stooped, peered through a hand-glass at a particular page, and tore that page from the book. Crumpling the leaf into a ball he dropped it into his pocket, and taking up the lantern he passed through an inner door and disappeared into the church.

“Mutilating the register, hey?” growled the doctor. “That’s felony. Now we have him on the hip. Quick, follow! I warrant this is Harry’s affair, my lord.”

A dozen cautious steps and we stood in the chancel. The floor was steeped in shadow, but the moonshine, falling through upper windows, striped the air with bands of greenish light. And through these bands we saw my uncle moving, gliding to his haunt. An oaken door swung back against a pillar with a jarring noise, and the gleam of the lantern showed the rector disappearing through an arched doorway in the wall.

“Ah! Quick, follow!” the doctor panted. “He’s gone to the Solway vault!”

Into the opening and down the ten narrow steps we

stole. The iron door at the foot had been unlocked and pushed aside by the rector; and standing in the darkness of the stair we watched him in the vault, unseen.

There, in the centre of that earthy-smelling crypt, my uncle stood, the relics of his race around him. Stone shelves encircled the vault, and on the shelves the coffins of the Solways:

Coffins leaden, iron, oaken;  
Coffins rusted, wormy, broken—

were ranked in rows. The silver name-plates were black with tarnish, the velvet trappings white with mildew; the palls were rotting and falling away.

But upon the coffins! Upon the coffins rested bag after bag of counted gold—the rector's hoard!

"Hum, hum! Old Hunks! I knew he'd have a stocking somewhere," panted the doctor at my elbow.

Breathless, we watched the miser fondling his money-bags, and numbering them over and over again. "Pills and powders! What a bank!" whispered the doctor. "Who'd ever look for money here?"

I started as he spoke, for a low crackling laugh seemed to answer him. It was the rector, unconscious of our witness, laughing and muttering as he fingered his gold.

"Ha, ha!" he chuckled. "Gold, good guinea-gold! Yours, Anthony, yours. *Not that brat's!* No! *Yours!*

"No danger now," he murmured. "Yet they knew, *they knew!* What was't the meddling fool Arbuthnot said? *The*

*lad's own money?* No, no; yours, Anthony, *yours!*"

"Hum, hum! Must be a fool, hey? Everybody calls me a fool," grumbled the doctor.

"All's safe, safe now!" went on the miser. "The brat's in jail. He'll hang, he'll hang! And Arbuthnot may search the register, if he choose."

"Old rascal!" growled the doctor.

"Only one page," whispered the miser, looking fearfully around him. "Felony; but only one page. The clerk will never miss it. That's another proof removed. I'll hide it with the others. Ah, are they safe, are they safe?"

With trembling hands he searched beneath a coffin-pall. The rotten fabric was torn by his hasty fingers as he drew forth a small leathern wallet.

"One, two," he counted, taking from the wallet two slips of yellowed paper and holding them to the light.

"Marriage certificate of Henry Solway the younger and Iza Monterey," he muttered. "One.

"Birth certificate of Harry Hugh Solway, son of Henry Solway the younger and Iza his wife. Ah, ha! Now the third.

"Register of birth of Henry Solway the younger, son of Henry Solway of this parish, and Barbara his wife," he read, as he unrolled the paper ball. "There, away with it, away with it! 'Henry Solway,' my elder brother, God forgive me! There's his coffin. You shall keep it, brother, you shall keep it!" he whispered as he thrust the

crumpled paper under the pall. “*Ah!*” he screamed, as he saw his shadow move. “Fool! Only my shadow! Fool!

“All’s safe now!” he whispered, toying with the money-bags again. “Yet, no! no! They’ll find the papers here when they bury me! Why do I keep the proofs? I promised the brat’s mother, but what’s a promise? They must burn!”

He opened the lantern, and the next moment the leaf from the parish register was ashes. “There, Arbuthnot!” hissed the rector. “Now let the meddling fool do his worst!”

“*And, by Galen, he will!*” roared the doctor, springing forward just in time to save my mother’s marriage lines from the flame. “What, you unnatural——”

The doctor stopped, in horror. Awful was the glare of fear, of rage, of hate that the miser turned upon him. Hands in air, the rector seemed to be invoking powers unseen. His lips writhed speechlessly, he clutched at his breast, he tottered, twisted, fell.

The doctor knelt, and touched the moveless breast. “The heart!” he said, with a sigh.

“*Dead?*” cried Roger.

“Dead,” said the doctor, rising from his knees.

“*Dead?*” I cried in horror, baring my head.

“Ay, dead as a coffin-nail, the poor old sinner. Hum, hum! Dead enough; and Harry’s the Squire of Beolea!”

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## CHAPTER XXVI

### Postscript

So ended my five adventurous days; and here should, properly, end my story. But now, years after, I pen it down for the ears of certain children, friends of mine; and as I read to them what one of them calls “the very lastest word of the very lastest page”, and pause, and look up, and lay the manuscript down, a storm of questioning assails my ears.

The trouble is that they have heard me tell the story so often that they know how it goes as well as I do myself.

“That’s not all! Now the rest, quick! Go on, please, Uncle!” And in vain I wave my hand, and shake my head again and again, protesting; they *will* have more.

“Bess! Bess! What about beautiful Brown Bess, Uncle?” says Meg, my pet.

“An’ bonny bwack Jill-pony, pretty bwack Jill?” pipes chubby little Ro, the six-year-old, bouncing up and down.

“Poor Bess lies buried in a certain park,” I say, and I look out from the library window to where a green mound swells beneath a flowering chestnut tree.

“Ah, good Brown Bess,” I say regretfully. “But Jill is still alive, you know, and sleek and happy in her own little stable at the Grange; with nothing to do, the lazy Jill, but ride a pack of chattering urchins once a year when

you, my children, go to Beolea.”

“Is it *that* Jill, Uncle Harry? Why, she’s grey, not black much,” says Meg.

“Ay, old and grey, good pony, but she lives; and while ever Nathan Bott is head-groom at the Grange, so long will Jill be petted like a baby.”

“And the dear old doctor, then? And sleepy Paregoric? And Mr. Beamish? And everybody, Uncle?”

“Why, you’ve seen the dear old doctor, of course you have. Still alive and hale, God bless him! But Paregoric dropped asleep one day and didn’t wake up again, and the doctor has never driven his gig since then. There is a new, young doctor at Redwych now. And as for Mr. Beamish, he was cured of his wound, and went away, I hope, to be a better man. There, is that all?”

“Oh no, Uncle. There are the runners left to tell about. Didn’t they catch you again?” asks thoughtful Harry, my namesake—Harry, the eldest born.

“They tried to get me, Harry. They came to the Grange with a warrant. Not for being a highwayman; the Brassingham magistrates only laughed at the tale of a boy turned highwayman. So Jeff and Jarvis came to arrest me on a new charge—for being a vagrant without a home. How Roger and the doctor laughed! And how the runners stared when they found that the vagrant lad was Squire of Beolea! They stared, and begged pardon, and touched their hats, and rode away to London.”

“Lucky for you, Uncle,” says Harry.

“Lucky for me, and a lesson for you, my boy. Remember how narrowly I escaped the penalties for playing with the law; and remember that highwaymen and pirates and all those romantic rascals are only scampish thieves at best.”

“Well, *now* you’ve left out the importantest people, Uncle!” cries Meg, as she leans upon my arm, and gives it a little shake. “You haven’t told us a word about Mr. Roger and the beautiful Miss Marjorie.”

“Oh, haven’t I? And can’t you guess? Why, here the very people are!” I say, as hand in hand into the room the Earl of —— and the Countess come, smiling a morning greeting.

“*Them!*” cries Meg. “Then you changed the names!” cries Harry. “Why, you means farver an’ muvver!” chirps little Ro, as he leaps into the elder Roger’s arms.



## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Some illustrations were moved to facilitate page layout.

[The end of *Nutbrown Roger and I* by J. H. (James Henry) Yoxall]