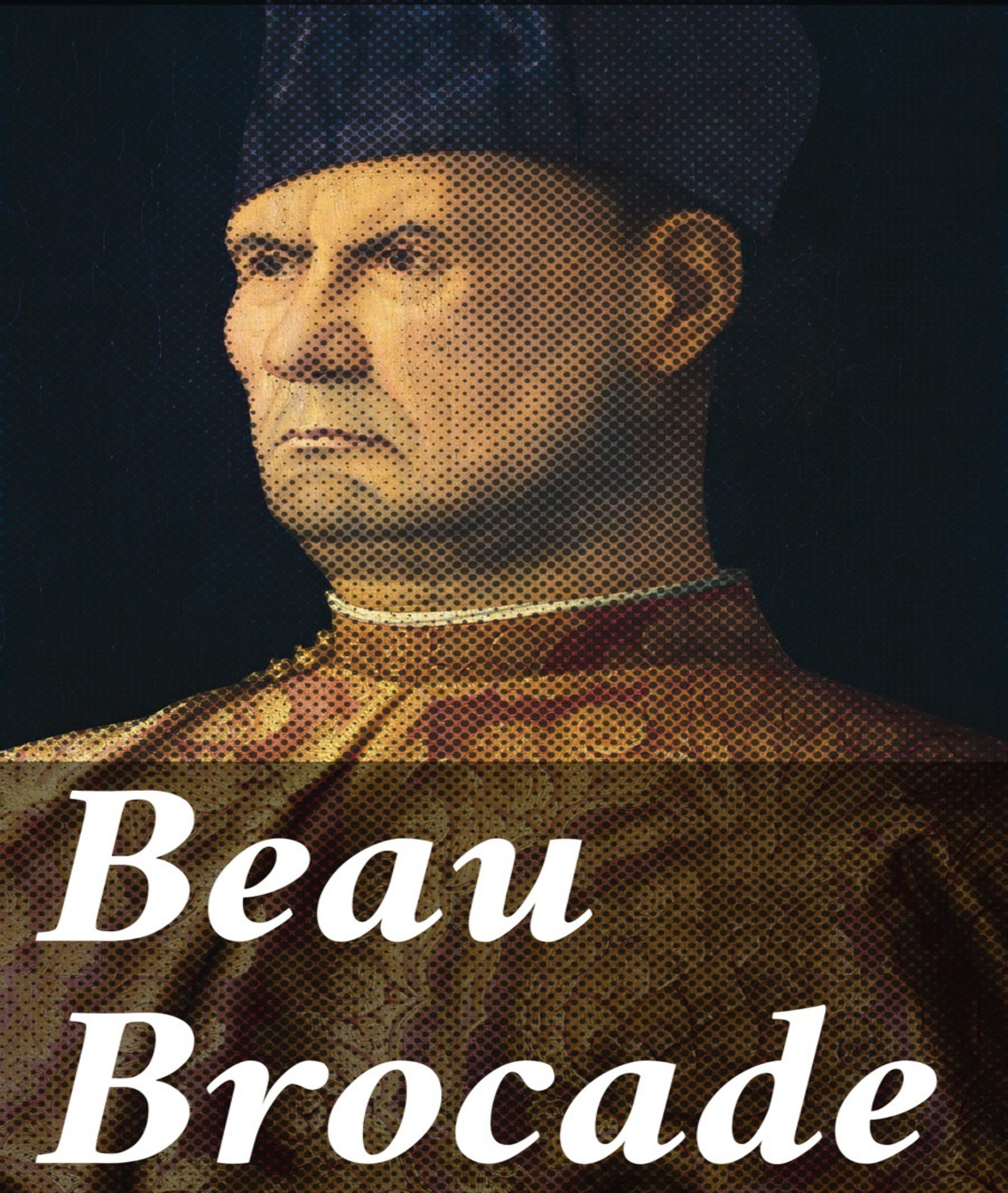
Baroness Orczy



# Beau Brocade

**Baroness Orczy**

# Beau Brocade

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# Table of Contents

# Part 1
# The Forge

Table of Contents

# Chapter 1
# By Act Of Parliament

Table of Contents

The gaffers stood round and shook their heads.

When the Corporal had finished reading the Royal Proclamation, one or two of them sighed in a desultory fashion, others murmured casually, “Lordy! Lordy! to think on it! Dearie me!”

The young ones neither sighed nor murmured. They looked at one another furtively, then glanced away again, as if afraid to read each other’s thoughts, and in a shamefaced manner wiped their moist hands against their rough cord breeches.

There were no women present fortunately: there had been heavy rains on the Moor these last three days, and what roads there were had become well-nigh impassable. Only a few men—some half-dozen perhaps—out of the lonely homesteads from down Brassington way, had tramped in the wake of the little squad of soldiers, in order to hear this Act of Parliament read at the cross-roads, and to see the document duly pinned to the old gallows-tree.

Fortunately the rain had ceased momentarily, only a cool, brisk nor’-wester came blustering across the Heath, making the older men shiver beneath their thin, well-worn smocks.

North and south, east and west, Brassing Moor stretched its mournful lengths to the distant framework of the Peak far away, with mile upon mile of grey-green gorse and golden bracken and long shoots of purple-stemmed bramble, and

here and there patches of vivid mauve, where the heather was just bursting into bloom; or anon a clump of dark firs, with ruddy trunks and gaunt arms stretched menacingly over the sparse young life below.

And here, at the cross-roads, the Heath seemed more desolate than ever, despite that one cottage with the blacksmith's shed beyond it. The roads themselves, the one to Aldwark, the other from Wirksworth, the third little more than a morass, a short cut to Stretton, all bore mute testimony to the remoteness, the aloofness of this forgotten corner of eighteenth-century England.

Then there was the old gallows, whereon many a foot-pad or sheep-stealer had paid full penalty for his crimes! True, John Stich, the blacksmith, now used it as a sign-post for his trade: a monster horseshoe hung there where once the bones of Dick Caldwell, the highwayman, had whitened in the bleak air of the Moor: still, at moments like these, when no one spoke, the wind seemed to bring an echo of ghostly sighs and laughter, for Dick had breathed his last with a coarse jest on his lips, and the ears of the timid seemed still to catch the eerie sound of his horse's hoofs ploughing the ruddy, shallow soil of the Heath.

For the moment, however, the cross-roads presented a scene of quite unusual animation: the Corporal and his squad looked resplendent in their scarlet tunics and white buckskins, and Mr Inch, the beadle from Brassington, was also there in his gold-laced coat, bob-tailed wig and three-cornered hat: he had lent the dignity of his presence to this solemn occasion, and in high top-boots, bell in hand, had tramped five miles with the soldiers, so that he might shout

a stentorian “Oyez! Oyez!” whenever they passed one of the few cottages along the road.

But no one spoke. The Corporal handed the Royal Proclamation to one of the soldiers; he too seemed nervous and ill at ease. The nor’-wester, with singular want of respect for King and Parliament, commenced a vigorous attack upon the great document, pulling at it in wanton frolic, almost tearing it out of the hands of the young soldier, who did his best to fix it against the shaft of the old gallows.

The white parchment looked uncanny and ghost-like fluttering in the wind; no doubt the nor’wester would soon tear it to rags.

“Lordy! Lordy! to think on it!”

There it was, fixed up at last. Up, so that any chance traveller who could might read. But those who were now assembled there—shepherds, most of them, on the Moor—viewed the written characters with awe and misgiving. They had had Mr Inch’s assurance that it was all writ there, that the King himself had put his name to it; and the young Corporal, who had read it out, had received the document from his own superior officer, who in his turn had had it at the hands of His Grace the Duke of Cumberland himself.

“It having come to the knowledge of His Majesty’s Parliament that certain subjects of the King have lately raised the standard of rebellion, setting up the Pretender, Charles Edward Stuart, above the King’s most lawful Majesty, it is hereby enacted that these persons are guilty of high treason and by the laws of the kingdom are therefore condemned to death. It is further enacted that it is unlawful

for any loyal subject of the King to shelter or harbour, clothe or feed any such persons who are vile traitors and rebels to their King and country: and that any subject of His Majesty who kills such a traitor or rebel doth thereby commit an act of justice and loyalty, for which he may be rewarded by the sum of twenty guineas."

It was this last paragraph that made the gaffers shake their heads and say "Lordy! Lordy! to think on it! to think on it!" For it seemed but yesterday that the old Moor, aye, and the hamlets and villages of Derbyshire, were ringing with the wild shouts of Prince Charlie's Highland Brigade, but yesterday that his handsome face, his green bonnet laced with gold, his Highland plaid and rich accoutrements, had seemed to proclaim victory to the Stuart cause from one end of the county to the other.

To be sure, that glorious, mad, merry time had not lasted very long. All the wiseacres had foretold disaster when the Prince's standard broke, just as it was taken into my Lord Exeter's house in Full Street. The shaft snapped clean in half. What could that portend but humiliation and defeat?

The retreat from Derby was still fresh in everyone's memory, and there were those from Wirksworth who remembered the rear-guard of Prince Charlie's army, the hussars with their half-starved horses and bedraggled finery, who had swept down on the villages and homesteads round about Ashbourne and had pillaged and plundered to their hearts' content.

But then those were the fortunes of war; fighting, rushing, running, plundering, wild huzzas, mad cavalcades, noise, bustle, excitement, joy of victory, and sorrow of

defeat, but this!! ... this Proclamation which the Corporal had brought all the way from Derby, and which had been signed by King George himself, this meant silence, hushed footsteps, a hidden figure perhaps, pallid and gaunt, hiding behind the boulders, or amidst the gorse on the Moor, or perishing mayhap at night, lost in the bog-land up Stretton way, whilst Judas-like treads crept stealthily on the track. It meant treachery too, the price of blood, a fellow-creature's life to be sold for twenty guineas.

No wonder the gaffers could think of nothing to say; no wonder the young men looked at one another shamefaced, and in fear.

Who knows? Any Derbyshire lad now might become a human bloodhound, a tracker of his fellow-creatures, a hunter of men. There were twenty guineas to be earned, and out there on the Heath, in the hut of the shepherd or the forge of the smith, many a pale wan face had been seen of late, which...

It was terrible to think on; for even out here, on Brassing Moor, there existed some knowledge of Tyburn Gate, and of Tower Hill.

At last the groups began to break up, the Corporal's work was done. His Majesty's Proclamation would flutter there in the cool September wind for awhile; then presently the crows would peck at it, the rain would dash it down, the last bit of dirty rag would be torn away by an October gale, but in the meanwhile the few inhabitants of Brassington and those of Aldwark would know that they might deny a starving fellow-creature bread and shelter, aye! and shoot

him too, like a wild beast in a ditch, and have twenty guineas reward to boot.

“I’ve seen nought of John Stich, Master Inch,” said the Corporal at last. “Be he from home?”

And he turned to where, just in the fork of the road, the thatched cottage, with a glimpse of the shed beyond it, stood solitary and still.

“Nay, I have not observated that fact, Master Corporal,” replied Master Inch, clearing his throat for some of those fine words which had gained for him wide-spread admiration for miles around. “I had not observated that John Stich was from home. Though in verity it behoves me to say that I do not hear the sound of Master Stich’s hammer upon his anvil.”

“Then I’ll go across at once,” said the Corporal. “Forward, my men! John Stich might have saved me the trouble,” he added, groping in his wallet for another copy of His Majesty’s Proclamation.

“Nay, Master Corporal, do not give yourself the futile trouble of traversing the muddy road,” said Mr Inch, sententiously. “John Stich is a loyal subject of King George, and by my faith! he would not harbourgate a rebel, take my word for it. Although, mind you, Mr Corporal, I have oft suspicionated…”

Mr Inch, the beadle, looked cautiously round; all the pompousness of his manner had vanished in a trice. His broad face beneath the bob-tailed wig and three-cornered hat looked like a rosy receptacle of mysterious information, as he laid his fat hand on the Corporal’s sleeve.

The straggling groups of yokels were fast disappearing down the muddy tracks; some were returning to Brassington, others were tramping Aldwark way; one wizened, solitary figure was slowly toiling up the road, little more than a quagmire, that led northwards across the Heath towards Stretton Hall.

The soldiers stood at attention some fifteen yards away, mute and disinterested. From the shed beyond the cottage there suddenly came the sound of the blacksmith's hammer upon his anvil. Mr Inch felt secure from observation.

"I have oft suspicionated John Stich, the smith, of befriending the foot-pads and highwaymen that haunt this God-forsaken Moor," he said, with an air of excited importance, rolling his beady eyes.

"Nay," laughed the Corporal, good-humouredly, as he shook off Master Inch's fat hand. "You'd best not whisper this confidence to John Stich himself. As I live, he would crack your skull for you, Master Beadle, aye, be it ever so full of dictionary words. John Stich is an honest man, I tell you," he added with a pleasant oath, "the most honest this side of the county, and don't you forget it."

But Mr Inch did not approve of the young soldier's tone of familiarity. He drew up his five feet of broad stature to their full height.

"Nay, but I designated no harm," he said, with offended dignity. "John Stich is a worthy fellow, and I spoke of no ordinary foot-pads. My mind," he added, dwelling upon that mysterious possession with conscious pride, "my mind, I may say, was dominating on Beau Brocade."

"Beau Brocade!!!"

And the Corporal laughed with obvious incredulity, which further nettled Mr Inch, the beadle.

“Aye, Beau Brocade,” he said hotly, “the malicious, pernicious, damned rascal, who gives us, that representate the majesty of the law, a mighty deal of trouble.”

“Indeed?” sneered the Corporal.

“I dare swear that down at Derby,” retorted Mr Inch, spitefully, “you have not even heard of that personage.”

“Oh! we know well enough that Brassing Moor harbours more miscreants than any corner of the county,” laughed the young soldier, “but methought Beau Brocade only existed in the imagination of your half-witted yokels about here.”

“There you are in grave error, Master Corporal,” remarked the beadle with dignity. “Beau Brocade, permit me to observe, does exist in the flesh. ’Twas only last night Sir Humphrey Challoner’s coach was stopped not three miles from Hartington, and his Honour robbed of fifty guineas, by that pernicious highwayman.”

“Then you must lay this Beau Brocade by the heels, Master Inch.”

“Aye! that’s easily said. Lay him by the heels forsooth, and who’s going to do that, pray?”

“Nay, that’s your affair. You don’t expect His Grace the Duke of Cumberland to lend you a portion of his army, do you?”

“His Grace might do worse. Beau Brocade is a dangerous rascal to the quality.”

“Only to the quality?”

“Aye, he’ll not touch a poor man; ’tis only the rich he is after, and uses but little of his ill-gotten gain on himself.”

“How so?” asked the Corporal, eagerly, for in spite of the excitement of camp life round about Derby, the fame of the daring highwayman had ere now tickled the fancy of the young soldiers of the Duke of Cumberland’s army.

“Why, I told you Sir Humphrey Challoner was robbed on the Heath last night—robbed of fifty guineas, eh?” said Master Inch, whispering in eager confidence. “Well, this morning, when Squire West arrived at the court-house, he found fifty guineas in the poor box.”

“Well?”

“Well, that’s not the first time nor yet the second that such a matter has occurred. The dolts round about here, the lads from Brassington or Aldwark, or even from Wirksworth, would never willingly lay a hand on Beau Brocade. The rascal knows it well enough, and carries on his shameful trade with impunity.”

“Odd’s fish! but meseems the trade is not so shameful after all. What is the fellow like?”

“Nay, no one has ever seen his face, though his figure on the Moor is familiar to many. He is always dressed in the latest fashion, hence the villagers have called him Beau Brocade. Some say he is a royal prince in disguise—he always wears a mask; some say he is the Pretender, Charles Stuart himself; others declare his face is pitted with smallpox; others that he has the face of a pig, and the ears of a mule, that he is covered with hairs like a spaniel, or has a blue skin like an ape. But no one knows, and with half the

villages on the Heath to aid and abet him, he is not like to be laid by the heels."

"A fine story, Master Inch," laughed the Corporal. "And is there no reward for the capture of your pig-faced, hairy, blue-skinned royal prince disguised as a common highwayman?"

"Aye, a reward of a hundred guineas," said Mr Inch, in a whisper that was hardly audible above the murmur of the wind. "A hundred guineas for the capture of Beau Brocade."

The Corporal gave a long significant whistle.

"And no one bold enough to attempt the capture?" he said derisively.

Mr Inch shook his head sadly.

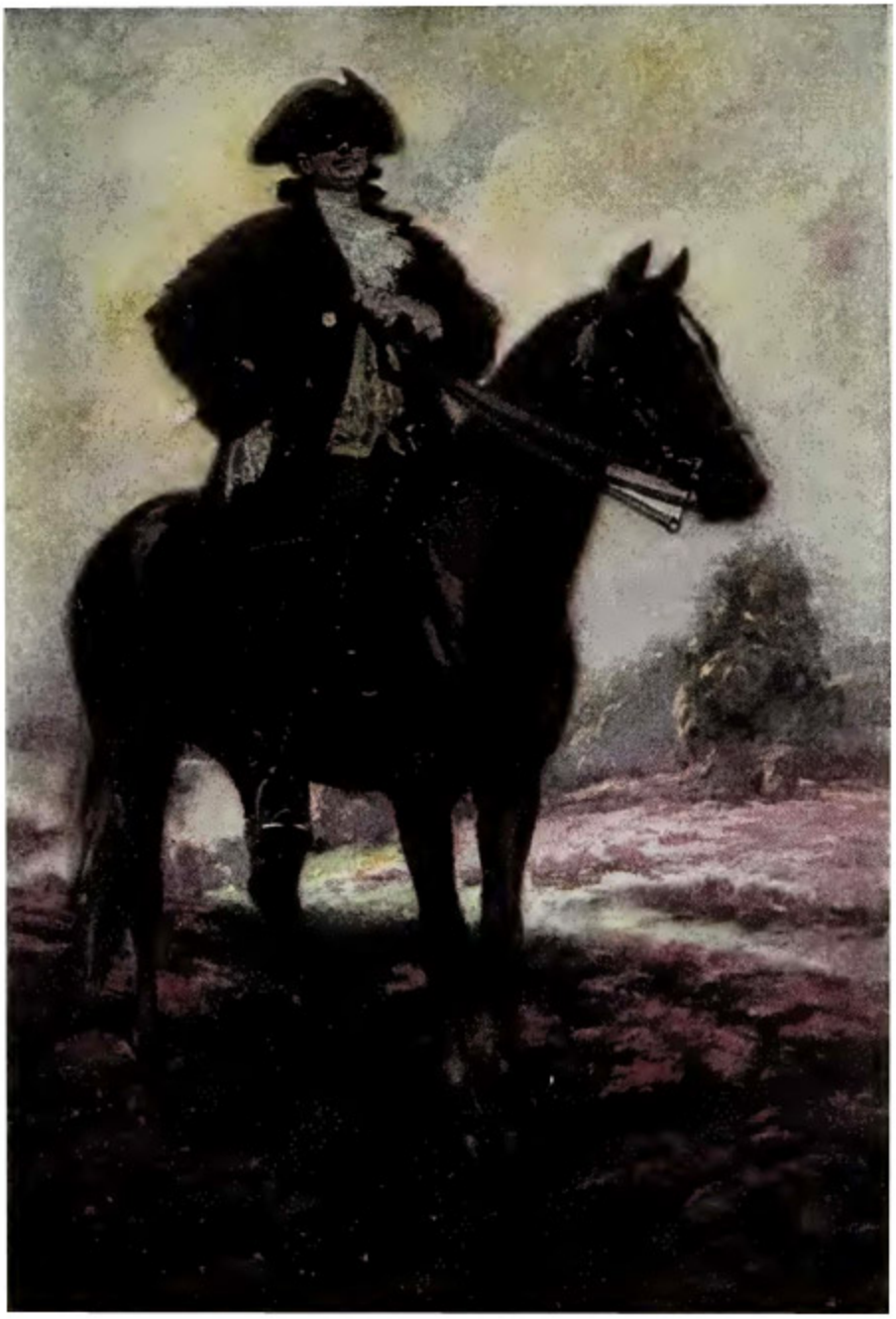
"No one could do it single-handed; the rascal is cunning as well as bold, and..."

But at this point even Mr Inch's voluble tongue was suddenly and summarily silenced. The words died in his throat; his bell, the badge of his important public office, fell with a mighty clatter on the ground.

A laugh, a long, loud, joyous, mirthful laugh, rang clear as a silver gong from across the lonely Moor. Such a laugh as would make anyone's heart glad to hear, the laugh of a free man, of a man who is whole-hearted, of a man who has never ceased to be a boy.

And pompous Mr Inch slowly turned on his heel, as did also the young Corporal, and both gazed out upon the Heath; the patient little squad of soldiers too, all fixed their eyes upon one spot, just beyond John Stich's forge and cottage, not fifty yards away.

There, clearly outlined against the cloud-laden sky, was the graceful figure of a horse and rider; the horse, a sleek chestnut thoroughbred, which filled all the soldiers’ hearts with envy and covetousness; the rider, a youthful, upright figure, whose every movement betokened strength of limb and elasticity of muscle, the very pose a model of ease and grace, the shoulders broad; the head, with a black mask worn over the face, was carried high and erect.



There, clearly outlined against the sky, was the graceful figure of a horse and rider

In truth it was a goodly picture to look upon, with that massive bank of white clouds, and the little patches of vivid blue as a rich, shimmering dome above it, the gold-tipped bracken, the purple heather all around, and far away, as a

mist-covered background, the green-clad hills and massive Tors of Derbyshire.

So good a picture was it that the tardy September sun peeped through the clouds and had a look at that fine specimen of eighteenth-century English manhood, then paused awhile, perchance to hear again that mirthful, happy laugh.

Then came a gust of wind, the sun retreated, the soldiers gasped, and lo! before Mr Inch or Mr Corporal had realised that the picture was made of flesh and blood, horse and rider had disappeared, there, far out across the Heath, beyond the gorse and bramble and the budding heather, with not a handful of dust to mark the way they went.

Only once from far, very far, almost from fairy-land, there came, like the echo of a silver bell, the sound of that mad, merry laugh.

“Beau Brocade, as I live!” murmured Mr Inch, under his breath.

# Chapter 2
# The Forge Of John Stich

Table of Contents

John Stich too had heard that laugh; for a moment he paused in his work, straightened his broad back and leant his heavy hammer upon the anvil, whilst a pleasant smile lit up his bronzed and rugged countenance.

“There goes the Captain,” he said, “I wonder now what’s tickling him. Ah!” he added with a short sigh, “the soldiers, maybe. He doesn’t like soldiers much, doesn’t the Captain.”

He sighed again and looked across to where, on a rough wooden bench, sat a young man with head resting on his hand, his blue eyes staring moodily before him. The dress this young man wore was a counterpart of that in which John himself was arrayed; rough worsted stockings, thick flannel shirt with sleeves well tucked up over fine, muscular arms, and a large, greasy, well-worn leather apron, denoting the blacksmith’s trade. But though the hands and face were covered with grime, a more than casual observer would soon have noticed that those same hands were slender and shapely, the fingers long, the nails neatly trimmed, whilst the face, anxious and careworn though it was, had in it a look of habitual command, of pride not yet crushed out of ken.

John Stich gazed at him for awhile, whilst a look of pity and anxiety saddened his honest face. The smith was a man of few words, he said nothing then, and presently the sound of his hammer upon the anvil once more filled the forge with its pleasant echo. But though John’s tongue was slow, his

ear was quick, and in one moment he had perceived the dull thud made by the Corporal's squad as, having parted from Mr Inch at the cross-roads, the soldiers ploughed their way through the mud round the cottage and towards the forge.

"Hist!" said John, in a rapid whisper, pointing to the fire, "the bellows! quick!"

The young man too had started in obvious alarm. His ear —the ear of a fugitive, trained to every sound that betokened danger—was as alert as that of the smith. With a sudden effort he pulled himself together, and quickly seized the heavy bellows with a will. He forced his eyes to glance carelessly at the door and his lips to whistle a lively country tune.

The Corporal paused a moment at the entrance, taking a quick survey of the interior of the forge, his men at attention behind him.

"In the King's name!" he said loudly, as he unfolded the Proclamation of His Majesty's Parliament.

His orders were to read it in every hamlet and every homestead in the district; John Stich, the blacksmith, was an important personage all around Brassing Moor, and he had not heard it read from beneath the old gallows at the cross-roads just now.

"Well, Corporal," said the worthy smith, quietly, as he put down his hammer out of respect for the King's name. "Well, and what does His Majesty, King George II., desire with John Stich, the blacksmith, eh?"

"Not with you alone, John Stich," replied the Corporal. "This is an Act of Parliament and concerns all loyal subjects

of the King. Who be yon lad?" he asked, carelessly nodding towards the young man at the bellows.

"My nephew Jim, out o' Nottingham," replied John Stich, quietly, "my sister Hannah's child. You recollect her, Corporal? She was in service with my Lord Exeter up at Derby."

"Oh, aye! Mistress Hannah Stich, to be sure! I didn't know she had such a fine lad of her own," commented the Corporal, as the young man straightened his tall figure and looked him fearlessly in the face.

"Lads grow up fast enough, don't they, Corporal?" laughed honest Stich, pleasantly; "but come, let's hear His Majesty's Proclamation since you've got to read it. But you see I'm very busy and..."

"Nay, 'tis my duty, John Stich, 'in every homestead in Derbyshire' 'tis to be read, so says this Act of Parliament. You might have saved this trouble had you come down to the cross-roads just now."

"I was busy," remarked John Stich, drily, and the Corporal began to read:—

"'It having come to the knowledge of His Majesty's Parliament that certain subjects of the King have lately raised the standard of rebellion, setting up the Pretender, Charles Edward Stuart, above the King's most lawful Majesty, it is hereby enacted that these persons are guilty of high treason and by the laws of the kingdom are therefore condemned to death. It is further enacted that it is unlawful for any loyal subject of the King to shelter or harbour, clothe or feed any such persons who are vile traitors and rebels to their King and country; and that any subject of His Majesty

who kills such a traitor or rebel doth thereby commit an act of justice and loyalty, for which he may be rewarded by the sum of twenty guineas.’”

There was a pause when the Corporal had finished reading. John Stich was leaning upon his hammer, the young man once more busied himself with the bellows. Outside, the clearing shower of September rain began pattering upon the thatched roof of the forge.

“Well,” said John Stich at last, as the Corporal put the heavy parchment away in his wallet. “Well, and are you going to tell us who are those persons, Corporal, whom our village lads are told to murder by Act of Parliament? How shall we know a rebel ... and shoot him ... when we see one?”

“There were forty persons down on the list a few weeks ago, persons who were known to be in hiding in Derbyshire,” said the young soldier, “but...”

“Well, what’s your ‘but,’ Corporal? There were forty persons whom ’twas lawful to murder a few weeks ago.... What of them?”

“They have been caught and hanged, most of them,” replied the soldier, quietly.

“Jim, lad, mind that fire,” commented John Stich, turning to his “nephew out o’ Nottingham,” for the latter was staring with glowing eyes and quivering lips at the Corporal, who, not noticing him, continued carelessly,—

“There was Lord Lovat now, you must have heard of him, John Stich, he was beheaded a few days ago, and so was Lord Kilmarnock ... they were lords, you see, and had a headsman all to themselves on Tower Hill, that’s up in

London: some lesser folk have been hanged, and now there are only three rebels at large, and there are twenty guineas waiting for anyone who will bring the head of one of them to the nearest magistrate."

The smith grunted. "Well, and who are they?" he asked roughly.

"Sir Andrew Macdonald up from Tweedside, then Squire Fairfield, you'd mind him, John Stich, over Staffordshire way."

"Aye, aye, I mind him well enough. His mother was a Papist and he clung to the Stuart cause ... young man, too, and hiding for his life.... Well, and who else?"

"The young Earl of Stretton."

"What! him from Stretton Hall?" said John Stich in open astonishment. "Jim, lad," he added sternly, "thou art a clumsy fool."

The young man had started involuntarily at sound of the last name mentioned by the Corporal; and the bellows which he had tried to wield fell with a clatter on the floor.

"Be gy! but an Act of Parliament can make thee a lawful assassin, it seems," added honest John, with a laugh, "but let me perish if it can make thee a good smith. What think you, Master Corporal?"

"Odd's life! the lad is too soft-hearted mayhap! Our Derbyshire lads haven't much sense in their heads, have they?"

"Well, you mind the saying, Corporal, 'Derbyshire born and Derbyshire bred...' eh?"

"'Strong i' the arm and weak i' th' head,'" laughed the soldier, concluding the apt quotation. "That's just it. Odd's

buds! they want some sense. What's a rebel or a traitor but vermin, eh? and don't we kill vermin all of us, and don't call it murder either—what?"

He laughed pleasantly and carelessly and tapped the side of his wallet where rested His Majesty's Proclamation. He was a young soldier, nothing more, attentive to duty, ready to obey, neither willing nor allowed to reason for himself. He had been taught that rebels and traitors were vermin ... egad! vermin they were, and as such must be got rid of for the sake of the rest of the kingdom and the safety of His Majesty the King.

John Stich made no comment on the Corporal's profession of faith.

"We'll talk about all that some other time, Corporal," he said at last, "but I am busy now, you see..."

"No offence, friend Stich.... Odd's life, duty you know, John, duty, eh? His Majesty's orders! and I had them from the Captain, who had them from the Duke of Cumberland himself. So you mind the Act, friend!"

"Aye! I mind it well enough."

"Everyone knows *you* to be a loyal subject of King George," added the Corporal in conciliatory tones, for John was a power in the district, "and I'm sure your nephew is the same, but duty is duty, and no offence meant."

"That's right enough, Corporal," said John Stich, impatiently.

"So good-morrow to you, John Stich."

"Good-morrow."

The Corporal nodded to the young man, then turned on his heel and presently his voice was heard ringing out the

word of command,—

“Attention!—Right turn—Quick march!”

John Stich and the young man watched the half-dozen red-coated figures as they turned to skirt the cottage: the dull thud of their feet quickly dying away, as they wound their way slowly up the muddy path which leads across the Heath to Aldwark village.

# Chapter 3
# The Fugitive

Table of Contents

Inside the forge all was still, whilst the last of the muffled sounds died away in the distance. John Stich had not resumed work. It was his turn now to stare moodily before him.

The young man had thrown the bellows aside, and was pacing the rough earthen floor of the forge like some caged animal.

“Tracked!” he murmured at last between clenched teeth, “tracked like some wild beast! perhaps shot anon like a dangerous cur behind a hedge!”

He sighed a long and bitter sigh, full of sorrow, anxiety, disappointment. It had come to this then! His name among the others—the traitors, the rebels! and he an innocent man!

“Nay, my lord!” said the smith, quietly, “not while John Stich owns a roof that can shelter you.”

The young man paused in his feverish walk; a look of gentleness and gratitude softened the care-worn expression on his face: with a boyish gesture he threw back the fair hair which fell in curly profusion over his forehead, and with a frank and winning grace he sought and grasped the worthy smith’s rough brown hand.

“Honest Stich!” he said at last, whilst his voice shook a little as he spoke, “and to think that I cannot even reward your devotion!”

“Nay, my lord,” retorted John Stich, drawing up his burly figure to its full height, “don’t talk of reward. I would gladly give my life for you and your family.”

And this was no idle talk. John Stich meant every word he said. Honest, kind, simple-hearted John! he loved those to whom he owed everything, loved them with all the devotion of his strong, faithful nature.

The late Lord Stretton had brought him up, cared for him, given him a trade, and set him up in the cottage and forge at the cross-roads, and honest Stich felt that as everything that was good in life had come from my lord and his family, so everything he could give should be theirs in return.

“Ah! I fear me,” sighed the young man, “that it is your life you risk now by sheltering me.”

Yet it was all such a horrible mistake.

Philip James Gascoyne, eleventh Earl of Stretton, was at this time not twenty-one years of age. There is that fine portrait of him at Brassing Hall painted by Hogarth just before this time. The artist has well caught the proud features, the fine blue eyes, the boyish, curly head, which have been the characteristics of the Gascoynes for many generations. He has also succeeded in indicating the sensitiveness of the mouth, that somewhat feminine turn of the lips, that all too-rounded curve of the chin and jaw, which perhaps robs the handsome face of its virile manliness. There certainly is a look of indecision, of weakness of will about the lower part of the face, but it is so frank, so young, so *insouciant*, that it wins all hearts, even if it does not captivate the judgment.

Of course, when he was very young, his sympathies went out to the Stuart cause. Had not the Gascoynes suffered and died for Charles Stuart but a hundred years ago? Why the change? Why this allegiance to an alien dynasty, to a king who spoke the language of his subjects with a foreign accent?

His father, the late Lord Stretton, a contented, unargumentative British nobleman of the eighteenth century, had not thought it worth his while to explain to the growing lad the religious and political questions involved in the upholding of this foreign dynasty. Perhaps he did not understand them altogether himself. The family motto is “Pour le Roi.” So the Gascoynes fought for a Stuart when he was King, and against him when he was a Pretender, and old Lord Stretton expected his children to reverence the family motto, and to have no opinions of their own.

And yet to the hearts of many the Stuart cause made a strong appeal. From Scotland came the fame of the “bonnie Prince” who won all hearts where’er he went. Philip was young, his father’s discipline was irksome, he had some friends among the Highland lords: and while his father lived there had as yet been no occasion in the English Midlands to do anything very daring for the Stuart Pretender.

When the Earl of Stretton died, Philip, a mere boy then, succeeded to title and estates. In the first flush of new duties and new responsibilities his old enthusiasm remained half forgotten. As a peer of the realm he had registered his allegiance to King George, and with his youthful romantic nature all afire, he clung to that new oath of his, idealised it

and loyally resisted the blandishments and lures held out to him from Scotland and from France.

Then came the news that Charles Edward, backed by French money and French influence, would march upon London and would stop at Derby to rally round his standard his friends in the Midlands.

Young Lord Stretton, torn between memories of his boyhood and the duties of his new position, feared to be inveigled into breaking his allegiance to King George. The malevolent fairy who at his birth had given him that weak mouth and softly rounded chin, had stamped his worst characteristic on the young handsome face. Philip's one hope at this juncture was to flee from temptation; he knew that Charles Edward, remembering his past ardour, would demand his help and his adherence, and that he, Philip, might be powerless to refuse.

So he fled from the county: despising himself as a coward, yet boyishly clinging to the idea that he would keep the oath he had sworn to King George. He wished to put miles of country between himself and the possible breaking of that oath, the possible yielding to the "bonnie Prince" whom none could resist. He left his sister, Lady Patience, at Stretton Hall, well cared for by old retainers, and he, a loyal subject to his King, became a fugitive.

Then came the catastrophe: that miserable retreat from Derby; the bedraggled remains of a disappointed army; finally Culloden and complete disaster; King George's soldiers scouring the country for rebels, the bills of attainder, the quick trials and swift executions.

Soon the suspicion grew into certainty that the fugitive Earl of Stretton was one of the Pretender's foremost adherents. On his weary way from Derby Prince Charles Edward had asked and obtained a night's shelter at Stretton Hall. When Philip tried to communicate with his sister, and to return to his home, he found that she was watched, and that he was himself attainted by Act of Parliament.

Yet he felt himself guiltless and loyal. He *was* guiltless and loyal: how his name came to be included in the list of rebels was still a mystery to him: someone must have lodged sworn information against him. But who?—Surely not his old friends—the adherents of Charles Edward—out of revenge for his half-heartedness?

In the meanwhile, he, a mere lad, became an outcast, condemned to death by Act of Parliament. Presently all might be cleared, all would be well, but for the moment he was like a wild beast, hiding in hedges and ditches, with his life at the mercy of any grasping Judas willing to sell his fellow-creature for a few guineas.

It was horrible! horrible! Philip vainly tried all the day to rouse himself from his morbid reverie. At intervals he would grasp the kind smith's hand and mutter anxiously,—

"My letter to my sister, John?—You are sure she had it?"

And patient John would repeat a dozen times the day,—

"I am quite sure, my lord."

But since the Corporal's visit Philip's mood had become more feverish.

"My letter," he repeated, "has Patience had my letter? Why doesn't she come?"