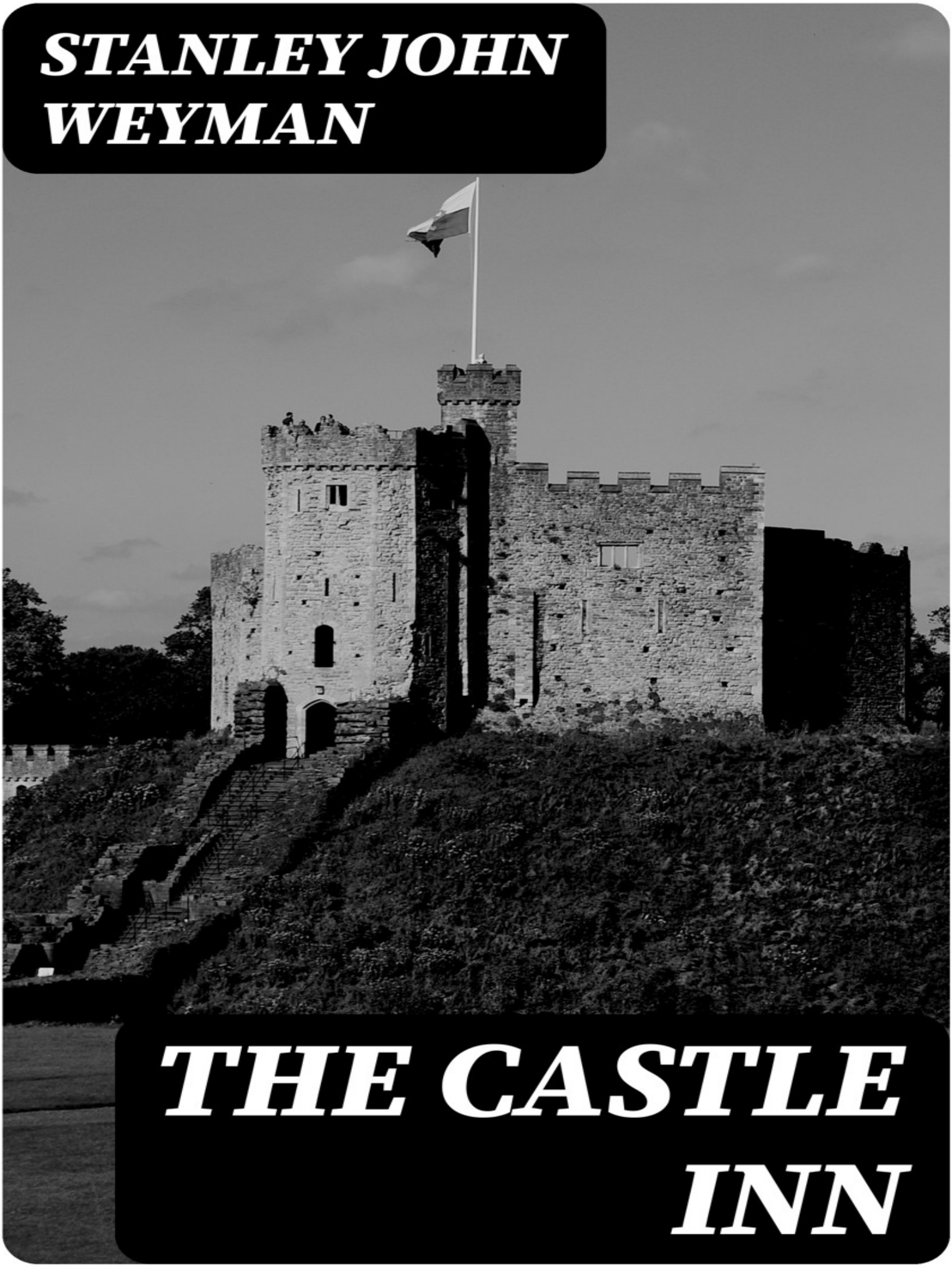
STANLEY JOHN WEYMAN



THE CASTLE INN

Stanley John Weyman

The Castle Inn

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CHAPTER I

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A KNIGHT-ERRANT

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About a hundred and thirty years ago, when the third George, whom our grandfathers knew in his blind dotage, was a young and sturdy bridegroom; when old Q., whom 1810 found peering from his balcony in Piccadilly, deaf, toothless, and a skeleton, was that gay and lively spark, the Earl of March; when *bore* and *boreish* were words of *haut ton*, unknown to the vulgar, and the price of a borough was 5,000*l.*; when gibbets still served for sign-posts, and railways were not and highwaymen were--to be more exact, in the early spring of the year 1767, a travelling chariot-and-four drew up about five in the evening before the inn at Wheatley Bridge, a short stage from Oxford on the Oxford road. A gig and a couple of post-chaises, attended by the customary group of stablemen, topers, and gossips already stood before the house, but these were quickly deserted in favour of the more important equipage. The drawers in their aprons trooped out, but the landlord, foreseeing a rich harvest, was first at the door of the carriage, and opened it with a bow such as is rarely seen in these days.

'Will your lordship please to alight?' he said.

'No, rascal!' cried one of those within. 'Shut the door!'

'You wish fresh horses, my lord?' the obsequious host replied. 'Of course. They shall be--'

'We wish nothing,' was the brisk answer. 'D'ye hear? Shut the door, and go to the devil!'

Puzzled, but obedient, the landlord fell back on the servants, who had descended from their seat in front and were beating their hands one on another, for the March evening was chill. 'What is up, gentlemen?' he said.

'Nothing. But we will put something down, by your leave,' they answered.

'Won't they do the same?' He cocked his thumb in the direction of the carriage.

'No. You have such an infernal bad road, the dice roll,' was the answer. 'They will finish their game in quiet. That is all. Lord, how your folks stare! Have they never seen a lord before?'

'Who is it?' the landlord asked eagerly. 'I thought I knew his Grace's face.'

Before the servant could answer or satisfy his inquisitiveness, the door of the carriage was opened in haste, and the landlord sprang to offer his shoulder. A tall young man whose shaped riding-coat failed to hide that which his jewelled hands and small French hat would alone have betrayed--that he was dressed in the height of fashion--stepped down. A room and a bottle of your best claret,' he said. 'And bring me ink and a pen.'

'Immediately, my lord. This way, my lord. Your lordship will perhaps honour me by dining here?'

'Lord, no! Do you think I want to be poisoned?' was the frank answer. And looking about him with languid curiosity, the young peer, followed by a companion, lounged into the house.

The third traveller--for three there were--by a gesture directed the servant to close the carriage door, and, keeping his seat, gazed sleepily through the window. The loitering crowd, standing at a respectful distance, returned his glances with interest, until an empty post-chaise, approaching from the direction of Oxford, rattled up noisily and split the group asunder. As the steaming horses stopped within a few paces of the chariot, the gentleman seated in the latter saw one of the ostlers go up to the post-chaise and heard him say, 'Soon back, Jimmie?'

'Ay, and I ha' been stopped too,' the postboy answered as he dropped his reins.

'No!' in a tone of surprise. 'Was it Black Jack?'

'Not he. 'Twas a woman!'

A murmur of astonishment greeted the answer. The postboy grinned, and sitting easily in his pad prepared to enjoy the situation. 'Ay, a woman!' he said. 'And a rare pair of eyes to that. What do you think she wanted, lads?'

'The stuff, of course.'

'Not she. Wanted one of them I took'--and he jerked his elbow contemptuously in the direction whence he had come--'to fight a duel for her. One of they! Said, was he Mr. Berkeley, and would he risk his life for a woman.'

The head ostler stared. 'Lord! and who was it he was to fight?' he asked at last.

'She did not say. Her spark maybe, that has jilted her.'

'And would they, Jimmie?'

'They? Shoo! They were Methodists,' the postboy answered contemptuously, 'Scratch wigs and snuff-colour. If she had not been next door to a Bess of Bedlam and in a

main tantrum, she would have seen that. But "Are you Mr. Berkeley?" she says, all on fire like. And "Will you fight for a woman?" And when they shrieked out, banged the door on them. But I tell you she was a pretty piece as you'd wish to see. If she had asked me, I would not have said no to her.' And he grinned.

The gentleman in the chariot opened a window. 'Where did she stop you, my man?' he asked idly.

'Half a mile this side of Oxford, your worship,' the postboy answered, knuckling his forehead. 'Seemed to me, sir, she was a play actress. She had that sort of way with her.'

The gentleman nodded and closed the window. The night had so far set in that they had brought out lights; as he sat back, one of these, hung in the carriage, shone on his features and betrayed that he was smiling. In this mood his face lost the air of affected refinement--which was then the mode, and went perfectly with a wig and ruffles--and appeared in its true cast, plain and strong, yet not uncomely. His features lacked the insipid regularity which, where all shaved, passed for masculine beauty; the nose ended largely, the cheek-bones were high, and the chin projected. But from the risk and even the edge of ugliness it was saved by a pair of grey eyes, keen, humorous, and kindly, and a smile that showed the eyes at their best. Of late those eyes had been known to express weariness and satiety; the man was tiring of the round of costly follies and aimless amusements in which he passed his life. But at twenty-six pepper is still hot in the mouth, and Sir George Soane continued to drink, game, and fribble, though the first

pungent flavour of those delights had vanished, and the things themselves began to pall upon him.

When he had sat thus ten minutes, smiling at intervals, a stir about the door announced that his companions were returning. The landlord preceded them, and was rewarded for his pains with half a guinea; the crowd with a shower of small silver. The postillions cracked their whips, the horses started forward, and amid a shrill hurrah my lord's carriage rolled away from the door.

'Now, who casts?' the peer cried briskly, arranging himself in his seat. 'George, I'll set you. The old stakes?'

'No, I am done for to-night,' Sir George answered yawning without disguise.

'What! crabbed, dear lad?'

'Ay, set Berkeley, my lord. He's a better match for you.'

'And be robbed by the first highwayman we meet? No, no! I told you, if I was to go down to this damp hole of mine--fancy living a hundred miles from White's! I should die if I could not game every day--you were to play with me, and Berkeley was to ensure my purse.'

'He would as soon take it,' Sir George answered languidly, gazing through the glass.

'Sooner, by--!' cried the third traveller, a saturnine, dark-faced man of thirty-four or more, who sat with his back to the horses, and toyed with a pistol that lay on the seat beside him. 'I'm content if your lordship is.'

'Then have at you! Call the main, Colonel. You may be the devil among the highwaymen--that was Selwyn's joke, was it not?--but I'll see the colour of your money.'

'Beware of him. He *doved* March,' Sir George said indifferently.

'He won't strip me,' cried the young lord. 'Five is the main. Five to four he throws crabs! Will you take, George?'

Soane did not answer, and the two, absorbed in the rattle of the dice and the turns of their beloved hazard, presently forgot him; his lordship being the deepest player in London and as fit a successor to the luckless Lord Mountford as one drop of water to another. Thus left to himself, and as effectually screened from remark as if he sat alone, Sir George devoted himself to an eager scrutiny of the night, looking first through one window and then through the other; in which he persevered though darkness had fallen so completely that only the hedges showed in the lamplight, gliding giddily by in endless walls of white. On a sudden he dropped the glass with an exclamation, and thrust out his head.

'Pull up!' he cried. 'I want to descend.'

The young lord uttered a peevish exclamation. 'What is to do?' he continued, glancing round; then, instantly returning to the dice, 'if it is my purse they want, say Berkeley is here. That will scare them. What are you doing, George?'

'Wait a minute,' was the answer; and in a twinkling Soane was out, and was ordering the servant, who had climbed down, to close the door. This effected, he strode back along the road to a spot where a figure, cloaked, and hooded, was just visible, lurking on the fringe of the lamplight. As he approached it, he raised his hat with an exaggeration of politeness.

'Madam,' he said, 'you asked for me, I believe?'

The woman--for a woman it was, though he could see no more of her than a pale face, staring set and Gorgon-like from under the hood--did not answer at once. Then, 'Who are you?' she said.

'Colonel Berkeley,' he answered with assurance, and again saluted her.

'Who killed the highwayman at Hounslow last Christmas?' she cried.

'The same, madam.'

'And shot Farnham Joe at Roehampton?'

'Yes, madam. And much at your service.'

'We shall see,' she answered, her voice savagely dubious. 'At least you are a gentleman and can use a pistol? But are you willing to risk something for justice' sake?'

'And the sake of your *beaux yeux*, madam?' he answered, a laugh in his voice. 'Yes.'

'You mean it?'

'Prove me,' he answered.

His tone was light; but the woman, who seemed to labour under strong emotion, either failed to notice this or was content to put up with it. 'Then send on your carriage,' she said.

His jaw fell at that, and had there been light by which to see him he would have looked foolish. At last, 'Are we to walk?' he said.

'Those are the lights of Oxford,' she answered. 'We shall be there in ten minutes.'

'Oh, very well,' he said, 'A moment, if you please.'

She waited while he went to the carriage and told the astonished servants to leave his baggage at the Mitre; this understood, he put in his head and announced to his host that he would come on next day. 'Your lordship must excuse me to-night,' he said.

'What is up?' my lord asked, without raising his eyes or turning his head. He had taken the box and thrown nicks three times running, at five guineas the cast; and was in the seventh heaven. 'Ha! five is the main. Now you are in it, Colonel. What did you say, George? Not coming! What is it?'

'An adventure.'

'What! a petticoat?'

'Yes,' Sir George answered, smirking.

'Well, you find 'em in odd places. Take care of yourself. But shut the door, that is a good fellow. There is a d----d draught.'

Sir George complied, and, nodding to the servants, walked back to the woman. As he reached her the carriage with its lights whirled away, and left them in darkness.

Soane wondered if he were not a fool for his pains, and advanced a step nearer to conviction when the woman with an impatient 'Come!' started along the road; moving at a smart pace in the direction which the chariot had taken, and betraying so little shyness or timidity as to seem unconscious of his company. The neighbourhood of Oxford is low and flat, and except where a few lights marked the outskirts of the city a wall of darkness shut them in, permitting nothing to be seen that lay more than a few paces away. A grey drift of clouds, luminous in comparison with the gloom about them, moved slowly overhead, and

out of the night the raving of a farm-dog or the creaking of a dry bough came to the ear with melancholy effect.

The fine gentleman of that day had no taste for the wild, the rugged, or the lonely. He lived too near the times when those words spelled danger. He found at Almack's his most romantic scene, at Ranelagh his *terra incognita*, in the gardens of Versailles his ideal of the charming and picturesque. Sir George, no exception to the rule, shivered as he looked round. He began to experience a revulsion of spirits; and to consider that, for a gentleman who owned Lord Chatham for a patron, and was even now on his roundabout way to join that minister--for a gentleman whose fortune, though crippled and impaired, was still tolerable, and who, where it had suffered, might look with confidence to see it made good at the public expense--or to what end patrons or ministers?--he began to reflect, I say, that for such an one to exchange a peer's coach and good company for a night trudge at a woman's heels was a folly, better befitting a boy at school than a man of his years. Not that he had ever been so wild as to contemplate anything serious; or from the first had entertained the most remote intention of brawling in an unknown cause. That was an extravagance beyond him; and he doubted if the girl really had it in her mind. The only adventure he had proposed, when he left the carriage, was one of gallantry; it was the only adventure then in vogue. And for that, now the time was come, and the *incognita* and he were as much alone as the most ardent lover could wish, he felt singularly disinclined.

True, the outline of her cloak, and the indications of a slender, well-formed shape which it permitted to escape, satisfied him that the postboy had not deceived him; but that his companion was both young and handsome. And with this and his bargain it was to be supposed he would be content. But the pure matter-of-factness of the girl's manner, her silence, and her uncompromising attitude, as she walked by his side, cooled whatever ardour her beauty and the reflection that he had jockeyed Berkeley were calculated to arouse; and it was with an effort that he presently lessened the distance between them.

'Et vera incessu patuit dea!' he said, speaking in the tone between jest and earnest which he had used before. '"And all the goddess in her step appears." Which means that you have the prettiest walk in the world, my dear--but whither are you taking me?'

She went steadily on, not deigning an answer.

'But--my charmer, let us parley,' he remonstrated, striving to maintain a light tone. 'In a minute we shall be in the town and--'

'I thought that we understood one another,' she answered curtly, still continuing to walk, and to look straight before her; in which position her hood, hid her face. 'I am taking you where I want you.'

'Oh, very well,' he said, shrugging his shoulders. But under his breath he muttered, 'By heaven, I believe that the pretty fool really thinks--that I am going to fight for her!'

To a man who had supped at White's the night before, and knew his age to be the *âge des philosophes*, it seemed the wildest fancy in the world. And his distaste grew. But to

break off and leave her--at any rate until he had put it beyond question that she had no underthought--to break off and leave her after placing himself in a situation so humiliating, was too much for the pride of a Macaroni. The lines of her head and figure too, half guessed and half revealed, and wholly light and graceful, had caught his fancy and created a desire to subjugate her. Reluctantly, therefore, he continued to walk beside her, over Magdalen Bridge, and thence by a path which, skirting the city, ran across the low wooded meadows at the back of Merton.

A little to the right the squat tower of the college loomed against the lighter rack of clouds, and rising amid the dark lines of trees that beautify that part of the outskirts, formed a *coup d'oeil* sufficiently impressive. Here and there, in such of the chamber windows as looked over the meadows, lights twinkled cheerfully; emboldened by which, yet avoiding their scope, pairs of lovers of the commoner class sneaked to and fro under the trees. Whether the presence of these recalled early memories which Sir George's fastidiousness found unpalatable, or he felt his fashion, smirched by the vulgarity of this Venus-walk, his impatience grew; and was not far from bursting forth when his guide turned sharply into an alley behind the cathedral, and, after threading a lane of mean houses, entered a small court.

The place, though poor and narrow, was not squalid. Sir George could see so much by the light which shone from a window and fell on a group of five or six persons, who stood about the nearest door and talked in low, excited voices. He had a good view of one man's face, and read in it gloom and anger. Then the group made way for the girl, eyeing her, as

he thought, with pity and a sort of deference; and cursing the folly that had brought him into such a place and situation, wondering what on earth it all meant or in what it would end, he followed her into the house.

She opened a door on the right-hand side of the narrow passage, and led the way into a long, low room. For a moment he saw no more than two lights on a distant table, and kneeling at a chair beside them a woman with grey dishevelled hair, who seemed to be praying, her face hidden. Then his gaze, sinking instinctively, fell on a low bed between him and the woman; and there rested on a white sheet, and on the solemn outlines--so certain in their rigidity, so unmistakable by human eyes--of a body laid out for burial.

CHAPTER II

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A MISADVENTURE

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To be brought up short in an amorous quest by such a sight as that was a shock alike to Soane's better nature and his worse dignity. The former moved him to stand silent and abashed, the latter to ask with an indignant curse why he had been brought to that place. And the latter lower instinct prevailed. But when he raised his head to put the question with the necessary spirt of temper, he found that the girl had left his side and passed to the other hand of the dead; where, the hood thrown back from her face, she stood looking at him with such a gloomy fire in her eyes as it needed but a word, a touch, a glance to kindle into a blaze.

At the moment, however, he thought less of this than of the beauty of the face which he saw for the first time. It was a southern face, finely moulded, dark and passionate, full-lipped, yet wide of brow, with a generous breadth between the eyes. Seldom had he seen a woman more beautiful; and he stood silent, the words he had been about to speak dying stillborn on his lips.

Yet she seemed to understand them; she answered them. 'Why have I brought you here?' she cried, her voice trembling; and she pointed to the bed. 'Because he is--he was my father. And he lies there. And because the man who

killed him goes free. And I would--I would kill *him*! Do you hear me? I would kill him!'

Sir George tried to free his mind from the influence of her passion and her eyes, from the nightmare of the room and the body, and to see things in a sane light. 'But--my good girl,' he said, slowly and not unkindly, 'I know nothing about it. Nothing. I am a stranger here.'

'For that reason I brought you here,' she retorted.

'But--I cannot interfere,' he answered, shaking his head. 'There is the law. You must apply to it. The law will punish the man if he has done wrong.'

'But the law will *not* punish him!' she cried with scorn. 'The law? The law is your law, the law of the rich. And he'--she pointed to the bed--'was poor and a servant. And the man who killed him was his master. So he goes free--of the law!'

'But if he killed him?' Sir George muttered lamely.

'He did!' she cried between her teeth. 'And I would have you kill him!'

He shook his head. 'My good girl,' he said kindly, 'you are distraught. You are not yourself. Or you would know a gentleman does not do these things.'

'A gentleman!' she retorted, her smouldering rage flaming up at last. 'No; but I will tell you what he does. He kills a man to save his purse! Or his honour! Or for a mis-word at cards! Or the lie given in drink! He will run a man through in a dark room, with no one to see fair play! But for drawing his sword to help a woman, or avenge a wrong, a gentleman--a gentleman does not do these things. It is true! And may--'

'Oh, have done, have done, my dear!' cried a wailing, tearful voice; and Sir George, almost cowed by the girl's fierce words and the fiercer execration that was on her lips, hailed the intervention with relief. The woman whom he had seen on her knees had risen and now approached the girl, showing a face wrinkled, worn, and plain, but not ignoble; and for the time lifted above the commonplace by the tears that rained down it. 'Oh, my lovey, have done,' she cried. 'And let the gentleman go. To kill another will not help him that is dead. Nor us that are left alone!'

'It will not help him!' the girl answered, shrilly and wildly; and her eyes, leaving Soane, strayed round the room as if she were that moment awakened and missed some one. 'No! But is he to be murdered, and no one suffer? Is he to die and no one pay? He who had a smile for us, go in or out, and never a harsh word or thought; who never did any man wrong or wished any man ill? Yet he lies there! Oh, mother, mother,' she continued, her voice broken on a sudden by a tremor of pain, 'we are alone! We are alone! We shall never see him come in at that door again!'

The old woman sobbed helplessly and made no answer; on which the girl, with a gesture as simple as it was beautiful, drew the grey head to her shoulder. Then she looked at Sir George. 'Go,' she said; but he saw that the tears were welling up in her eyes, and that her frame was beginning to tremble. 'Go! I was not myself--a while ago--when I fetched you. Go, sir, and leave us.'

Moved by the abrupt change, as well as by her beauty, Sir George lingered; muttering that perhaps he could help her in another way. But she shook her head, once and again;

and, instinctively respecting the grief which had found at length its proper vent, he turned and, softly lifting the latch, went out into the court.

The night air cooled his brow, and recalled him to sober earnest and the eighteenth century. In the room which he had left, he had marked nothing out of the common except the girl. The mother, the furniture, the very bed on which the dead man lay, all were appropriate, and such as he would expect to find in the house of his under-steward. But the girl? The girl was gloriously handsome; and as eccentric as she was beautiful. Sir George's head turned and his eyes glowed as he thought of her. He considered what a story he could make of it at White's; and he put up his spying-glass, and looked through it to see if the towers of the cathedral still overhung the court. 'Gad, sir!' he said aloud, rehearsing the story, as much to get rid of an unfashionable sensation he had in his throat as in pure whimsy, 'I was surprised to find that it was Oxford. It should have been Granada, or Bagdad, or Florence! I give you my word, the houris that the Montagu saw in the Hammam at Stamboul were nothing to her!'

The persons through whom he had passed on his way to the door were still standing before the house. Glancing back when he had reached the mouth of the court, he saw that they were watching him; and, obeying a sudden impulse of curiosity, he turned on his heel and signed to the nearest to come to him. 'Here, my man,' he said, 'a word with you.'

The fellow moved towards him reluctantly, and with suspicion. 'Who is it lies dead there?' Sir George asked.

'Your honour knows,' the man answered cautiously.

'No, I don't.'

'Then you will be the only one in Oxford that does not,' the fellow replied, eyeing him oddly.

'Maybe,' Soane answered with impatience. 'Take it so, and answer the question,'

'It is Masterson, that was the porter at Pembroke.'

'Ah! And how did he die?'

'That is asking,' the man answered, looking shiftily about. 'And it is an ill business, and I want no trouble. Oh, well'--he continued, as Sir George put something in his hand--'thank your honour, I'll drink your health. Yes, it is Masterson, poor man, sure enough; and two days ago he was as well as you or I--saving your presence. He was on the gate that evening, and there was a supper on one of the staircases: all the bloods of the College, your honour will understand. About an hour before midnight the Master sent him to tell the gentlemen he could not sleep for the noise. After that it is not known just what happened, but the party had him in and gave him wine; and whether he went then and returned again when the company were gone is a question. Any way, he was found in the morning, cold and dead at the foot of the stairs, and his neck broken. It is said by some a trap was laid for him on the staircase. And if it was,' the man continued, after a pause, his true feeling finding sudden vent, 'it is a black shame that the law does not punish it! But the coroner brought it in an accident.'

Sir George shrugged his shoulders. Then, moved by curiosity and a desire to learn something about the girl, 'His daughter takes it hardly,' he said.

The man grunted. 'Ah,' he said, 'maybe she has need to. Your honour does not come from him?'

'From Whom? I come from no one.'

'To be sure, sir, I was forgetting. But, seeing you with her--but there, you are a stranger.'

Soane would have liked to ask him his meaning, but felt that he had condescended enough. He bade the man a curt good-night, therefore, and turning away passed quickly into St. Aldate's Street. Thence it was but a step to the Mitre, where he found his baggage and servant awaiting him.

In those days distinctions of dress were still clear and unmistakable. Between the peruke--often forty guineas' worth--the tie-wig, the scratch, and the man who went content with a little powder, the intervals were measurable. Ruffles cost five pounds a pair; and velvets and silks, cut probably in Paris, were morning wear. Moreover, the dress of the man who lost or won his thousand in a night at Almack's, and was equally well known at Madame du Deffand's in Paris and at Holland House, differed as much from the dress of the ordinary well-to-do gentleman as that again differed from the lawyer's or the doctor's. The Mitre, therefore, saw in Sir George a very fine gentleman indeed, set him down to an excellent supper in its best room, and promised a post-chaise-and-four for the following morning--all with much bowing and scraping, and much mention of my lord to whose house he would post. For in those days, if a fine gentleman was a very fine gentleman, a peer was also a peer. Quite recently they had ventured to hang one; but with apologies, a landau-and-six, and a silken halter.

Sir George would not have had the least pretension to be the glass of fashion and the mould of form, which St. James's Street considered him, if he had failed to give a large share of his thoughts while he supped to the beautiful woman he had quitted. He knew very well what steps Lord March or Tom Hervey would take, were either in his place; and though he had no greater taste for an irregular life than became a man in his station who was neither a Methodist nor Lord Dartmouth, he allowed his thoughts to dwell, perhaps longer than was prudent, on the girl's perfections, and on what might have been were his heart a little harder, or the not over-rigid rule which he observed a trifle less stringent. The father was dead. The girl was poor: probably her ideal of a gallant was a College beau, in second-hand lace and stained linen, drunk on ale in the forenoon. Was it likely that the fortress would hold out long, or that the maiden's heart would prove to be more obdurate than Danäe's?

Soane, considering these things and his self-denial, grew irritable over his Chambertin. He pictured Lord March's friend, the Rena, and found this girl immeasurably before her. He painted the sensation she would make and the fashion he could give her, and vowed that she was a Gunning with sense and wit added; to sum up all, he blamed himself for a saint and a Scipio. Then, late as it was, he sent for the landlord, and to get rid of his thoughts, or in pursuance of them, inquired of that worthy if Mr. Thomasson was in residence at Pembroke.

'Yes, Sir George, he is,' the landlord answered; and asked if he should send for his reverence.

'No,' Soane commanded. 'If there is a chair to be had, I will go to him.'

'There is one below, at your honour's service. And the men are waiting.'

So Sir George, with the landlord, lighting him and his man attending with his cloak, descended the stairs in state, entered the sedan, and was carried off to Pembroke.

CHAPTER III

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TUTOR AND PUPILS--OLD STYLE

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Doctor Samuel Johnson, of Johnson's Court, Fleet Street, had at this time some name in the world; but not to the pitch that persons entering Pembroke College hastened to pay reverence to the second floor over the gateway, which he had vacated thirty years earlier--as persons do now. Their gaze, as a rule, rose no higher than the first-floor oriel, where the shapely white shoulder of a Parian statue, enhanced by a background of dark-blue silken hanging, caught the wandering eye. What this lacked of luxury and mystery was made up--almost to the Medmenham point in the eyes of the city--by the gleam of girandoles, and the glow, rather felt than seen, of Titian-copies in Florence frames. Sir George, borne along in his chair, peered up at this well-known window--well-known, since in the Oxford of 1767 a man's rooms were furnished if he had tables and chairs, store of beef and October, an apple-pie and Common Room port--and seeing the casement brilliantly lighted, smiled a trifle contemptuously.

'The Reverend Frederick is not much changed,' he muttered. 'Lord, what a beast it was! And how we hazed him! Ah! At home, is he?'--this to the servant, as the man lifted the head of the chair. 'Yes, I will go up.'

To tell the truth, the Reverend Frederick Thomasson had so keen a scent for Gold Tufts or aught akin to them, that it would have been strange if the instinct had not kept him at home; as a magnet, though unseen, attracts the needle. The same prepossession brought him, as soon as he heard of his visitor's approach, hurrying to the head of the stairs; where, if he had had his way, he would have clasped the baronet in his arms, slobbered over him, after the mode of Paris--for that was a trick of his--and perhaps even wept on his shoulder. But Soane, who knew his ways, coolly defeated the manoeuvre by fending him off with his cane; and the Reverend Frederick was reduced to raising his eyes and hands to heaven in token of the joy which filled him at the sight of his old pupil.

'Lord! Sir George, I am inexpressibly happy!' he cried. 'My dear sir, my very dear sir, welcome to my poor rooms! This is joy indeed! Gaudeamus! Gaudeamus! To see you once more, fresh from the groves of Arthur's and the scenes of your triumphs! Pardon me, my dear sir, I must and will shake you by the hand again!' And succeeding at last in seizing Sir George's hand, he fondled and patted it in both of his--which were fat and white--the while with every mark of emotion he led him into the room.

'Gad!' said Sir George, standing and looking round. 'And where is she, Tommy?'

'That old name! What a pleasure it is to hear it!' cried the tutor, affecting to touch his eyes with the corner of a dainty handkerchief; as if the gratification he mentioned were too much for his feelings.

'But, seriously, Tommy, where is she?' Soane persisted, still looking round with a grin.

'My dear Sir George! My honoured friend! But you would always have your joke.'

'And, plainly, Tommy, is all this frippery yours?'

'Tut, tut!' Mr. Thomasson remonstrated. 'And no man with a finer taste. I have heard Mr. Walpole say that with a little training no man would excel Sir George Soane as a connoisseur. An exquisite eye! A nice discrimination! A--'

'Now, Tommy, to how many people have you said that?' Sir George retorted, dropping into a chair, and coolly staring about him. 'But, there, have done, and tell me about yourself. Who is the last sprig of nobility you have been training in the way it should grow?'

'The last pupil who honoured me,' the Reverend Frederick answered, 'as you are so kind as to ask after my poor concerns, Sir George, was my Lord E----'s son. We went to Paris, Marseilles, Genoa, Florence; visited the mighty monuments of Rome, and came home by way of Venice, Milan, and Turin. I treasure the copy of Tintoretto which you see there, and these bronzes, as memorials of my lord's munificence. I brought them back with me.'

'And what did my lord's son bring back?' Sir George asked, cruelly. 'A Midianitish woman?'

'My honoured friend!' Mr. Thomasson remonstrated. 'But your wit was always mordant--mordant! Too keen for us poor folk!'

'D'ye remember the inn at Cologne, Tommy?' Sir George continued, mischievously reminiscent. 'And Lord Tony arriving with his charmer? And you giving up your room to

her? And the trick we played you at Calais, where we passed the little French dancer on you for Madame la Marquise de Personne?'

Mr. Thomasson winced, and a tinge of colour rose in his fat pale face. 'Boys, boys!' he said, with an airy gesture. 'You had an uncommon fancy even then, Sir George, though you were but a year from school! Ah, those were charming days! Great days!'

'And nights!' said Sir George, lying back in his chair and looking at the other with eyes half shut, and insolence half veiled. 'Do you remember the faro bank at Florence, Tommy, and the three hundred livres you lost to that old harridan, Lady Harrington? Pearls cast before swine you styled them, I remember.'

'Lord, Sir George!' Mr. Thomasson cried, vastly horrified. 'How can you say such a thing? Your excellent memory plays you false.'

'It does,' Soane answered, smiling sardonically. 'I remember. It was seed sown for the harvest, you called it--in your liquor. And that touches me. Do you mind the night Fitzhugh made you so prodigiously drunk at Bonn, Tommy? And we put you in the kneading-trough, and the servants found you and shifted you to the horse-trough? Gad! you would have died of laughter if you could have seen yourself when we rescued you, lank and dripping, with your wig like a sponge!'

'It must have been--uncommonly diverting!' the Reverend Frederick stammered; and he smiled widely, but with a lack of heart. This time there could be no doubt of the pinkness that overspread his face.

'Diverting? I tell you it would have made old Dartmouth laugh!' Sir George said, bluntly.

'Ha, ha! Perhaps it would. Perhaps it would. Not that I have the honour of his lordship's acquaintance.'

'No? Well, he would not suit you, Tommy. I would not seek it.'

The Reverend Frederick looked doubtful, as weighing the possibility of anything that bore the name of lord being alien from him. From this reflection, however, he was roused by a new sally on Soane's part. 'But, crib me! you are very fine to-night, Mr. Thomasson,' he said, staring about him afresh. 'Ten o'clock, and you are lighted as for a drum! What is afoot?'

The tutor smirked and rubbed his hands. 'Well, I--I was expecting a visitor, Sir George.'

'Ah, you dog! She is not here, but you are expecting her.'

Mr. Thomasson grinned; the jest flattered him. Nevertheless he hastened to exonerate himself. 'It is not Venus I am expecting, but Mars,' he said with a simper. 'The Honourable Mr. Dunborough, son to my Lord Dunborough, and the same whose meritorious services at the Havanna you, my dear friend, doubtless remember. He is now cultivating in peace the gifts which in war--'

'Sufficed to keep him out of danger!' Sir George said bluntly. 'So he is your last sprig, is he? He should be well seasoned.'

'He is four-and-twenty,' Mr. Thomasson answered, pluming himself and speaking in his softest tones. 'And the most charming, I assure you, the most debonair of men. But do I hear a noise?'