

**ARTHUR
QUILLER-COUCH**



**THE SPLENDID
SPUR**

Arthur Quiller-Couch

The Splendid Spur

**Being Memoirs of the Adventures of Mr. John Marvel,
a Servant of His Late Majesty King Charles I, in the
Years 1642-3**

EAN 8596547235323

DigiCat, 2022

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CHAPTER I. — THE BOWLING-GREEN OF THE “CROWN.”

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He that has jilted the Muse, forsaking her gentle pipe to follow the drum and trumpet, shall fruitlessly besiege her again when the time comes to sit at home and write down his adventures. 'Tis her revenge, as I am extremely sensible: and methinks she is the harder to me, upon reflection how near I came to being her lifelong servant, as you are to hear.

'Twas on November 29th, Ao. 1642—a clear, frosty day—that the King, with the Prince of Wales (newly recovered of the measles), the Princes Rupert and Maurice, and a great company of lords and gentlemen, horse and foot, came marching back to us from Reading. I was a scholar of Trinity College in Oxford at that time, and may begin my history at three o'clock on the same afternoon, when going (as my custom was) to Mr. Rob. Drury for my fencing lesson, I found his lodgings empty.

They stood at the corner of Ship Street, as you turn into the Corn Market—a low wainscoted chamber, ill-lighted but commodious. “He is off to see the show,” thought I as I looked about me; and finding an easy cushion in the

window, sat down to await him. Where presently, being tired out (for I had been carrying a halberd all day with the scholars' troop in Magdalen College Grove), and in despite of the open lattice, I fell sound asleep.

It must have been an hour after that I awoke with a chill (as was natural), and was stretching out a hand to pull the window close, but suddenly sat down again and fell to watching instead.

The window look'd down, at the height of ten feet or so, upon a bowling-green at the back of the "Crown" Tavern (kept by John Davenant, in the Corn Market), and across it to a rambling wing of the same inn; the fourth side—that to my left—being but an old wall, with a broad sycamore growing against it. 'Twas already twilight; and in the dark'ning house, over the green, was now one casement brightly lit, the curtains undrawn, and within a company of noisy drinkers round a table. They were gaming, as was easily told by their clicking of the dice and frequent oaths: and anon the bellow of some tipsy chorus would come across. 'Twas one of these catches, I dare say, that woke me: only just now my eyes were bent, not toward the singers, but on the still lawn between us.

The sycamore, I have hinted, was a broad tree, and must, in summer, have borne a goodly load of leaves: but now, in November, these were strewn thick over the green, and nothing left but stiff, naked boughs. Beneath it lay a crack'd bowl or two on the rank turf, and against the trunk a garden bench rested, I suppose for the convenience of the players. On this a man was now seated.

He was reading in a little book; and this first jogged my curiosity: for 'twas unnatural a man should read print at this dim hour, or, if he had a mind to try, should choose a cold bowling-green for his purpose. Yet he seemed to study his volume very attentively, but with a sharp look, now and then, toward the lighted window, as if the revellers disturb'd him. His back was partly turn'd to me; and what with this and the growing dusk, I could but make a guess at his face: but a plenty of silver hair fell over his fur collar, and his shoulders were bent a great deal. I judg'd him between fifty and sixty. For the rest, he wore a dark, simple suit, very straitly cut, with an ample furr'd cloak, and a hat rather tall, after the fashion of the last reign.

Now, why the man's behavior so engaged me, I don't know: but at the end of half an hour I was still watching him. By this, 'twas near dark, bitter cold, and his pretence to read mere fondness: yet he persevered—though with longer glances at the casement above, where the din at times was fit to wake the dead.

And now one of the dicers upsets his chair with a curse, and gets on his feet. Looking up, I saw his features for a moment—a slight, pretty boy, scarce above eighteen, with fair curls and flush'd cheeks like a girl's. It made me admire to see him in this ring of purple, villainous faces. 'Twas evident he was a young gentleman of quality, as well by his bearing as his handsome cloak of amber satin barr'd with black. “I think the devil's in these dice!” I heard him crying, and a pretty hubbub all about him: but presently the drawer enters with more wine, and he sits down quietly to a fresh game.

As soon as 'twas started, one of the crew, that had been playing but was now dropp'd out, lounges up from his seat, and coming to the casement pushes it open for fresh air. He was one that till now had sat in full view—a tall bully, with a gross pimpled nose; and led the catches in a bull's voice. The rest of the players paid no heed to his rising; and very soon his shoulders hid them, as he lean'd out, drawing in the cold breath.

During the late racket I had forgot for a while my friend under the sycamore, but now, looking that way, to my astonishment I saw him risen from his bench and stealing across to the house opposite. I say “stealing,” for he kept all the way to the darker shadow of the wall, and besides had a curious trailing motion with his left foot as though the ankle of it had been wrung or badly hurt.

As soon as he was come beneath the window he stopped and called softly—

“Hist!”

The bully gave a start and look'd down. I could tell by this motion he did not look to find anyone in the bowling-green at that hour. Indeed he had been watching the shaft of light thrown past him by the room behind, and now moved so as to let it fall on the man that addressed him.

The other stands close under the window, as if to avoid this, and calls again—

“Hist!” says he, and beckons with a finger.

The man at the window still held his tongue (I suppose because those in the room would hear him if he spoke), and so for a while the two men studied one another in silence, as if considering their next moves.

After a bit, however, the bully lifted a hand, and turning back into the lighted room, walks up to one of the players, speaks a word or two and disappears.

I sat up on the window seat, where till now I had been crouching for fear the shaft of light should betray me, and presently (as I was expecting) heard the latch of the back perch gently lifted, and spied the heavy form of the bully coming softly over the grass.

Now, I would not have my readers prejudiced, and so may tell them this was the first time in my life I had played the eavesdropper. That I did so now I can never be glad enough, but 'tis true, nevertheless, my conscience pricked me; and I was even making a motion to withdraw when that occurred which would have fixed any man's attention, whether he wish'd it or no.

The bully must have closed the door behind him but carelessly, for hardly could he take a dozen steps when it opened again with a scuffle, and the large house dog belonging to the "Crown" flew at his heels with a vicious snarl and snap of the teeth.

'Twas enough to scare the coolest. But the fellow turn'd as if shot, and before he could snap again, had gripped him fairly by the throat. The struggle that follow'd I could barely see, but I heard the horrible sounds of it—the hard, short breathing of the man, the hoarse rage working in the dog's throat—and it turned me sick. The dog—a mastiff—was fighting now to pull loose, and the pair swayed this way and that in the dusk, panting and murderous.

I was almost shouting aloud—feeling as though 'twere my own throat thus gripp'd—when the end came. The man

had his legs planted well apart.

I saw his shoulders heave up and bend as he tightened the pressure of his fingers; then came a moment's dead silence, then a hideous gurgle, and the mastiff dropped back, his hind legs trailing limp.

The bully held him so for a full minute, peering close to make sure he was dead, and then without loosening his hold, dragged him across the grass under my window. By the sycamore he halted, but only to shift his hands a little; and so, swaying on his hips, sent the carcass with a heave over the wall. I heard it drop with a thud on the far side.

During this fierce wrestle—which must have lasted about two minutes—the clatter and shouting of the company above had gone on without a break; and all this while the man with the white hair had rested quietly on one side, watching. But now he steps up to where the bully stood mopping his face (for all the coolness of the evening), and, with a finger between the leaves of his book, bows very politely.

“You handled that dog, sir, choicely well,” says he, in a thin voice that seemed to have a chuckle hidden in it somewhere.

The other ceased mopping to get a good look at him.

“But sure,” he went on, “’twas hard on the poor cur, that had never heard of Captain Lucius Higgs—”

I thought the bully would have had him by the windpipe and pitched him after the mastiff, so fiercely he turn'd at the sound of this name. But the old gentleman skipped back quite nimbly and held up a finger.

“I'm a man of peace. If another title suits you better—”

“Where the devil got you that name?” growled the bully, and had half a mind to come on again, but the other put in briskly—

“I’m on a plain errand of business. No need, as you hint, to mention names; and therefore let me present myself as Mr. Z. The residue of the alphabet is at your service to pick and choose from.”

“My name is Luke Settle,” said the big man hoarsely (but whether this was his natural voice or no I could not tell).

“Let us say ‘Mr. X.’ I prefer it.”

The old gentleman, as he said this, popped his head on one side, laid the forefinger of his right hand across the book, and seem’d to be considering.

“Why did you throttle that dog a minute ago?” he asked sharply.

“Why, to save my skin,” answers the fellow, a bit puzzled.

“Would you have done it for fifty pounds?”

“Aye, or half that.”

“And how if it had been a *puppy*, Mr. X?”

Now all this from my hiding I had heard very clearly, for they stood right under me in the dusk. But as the old gentleman paused to let his question sink in, and the bully to catch the drift of it before answering, one of the dicers above struck up to sing a catch——

“With a hey, trolly-lolly! a leg to the Devil,
And answer him civil, and off with your cap:
Sing—Hey, trolly-lolly! Good-morrow, Sir Evil,
We’ve finished the tap,
And, saving your worship, we care not a rap!”

While this din continued, the stranger held up one forefinger again, as if beseeching silence, the other remaining still between the pages of his book.

“Pretty boys!” he said, as the noise died away; “pretty boys! 'Tis easily seen they have a bird to pluck.”

“He's none of my plucking.”

“And if he were, why not? Sure you've picked a feather or two before now in the Low Countries—hey?”

“I'll tell you what,” interrupts the big man, “next time you crack one of your death's-head jokes, over the wall you go after the dog. What's to prevent it?”

“Why, this,” answers the old fellow, cheerfully. “There's money to be made by doing no such thing. And I don't carry it all about with me. So, as 'tis late, we'd best talk business at once.”

They moved away toward the seat under the sycamore, and now their words reached me no longer—only the low murmur of their voices or (to be correct) of the elder man's: for the other only spoke now and then, to put a question, as it seemed. Presently I heard an oath rapped out and saw the bully start up. “Hush, man!” cried the other, and “hark-ye now—”; so he sat down again. Their very forms were lost within the shadow. I, myself, was cold enough by this time and had a cramp in one leg—but lay still, nevertheless. And after awhile they stood up together, and came pacing across the bowling-green, side by side, the older man trailing his foot painfully to keep step. You may be sure I strain'd my ears.

“—besides the pay,” the stranger was saying, “there's all you can win of this young fool, Anthony, and all you find on

the pair, which I'll wager—”

They passed out of hearing, but turned soon, and came back again. The big man was speaking this time.

“I'll be shot if I know what game *you're* playing in this.”

The elder chuckled softly. “I'll be shot if I mean you to,” said he.

And this was the last I heard. For now there came a clattering at the door behind me, and Mr. Robert Drury reeled in, hiccuping a maudlin ballad about “*Tib and young Colin, one fine day, beneath the haycock shade-a,*” &c., &c., and cursing to find his fire gone out, and all in darkness. Liquor was ever his master, and to-day the King's health had been a fair excuse. He did not spy me, but the roar of his ballad had startled the two men outside, and so, while he was stumbling over chairs, and groping for a tinder-box, I slipp'd out in the darkness, and downstairs into the street.

CHAPTER II. — THE YOUNG MAN IN THE CLOAK OF AMBER SATIN,

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Guess, any of you, if these events disturbed my rest that night. 'Twas four o'clock before I dropp'd asleep in my bed in Trinity, and my last thoughts were still busy with the words I had heard. Nor, on the morrow, did it fair any better with me: so that, at rhetoric lecture, our president—Dr. Ralph Kettle—took me by the ears before the whole class. He was the fiercer upon me as being older than the gross of my fellow-scholars, and (as he thought) the more restless under discipline. “A tutor'd adolescence,” he would say, “is a fair grace before meat,” and had his hourglass enlarged to point the moral for us. But even a rhetoric lecture must have an end, and so, tossing my gown to the porter, I set off at last for Magdalen Bridge, where the new barricado was building, along the Physic Garden, in front of East Gate.

The day was dull and low'ring, though my wits were too busy to heed the sky; but scarcely was I past the small gate in the city wall when a brisk shower of hail and sleet drove me to shelter in the Pig Market (or *Proscholium*) before the Divinity School. 'Tis an ample vaulted passage, as I dare say you know; and here I found a great company of people already driven by the same cause.

To describe them fully 'twould be necessary to paint the whole state of our city in those distracted times, which I have neither wit nor time for. But here, to-day, along with many doctors and scholars, were walking courtiers, troopers, mountebanks, cut-purses, astrologers, rogues and

gamesters; together with many of the first ladies and gentlemen of England, as the Prince Maurice, the lords Andover, Digby and Colepepper, my lady Thynne, Mistress Fanshawe, Mr. Secretary Nicholas, the famous Dr. Harvey, arm-in-arm with my lord Falkland (whose boots were splash'd with mud, he having ridden over from his house at Great Tew), and many such, all mix'd in this incredible tag-rag. Mistress Fanshawe, as I remember, was playing on a lute, which she carried always slung about her shoulders: and close beside her, a fellow impudently puffing his specific against the *morbis campestris*, which already had begun to invade us.

"Who'll buy?" he was bawling. *"'Tis from the receipt of a famous Italian, and never yet failed man, woman, nor child, unless the heart were clean drown'd in the disease: the best part of it good muscadine, and has virtue against the plague, smallpox, or surfeits!"*

I was standing before this jackanapes, when I heard a stir in the crowd behind me, and another calling, *"Who'll buy? Who'll buy?"*

Turning, I saw a young man, very gaily dressed, moving quickly about at the far end of the Pig Market, and behind him an old lackey, bent double with the weight of two great baskets that he carried. The baskets were piled with books, clothes, and gewgaws of all kinds; and 'twas the young gentleman that hawked his wares himself. *"What d'ye lack?"* he kept shouting, and would stop to unfold his merchandise, holding up now a book, and now a silk doublet, and running over their merits like any huckster—but with the merriest conceit in the world.

And yet 'twas not this that sent my heart flying into my mouth at the sight of him. For by his curls and womanish face, no less than the amber cloak with the black bars, I knew him at once for the same I had seen yesterday among the dicers.

As I stood there, drawn this way and that by many reflections, he worked his way through the press, selling here and there a trifle from his baskets, and at length came to a halt in front of me.

“Ha!” he cried, pulling off his plumed hat, and bowing low, “a scholar, I perceive. Let me serve you, sir. Here is the ‘History of Saint George,’” and he picked out a thin brown quarto and held it up; “written by Master Peter Heylin; a ripe book they tell me (though, to be sure, I never read beyond the title), and the price a poor two shillings.”

{Illustration: “A scholar, I perceive. Let me serve you sir?”—Page 30.}

Now, all this while I was considering what to do. So, as I put my hand in my pocket, and drew out the shillings, I said very slowly, looking him in the eyes (but softly, so that the lackey might not hear)——

“So thus you feed your expenses at the dice: and my shilling, no doubt, is for Luke Settle, as well as the rest.”

For the moment, under my look, he went white to the lips; then clapped his hand to his sword, withdrew it, and answered me, red as a turkey-cock—

“Shalt be a parson, yet, Master Scholar: but art in a damn'd hurry, it seems.”

Now, I had ever a quick temper, and as he turned on his heel, was like to have replied and raised a brawl. My own

meddling tongue had brought the rebuff upon me: but yet my heart was hot as he walked away.

I was standing there and looking after him, turning over in my hand the "Life of Saint George," when my fingers were aware of a slip of paper between the pages. Pulling it out, I saw 'twas scribbled over with writing and figures, as follows:—

"Mr. Anthony Killigrew, his acct for Oct. 25th, MDCXLII.—
For herrings, 2d.; for coffie, 4d.; for scowring my coat, 6d.; at bowls, 5s. 10d.; for bleading me, 1s. 0d.; for ye King's speech, 3d.; for spic'd wine (with Marjory), 2s. 4d.; for seeing ye Rhinoceros, 4d.; at ye Ranter-go-round, 6 3/4d.; for a pair of silver buttons, 2s. 6d.; for apples, 2 1/2d.; for ale, 6d.; at ye dice, L17 5s.; for spic'd wine (again), 4s. 6d."

And so on.

As I glanced my eye down this paper, my anger oozed away, and a great feeling of pity came over me, not only at the name of Anthony—the name I had heard spoken in the bowling-green last night—but also to see that monstrous item of L17 odd spent on the dice. 'Twas such a boy, too, after all, that I was angry with, that had spent fourpence to see the rhinoceros at a fair, and rode on the ranter-go-round (with "Marjory," no doubt, as 'twas for her, no doubt, the silver buttons were bought). So that, with quick forgiveness, I hurried after him, and laid a hand on his shoulder.

He stood by the entrance, counting up his money, and drew himself up very stiff.

"I think, sir," said I, "this paper is yours."

"I thank you," he answered, taking it, and eyeing me. "Is there anything, besides, you wished to say?"

“A great deal, maybe, if your name be Anthony.”

“Master Anthony Killigrew is my name, sir; now serving under Lord Bernard Stewart in His Majesty's troop of guards.”

“And mine is Jack Marvel,” said I. — “Of the Yorkshire Marvels?”

“Why, yes; though but a shoot of that good stock, transplanted to Cumberland, and there sadly withered.”

“’Tis no matter, sir,” said he politely; “I shall be proud to cross swords with you.”

“Why, bless your heart!” I cried out, full of laughter at this childish punctilio; “d’ye think I came to fight you?”

“If not, sir”—and he grew colder than ever—“you are going a cursed roundabout way to avoid it.”

Upon this, finding no other way out of it, I began my tale at once: but hardly had come to the meeting of the two men on the bowling-green, when he interrupts me politely——

“I think, Master Marvel, as yours is like to be a story of some moment, I will send this fellow back to my lodgings. He's a long-ear'd dog that I am saving from the gallows for so long as my conscience allows me. The shower is done, I see; so if you know of a retir'd spot, we will talk there more at our leisure.”

He dismiss'd his lackey, and stroll'd off with me to the Trinity Grove, where, walking up and down, I told him all I had heard and seen the night before.

“And now,” said I, “can you tell me if you have any such enemy as this white-hair'd man, with the limping gait?”

He had come to a halt, sucking in his lips and seeming to reflect—

“I know one man,” he began: “but no—'tis impossible.”

As I stood, waiting to hear more, he clapp'd his hand in mine, very quick and friendly: “Jack,” he cried;—“I'll call thee Jack—'twas an honest good turn thou hadst in thy heart to do me, and I a surly rogue to think of fighting—that could make mincemeat of thee.”

“I can fence a bit,” answer'd I. — “Now, say no more, Jack: I love thee.”

He look'd in my face, still holding my hand and smiling. Indeed, there was something of the foreigner in his brisk graceful ways—yet not displeasing. I was going to say I had never seen the like—ah, me! that both have seen and know the twin image so well.

“I think,” said I, “you had better be considering what to do.”

He laugh'd outright this time; and resting with his legs cross'd, against the trunk of an elm, twirl'd an end of his long lovelocks, and looked at me comically. Said he: “Tell me, Jack, is there aught in me that offends thee?”

“Why, no,” I answered. “I think you're a very proper young man—such as I should loathe to see spoil'd by Master Settle's knife.”

“Art not quick at friendship, Jack, but better at advising; only in this case fortune has prevented thy good offices. Hark ye,” he lean'd forward and glanc'd to right and left, “if these twain intend my hurt—as indeed 'twould seem—they lose their labor: for this very night I ride from Oxford.”

“And why is that?”

“I'll tell thee, Jack, tho' I deserve to be shot. I am bound with a letter from His Majesty to the Army of the West,

where I have friends, for my father's sake—Sir Deakin Killigrew of Gleys, in Cornwall. 'Tis a sweet country, they say, tho' I have never seen it."

"Not seen thy father's country?"

"Why no—for he married a Frenchwoman, Jack, God rest her dear soul!"—he lifted his hat—"and settled in that country, near Morlaix, in Brittany, among my mother's kin; my grandfather refusing to see or speak with him, for wedding a poor woman without his consent. And in France was I born and bred, and came to England two years agone; and this last July the old curmudgeon died. So that my father, who was an only son, is even now in England returning to his estates: and with him my only sister Delia. I shall meet them on the way. To think of it!" (and I declare the tears sprang to his eyes): "Delia will be a woman grown, and ah! to see dear Cornwall together!"

Now I myself was only a child, and had been made an orphan when but nine years old, by the smallpox that visited our home in Wastdale Village, and carried off my father, the Vicar, and my dear mother. Yet his simple words spoke to my heart and woke so tender a yearning for the small stone cottage, and the bridge, and the grey fells of Yewbarrow above it, that a mist rose in my eyes too, and I turn'd away to hide it.

"'Tis a ticklish business," said I after a minute, "to carry the King's letter. Not one in four of his messengers comes through, they say. But since it keeps you from the dice——"

"That's true. To-night I make an end."

"To-night!"

“Why, yes. To-night I go for my revenge, and ride straight from the inn door.”

“Then I go with you to the 'Crown,'" I cried, very positive.

He dropp'd playing with his curl, and look'd me in the face, his mouth twitching with a queer smile.

“And so thou shalt Jack: but why?”

“I'll give no reason," said I, and knew I was blushing.

“Then be at the corner of All Hallows' Church in Turl Street at seven to-night. I lodge over Master Simon's, the glover, and must be about my affairs. Jack,"—he came near and took my hand—“am sure thou lovest me.”

He nodded, with another cordial smile, and went his way up the grove, his amber cloak flaunting like a belated butterfly under the leaf less trees; and so pass'd out of my sight.



CHAPTER III. — I FIND MYSELF IN A TAVERN BRAWL: AND BARELY ESCAPE.

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It wanted, maybe, a quarter to seven, that evening, when, passing out at the College Gate on my way to All Hallows' Church, I saw under the lantern there a man loitering and talking with the porter. 'Twas Master Anthony's lackey; and as I came up, he held out a note for me.

Deare Jack

Wee goe to the "Crowne" at VI. o'clock, I having mett with Captain Settle, who is on dewty with the horse tonite, and must to Abendonn by IX. I looke for you—

Your unfayned loving

A. K.

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The bearer has left my servise, and his helth conserus me nott. Soe kik him if he tarrie.

This last advice I had no time to carry out with any thoroughness: but being put in a great dread by this change of hour, pelted off toward the Corn Market as fast as legs could take me, which was the undoing of a little round citizen into whom I ran full tilt at the corner of Balliol College: who, before I could see his face in the darkness,

was tipp'd on his back in the gutter and using the most dismal expressions. So I left him, considering that my excuses would be unsatisfying to his present demands, and to his cooler judgment a superfluity.

The windows of the "Crown" were cheerfully lit behind their red blinds. A few straddling grooms and troopers talked and spat in the brightness of the entrance, and outside in the street was a servant leading up and down a beautiful sorrel mare, ready saddled, that was mark'd on the near hind leg with a high white stocking. In the passage, I met the host of the "Crown," Master John Davenant, and sure (I thought) in what odd corners will the Muse pick up her favorites! For this slow, loose-cheek'd vintner was no less than father to Will Davenant, our Laureate, and had belike read no other verse in his life but those at the bottom of his own pint-pots.

"Top of the stairs," says he, indicating my way, "and open the door ahead of you, if y'are the young gentleman Master Killigrew spoke of."

I had my foot on the bottom step, when from the room above comes the crash of a table upsetting, with a noise of broken glass, chairs thrust back, and a racket of outcries. Next moment, the door was burst open, letting out a flood of light and curses; and down flies a drawer, three steps at a time, with a red stain of wine trickling down his white face.

"Murder!" he gasped out; and sitting down on a stair, fell to mopping his face, all sick and trembling.

I was dashing past him, with the landlord at my heels, when three men came tumbling out at the door, and downstairs. I squeezed myself against the wall to let them

pass: but Master Davenant was pitch'd to the very foot of the stairs. And then he picked himself up and ran out into the Corn Market, the drawer after him, and both shouting "Watch! Watch!" at the top of their lungs; and so left the three fellows to push by the women already gathered in the passage, and gain the street at their ease. All this happen'd while a man could count twenty; and in half a minute I heard the ring of steel and was standing in the doorway.

There was now no light within but what was shed by the fire and two tallow candles that gutter'd on the mantelshelf. The remaining candlesticks lay in a pool of wine on the floor, amid broken glasses, bottles, scattered coins, dice boxes and pewter pots. In the corner to my right cower'd a potboy, with tankard dangling in his hand, and the contents spilling into his shoes. His wide terrified eyes were fix'd on the far end of the room, where Anthony and the brute Settle stood, with a shattered chair between them. Their swords were cross'd in tierce, and grating together as each sought occasion for a lunge: which might have been fair enough but for a dog-fac'd trooper in a frowsy black periwig, who, as I enter'd, was gathering a handful of coins from under the fallen table, and now ran across, sword in hand, to the Captain's aid.

'Twas Anthony that fac'd me, with his heel against the wainscoting, and, catching my cry of alarm, he call'd out cheerfully over the Captain's shoulder, but without lifting his eyes—

"Just in time, Jack! Take off the second cur, that's a sweet boy!"

Now I carried no sword; but seizing the tankard from the potboy's hand, I hurl'd it at the dog-fac'd trooper. It struck him fair between the shoulder blades; and with a yell of pain he spun round and came toward me, his point glittering in a way that turn'd me cold. I gave back a pace, snatch'd up a chair (that luckily had a wooden seat) and with my back against the door, waited his charge.

'Twas in this posture that, flinging a glance across the room, I saw the Captain's sword describe a small circle of light, and next moment, with a sharp cry, Anthony caught at the blade, and stagger'd against the wall, pinn'd through the chest to the wainscoting.

“Out with the lights, Dick!” bawl'd Settle, tugging out his point. “Quick, fool—the window!”

Dick, with a back sweep of his hand, sent the candles flying off the shelf; and, save for the flicker of the hearth, we were in darkness. I felt, rather than saw, his rush toward me; leap'd aside; and brought down my chair with a crash on his skull. He went down like a ninepin, but scrambled up in a trice, and was running for the window.

There was a shout below as the Captain thrust the lattice open: another, and the two dark forms had clambered through the purple square of the casement, and dropped into the bowling-green below.

By this, I had made my way across the room, and found Anthony sunk against the wall, with his feet outstretched. There was something he held out toward me, groping for my hand and at the same time whispering in a thick, choking voice—

“Here, Jack, here: pocket it quick!”

'Twas a letter, and as my fingers closed on it they met a damp smear, the meaning of which was but too plain.

“Button it—sharp—in thy breast: now feel for my sword.”

“First let me tend thy hurt, dear lad.”

“Nay—quickly, my sword! 'Tis pretty, Jack, to hear thee say 'dear lad.' A cheat to die like this—could have laugh'd for years yet. The dice were cogg'd—hast found it?”

I groped beside him, found the hilt, and held it up.

“So—'tis thine, Jack: and my mare, Molly, and the letter to take. Say to Delia—Hark! they are on the stairs. Say to—”

With a shout the door was flung wide, and on the threshold stood the Watch, their lanterns held high and shining in Anthony's white face, and on the black stain where his doublet was thrown open.

In numbers they were six or eight, led by a small, wrynecked man that held a long staff, and wore a gilt chain over his furr'd collar. Behind, in the doorway, were huddled half a dozen women, peering: and Master Davenant at the back of all, his great face looming over their shoulders like a moon.

“Now, speak up, Master Short!”

“Aye, that I will—that I will: but my head is considering of affairs,” answered Master Short—he of the wryneck. “One, two, three—” He look'd round the room, and finding but one capable of resisting (for the potboy was by this time in a fit), clear'd his throat, and spoke up—

“In the king's name, I arrest you all—so help me God! Now what's the matter?”

“Murder,” said I, looking up from my work of staunching Anthony's wound.