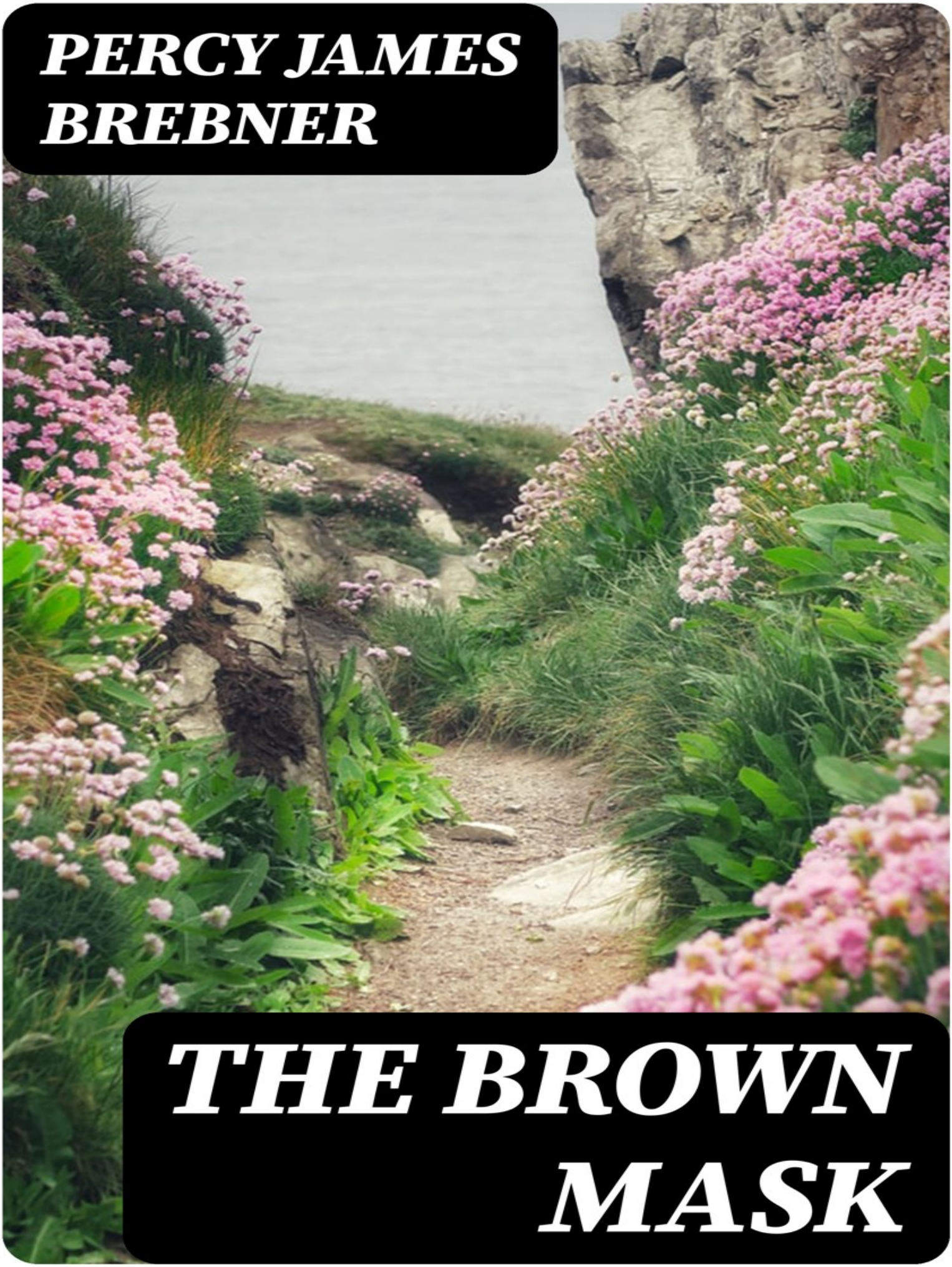
PERCY JAMES BREBNER



# THE BROWN MASK

**Percy James Brebner**

# The Brown Mask

EAN 8596547362302

DigiCat, 2022
Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

# Table of Contents

# CHAPTER I

Table of Contents

## BRETHREN OF THE ROAD

Dismal in appearance, the painted sign over the mean doorway almost obliterated by time and weather, there was nothing attractive about the "Punch-Bowl" tavern in Clerkenwell. It was hidden away at the end of a narrow alley, making no effort to vaunt its existence to the world at large, and to many persons, even in the near neighbourhood, it was entirely unknown. Like a gentleman to whom debauchery has brought shame and the desire to conceal himself from his fellows, so the "Punch-Bowl" seemed an outcast amongst taverns. Chance visitors were few, were neither expected nor welcomed, and ran the risk of being told by the landlady, in terms which there was no possibility of misunderstanding, that the place was not for them. It was natural, therefore, that a certain air of mystery should surround the house, for, although the alley was a *cul-de-sac*, there were stories of marvellous escapes from this trap even when the entrance was closed by a troop of soldiers, and it was whispered that there was a secret way out from the "Punch-Bowl" known only to the favoured few. Nor was an element of romance wanting. The dwellers in this alley were of the poorest sort, dirty and unkempt,

picking up a precarious livelihood, pickpockets and cutpurses—"foysters" and "nyppers" as their thieves' slang named them; yet, through all this wretched shabbiness there would flash at intervals some fine gentleman, richly dressed, and with the swagger of St. James's in his gait. Conscious of the sensation he occasioned, he passed through the alley looking strangely out of place, yet with no uncertain step. He was a hero, not only to these ragged worshippers, but in a far wider circle where wit and beauty moved; he knew it, gloried in it, and recked little of the price which must some day be paid for such popularity. The destination of these gentlemen was always the "Punch-Bowl" tavern.

Neither of a man, nor of a tavern, is it safe to judge only by the exterior. A grim and forbidding countenance may conceal a warm heart, even as the unprepossessing "Punch-Bowl" contained a cosy and comfortable parlour. To-night, half a dozen fine gentlemen were enjoying their wine, and it was evident that the landlady was rather proud of her guests. Buxom, and not too old to forget that she had once been accounted pretty, she still loved smartness and bright colours, was not averse to a kiss upon occasion, and had a jest—coarse, perhaps, but with some wit in it—for each of her customers. She knew them well—their secrets, their love episodes, their dangers; sometimes she gave advice, had often rendered them valuable help, but she had also a keen eye for business. Her favours had to be paid for, and even from the handsomest of her customers a kiss had never been known to settle a score. The "Punch-Bowl" was no place for empty pockets, and bad luck was rather a crime

than an excuse. When it pleased her the landlady could tell many tales of other fine gentlemen she had known and would never see again, and she always gave the impression that she considered her former customers far superior to her present ones. Perhaps she found the comparison good for her business since she spoke to vain men. She had become reminiscent this evening.

"The very night before he was taken he sat where you're sitting," she said, pointing to one of her customers who was seated by the hearth. "Ah! He made a good end of it did Jim o' the Green Coat; kicked off his boots as if they were an old pair he had done with, and threw the ordinary out of the cart, saying he had no time to waste on him just then. I was there and saw it all."

There was silence as she concluded her glowing tale. Depression may take hold of the most careless and light-hearted for a moment, and even the attraction of making a good end, with an opportunity of spurning a worthless ordinary, cannot always appeal. The landlady had contrived to make her story vivid, and furtive glances were cast at the individual who occupied the seat she had indicated. There suddenly appeared to be something fatal in it and ample reason why a man might congratulate himself on being seated elsewhere. The occupant was the least concerned. He had taken the most comfortable place in the room; it seemed to be rightly his by virtue of his dress and bearing. He had the grand air as having mixed in high society, his superiority was tacitly admitted by his companions, and the landlady had addressed herself especially to him, as though she knew him for a man of consequence.

"When the time comes you shall see me die game, too, I warrant," he laughed, draining his glass and passing it to be refilled. "One death is as good as another, and at Tyburn it comes quicker than to those who lie awaiting it in bed."

"That's true," said the landlady.

"I should hate to die in a bed," the man went on. "The open road for me and a quick finish. It's the best life if it isn't always as long as it might be. I wouldn't forsake it for anything the King could offer me. It's a merry time, with romance, love and adventure in it, with plenty to get and plenty to spend, with a seasoning of danger to give it piquancy—a gentleman's life from cock-crow to cock-crow, and not worthy of a passing thought is he who cannot make a good end of it. I'd sooner have the hangman for a bosom friend than a man who is likely to whimper on the day of reckoning. Did I tell you that a reverend bishop offered me fifty guineas for my mare the other day?"

"You sold her?" came the question in chorus.

"Sold her! No! I told him that she would be of little use to him, since no one but myself could get her up to a coach."

"Your impudence will be the death of you, John," laughed the landlady.

"That seems a fairly safe prophecy," answered Gentleman Jack—for so his companions named him—"still, I've heard of one bishop who took to the road in his leisure hours. He died of a sudden fever, it was said; but, for all that, he returned one night from a lonely ride across Hounslow Heath, and was most anxious to conceal the fact that somebody had put a bullet into him. My bishop may have become ambitious—indeed, I think he had, for he had

intellect enough to understand my meaning and was not in the least scandalised."

"Then we may yet welcome him at the 'Punch-Bowl,'" said one man. "So far, this house has entertained no one higher in the church than a Fleet parson. I see no sin in drinking the bishop's good health and wishing him the speedy possession of a horse to match his ambition."

"Anyone may serve as a toast," said another; "but could a bishop be good company under any circumstances, think you?"

"Gad! why not?" asked Gentleman Jack. "He'd Spend his time trying to square his profession with his conscience maybe, and when a man is reduced to that, bishop or no bishop, there's humour enough, I warrant."

The health was drunk with laughter, and the air of depression which had followed the landlady's recital disappeared like clouds from an April sky. Each one had some story to tell, some item to add to the accumulated glory of the road.

"Ay, it's a merry life," said the man who had had doubts about the bishop's company, "and the only drawback is that it comes to an end when you're at the top of your success. The dealers in blood-money never hunt a man down until he's worth his full price."

"And isn't that the best time to take the last ride?" exclaimed Gentleman Jack. "Who would choose to grow old and be forgotten? What should we do sitting stiffly in an armchair, wearing slippers because boots hurt our poor swollen feet? What should we be without a pair of legs strong enough to grip the saddle or with eyes too dim to

recognise a pretty woman, lacking fire to fall in love, and with lips which had lost their zest for kissing?"

"But we come to that last ride before we lack anything—that's the trouble," was the answer.

"Not always," said another man. "Galloping Hermit was feared on all the roads before I had stopped my first coach, and he is still feared to-day." The speaker was young, and he mentioned the name of the notorious highwayman with a kind of reverence.

"They say he's the devil himself, and that's why he's never been taken," said another. "Did any of you ever see him?"

"Once." And they all turned quickly towards the man who spoke. "My mare had gone lame, and I had dismounted in a copse to examine her, when there was the quick, regular beat of hoofs at a gallop across the turf. I was alert on my own account in a moment, crouching down amongst the undergrowth, for with a lame animal I could have made but a poor show. There flashed past me a splendid horseman, man and beast one perfect piece of harmony. The moon was near the full. I saw the neat, strong lines of the horse, the easy movement of the rider, and I could see that the mask which the man wore was brown. This happened two years ago, out beyond Barnet."

"And without that brown mask no one knows him." said the man who had first spoken of him. "He has been met on all the roads, north, south, east and west—never in company, always alone. He never fails, yet the blood-feasters have watched for him in vain. Truly, he disappears as mysteriously as the devil might. He may go to Court. He

may be a well-known figure there, gaming with the best, a favoured suitor where beauty smiles. He may even have been here amongst us at the 'Punch-Bowl' without our knowing it."

"It is not impossible," Gentleman Jack admitted, smiling a little at the others' enthusiasm.

"I envy him," was the answer. "We seem mean beside such a man as
Galloping Hermit."

"I do not cry 'Yes' to that," said Gentleman Jack, just in time to prevent an outburst from the landlady, who appeared to fancy that the quality of her entertainment was being called in question. "The brown mask conceals a personality, no doubt, but before we can judge between man and man we must know something of their various opportunities. Were he careful and lucky, such a man as my bishop would be hard to run to earth. Galloping Hermit is careful, for only at considerable intervals do we hear of him. The road would seem to be a pastime with him, rather than a life he loved. For me, the night never comes that I do not long to be in the saddle, that I do not crave for the excitement, even if there be no spoil worth the trouble of taking. This man is different. He is only abroad when the quarry is certain. True, success has been his, but for all that the fear of Tyburn may spoil his rest at night, and when he gets there we may find that the brown mask conceals a coward after all."

"Had you seen him that night as I did you would not say so," was the answer.

"I like speech with a man before I judge his merits," said Gentleman Jack, rising from his chair and flicking some dust from his sleeve. He appeared to resent such slavish admiration of Galloping Hermit—perhaps because he felt that his own pre-eminence was challenged. It pleased him to think that his name must be in everyone's mouth, that his price in the crime-market must for months past have been higher than any other man's, and he was suddenly out of humour with the frequenters of the "Punch-Bowl." He threw a guinea to the landlady, told her to buy a keepsake with the change, and passed out with a careless nod, much as though he intended never to come back into such low company.

The landlady stood fingering the guinea, turning it between her finger and thumb, rather helping her reflections by the action than satisfying herself that the coin was a good one.

"I believe we've had Galloping Hermit here to-night," she said suddenly. "It was unlike Gentleman Jack to talk as he did just now. Mark my words, he wears a brown mask on special occasions, and thought by sneering to throw dust in our eyes. It's not the first time I have considered the possibility, and I'm not sure that I won't buy a brown silk mask for keepsake and slip it on when next I see him coming in at the door. That would settle the question."

She had many arguments to support her opinion, reminded her customers of many little incidents which had occurred in the past, recalling Gentleman Jack's peculiar behaviour on various occasions. Her arguments sounded

convincing, and for an hour or more they discussed the question.

The opportunity to test her belief by wearing a brown silk mask never came, however, for that same night Gentleman Jack was taken on Hounslow Heath. A stumbling horse put him at the mercy of the man he sought to rob, who struck him on the head with a heavy riding-whip, and when the highwayman recovered consciousness he found himself a prisoner, bound hand and foot. He endeavoured to bargain with his captor, and made an attempt to outwit him, but, failing in both efforts, he accepted his position with a good grace, determined to make the best of it. Newgate should be proud of its latest resident. For a little space, at any rate, he would be the hero of fashionable circles, and go to his death with all the glamour of romance. He would leave a memory behind him that the turnkeys might presently make stirring tales of, as they drank their purl at night round the fire in the prison lobby.

The highwayman's story concerning the bishop quickly went the round of the town, and a wit declared that at least half the reverend gentlemen went trembling in their shoes for fear of their names being mentioned. The story, and the wit's comment, served to raise the curiosity of the fashionable world, and more than one coach stopped by Newgate to set down beauty and its escort on a visit to the highwayman. But a greater sensation was pending. Who first spread the report no one knew, but it was suddenly whispered that this man was in reality no other than the notorious wearer of the brown mask. When questioned he did not deny it, and his evident pleasure at the mystery

which surrounded him went far to establish the story. For every person interested in Gentleman Jack, a dozen were anxious to see and speak to Galloping Hermit. Every tale concerning him was recalled and re-told, losing nothing in the re-telling. Men had rather envied his adventurous career, many women's hearts had beat faster at the mention of his name, and now the most absurd theories regarding his real personality were seriously discussed in coffee-houses, in boudoirs, and even at Court. It was whispered that the King himself would intervene to save him from the gallows.

For a long time no trial had caused such a sensation, and Judge Marriott, whose ambition it was to be likened to his learned and famous brother, Judge Jeffreys, rose to the occasion and succeeded in giving an excellent imitation of the bullying methods of his idol. This was an opportunity to win fame, he argued, and he gave full play to the little wit he possessed and ample licence to his undeniable powers of vituperation and blasphemy.

Newgate was thronged, and the prisoner bore himself gallantly as a man might in his hour of triumph. It was a great thing to be an object of interest to statesmen, scholars, and wits, and to win smiles and tears from beauty. His eyes travelled slowly over the sea of faces, and rested for a little while upon a young girl. Her eyes were downcast, but he thought there must be tears in them, and for a moment he was more interested in her than in anyone else. Why had she come? She was different from all the other women about her. Beside her sat an elderly woman who seemed to be enjoying herself exceedingly, and appeared to

find especial relish in Judge Marriott's remarks. The more brutal they were the more witty she seemed to think them.

As sentence was pronounced the girl rose to her feet and turned to go. In truth, it had been no wish of hers to come. The judge, the people, and the whole atmosphere sickened her. She longed to get away, to feel the fresh air upon her cheek; and in her anxiety to depart she took no particular trouble to make sure that her companion was following her. There was a hasty crushing on all sides of her, and as she was carried forward she became conscious that she was alone, that she was being stared at and commented upon by some of those who were about her. She ought not to be there, she felt it rather than knew it, and was painfully aware that people were judging her accordingly. One man spoke to her, and in her effort to escape his attentions she contrived to thrust herself into a corner of an outer lobby, and waited.

"Can I be of service?"

For a moment she thought that the man she had escaped from had found her, and she turned indignantly. The steady grey eyes that met hers were eyes to trust—she felt that at once. This was quite a different person. He was young, with a face grave beyond his years, and a sense of strength about him likely to appeal to a woman.

"I am waiting for my aunt, Lady Bolsover," she said, the colour mounting to her cheeks under his steady gaze, and then, suddenly anxious that he should not think evil of her, she added: "I did not want to come. It was horrible."

"Your aunt must have missed you," he said, glancing round the almost empty lobby, for the crowd had poured out

into the street by this time. "If you have a coach waiting, may I take you to it?"

"Oh, please—do."

The crowd was dense in the street, and their progress was slow, but the man forced a way for her. His face gave evidence that it would be dangerous for anyone to throw a jest at his companion. There was a general inclination to give him the wall as he went.

"I am glad you did not come here willingly," he said suddenly, as though no other thought had been in his mind all this time. "This is no place for a woman."

"Indeed, no. I am wondering why a man should be here either."

"Galloping Hermit once did me a kindness. I would like to repay the debt."

"But how? What could you do?"

"I could not tell. Something might have happened to give me an opportunity. It did not; still, I shall see him presently. Perhaps I may yet be able to do him some small service."

"Oh, I hope so, poor man," she answered. "There is the coach, and my aunt. She will thank you."

Lady Bolsover, who was talking to Lord Rosmore, did not appear agitated, but she hurried forward when she caught sight of her niece.

"My child, I have been consumed with anxiety, and—"

"This gentleman—" the girl began, and then stopped. The man had not followed her as she went to meet her aunt. He had disappeared.

There came no intervention on the prisoner's behalf in the days that followed, nor did he set up any plea for his life

on the ground of knowing of plots against the King's Majesty. This would be to shirk the day of reckoning, and he had boasted to his companions at the "Punch-Bowl" that they should see him play the game to the end. He would fulfil this promise to the letter. He had ridden up Holborn Hill scores of times, seeking spoil and adventure on Hounslow Heath or elsewhere; he would journey up it once more, and pay the price like a gentleman. It would be no lonely journey; there would be excitement and triumph in it. He had lived his life and enjoyed it; he had allowed nothing to stand in the way of his desires; he had pressed into a few short years far more satisfaction than any other career could have given him. Why should he whimper because the end came early? It would be a good end to make, full of movement and colour. He knew, for he had been a spectator when others had taken that journey, and he was of more importance than they were. The whole town was ringing with his fame. Why should he have regrets? Beauty and fashion came to visit him, and one man came to thank him for some former kindness, a trivial matter that the highwayman had thought nothing of and had forgotten.

It came, that last morning, a fine morning flushed with the new life of the world that trembles hesitatingly in the spring of the year, and steeps the hearts of men and women with stronger hope and wider ambition; such a morning as draws a veil over past failures and disappointments, and floods the future with success and achievement. It seemed a pity to have to die on such a morning, and for one moment there was regret in the highwayman's soul as he took his place in the cart. The next he braced himself to play

his part, for there were great crowds in the streets, waiting and making holiday. All eyes were turned, watching for the procession, for was it not Galloping Hermit who came, the notorious wearer of the brown mask, the hero of wealth and squalor alike, the man whose deeds had already passed into legend? No one thought of him as Gentleman Jack, not even his companions of the "Punch-Bowl" who were in the crowd to see him pass; not the landlady, who had come to see the last of him, and stood at the end of the journey, waiting and watching.

By the steps of St. Sepulchre's Church there was a pause. A woman, one of a frail sisterhood, yet strangely pretty and innocent to look upon, held up a great nosegay to the hero of the hour, and as he took it he bent down and kissed her.

"Don't let another's kiss make you forget this one too soon," he said gaily, and her lips smiled while there was a sob in her throat.

The cart jogged on again, and at intervals the man buried his face in the flowers. This was his hour, and if he had any fear or regret, there were no eyes keen enough to note the fact.

Tyburn and its fatal tree were in sight across a surging crowd. Even at the last moment the King might intervene, it was whispered, and there were some who looked for signs of a swift-coming messenger. But the cart came nearer, slowly and surely; the space round the gallows was kept clear with difficulty, and there was no sign of hurrying reprieve.

This was the end of the game. Now was the great test of courage. He was too great a man to indulge in small things

to prove it.

"I've been used to riding in the night; a morning ride tires one," he said carelessly. "Let's get it over, or I shall be getting hungry, as all these folks must be. There's a good pair of boots for anyone who has the courage to wear them. I'm ready. Make an end of it."

And the landlady at the "Punch-Bowl" that night drank to his memory, declaring that he had died game, as was fitting for a gentleman of the road.

# CHAPTER II

Table of Contents

# BARBARA LANISON

As the coach rolled heavily homewards towards St. James's Square, Lady Bolsover speedily recovered from her anxiety concerning her niece; she did not even reprimand her for getting lost in the crowd, and seemed to take no interest whatever in the gentleman who had come to the rescue and had not waited to be thanked. He could have been no person of consequence, or he would not have neglected the opportunity of bowing over her hand. She talked of nothing but the trial and the excellent manner in which her friend Judge Marriott had conducted it. Some of his witticisms she remembered and repeated with such excellent point that her niece shuddered again as she had done when they fell from the judge's lips.

"It was altogether horrible," said the girl. "I wonder why you made me go."

"Judge Marriott's wit horrible!" exclaimed Lady Bolsover. "Pray do not say so in company, or you will be taken for a fool."

"I meant the trial—the whole thing. Why did we go?"

"Would you be altogether out of the fashion, Barbara?"

"Such fashion, yes, I think so."

"Ah, that's the drawback of living in the country," was the answer. "All one's morals and manners smell of the soil, and a woman's attainments are limited to the making of gooseberry wine and piecrusts. I was of that pattern myself once, but, thank heaven! I married wisely and escaped from it. You must do the same, Barbara."

"Indeed, I am not sure that I want to, and yet—"

"I am grateful for the reservation," said Lady Bolsover, "or I should be compelled to think that all my care of you during these last few months had been wasted."

"Oh, no; I have learnt many things—many things that it is good for me to know. I have seen men and women who seem to live in another world to the one I have knowledge of, a large and most interesting world, truly, yet not altogether to my taste. Is it not a strange world that can enjoy what we have witnessed to-day?"

"I must confess I enjoyed Judge Marriott hugely," was the answer, "and the prisoner was a man, I'll say that for him. I almost regret not having had the honour of being stopped by him. I grant you he was interesting, and played his part gallantly."

"Doomed to die on the gallows! Do you call that playing a part?"

"My dear," and Lady Bolsover touched the girl's arm, "did I not know your ancestry I should imagine your father a scurvy Puritan and your mother a kitchen wench given to long hymns and cant of a Sunday. Are you sure this cavalier of yours was not some miserable sniveller who found time to favour you with a sermon? He disappeared so hastily that it would seem he was ashamed of himself."

The girl did not answer, and if the colour came into her cheeks at the memory of what the man had said to her, Lady Bolsover was too amused at her own conjecture to notice it.

There are those who are so intent upon living that they have little time to think. Lady Bolsover was of these. The hour that did not hold some excitement in it wearied her and made her petulant. Her husband, dead these ten years, had been amongst the enthusiastic welcomers of Charles at his Restoration, and his wife had from first to last been a well-known figure in the Court of the Merry Monarch. That she was no beauty, rather than because she possessed any great strength of character, probably accounted for the fact that she enjoyed no peculiar fame in that dissolute company. As she could not be the heroine of an intrigue, it pleased her to consider herself too great a dame for such affairs, and she was fully persuaded that she might count her lovers by the score, even now, had she so desired. As she had no very definite character, so she had no real convictions. Charles was dead, and James was King. Many changes were imminent, and Lady Bolsover was waiting to see in which direction the wind blew. Her nature, perhaps, was to hate Puritans and all their ways, but, if necessary to her own well-being, she would easily be able to love them and curse all Catholics. She was not really bad at heart, but she was a strange companion for Barbara Lanison.

Some few months ago Sir John Lanison, of Aylingford Abbey in Hampshire, Lady Bolsover's brother and Barbara's uncle and sole guardian since the death of her parents, had suggested that his sister should take charge of his ward for

a little while. Practically she knew nothing of London, he said, and it was time she did. Sir John declared that he did not want it to be said that he had hidden his niece away at the Abbey so that no man should have a chance of seeing her. He had known prettier women, but she was well enough, and where her face failed to attract her ample fortune would.

"She's got more learning than is needful for a girl, to my mind," he told his sister; "but that kind of nonsense will be knocked out of her as soon as she understands her value as a woman. Send her back with all the corners rounded, my dear Peggy—that is what I want."

Lady Bolsover had done her best, but the result was not very satisfactory. Barbara had convictions which her aunt was powerless to undermine, and seemed to set such a value upon herself that no man was able to make the slightest impression on her. She had barely refrained from laughing outright at the compliments of recognised wits, and half a dozen gallants with amorous intentions had been baffled and put to shame. Lord Rosmore, whose way with a woman was pronounced irresistible, had declared her adorable, but impossible, and Judge Marriott had promised Lady Bolsover a very handsome gratuity if she could persuade her niece to favour him and become his wife.

Barbara Lanison could not be unconscious of the sensation she caused—a woman never is—but she sometimes studied the reflection in her mirror, and tried to discover the reason. Quite honestly she failed. She was not dissatisfied with the reflection, in its way it was pleasing, she admitted, but she had not supposed that it was of the

kind that would appeal to men, and to such a variety of men. The women who usually pleased them were so different. It even occurred to her that there might be something in herself, in her behaviour, which was not quite nice, and that her real attraction lay in this, an idea which proved that her estimate of the men who came to her aunt's house was not a very high one.

Born and bred in the country, and with an amount of learning which her uncle considered unnecessary, she had prejudices, no doubt, and possibly had a standard of female beauty in her mind which her own reflection did not satisfy. That she was mistaken in her own estimate of herself was certain, or the men would not have been so assiduous in their attentions. Perhaps she admired dark women, and the reflection which smiled at her out of the depths of the mirror was fair. The eyes were blue—that blue which the sky shows in the early morning of a cloudless day, and there was a suggestion of tears in them—the tears which may come from much laughter rather than those which speak of sorrow. There was a touch of gold in the fair hair, which was inclined to be rebellious and curl into little lovelocks about her neck and forehead. The skin was fair, with the bloom of perfect health upon it, and the little mouth was firm, the lips fresh as from the kiss of a rose. There was grace in all her movements, that unstudied grace which tells of life in the open air and freedom from restraint; and in thought and word and deed conventionality had small interest for her. It was hardly wonderful that Lord Rosmore should pronounce her adorable, or that Judge Marriott should forget that his youth was a thing of the past. Indeed, she had come as a

revelation to the men whose lives were made up of Court intrigue and artificiality.

Perhaps another reason why Barbara Lanison found it difficult to understand the sensation she created lay in the fact that her heart and affections remained entirely untouched. Those blue eyes, underneath their long lashes, saw very keenly, and gave her a quick insight into character. She was not to be easily led, and if she did a good many things in her aunt's house, where she was a guest, which did not come naturally to her and which did not please her, there was a point beyond which no persuasion on Lady Bolsover's part could make her go. Much against her will she had been taken to the trial of the highwayman, and that she was ashamed of being there was shown by her eager desire to explain her presence to the man who had come to her rescue in the crowd. It would probably have annoyed Lady Bolsover considerably had she known that her niece thought more of this man during the next few days than of all the eligible gallants who had been brought to her notice.

If in one sense Lady Bolsover had to admit failure with regard to her plans concerning her niece, in another direction she had achieved considerable success, for since the advent of Barbara Lanison her own favour had been courted on all sides, and her house in St. James's Square had become a little Court in itself. To half a dozen men who had flattered her sufficiently as a first step towards her good graces, she had promised to do her best with her niece on their behalf, and at intervals she dispensed encouragements for which no action or private word of Barbara's gave any foundation. Lady Bolsover found her present *entourage* very

pleasant, and was not inclined to spoil it by being too definitely honest. It was therefore with considerable chagrin that, a few days after the trial, she received a message from her brother that Barbara was to return to Aylingford Abbey without delay; and since Judge Marriott was about to pay him a visit, nothing could be better than that Barbara should travel in his company.

Barbara was quite ready to return to the Abbey, but she did not relish Judge Marriott as a travelling companion. He was old enough to be her father, and foolish enough to attempt to make love to her. She had disliked him from the first; she had come near to hating him since she had seen and heard him at that dreadful trial. The self-satisfied judge, on the other hand, hoped to make capital out of the trial. He had been instrumental in ridding the world of a notorious highwayman, one who had made himself unpleasantly known to not a few of those who were Sir John's guests from time to time. The trial would be much talked of at Aylingford, and Marriott could not fail to be a centre of attraction. His acumen must also have appealed to the woman whose escort he was to be. His conduct of the case must have impressed her with his importance. She was the most beautiful woman with whom he had ever been brought into contact, and his ambition took to itself wings. Why should not this woman belong to him? True, he had no family behind him to boast of, but he had made a position, and the way to greater things lay open before him. Jeffreys was his friend, and Jeffreys was a power with the new King. High honours might be in the near future for Judge Marriott. He was an ugly man—with all his willingness to do so, he

could not gainsay that; but he consoled himself with the reflection that many beautiful women had married men whose looks certainly did not recommend them. It was only the commonplace that women turned from, and he was sufficiently ugly not to be commonplace.

So Judge Marriott exerted himself to amuse and interest his fair young charge as they journeyed together into Hampshire, and not altogether without success. He soon discovered that all discussion concerning the trial was unwelcome, that the girl's foolish sympathies had been with the prisoner rather than the judge, and he quickly talked of other things. He almost made Barbara believe that he regretted Nature had not made him a highwayman instead of a judge, and he certainly succeeded in making the girl confess to herself that he was not such an unpleasant travelling companion as she had expected.

The day had been cloudy, threatening rain, and twilight came early. When the coach began to cross Burford Heath it was dusk. Barbara was tired, and leaned back in her corner, while the judge lapsed into silence, not altogether oblivious to the fact that there might be dangers upon the heath. The road was heavy, and in places deep-rutted; the grinding and crunching of the wheels, the only sound breaking the stillness of the evening, grew monotonous; and the constant heavy jolting was trying. Suddenly there was a cry from the post-boys, and the coach came to a standstill with a jerk.

"Curse them! They've managed to break down!" exclaimed Marriott. His hand trembled a little as he let down the window, and it seemed to Barbara that he was more afraid than angry. He thrust his head out of the window with

an oath, then drew it in sharply. A horseman stood at the door with a pistol in his hand.

"There is payment to make for crossing the heath."

The judge broke out into a torrent of abuse, but whether at the man who barred his way or at himself for being unprepared, it was difficult to say.

"And the payment is extra for cursing your luck, especially in the presence of a lady," said the man sharply, in a tone which admitted no argument and proved him master of the situation.

Barbara, sitting upright, looked steadily into the masked face of the highwayman, deeply interested, but without fear. Was it fancy, or was there a familiar note in the man's voice? Marriott had shrunk back in the coach as he fumbled for his purse. He tried to conceal his face from the man, for, should the highwayman discover his identity, he might consider the moment opportune to avenge his brother of the road who had so recently died at Tyburn.

"A meagre purse for so famous a judge," the man said, weighing it in his hand; "but your money is a small matter. I have a bigger score to settle than that. Out with you!" and the man flung open the coach door.

Marriott shrank farther back until he appeared a very small and mean man in the corner of the coach. He tried to speak, but his words were inarticulate, and Barbara could feel him trembling violently.

"Get out, or—"

"Surely, sir, you would not kill him?" and Barbara stretched out an arm to protect him.

"Do you plead for him, mistress? He is lucky to have such an advocate. Get out, judge. For the sake of those bright eyes beside you, you may keep your life, but you shall do penance for your sins. Get out, I say."

Very reluctantly Marriott crept from the carriage.

"You have all my money," he whimpered.

"Down on your knees, then, and ask pardon for passing judgment on a better man than yourself. Down! Quickly, or this pistol of mine may forget that I have made a promise."

Marriott sank upon his knees in a place where the road was very muddy.

"The man I sent to Tyburn—say it after me."

"The man I sent to Tyburn," repeated Marriott.

"—was a gentleman compared to me."

"—was a gentleman compared to me."

"I am an unjust judge, a scoundrel at heart, a mean, contemptible coward, unfit to consort with honest men, and every pure, good woman should spurn me like dirt. Say it! Louder! The lady should be interested in your confession."

Marriott said the words, raising his voice as he was ordered.

"And I pray to Heaven to have pity on the soul of the man I sent to his death at Tyburn. Say it aloud, with uplifted hands. It is a prayer you may well make, for, God knows, you'll have need of all His mercy some day."

The prayer was repeated, and so like a real prayer was it that, in the darkness of the coach, Barbara smiled. Prayer and Judge Marriott seemed so wide asunder.

"Now get back into the coach, and take care your muddy clothes do not soil the lady's gown, as your presence could

hardly fail to be pestilential to her, did she but know you as you really are. Good-night, fair mistress; some day I hope to see you under better escort."

For a moment he bowed low over his horse's neck, then he turned and galloped straight across the heath.

Judge Marriott had entered the coach hurriedly, so glad to escape from the highwayman that he did not consider how poor a figure he had cut in the sight of the girl. Fearful that his tormentor might not yet have done with him, he sank back in his corner again. Barbara was sitting forward looking from the window.

"He has gone," she said.

"Curse him!" said Marriott in a whisper. He was still afraid, and his voice trembled. "Surely his mask was—"

"It was brown," said Barbara. "I thought the man who wore the brown mask was dead."

"I thought so too," he muttered as he leaned forward to the window and watched the highwayman disappear into the shadows of the night.