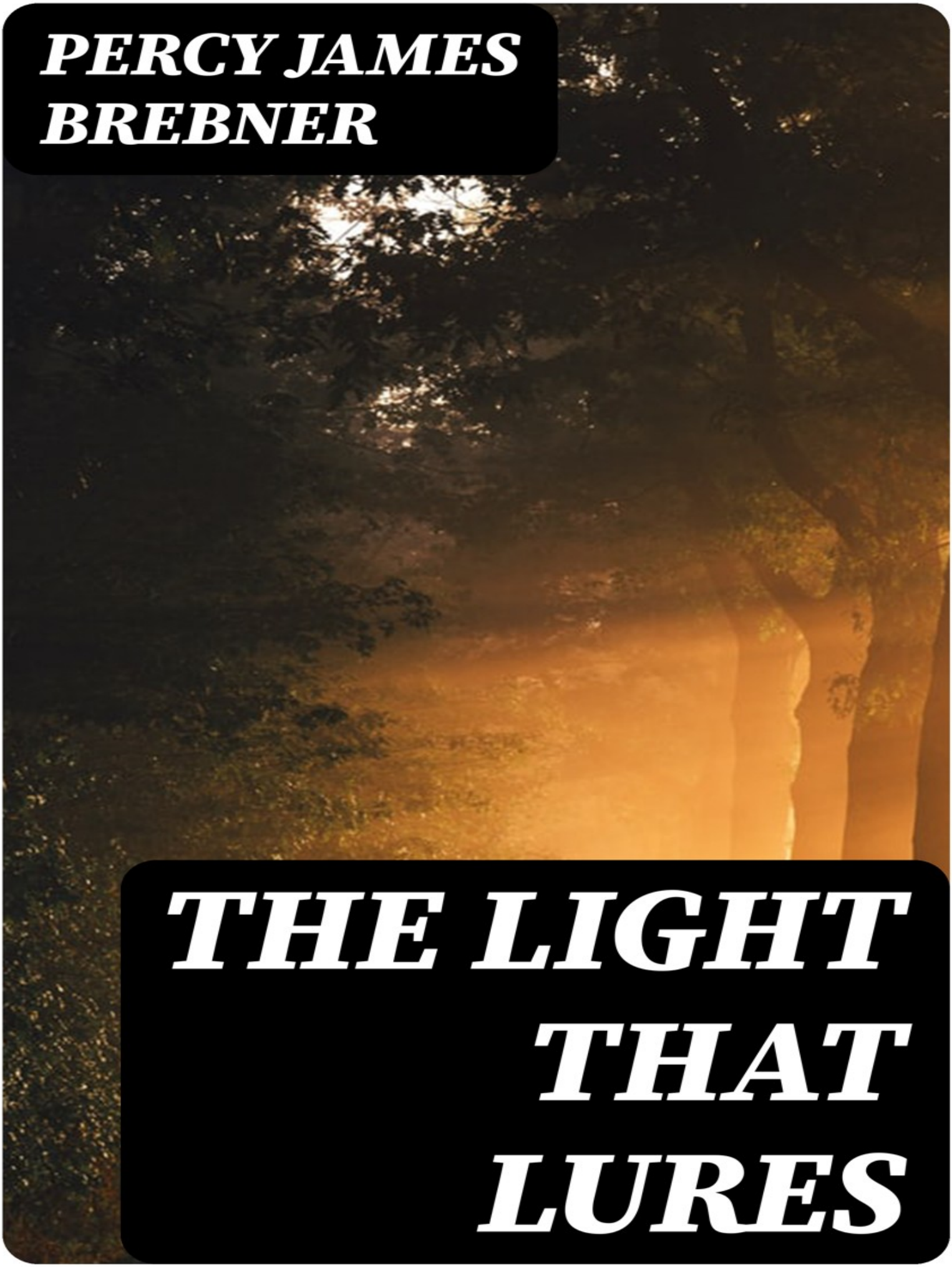
PERCY JAMES BREBNER
THE LIGHT THAT LURES

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PROLOGUE

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ACROSS THE WATERS OF THE BAY

Seated on a green hummock, his knees drawn up, his elbows resting on his knees and his head supported in his open hands, a boy sat very still and preoccupied, gazing straight into the world before him, yet conscious of little beyond the visions conjured up by his young mind. His were dim visions begot of the strenuous times in which he lived, and which were the staple subject of conversation of all those with whom he came in contact, yet his shadowy dreams had something of the past in them, and more, far more, of that future which to youth must ever be all important. But this young dreamer was not as dreamers often are, with muscle subservient to brain, the physical less highly developed than the mental powers; on the contrary, he was a lad well knit together, his limbs strong and supple, endurance and health unmistakable, a lad who must excel in every manly exercise and game. Perhaps it was this very superiority over his fellows which, for the time being, at any rate, had made him a dreamer. While other boys, reproducing in their games that which was happening about them, fought mimic battles, inflicted and suffered mimic death, experienced terrible siege in some small copse which to their imagination stood for a beleaguered city, or carried some hillock by desperate and impetuous assault, this boy, their master in running, in swimming, in wrestling, in sitting

a horse as he galloped freely, was not content with mimicry, but dreamed of real deeds in a real future.

It was a fair scene of which this boy, for the moment, seemed to be the centre. Before him lay the great expanse of Chesapeake Bay scintillating in the light of the afternoon, a sail here and there catching the sunlight and standing out clearly from a background of distant haze. A wide creek ran sinuously into the land, the deep blue of its channel distinct from the shallow waters and the swamps from which a startled crane rose like an arrow shot across the vault of the sky. To the right, surrounded by its gardens and orchards, stood a house, long, low, large and rambling, the more solid successor to the rough wooden edifice which had been among the first to rise when this state of Virginia had become a colony for cavaliers from England. Flowers trailed over the wide porch and shone in patches of brilliant color about the garden, alternating with the long-cast shadows of cedar, cypress, and yellow pine; fruit turned to opulent red and purple ripeness in the orchards; and the song of birds, like subdued music, came from tree and flower-lined border. In close proximity to the house Indian corn was growing, and a wide area of wheat ripened to harvest, while beyond, like a vast green ocean, stretched the great tobacco plantation, with here and there the dark blot of a drying shed like a rude ark resting upon it. In the far distance, bounding the estate, a line of dark woods seemed to shut out the world and wrap it in impenetrable mystery. Over all this great estate the boy sitting on the hummock was known as the young master, but he was not dreaming of a future which should have wealth in it, pleasure, all that the heart of a

man can wish for; but of toil and hardship bravely borne, of fighting days and camp fires, of honor such as heroes attain to.

He had been born in stirring times. For more than five years past war had been in the land, the struggle for freedom against a blind and tyrannical government. It had been one thing to make the Declaration of Independence, it had been quite another matter to carry it into effect. Early success had been followed by disasters. Washington had been defeated on Long Island; his heroic endeavor to save Philadelphia by the battle of Brandywine against an enemy far superior in numbers had failed; yet a month later a large British force had been compelled to surrender at Saratoga. These fighters for freedom seemed to know defeat only as a foundation upon which to build victory. England might send fresh armies and fresh fleets, but there were men on land and sea ready to oppose them, ready to die for the freedom they desired and the independence they had proclaimed; and it was only a few months ago that the war had been virtually ended by the surrender of Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown.

Colonel Barrington had taken an active and honorable part in the conflict, yet in the beginning of the trouble, like many another man of his class, he had been for peace, for arbitration, for arrangement if possible. His fathers had been among the earliest settlers in Virginia, representatives of an English family, whose roots stretched far back into history. They had come to rest on this very spot of earth, had raised their first rough wooden dwelling here, calling it Broadmead, after the name of their home in England. Love

for the old country was still alive in Colonel Barrington, and it was only after grave deliberation that he had drawn the sword, convinced that he drew it for the right. Doubtless there were some in this great conflict who were self-seeking, but this was certainly not the case with Henry Barrington. He had much to lose, nothing personal to win which seemed to him of any consequence. Broadmead he loved. He had been born there. In due time he had brought home to it his beautiful young wife, daughter of a French family in Louisiana, and until this upheaval the years had passed happily, almost uneventfully, yet bringing with them increasing prosperity.

The boy, dreaming dreams and stretching out toward an ideal, might well have taken his father for model, but, while reverencing him and knowing him to be a great and good man, his young imagination had been fired by a different type of hero, the man whose restless and adventurous spirit had brought him four years ago to fight as a volunteer in the cause of freedom; who had come again only a year since and had done much to bring about the surrender of Lord Cornwallis; the man who, only the other day, had been publicly thanked by General Washington speaking for the nation he had helped to found; the man who was at this moment his father's guest—the Marquis de Lafayette. There was much of the French spirit in the boy, inherited from his mother, and to every word the Marquis had uttered he had listened eagerly, painting his hero in colors that were too bright and too many, perhaps. An hour ago he had stolen out of the house to this hummock, a favorite spot of his, to dream over all he had heard and of the future.

His eyes were fixed upon a distant white sail, sun touched, which lessened far out across the bay, which presently became a point of light and was then hidden in the haze of the horizon. That was the way of dreams surely, the road which led to the realization of hope. That ship might go on and on through sunlight and storm, through mist and clear weather, and some time, how long a time the boy did not know, it would reach another land, France perchance, surely the best of all lands, since it bred such men as the Marquis de Lafayette.

"Dreaming, Richard?"

The grass had deadened the sound of approaching footsteps and the boy rose hastily. His face flushed as he recognized his visitor.

He was a thin man, still young, with an earnest face which at once arrested attention. It was far more that of a visionary than was the boy's, a difficult countenance to read and understand. If, for a moment, the neatness and precision of his dress suggested a man of idle leisure, a courtier and little more, there quickly followed a conviction that such an estimate of his character was a wrong one. Dreamer he might be, in a sense, but he was also a man of action. The spare frame was full of energy, there was determination in the face. This was a man who knew nothing of fear, whom danger would only bring stronger courage; a man who would press forward to his goal undaunted by whatever difficulties stood in the way. He was an idealist rather than a dreamer, one who had set up a standard in his life and, right or wrong, would live his life true to that standard. He was a man to trust, even though

he might not inspire love, a leader for a forlorn hope, a personality which brought confidence to all who came in touch with it. His eyes, kindly but penetrating, were fixed upon the lad to whom he was a hero. He was the famous Marquis de Lafayette.

"Yes, sir, I was—I was thinking."

"Great thoughts, I warrant, for so young a mind. Let us sit down. This is a famous seat of yours, a good place to dream in with as fair a slice of the world's beauty to gaze upon as could well be found. Come, tell me your dreams."

The boy sat down beside him, but remained silent.

"Shall I help you?" said the Marquis. "Ah, my lad, I know that it is difficult to tell one's dreams, they are often such sacred things; but your good mother has been telling me something about you. We are of the same blood, she and I, so we talk easily and tell each other secrets, as two members of a large family will. She tells me, Richard, that you have thought a great deal about me."

"Indeed, sir, I have."

"And made something of a hero of me; is that it?"

"Would that anger you, sir?"

"Anger me! Why, my lad, the man who can become a child's hero should be proud of it. There must be something good mixed with his common clay for him to achieve so much. I am glad and proud, as proud as I am of General Washington's thanks the other day; you need not look at me with such disbelief in your eyes, for I only say what is true. So now tell me your dreams."

"They are only half dreams," said the boy slowly, but to-day they seem clearer. They have one end and aim, to be

like you, to fight for the oppressed, to fight and to conquer."

"The dreams are worthy, Richard, but set yourself a higher standard. That you think so much of me almost brings a blush to my cheek, lad, for I am a poor hero. Yet, there is this in common between us, I too, have had such dreams—have them still. I am striving to make my dreams come true. So much every man can do. You have, or you will have presently, your duty set straight before you. Duty is like that; it never lies in ambush. Along that path of duty you must march and never turn aside. It is a strange path, for though it is distinct and clear that all may recognize it, yet for each individual it seems to have a different direction. It leads some to mighty deeds which must echo round the world; some it will bring to poverty, obscurity, disgrace perchance, but these are heroes, remember, as the others are, greater heroes I think, since no man knows them or cheers them on. You have not thought of such heroes, Richard?"

"No, sir."

"I thought not. That is why I came to talk to you. I cannot tell what your future is to be, I do not know in what way you are destined to travel, but duty may not call upon you to wear the sword or ride in the forefront of a charge. This country has just had a glorious birth, a rebirth to freedom. Your father has helped to fight for it; you may be called upon to work peaceably for it."

"I hope, sir, my duty will mean the sword and the charge."

"Your countrymen are probably glad to have peace," he answered.

"But this is not the only land where men are cruelly treated and would fight for freedom," the boy returned. "You came here to help us against the English. Some day may I not journey to help others?"

"Perhaps."

"My mother is French, therefore I am partly French. I love my father, but I am more French than English. I should love to fight for France," and the boy looked up eagerly into his companion's face.

"So that is the real secret out at last," said Lafayette, with a light laugh. "You would love to fight for France."

"Yes, sir; and it makes you laugh. I have not told it to any one else; I knew they would laugh."

"But you expected better things of me. Forgive me, lad, I was not laughing at you; yet you must learn not to mind the laughter of others. Whenever a man is in earnest there will always be some to ridicule what they term his folly. He is something of a hero who can stand being laughed at."

"Sir, did you not say to my father only to-day as you sat at dinner in the hall, that France was groaning under oppression, and there was no knowing what would be the end of it?"

"I did, Richard, I did."

"Then, Monsieur de Lafayette, it might be that some day I might cross the sea to help France."

The Marquis laughed softly and patted the boy's head.

"So that is your dream. I hope freedom may be bought without blood, but—"

"But you do not think so, sir."

"Why should you say that?"

"Partly because of the way you say it, partly because I have been told that you are farseeing. I have listened so eagerly to all the stories told about you."

"If such a fight for freedom came in France, it would be far more terrible than the war here," and the Marquis made the statement rather to himself than to the boy.

"Then it may be my duty to come and help you," said Richard.

"If the opportunity should come, see that your adventurous spirit does not make it your duty whether it be so or not. There are some years to pass before these young limbs of yours are fit for fighting, or this brain of yours has to make a decision. You have a good father and mother, they will guide you. Dream your dreams, and I doubt not, my friend Richard Barrington will become a hero to many. Are you coming back to the house with me? Within an hour I am leaving."

"You are going back to France?"

"Yes."

"It is a wonderful land, isn't it?"

"To a true man his own country is always a wonderful land."

"Yes, and I am mostly French," said the boy.

"No, lad. You are an American, a Virginian. Be proud of it."

"I am proud of it, sir; yet a Virginian gentleman might fight for France."

"And France might be glad to claim his sword. Yes, that is true. Well, lad, come in peace or in war, do not fail to make inquiry in Paris for Lafayette. He shall return you something

of the courtesy which has been shown to him in this country and in your father's house."

"Thank you, oh, thank you a thousand times. I can talk about it to my mother now. She shall share my dreams."

As he went toward the house he looked back across the waters of the bay. Yet another sail, with the sun upon it, was fading slowly into the distant haze.

CHAPTER I

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THE MAN BY THE ROADSIDE

A solemn twilight, heavy and oppressive, was closing a dull, slumberous day. It was late in the year for such weather. Not a breath stirred in the trees by the roadside, not a movement in hedge or ditch; some plague might have swept across the land, leaving it stricken and desolate, even the cottages here and there showed no lights and appeared to be deserted. The road ran straight between ill-conditioned and neglected fields, and for an hour or more no traveler had passed this way, yet it was a high road, and at a few miles distance was Paris. Yonder toward the northeast lay the city, the twilight heavy over it too, but it was not silent. The throb of human passion and anger beat in it with quick, hammering strokes, and men and women, looking into one another's eyes, either laughed while they sang and danced madly, or shrank away, afraid of being seen, fearing to ask questions.

The twilight had grown deeper, and the horizon was narrowing quickly with the coming of night, when the sound of horses' hoofs broke the silence and two riders came rapidly round a bend into the long stretch of straight road, traveling in the direction of Paris. They rode side by side as comrades and as men with a purpose, a definite destination which must be reached at all hazards, yet at a casual glance it would appear that they could have little in common. One was an elderly man with grizzled hair, face deeply lined,

sharp eyes which were screwed up and half closed as if he were constantly trying to focus things at a distance. He was tall, chiefly accounted for by his length of leg, and as thin as a healthy man well could be. His horsemanship had no easy grace about it, and a casual observer might have thought that he was unused to the saddle. There would have been a similar opinion about anything this man did; he never seemed to be intended for the work he was doing, yet it was always well done. He was a silent man, too, and his thoughts were seldom expressed in his face.

His companion was a young man, twenty-five or twenty-six, although his face might suggest that he was somewhat older. His was a strong face, cleanly cut, intelligent, purposeful, yet there was also a certain reserve, as though he had secrets in his keeping which no man might know. Like his comrade, there was little that escaped his keen observation, but at times there was a far-off look in his eyes, as though the present had less interest for him than the future. He sat his horse as one born to the saddle; his hands were firm, his whole frame full of physical force, energy, and endurance—a man who would act promptly and with decision, probably a good man to have as a friend, most certainly an awkward one to have as an enemy.

"We delayed too long at our last halt, Seth. I doubt whether we shall see Paris to-night," he said presently, but made no effort to check the pace of his horse.

"I've been doubting that for an hour past, Master Richard," was the answer.

The grizzled man was Seth, or sometimes Mr. Seth, to all who knew him. So seldom had he heard himself called Seth

Dingwall that he had almost forgotten the name. Born in Louisiana, he believed he had French blood in him, and spoke the language easily. He had gone with his mistress to Virginia when she married Colonel Barrington, and to him Broadmead was home, and he had no relation in the wide world.

"Is it so necessary to reach the city to-night?" he asked after a pause.

"I had planned to do so."

The answer was characteristic of the man. As a boy, when he had made up his mind to do a thing, he did it, even though well-merited punishment might follow, and the boy was father to the man. Save in years and experience, this was the same Richard Barrington who had dreamed as he watched sunlit sails disappear in the haze over Chesapeake Bay.

"I was thinking of the horses," said Seth. "I reckon that we have a long way to travel yet."

"We may get others presently," Barrington answered, and then, after a moment's pause, he went on: "We have seen some strange sights since we landed—ruined homes, small and great, burned and desolated by the peasants; and in the last few hours we have heard queer tales. I do not know how matters stand, but it looks as if we might be useful in Paris. That is why we must push on."

"Master Richard," he said slowly.

"Yes."

"Have you ever considered how useless a man may be?"

"Ay, often, and known such men."

"You do not catch my meaning. I am talking of a man who is full of courage and determination, yet just because he is only one is powerless. A lion might be killed by rats if there were enough rats."

"True, Seth, but there would be fewer rats by the time the lion was dead, and a less number for the next lion to struggle with."

"A good answer," said Seth, "and I'm not saying it isn't a right one, but I'm thinking of that first lion which may be slain."

A smile, full of tenderness, came into Barrington's face which, in the gathering darkness, his companion could hardly have seen had he turned to look at him, which he did not do.

"I know, Seth, I know, but I am not one man alone. I have you. It seems to me that I have always had you, and Heaven knows I should have had far less heart for this journey had you not come with me. In the old days you have been nurse and physician to me. I should have drowned in the pond beyond the orchard had you not been at hand to pull me out; I should have broken my skull when the branch of that tree broke had you not caught me; and I warrant there's a scar on your leg somewhere to show that the bull's horn struck you as you whisked me into a place of safety."

"There was something before all those adventures, Master Richard."

"What was that, Seth?"

"It was a morning I'm not forgetting until I'm past remembering anything. We all knew you were coming, and we were looking every day to hear the news. When we did

hear it, it was only part of the story, and the other part was most our concern for a while. The mistress was like to die, they said. I remember there was wailing among the plantation hands, and Gadman the overseer had to use his whip to keep 'em quiet. We others were just dumb and waited. Then came the morning I speak of. The mistress was out before the house again for the first time. I chanced to be by, and she called me. You were lying asleep in her lap. 'Seth,' she said, 'this is the young master; isn't he beautiful? You must do your best to see that he comes to no harm as he grows up.' Well, that's all I've done, and it's what I'm bound to go on doing just as long as ever I can. That was the first time I saw you, Master Richard."

Barrington did not answer. His companion's words had brought a picture to his mind of his home in Virginia, which he had never loved quite so well perhaps as at this moment when he was far away from it, and was conscious that he might never see it again. Only a few months ago, when he had sat on the hummock, falling into much the same position as he had so often done as a boy, he had even wondered whether he wanted to return to it. Broadmead could never be the same place to him again. His father had died five years since, and that had been a terrible and sincere grief to him, but he had his mother, and had to fill his father's place as well as he could. The work on the estate gave him much to do, and if the news from France which found its way to Broadmead set him dreaming afresh at times, he cast such visions away. He had no inclination to leave his mother now she was alone, and he settled down to peaceful, happy days, hardly desiring that anything should

be different, perhaps forgetting that some day it must be different. Not a year had passed since the change had come. A few days' illness and his mother was suddenly dead.

He was alone in the world. How could Broadmead ever be the same to him again?

"Seth, did my mother ever say anything more to you about me?" he asked suddenly.

"She thanked me for saving you from the bull, though I wanted no thanks."

"Nothing more?"

"Only once," Seth returned, "and then she said almost the same words as she did when I first saw you lying on her knee. 'See that he comes to no harm, Seth.' She sent for me the night before she died, Master Richard. That's why I'm here. I didn't want to leave Virginia particularly."

Barrington might have expressed some regret for bringing his companion to France had not his horse suddenly demanded his attention. They had traversed the long stretch of straight road, and were passing by a thin wood of young trees. Long grass bordered the road on either side, and Barrington's horse suddenly shied and became restive.

"There's something lying there," said Seth, whose eyes were suddenly focused on the ground, and then he dismounted quickly. "It's a man, Master Richard, and by the Lord! he's had rough treatment."

Barrington quieted his horse with soothing words, and dismounting, tethered him to a gate.

"He's not dead," Seth said, as Barrington bent over him; and as if to endorse his words, the man moved slightly and groaned.

"We can't leave him, but—"

"But we shall not reach Paris to-night," Seth returned. "Didn't they tell us we should pass by a village? I have forgotten the name."

"Trémont," said Richard.

"It can't be much farther. There's no seeing to find out his injuries here, but if you could help to get him over the saddle in front of me, Master Richard, I could take him along slowly."

A feeble light glimmered presently along the road, which proved to be the light from a tavern which stood at one end of the village, a rough and not attractive house of entertainment, a fact that the neighbors seemed to appreciate, for no sound came from it.

"Those who attacked him may be there, Master Richard, refreshing themselves after their dastardly work."

"They must be saying silent prayers of repentance, then. Stay in the shadows, Seth; I'll make inquiry."

Leading his horse, Barrington went to the door and called for the landlord. He had to call twice before an old man shuffled along a dark passage from the rear of the house and stood before him.

"Are there lodgings for travelers here?"

"Lodgings, but no travelers. Trémont's deserted except by children and invalids. All in Paris, monsieur. Ay, these be hard times for some of us."

"I'm for Paris, but must rest here to-night."

"You're welcome, monsieur, and we'll do our best, but it's poor fare you'll get and that not cheap."

"Are there no travelers in the house?"

"None; none for these two months."

"No visitor of any kind?"

"None. Only four to-day, and they cursed me and my wine."

"I have a friend with me, and a wounded man. We found him by the roadside."

"We'll do our best," said the landlord, and he turned away and called for his wife.

As Barrington and Seth carried the wounded man in, the landlord looked at him and started.

"You know him?" asked Barrington sharply.

"I saw him only to-day. I'll tell you when you've got him comfortable in his bed."

"Is there a doctor in Trémont?"

"No, monsieur. Over at Lesville there's one, unless he's gone to Paris with the rest, but he couldn't be got here until the morning.".

"I may make shift to patch him up to-night, Master Richard," said Seth. "I helped the doctors a bit before Yorktown, when I was with the Colonel."

Possibly no physician or surgeon would have been impressed with Seth's methods. He was never intended to dress wounds, and yet his touch was gentle.

"He'll do until the doctor comes to-morrow," said Seth, as he presently found Barrington at the frugal meal.

The landlord apologized for the frugality, but it was all he could do.

"May I never face less when I am hungry," said Barrington. "You saw this man to-day, landlord, you say?"

"Yes. I told you that four men cursed me and my wine. They had been here an hour or more, talking of what was going forward in Paris, and of some business which they were engaged upon. I took little note of what they said, for every one is full of important business in these days, monsieur, but the man who lies upstairs presently rode past. I saw him from this window, and my four guests saw him, too. They laughed and settled their score, and five minutes later had brought their horses from the stable behind the inn and were riding in the direction he had taken."

"And attacked him a little later, no doubt."

"It would seem so," said the landlord.

"Should they return, keep it a secret that you have a wounded man in the house. Will that purchase your silence?"

The landlord looked at the coins Barrington dropped into his hand.

"Thank you, monsieur, you may depend upon it that no one shall know."

Seth presently went to see the patient again, and returned in a few moments to say he was conscious.

"I told him where we found him, and he wants to see you, Master Richard."

"Your doctoring must be wonderfully efficacious, Seth."

"Brandy is a good medicine," was the answer; "but the man's in a bad way. He may quiet down after he's seen you."

The man moved slightly as Barrington entered the room, and when he spoke his words came slowly and in a whisper, yet with some eagerness.

"They left me for dead, monsieur; they were disturbed, perhaps."

"Why did they attack you?"

"I was carrying a message."

"A letter—and they stole it?" asked Barrington.

"No, a message. It was not safe to write."

"To whom was the message?"

"To a woman, my mistress, from her lover. He is in the hands of the rabble, and only she can save him. For the love of Heaven, monsieur, take the message to her. I cannot go."

"What is her name?" Barrington asked.

"Mademoiselle St. Clair."

"Certainly, she shall have it. How shall I make her understand?"

"Say Lucien prays her to come to Paris. In my coat yonder, in the lining of the collar, is a little gold star, her gift to him. Say Rouzet gave it to you because he could travel no farther. She will understand. You must go warily, and by an indirect road, or they will follow you as they did me."

"And where shall I find Mademoiselle St. Clair?"

"At the Château of Beauvais, hard by Lausanne, across the frontier."

"Lausanne! Switzerland!"

Before the man could give a word of further explanation there was a loud knocking at the door of the inn which the landlord had closed for the night, and when it was not opened immediately, angry curses and a threat to break it

down. The patient on the bed did not start, he was too grievously hurt to do that, but his white face grew gray with fear.

"It is nothing, only a late traveler," said Barrington. "And, my good fellow, I cannot go to—"

The man's eyes were closed. The sudden fear seemed to have robbed him of consciousness. It was quite evident to Barrington that he could not be made to understand just now that a journey to Beauvais was impossible. He waited a few minutes to see if the man would rouse again, but he did not, and seeing that an explanation must be put off until later, he went out of the room, closing the door gently behind him. As he descended the stairs the landlord tiptoed up to meet him.

"The men who were here to-day and cursed my wine," he whispered. "Two of them have returned!"

CHAPTER II

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A BINDING OATH

The return of these men, if indeed they were responsible for the condition of the man upstairs, might augur further evil for him. They had perchance returned along the road to make certain that their work was complete, and, finding their victim gone, were now in search of him. Exactly what reliance was to be placed on the word of the wounded man, Barrington had not yet determined. He might be a contemptible spy, his message might contain hidden information to the enemies of his country; he was certainly carrying it to aristocrats who were safe across the frontier, and he might fully deserve all the punishment which had been meted out to him, but for the moment he was unable to raise a hand in his own defense and his helplessness appealed to Barrington. These men should not have their will of him if he could prevent it.

"Keep out of the way of being questioned," he whispered to the landlord, as they went down the stairs. It was characteristic of Richard Barrington that he had formed no plan when he entered the room. He believed that actions must always be controlled by the circumstances of the moment, that it was generally essential to see one's enemy before deciding how to outwit him, a false theory perhaps, but, given a strong personality, one which is often successful.

"Good evening, gentlemen! My friend and I are not the only late travelers to-night."

The two men looked sharply at him. Their attention had been keenly, though furtively, concentrated upon Seth, who sat in a corner, apparently half asleep. In fact, having just noticed them, he had closed his eyes as though he were too weary and worn out to talk.

Both men curtly acknowledged Barrington's greeting, hardly conscious of the curtness maybe. They were of the people, their natural roughness turned to a sort of insolent swagger by reason of the authority which had been thrust upon them. They were armed, blatantly so, and displayed the tri-colored cockade. In some society, at any rate, they were of importance, and this stranger and the manner of his greeting puzzled them. He spoke like an aristocrat, yet there was something unfamiliar about him.

"Did you have to batter at the door before you could gain admittance?" asked one. Of the two, he seemed to have the greater authority.

"No, we arrived before the door was closed."

"Closed doors are suspicious," the man returned with an oath. "This is the day of open doors and freedom for all, citizen."

"Liberty, equality, and fraternity," Barrington answered. "It is a good motto. One that men may well fight for."

"Do you fight for it?" asked the man, truculently.

"Not yet," said Barrington, very quietly and perfectly unmoved, apparently seeing nothing unusual in the man's manner or his question, but quite conscious that Seth had sleepily let his hand slip into his pocket and kept it there.

"Late travelers on the road are also suspicious," said the man, stepping a little nearer to Barrington.

"Indeed! Tell me, of what are you afraid? My friend and I are armed, as I see you are. We may join forces against a common danger. Four resolute men are not easily to be played with."

"Aristocrats find it convenient to travel at night, and tricked out just as you are," he said. "I have taken part in stopping many of them."

"Doubtless an excellent and useful occupation," Barrington returned.

"And I have heard many of them talk like that," said the man, "an attempt to throw dust into eyes far too sharp to be blinded by it. You will tell me where you travel to and where from."

"Do you ask out of courteous curiosity, as meeting travelers may do, or for some other reason?"

"You may think whichever pleases you."

"I am not making for the frontier, if that is what you want to know," laughed Barrington.

"I asked a question which it will be well for you to answer," said the man, and it was evident that his companion was also on the alert.

"Have you authority to question me?" Barrington asked.

"Papers here," said the man, touching his coat, "and this." His hand fell upon a pistol in his belt.

"Leave it there. It is the safest place."

Seth's hands had come from his pocket with a pistol in it. Barrington still laughed.