

VICTOR STAFFORD REID

BASCOBEL

3.
They come back home from War of 1812,
back to slavery island, but will not accept it
because they have been fighting for freedom.

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OR
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CHAPTER 1

You heard the drums beating the Assembly, the trumpets ^{mounting} ~~climbing~~ higher and higher, and hallelujah leaped ^{up in} inside of you. A glory stood up ^{plain in} within us as we wheeled from the asphalted road ^{and settled into parade dress. We} onto the grass of the ~~poor~~ field; and saw the population of eyes beyond the rope barriers staring ^{in wonder} at the ~~plain~~ and order of us, ^{The splendid gleam of our brass and the thunder in the shine of our leather — and we forget our defeat for a while.} Some ten thousand, the papers will say, ^{dispatch writers} gathered to see this last parade of the ~~British~~ Westers. Westers was the fond name given to us by those other tens of thousands we have stood bulwark for, up and down the world, a century and a half and more now. And the ~~papers~~ ^{THEY} will ^{talk of our} make a great to do tomorrow about the steadiness, ^{OF our proud, inextinguishable spirit} with which we ~~paraded~~ for this last ceremonial; and that loyal and true to His Majesty ^{as} ~~forever~~, will these disbanded soldiers be. Roll up, I should say to these ^{dispatch} newspaper writers.

Roll up and fall back, you big hypocrites. It didn't have to be at all.

^{We didn't have to have New Memoirs on talk between our legs. We weren't licked more than a possum}
This morning, the ^{fatigue detail SANK} ~~Adjutant~~ ^{and strong} ~~reared~~ into the earth the iron corner-posts, through which the ropes ^{parade} are ~~strung~~, fencing the ~~poor~~ field, east to west. At the centre is a place reserved for the nobles — the men of morning coats and striped trousers and their women who laugh under bright parasols. To the right of this ~~enclosure~~, you discern with a roll of your eyes the ^{fine broadcloths} ~~loud tweeds~~ of the ^{slaveholders} ~~men who make money from clever commerce~~, and their women ~~uncomfortable~~ in ^{yards of} ~~yards of~~ hot silk. Then, away from them all, in ^{DISPARAGE} ~~printed~~ cottons and canvas shoes, the people ^{the slave} of whom I knew so little while I lived between the pages of the Manual, but to whom, now, they send me.

And under the smash and fury of the heels of the regiment, under the thuds of our boots on the ~~poor~~ field, in a quiet that is all my own, their voices reach for me, running over with mockery:

What are you doing here, Laban, man? An Old Soldier already — and you so young too?

There is no answer from me. I throw back their mockery at them, the dung-eaters. I had nothing to do with the arrangements which bring me here today. While I served King George, I ^{I fought his war of 1812 and did more than he demanded of me.} served with a single mind. ^{am} Now that he is finished with me, today I ^{bring} ~~return~~ his Colours.

^{TAKE XX IN A CHARGE} That is all. Stop your ears and march proud, lad. { ^{I am Laban, the Colour Sergeant, etc etc}
So the regiment comes behind me, in Companies, four deep, fifty abreast, stepping in review order to the ^{Beautiful} ~~twirl~~ of the drum-major's staff. ^{as it passes} ~~Buzz~~ in a dumb show, ^{march comes} ~~padding~~ our steps, is the staff; the six-foot long pole, slick ^{at} in the shaft and circled at the butt with coloured cords and carvings, emblematic of our victories. ^{But not a word of our defeats.} It is childish, the way the stick twirls; for out of the corner of my eye I see its spin and flash in the sun and I am ~~presently~~ reminded of the Piper of Hamelin. ^{Once it was like the staff of God to LABAN the Colour Sergeant.} There is a slight shock in me, ^{today I can} that almost ~~laugh~~ at it.

^(GRAND)
They say the March to which we march was written by a soldier of the Regiment. That is well understood. For ^{listen to} ~~hear~~ (the oboes and the ~~low-pitched~~ clarionets), ^{Nearer to the drums.} like the voices of my people bargaining in the market-place — so much for this; no, I give so much for that; add this to it; no, take a mite from it — until there comes an impatience in the hurry of the

trumpets, quickening the business to acceptance — and the nod of heads which tell confirmation in the double beats from the drums. Indeed, it is a matter to be believed and to stand to say, that only an old one of the people could have written such a march as this.

march my company. We carry the
The Colours go with us. I am with the company whose honour it is to bear the Colours forever. There is the bright and brave Royal Standard, *Stowed out of eastern* ~~delivered~~ *The Regiment* ~~handed~~ *The* to us in the courtyard of Buckingham Palace by the King's own hand. It goes before the other. The other has lost its beauty to time and weather and the ravelled tatters flutter in the breeze. A man could be pardoned for believing that it goes behind the other *Royal Standard since* ~~because~~ of its poor appearance. But look to it, *your* ~~it~~ *tongue, God strike you,*

Look to it. It took honours in the shameful Carolinas long before you were
is and we shook it out to the TURKMAN. It CHUCKED The Chin of the Americans
born. It was known to the Spaniards on the Main and bore the pride of the Americans
at New Orleans. It was shaken out before the savage Boers and made the Ashantis howl
with fear. Ask Cetewayo of the Zulus how it met the day. Cetewayo who came at my fathers with his battle-cry that asked for nothing better than a shroud:

If we go backward, we die, if we go forward, we die, Brothers, go forward and die.

Look to it and weep. Tears are an adornment to the proud man and 'tis the weakling who is ashamed of them. I shed a million tears inside me. And yet, I do not say, Remove This Cup.

The ceremony is called Trooping the Colours.

arm ~~In fact,~~ I march at right marker with my shoulders squared and my chin in, *world comes by* and ~~more~~ who see my line as we turn into right formation could dare to say on the Book that we are ~~not~~ moved by some exact machine. There is no need for a command.

I commence to turn my line as the band goes into the slow march, slapping my toes to the turf and lifting my knees straight in the cock-a-hoop of the showy ceremonial step which is a pride of the regiment. *We do it* ~~It is done~~ with a deceptive movement which takes me slowly around, *parade -* ~~dressing~~ *The* my line with me, the empty bayonet scabbard at my side scarcely shaking as my boots hit to the measure. *The man at* ~~He who is~~ right marker has great responsibility on him. He is the hinge on which the line of men will turn. *I am that man.* I get my corporal's shoulder at point in the corner of my eye. Then, as if they were strung on a baton with the grip held by me, I turn the line with perfection.

The band has gone into The Ash Grove in a slow time and I hold down the turn with all my heart and mind gone into the fifty lads who march at my left shoulder. I must bear around easy, an inch each step, keeping the exact beat so the young soldier fifty paces away on my left will have completed the fifty paces he

just at ^{that} the moment ~~at~~ I end the few inches of turn such a manoeuvre requires of me as right marker. It is a great and proud responsibility and my mind must enter them all and say, Here is the placement of the heel, the turn of the shoulder, no more, no less, sweeping away the force pulling at the youngest soldier's knees that is telling him to go faster, or threatening to anchor his legs so he will stumble and make a laughing stock of the Company.

But trials and tribulations must bow to will. And there is no arrow made that could command a better flight than the formation of A Company as our line comes around on the old song which is bringing a swallow to my throat.

The friends of my childhood again are before me

Fond memories waken as freely I roam.

This is the wonder of it all. That with the evening sun on my face and the Colour flapping in the breeze off the sea, that marching with the thousand detail of the Regiment and with A Company the lodestone of ten thousand pair of eyes, my mind can wander away down the years and pick up the pieces of such memories as a lifetime of soldiering can bring. I remember with a remembrance that is as if yesterday the months and years I have worn the King's khaki since my eyes were at my knees.

There is a grand and blessed feeling at the cheering from the population of Nobs to the east of the enclosure of nobs. The mockery ^{at us} that had been in them has left them ^{because of} ~~with~~ the way we have commended ourselves on the parade and now is turned at the nobs as if they would ~~say~~ say, Think you, you could do out there as our sons have done this day, Big Nobs?

The chain mail of the full dress helmet is cool against my cheek and the ^{gun} ~~rifle~~ is snug and balanced at my shoulder. The slow march brings us into line and now we face the saluting base and my eyes stand to fours with the Colonel's. There is thought and sorrow on him too. Nobody has to tell me that he is saddened too.

He was with us ^{all the way to New Orleans} at ~~Hill 60~~. That time, we went up three times and came back twice with a red drench behind us marking the way way we had been. He was with us ^{in all the} ~~before the~~ battles and skirmishes of our FIFTY Regiment. Turkoman and knew the foulness death can be on the clean sands of the desert. Now he must stand at the base of the flagpole and salute the end of the regiment. He must listen to the Last Post played with drums and bugles and wonder why this had to be. After the parade, when the sergeant's stripes on my arm will hold meaning no longer, I shall spit.

Laban Daniels is my name, colour-sergeant, a Jamaica-man, thirty-two, ~~who is the~~ ^{son of slave}
~~son of a soldier who was a son of a soldier in the Foot of the British West Indies.~~ ^{but now a sergeant in the Fort. I went to America and fought for the King and}
~~There are no parents to me now.~~ ^{my} ~~My father went in the Second Boer War and my mother~~ ^{are dead. He} ~~went in the cholera.~~ ^{she} ~~I was raised as a Boy of the regiment and learnt my speech in a~~ ^{took to}
~~barrack-room.~~ ~~I studied the parts of a rifle at the time when other lads were learning~~ ^{whipping}
~~of stamen and pistil.~~ ~~God was second in command to my Colonel, and the Cherubims were~~ ^{with my}
~~only an officers corps with wings.~~ ~~At eighteen, I went to the colour company and learn~~ ^{Now}
~~there that only in the garrison chapel did the Cross of Calvary go before the regimental~~ ^{the} ~~flag.~~ ^{King is}
~~Only years after, at Ypres and Passchendaele and in the Valley of Jordan, was I~~ ^{tried of}
~~sobered and tempered to other beliefs.~~ ^{was}

Now, today, I stand in line and hear my Colonel address this final parade. He ~~has~~
~~has not said why the regiment is being disbanded.~~ ~~Nor ho can so many ~~xxxxx~~ thousand~~
~~men, schooled all their lives into obeying, begin now to fend for themselves.~~ ~~How can~~
~~he talk plainly if he cannot talk the truth? And how can he speak truth without telling~~
~~of the shame of England? And where would that place him, a serving soldier and an~~
~~Englishman? For, look you, it should be known to you that the god and the cherubims of~~
~~this regiment will not be cast away like the rest of us.~~

The Colonel and his English officers will go by ship to Buckingham Palace and lay
 the colours at the feet of the King. ~~The Colonel~~ ^{He} will bend a knee and lie to the King,
 telling him how ~~the~~ ^{Jamaican} the lads still love him even though the regiment has been broken up.
 Then the King will give ~~him~~ ^{the Colonel} his hand to kiss; and papers bearing curious seals will
 send ~~him~~ ^{him} and his officers to other regiments. Then the fat men ~~in~~ ^{at the top} Whitehall and Downing
 Street will have shaken the water from their hands and their ~~xxxx~~ ^{xxxx} souls will
 have been purified.

Oh, I ask your pardon. A man's tongue should be kind even when his sorrow and
 anger is strong. Moreover, such ~~thoughts~~ matters do not bear in my tale.

The sun is almost behind the hills and the seawind is gone to sleep. Now the
 night-winds from the land will steal down, soft as the evening drawing in. ^{A cock crowed}
^{somewhere in the midst of the slave people.}

There is a bell which is rung each evening in the Catholic mission just outside
 the garrison wall. I am not of the faith, and hold little with any church; though there
 is something about the hymns and the psalms which has oftentimes got inside of me with
 a great swelling that I must fill my chest with air and ~~xxxx~~ ^{roll} out the mighty matters
 which dwell in me at that time. But I speak of this bell. It is rung three times three,
 and then a long salvo which takes the multiple of three. Those who hold to the Papist
 church have answered to my enquiries that this means the Trinity, a salute each to the

Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost; and then a joining of all to signify their belief in the Three-in-One. It is a belief I hardly understand but which I will not argue with.

Do not misunderstand me. A Boy in the regiment must go church, the Church of England preferred; and at twelve, there is stout pressure from the Padre that you should be confirmed. All these I have done. And I stand to witness that many have told me how the giving of the ~~Exsacra~~ Eucharist before a battle has been a deal of comfort to them. I do not argue. Even though within myself I have thought how I drew my best comfort from the knowledge that the magazine was full and that my thews and sinews were strong beyond my years. ~~Exsacra~~

no!
I am ~~not~~ a humble man.

But to go with this bell from the mission. I will say, ~~often and often~~, before judge and jury, that although I am not of the Faith, such a bell puts quiet into a man and ~~blows out his fears of the dark~~. For, I doubt not that big as some men talk, there is a fear of the dark in most of us.

Now while the Colonel talks, the bell commences to tell of the Trinity.

"True words," my corporal mutters ^{along the line the boys shed soft laughter} beside me. ~~Believe me I am not a humble man~~

It was as if he had laugh a bitter laugh aloud. Strangers to our land and tongue know nothing of the things my people can hide in a plain seeming phrase. Let the mightiest liar of the garrison be telling his tale, and there comes the crowing of a rooster, or a hound's bark, ~~from the officers' quarters~~, and somewhere, from a dry belly there will come, True word, and the barrack-room lawyer will be a ~~shaved~~ landcrab, ^{in the laughter,} scuttling for a hole in the rock. The saying comes from the rooster ^{which} ~~who~~ applauded ^{how} ~~the~~ Peter's ^{fib.}

^{christened} My corporal, ^{at the Font but} Nathaniel Murphy ^{the in Company} ~~by christening~~, Nat Murph to ~~those who are his~~ friends, is as big in body as me. A good man to be at your side, ~~he is~~, and I be struck dead if ever there has been a time that I have seen him afraid. There is wealth of bone and brain in him and a similar fire in him as in me. I ~~hold my heart and say,~~ he has been my finest friend.

We have trooped the Colours and my Colonel has said his empty words. The ^{flag} ~~glory~~ ^{gone into} ~~has been hidden in~~ a canvas bag and handed to the Captain of the Guard ^{to keep} ~~in whose care~~ and ~~keeping it will be~~ until they kneel before the King. Now will come the Beating of the Retreat.

We go through the order of the Retreat, listen to the call and answer of the bugles, march and countermarch until there comes a soft flurry from the iron triangles in the band and the lift of the wind instruments and they mount into the vesper hymn. My people, who cannot hear a hymn in quiet, must needs start to sing. I could ^{banish} ~~not~~ ^{I want to} ~~and~~ roar ~~at~~ them to stop ~~doing so~~ and so to my heart. The hymning shakes Nat Murph

too and he swore a string of soft oaths.

I tell him, sharp: "Steady!" through the side of my mouth. My Company will die as proud as they lived. I ~~am~~ ~~think~~ firmly put the dam' farewell

out of my mind and think on the land instead. The land
The Colonel said would be ^{decided} ~~for~~ to us for ^{having been} ~~being~~ and loyal
soldiers.

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I must introduce Cobina. Once before, in my soldiering, I went up into the Blue Mountains. There, the peaks are the footstools of God. The valleys between the peaks are gowned in mists and garlanded in cloud-wreaths. There is mystery and beauty as in a woman in them; and the hills around them, catching the early ~~sunlight~~ sunlight, preen themselves in green and yellow gold like foppish males at a promenade. The trills and pipings of the birds take music through every valley; and each opening into each, a man ascending the valleys may imagine that Jehovah had sent His household guards to honour you up the hallways to His footstool.

So do my thoughts climb as they near Cobina.

Cobina Althea Lawrence was her full name. The Queen of Sheba should be her name.

A goodly ~~heritage~~ heritage has come down to us from the comely woman whose passion ran deep and with purpose. And, under such a heritage, it has never ceased to be a wonder to me that the foolishness should ever be accomplished which puts the brown men and women of my people in poor countenance in the courts of men. How did it envelope us? How many centuries must we bore through before we pass out of it?

But let that be.

Beauty of face is not uncommon to the women of the world. Look here: Those who have no beauty may even find it in jars of salves. An ugly woman is a cause for wonderment; and even speculation: Whether she has kept herself so on purpose, to draw the eyes to the jackdaw among so many of rich plumage. But, beauty of presence is a reward kept for the goddesses among women. There, let my love take her place.

Not Murph opened the barrack room door and the singing from the mess came in with her. They had sung through all the hardships we had pulled up in our campaigning, and, quieted.

I am a plain soldier — an Old Soldier stripped of the brass and khaki. Words draw clumsily to my lips. Not with ~~lilt~~ *incredibly wrought in iron as do Mr. Winston Churchill's* and wonder as they do to Mr. Lloyd George. I find no grace in my tongue, except when it is to my honour to escort the Colours in the Chapel on St. George's Day. Then, truly, I take to myself the mantle of Shepherd David, and the psalms which he composed in the fields of Zion are on my lips as my very own. Out with ~~power~~ *strength* and ~~glory~~ *pour* the mighty hymns; and, for a moment, I say there is a cathedral in me. I say it with humility. A man should not make a boast ~~of~~ of matters in which he had no voice in shaping.

much beer, they were harmonizing a vesper hymn.

But when I speak of Cobina, I speak with assurance that there is none to question my

CHAPTER 4

"Murph, the fishermen who went with the Gallilean on his missions could ~~ha~~ ha' had no ~~amaxes~~ call to quarrel at what they had left behind. A man who could ha' said with a straight face 'Lo, we have left all ~~amaxes~~ ^{to follow after thee'} must have been a great hypocrite. Why should there be surprise that when the enemy came within range he forsook his platoon commander and nearly broke his neck ~~a-~~running?"

I speak to Murph about Peter, the Fisherman, as we turn into Rae Town and the street along the beachfront with the sun hot on our tweeds. Never, never, I stand to say had I ever felt such ~~hazz~~ hell when I wore khaki. Sweat runs down my back and I listen ~~t~~ to hear my feet squelching in the tight brown boots. I see there is a similar suffering on Murph, for he talks with a gasp like a ~~gasp~~ dying fish. He uses his wet handkerchief before he answers. I have still got my broad regulation khaki 'kerchief with me, and I rejoice to see that the white square which he had bought from the leering young man has lost all its beautiful starching.

"It is the crowding, Laban," he said, waving a weak hand. "It is that there is no room for them. The fishing villages in St. Thomas' parish are wide and ~~x~~ clean as the sky. It is the foolishness of having a fishing beach in the city which makes it stink."

The big island prison is on the edge of Rae Town. A fortress it is, of high and high red brick walls and a bell which clangs the hours with a cruel humour to the iron clappers since it must know that an hour holds but little meaning to those caged inside. A place of penal ~~xx~~ servitude it is; and a knot of anger is known by my belly whenever my eyes meet the red walls. ^{For} there is a bloody beauty to it when the sun, sinking beyond Port Royal, paints the walls for a little while and confuses your mind this while. It is not outside of reason to see why this anger comes on me. My eyes run to beauty wherever it shows itself; so, it brings a vexing of my spirit when I find such a marvellous handiwork as these ordered bricks, enclosing nought but shame and degradation. That is my way.

Moreover, I must tell that 'twixt this prison and the ugly warehouses, the beach at Rae Town is being squeezed to death. My Cobina dwells on this beach.

We step from the street and put our backs to the ~~w~~ fence so the drays will pass with fair way. Some of the men who sit on the sidewalks have empty sleeves to their ~~shir~~ shirts and eyes filled with anger. They do not ~~move~~ aside for anyone and we had to force a passage, not to be under the wheels of the drays. I speak to Murph of their ill ~~manner~~ manners. He looks down on them and speaks in disgust.

"'Tis the dynamite," he said.

I am puzzled.

"'Tis against the law to use dynamite in the fishing," Murph explained. "Caught

with it, there is a stretch of months in the penitentiary. These with the empty sleeves ha' had a hand blown away because of their carelessness. So now, 'tis known by all and the law that they were dynamiters. But the law says they have had punishment enough and leave them alone. They are not of any use in a boar longer, so they stay around the beach and bum the fishers, a-hating everyone else."

I looked on them again and pity came on me for them. Often there was an ugly sear to their faces where the great heat of the explosion had touched.~~it~~

"It is a wicked and a foolish way," said Murph, the fisher, with anger. "It kills from the roe to the leathery old shark when they light the sticks and throw them into the schools. If some did no' have their arms blown off, soon there would be no more fishing for the hooks and the nets. They are — "

I hear ablasphemy from Murph and look around to see that a brick has fallen on his brown velour hat and above that, at the top edge of the fence, the grinning face of a dirty child. I move as if to strike at the face and he falls back into the yard, howling for blue murder. I hurry Murph into the street before ~~soon~~ ^{the} slattern woman who owns ~~if~~ it can put her bugle voice to us. I know the street well.

Fences run down the land side of it, but that to the seawards is open to the beach. There ~~is~~ ^{are} open gutters down the sides and men and women on stools are a-mending their nets. For the most part the men are naked to the waist and the women scantily clad and torn in shameful places. There is such a rise of voices quarreling, laughing and sometimes seeming to be busy at both that 'tis as if we waded ~~by~~ chest high through a sea of heat and noise.

"A bedlam — a badword bedlam!" Murph cried at me as we picked our ways through fish offal and ~~fighting~~ squabbling dogs.

Then he remembered what ~~we~~ I had been saying and went back to his apostleship.

"It is crowded. They cannot spread out, so they sit on each other."

He waved his hand to the prison and the warehouses. It is true, to think of it. But thought did not stay on me when I came to Ree Town. In the swiftened beat to my pulse, there was a slowing to my brain. Used to commanding as I was, now I was being ordered about by my emotions; all howling this way and that; until one face came into my eyes and all of these gathered to stand in salute before it. Then as her beauty broke on me, there came not the peace which would be expected, but a turmoil of heat to be up and doing. It hammered with force and torment at my mind, that another night should not draw over the sea before she was taken from here and placed somewhere more befitting. All this — is the matter that puts a hand on my thinking.

Otherwise, I would have seen like Murph that the prison and the warehouses were pressing cruelly on the beach — and that the fishers must live near the affairs which give them bread, regardless. So then there would not be anger in me at these people who

threw their offal about the beautiful feet of my beloved. My understanding of them would have in no way tempered my determination to take out what was mine.

Murph had never been here with me. He had seen Cobina at the Mess, when, to my invitation, she had attended. He had stood with me at the windows of the papist chapel outside the garrison and watched her ^{telling} her beads. But now, here he was walking beside me ^{easily} why such and such a place was as it was. Would a listener know that this Nat Murph was a man of less patience than me? Oh, to flood and wind he wouldn't.

All this while of thinking, I could not still my racing heart nor command my eyes to stay on duty near my feet. My eyes must lift and seek ahead with eagerness — until I saw her.

They say the cedar groves of the Blue Mountains were planted for the special joy of the Lord; and that when he wept at the fall of Adam, the ferns grew where His tears fell. Beautiful these are; and I would not but be believing that the God to Whom Shepherd Davie composed his ^{Eighth} ~~Eighty~~, would have chosen the cedars among which to walk; and also that the ferns ~~and the~~ of the Passes are a commemoration of the Holy Weeping. But I say the joy of His handiwork is seen in the creatures He made. And further, I say ~~th~~ there was that in Cobina that told me He was not displeased. I say it with humility. I am not a blasphemous man, even if I believe what I believe.

There are sights of beauty I have seen and I have treasured them in the room behind my eyes. I ha' seen the sun setting at Lucea; I have seen it rise in the Port Royal mountains. Noon has come to me through the ripening mango groves of Mona, bursting ^{with} in scents; and ask the man who has stayed with the moon in the bay near Falmouth whether he agrees with Shepherd Davie that All His works are excellent?

I have known many years in many lands. I have buried my lads in French earth and bivouacked in the shade of the Pyramids. I hardly fed at my mother's breast, but was a-killing for the King before I was twenty. They say of me in the regiment, that ~~from~~ a blacksmith must have shaped my heart, and that my brain is refilled with iced water each reveille. Murph tells me they say I am tough. Aie, but 'tis a goodly thing when a man can laugh at himself.

There are some inches to my stature over and above the bar which stand at six feet in the tailor's shop. In fact, I give to none of the regiment in height, although between Murph and Joe Black, there is some question left over in any argument as to whether I hold a full inch over their crowns. Yet, it stands to reason that with my height and an unmistakable strength to ~~by~~ my breadth, many men, especially if they have not had drink, will not stand to dally blows with me. I am not gentle. I have commanded too much to be gentle. I hate strongly, and forgive slowly. But — I call no witness to

this save myself — no man knew what weakness dwelt inside me when I stood before my Cobina.

I should see her presence now and set down here what I see. Then, perhaps, the Shepherd Davie would turn his eyes away from me while I borrowed of his eloquence. Then I would make the mornings of the month of ^{May} ~~xxx~~ blush to be compared with her gentle or squander the soft, dark nights of youth; ~~cz,xinzazupndtzrft~~ Spring in a spendthrift seeking for the likeness of her skin. I would hold a river in my fists and pour it down a bed of moss and ferns until the sound of her voice was faithfully heard; and throw the idle ~~sax~~ ^{stars} into fear and trembling as I charged through their halls a-searching for the match to her eyes.

But I am a thrifty man. Moreover, I am no' as proud to believe the eloquence of King Davie could be mine. So I simply stand here now in the Rae Town street and see her standing near the end of the street, her face turned to the ocean. There is a great love of the ocean in her. She speaks of it in the same voice that she has for Our Lady; and although I am not a man who holds to the papist beliefs, yet, because of my great love to her, I will cast a blow anytime to the man who rouses his evil tongue to ~~sneak~~ blaspheme at this matter we know so little of.

My hand on Murph's arm puts him into ^a ~~the~~ side street, and I halt our advance. Murph has not been easy since this morning when I asked that he accompany me to the beach. He has come slowly and with an angry puzzlement which I have well sensed. It is clear to me why he has spoken so long on the sights which we saw as we passed into the fishing district; and why he has suddenly become a politician, mouthing on the sins of the town landowners who ~~ha~~ placed their buildings to crowd the beach. Murph has put his tongue to work on another matter so he will not vex his friend by enquiring why he ~~shon~~ should come to such a business, when he could have with profit gone to arrange for our passage on the truck.

Hear me now. Last night, I told him I would not be churched with Cobina until we had looked at the land the King had given us. We will go this morning to see whether Cobina and me can live as man and wife on prosperity, and not as cat and ^{dog} ~~and~~ in poverty. There should be a house and a garden for her. A garden with roses, so help me, God, you hear me, Murph?

I told him this with fire in my declaration to match the fire he was heaping on me for what he called my great cowardice. I told my head, with a great condemnation of my heart, that my declaration was just. A bullet which goes to the target, goes not because 'tis the wish of the man in the firing pit, but because he has given thought to wind and weather and the lift of the barrel. Mr. William Shakespeare told it that the fault is not in our stars why we are underlings. Mr. Shakespeare's wisdom falls on our foolishness with the peppery snarl of a kettle drum. Eh, the stars are idle to our

stumbings. Keep your head down, you five-year fool!

(How these army sayings die hard! The Colours are gone to Buckingham Palace and we have swapped khaki for Scotch tweed, yet the saying remain in my head.)

I hear Murph's voice coming at me.

"Why do we stop here? You want to go on alone?"

"No — no. No, Murph. I don't want to go on alone."

Murph gets to understand my voice and I hear his breath draw slowly as he followed the direction of my eyes.

There is a very notable queen which the Egypt-men in the Cairo museum used to make much fuss about. Nefertiti, is her name; and I say with my head on the block, there has been no queen of England to stand in her shadow for beauty; excepting, perhaps, that Elisabeth who reigned in the time of Mr. Shakespeare. Like the face of Nefertiti's, was Cobina, looking towards the ocean. And for the space in which you could draw three ~~breath~~ breaths, Murph and me stood still in the street; and there was no remembrance of the noisy life around us.

"Go to her," Murph said after a while. "I will wait here."

Oh, Murph. Poor Murph. I had fought my battle and gained the victory by the time he spoke. There was a full hunger in me yet. Do not misunderstand me. A cry was going through me. I was standing at the walls of the city and did not lack for trumpets. It is not a great conceit for me to set down that I was beloved by her doubly and some beyond the love that a maid bears for a man. In humility, I make this plain. But I had chosen my road and would not turn from it. I remember with good remembrance, ~~King~~ King Moses and the Promised Land. So it was with me now. It is a matter of Holy Writ that all the forced marches we make in our time have been made sometime ~~before our time~~ before our time. Everything that happens, ~~had~~ has happened already

But now, should I shout hallelujah? Could I clap my hands with a joyful noise and say Blessed be the Lord God of Israel for he hath redeemed His people?

I am a sergeant of the Colours who cuts his teeth on the barrack room floor. What sorrow I have in myself is kept to myself. I laugh a little and turn Murph into the side street and walk away from the beach with aloes thick in my throat and blasphemies shaking me to the roots.

CHAPTER 6

We had fought for this land. Now we were free. Murph, my corporal, and me got the ~~freedom papers~~ freedom papers from one Colonel and model off a ~~RECON-~~ ^{RECON-} ~~document~~ ^{document} on land.

There is a land to be inherited by the meek, the Good Book says. It has not been inconceivable for me to think that these would be standing heirs to a quantity of black loam, with riches sufficient to make the heart leap to the luck of it. But I have sometimes thought what a noble act indeed it must be to bring such riches of muck and ~~manure~~ ^{manure} which manure to those who turn the other cheek. An act of grace ~~that~~ nobody has to tell me must come straight from God Almighty. Now, I stand and wonder whether there has been a hidden meaning. Is it that only the meek shall inherit the earth? ^{inherited fine black loam with springs in it. We had fought for it.} ~~There is little meekness in~~ Murph and me. ^{We are not meek men, but we hoped we had.} We ~~have~~ climbed and stumbled half the night up a stony track that could not have been ~~under~~ ^{on the top} wider than a ~~man's~~ ^{man's} hand at many ~~places~~ ^{at}. Towards morning, ~~with~~ weariness on us, we bedded at the side of the mountain, ^{First light} ~~track~~, using our haversacks for pillows. ~~Then, at the peep of day, stood over the mountains, we roused ourselves and looked around.~~ ^{we were up looking around.}

^{time} "There is time ^{time} the mist must have to clear, Iabe," Murph grunted at me and put his head back to the haversack.

I thought to sleep too, but stronger thoughts ~~than sleep~~ ^{worried} were in my head. So I felt around for brushwood which would ^{offer} give me a coffee-fire, using some of our rum ~~from the haversack~~ ^{spirit} to give ^{to} the damp wood, ~~life to accept the match.~~ Working quietly so I would not have Murph waking, I put on a ~~billiecan~~ ^{billiecan} to boil. Funny it is how, sometimes, although you know that your thoughts will be dismal, yet you crave loneliness in which ~~to think.~~ Like a moth to a flame, so goes all your energies into finding the loneliness in which ~~to think.~~ Funny, it is.

I get the brushwood together and ~~do the matters which will~~ ^{do} start the fire, and all the while that my hands ^{are} ~~are~~ busy, my eyes ^{were} ~~are~~ seeing a grey sand beach, and Cobina waiting in the wind for the homecoming of her ^{pa} ~~father~~ and his rowers ^{of} ~~from~~ the dark seas. ^{Cobina was my first helper the war. Her pa, a freedman, had slave ropes.} She has told me how, each morning, before sun-up, she must take ~~such things as~~ ^{with her} they will need for food when the canoe comes in with the catch. A poor home she has, with all the morsels accounted for.

Then at that time it seems strange to me that fishers should be short of food; strange, until she tells how the fishing-grounds in the ^{bay} ~~harbour~~ have been worked and worked ^{by the poor boats} ~~for generations and so the catch gets less and less.~~ ^{Boats too poorly built to go far for fish.} That was the time I took to bringing bread and meat to her from the garrison, for doubts gathered in my mind. Doubts which were beliefs that my girl was knowing hunger often. Very well. Now then. If all this be known to me, why should it be that a strong moment is denied me where- in I would go forward ~~and have her churched to me now~~ ^{now}.

Such a question leaves me angry. It is foully put, I tell myself. I loved Cobina before there was talk that the regiment would die, and so I had filled her head with ~~the~~ the pictures of a home in the married sergeants' quarters and space for a garden of her

own. Now that these could not be had, what should it be? Wedlock in poverty and so stand to see her fade?

Rightly you will say, There is a cowardice and a cowardice. I had never lacked the courage to order my platoon to fall back of me, while I went up and over. But this cowardice — now here was a great difference.

I have become a puzzle and a worry to Murph as to myself. He sees a strangeness in me not to be accounted for. He has put his head back on the rough pillow, but I doubt not that he is awake. My mind tells me that Nat Murph is not overwilling to rise early before our business of the day begins. That is the way he has chosen, so there will be no idle hours in which ~~idle~~ idle talk may vex our friendship. In my own good time, he believes I will talk of it. ~~He knows all of me.~~ We have been many years together, Murph and me.

The coffee is ~~drawn~~ ^{right.} and I sit and watch the firelight fading. The birds are ~~waking~~ ^{is very sincere} and a pitchbarrie ~~makes a fine skink~~ ^{IN A TREE.} somewhere ~~above my head.~~ ^{important} There is a rapid beat, a pause and a sharp question, then a rapid beat again from a ~~hurrying~~ ^{important} woodpecker. Perhaps a father ~~he is~~, an early bird with mouths to feed. ~~A father of little children.~~ There is no ~~great~~ cowardice in birds. ~~Then many these~~ ^{Then many these} ~~birds.~~

I take the ~~plan~~ ^{diagram} from my haversack — ~~the plan~~ ^{the plan} Murph had got from the officer — and unfold it at my feet to take my bearings and see how much farther we will have to walk. Murph stirs and groans, ~~to wakefulness.~~ ^{wakes easily and falls in a moment.} I watch him while his eyes open — ~~to clear for one who has been asleep.~~ He looks into the tree under which we had laid. He brought his eyes down from the chirping pitchbarrie so that with mine they stood at ~~four.~~ A grin came on him.

"A cold reveille, ^{west,} sarge," he said.

"Yawn it off. There is hot coffee," I tell him.

He wrinkles his nose like a bulldog — a big, brown bulldog. ~~In Syria,~~ ^{army} the loudmouthed lads from the ~~armies~~ ^{London} used to say he was ~~as~~ ^{looked like} Mr. Winston Churchill in ~~carbon.~~ ^{charcoal.} It was said with angry mocking; for was it no' the wild Admiralty man who had wasted them against the Turkoman at the Dardenelles?

He sat up and I pushed the mug at him. He sipped at it, his eyes over the rim looking about the land on which we had slept. It was a wild land; wild and rocky and fr from the meagre look of the shrubs, not of much virtue. Such little ~~space~~ ^{soil} was there for ~~still~~ ^{The} between the rocks. ~~Truly, there were tall trees,~~ ^{were tall,} green and leafy. And the look of it from a distance was of such a beauty that men would — passing — say: ~~Truly a land for our sons and our sons' sons.~~ ^{it held promise in passing} But it was well that they passed on at a distance. Stop to see the heritage you were bequeathing and there would be a great howl that a man could be so deceived. It promised much from a distance, but ~~once~~ under your feet,

it was a blown lamp. ~~of~~
The kind of land ~~to~~ to give away
to old slaves like the Ball

Yet *will ever be* *The boulders are*
~~these~~, this land ~~is~~ ^{is} unready for the plough. ~~For~~ ^{For} prime with life and standing firm ~~are~~
~~the boulders~~. ^{mighty}

Come back in a thousand years --- it seems to me the working woodpecker is
beating out on the tree trunk. Aie, come back when these rocks have been softened into
earth; but what will we do, meantime?

Meantime we must gird our loins. Never a lost war until the last battle. I ~~stepped~~
stooped and picked up the ^{surveyor's diagram} ~~plan~~ which we had left lying on the ground. In ~~next~~ ^{small} squares,
the army has marked out the sepezate plots on which they will pasture their old mules.
~~This valley goes altogether to the A company, the Colour Company. It is a laughable~~
~~matter to wonder whether we have been granted the best portions.~~ ^{given} I read the names ~~on~~
the plan and the reading ^{makes me better} ~~quietens my anger.~~

Murph and me beside each other at the north-east end; Joe Black; Chippy Dale,
the Company bugler whose ~~eyes~~ stature grows in my shadow; Bully Ferguson; Charlie Cot-
ton who talks like a preacher and won a medal for killing more than his share of men;
Reggie Sturgeon, who played at right centre for the regimental team with such skill
in his boots that your face ached with the cheering of him --- aie, and Nicky Ffolkes
too. ~~We~~

slabbing
We, schooled in ~~besetting~~ ^{slabbing} men with lead and ~~x~~ steel, to be put into the ranks
with hoes and forks to fight God and His rocky mountain. There is no meekness in any
of us. No inheritance for such as us.

"Walk, Murph, *We will walk,*" I tell my corporal. "We will visit around the
property" *inheritance.*"

CHAPTER 6

It was a fortnight before they came. I saw in their eyes what I expected to see after their carouse. Money in their fobs and the discipline of the regiment from off their backs, they had gone with plunge and gusto into rich living. Now I was seeing them stunned and, aie, much ashamed, at the difficult affair it is to suddenly fend for ~~yourself~~ yourself when you have been looked after for much of your years.

Then it was my task to meet them all at the ~~mg~~ edge of the track and confirm that this was indeed our land. And I say, again and again, ~~me~~ nevermore would I want to be so bedevilled as I have been at these moments. It was almost as if their oathings was meant for my head in particular. At first, I joined in the swearing, with Dale, Black, Beamish, Bully — but as time and custom grew on me, I found I could just stand aside on the track and wait until their wraths had cooled.

I ~~me~~ practised to watching them to see who were most illstruck, and I noticed how the men who had been brought up on the land would purse their lips after the first few blasphemies, then search with knowing eyes to see how lay the contours and where they could hope to farm from. But not so the city men. Their minds had pictured soft, clear earth like in the gardens of the officers. Such a wilderness as they now saw could not be countenanced at all Others like Murph and Nicky Ffolkes who had were coast born, could not stand the sight of it.

But it was left for Charley Cotton, who came at the end of the month, to put his mouth on the right words. Charley wore black, just as my mind expected. Just in the ~~same~~ same way as I knew Rich Beamish would wear a red tie with his blue suit, or that Nicky Ffolkes would be sloppy in dirty drills, or that Chippy Dale would no' think it foolish to be climbing the mountains in ~~spats~~ ^{puttee} with a green feather in his hat.

So Charlie Cotton in black and his face at peace, stood with me at the edge of the track and followed the wave of my hand. A grimness settled at the ends of his mouth as his eyes took in all my hand showed him.

"Who hath led me unto the Valley of Salt? Hast not Thou cast us off, O God?"

I know Charley's words to be from the psalms of Soldier Davie, and I settle in my heart that it is befitting to our circumstance. Indeed, we have been cast off.

Howsoever, I stir away from any such contemplation; for there is work to do.

Murph and me have not been idle since we came here. We had been living on our rations while we built ourselves a useful hut from roundwood and thatch. We had hardly finished the work when the lads commenced a-coming — and right away, right away, there we were back in the regiment. For, like children let out of school to play, the lads had squandered their portions in some days of high and riotous living and were ~~me~~ returned to their Colour Sergeant with their eyes turned up to me for commands. It is no boastful piece for me to say, I was not put out. I looked at Murph; he looked back

at me. There was a bit of a grin on him and a lift of his shoulders. He knows me and my love and regard to be out in front. Very well, then.

So we waited a fortnight more to see what we would get. Then when Charley Cotton had come in with the ~~mes~~ news that no more of the lads would be climbing the mountains to see what King George had given us, I hit my palm with my fist and made my mind up. Murph ~~and me~~ counted heads and found there were a round fifty, barring me.

"'Tis a little less than Moses began with, Sarge," he said dryly the evening we talked together at the foot of a juniper. I plucked a leaf and played it about my nose, my eyes sly on him. Chippy Dale had brought his bugle with him and now we heard, with a grin on Murph, the wind of his instrument in a kitchen call. Murph and me had pooled our cash with Charley Cotton and those others who were not altogether bereft of their silver. It was a right and a duty of us all to see that none of the others went without food. Not even Nicky Ffolkes.

"Moses began with a promise, Nat Murph," I said in seriousness.

"And Moses did no' live to see the promise come ~~to~~ to fruit."

My thoughts raced around and I say the grey beach of the Rae Town fishers.

"But I will live to be ^{see it} there," I said with conviction and quietness.

He looked at me sharply. Then — "So what to do now?"

I brought back my thoughts and turned myself as if on parade. Let memories be aside for now, Murph, lad.

I hear his boots behind me taking up my stride and we marched back to where the lads were ~~taking~~ finding their places on the rocks about the cooking fire. I made my eyes fours with Chippy Dale and beckoned with my finger. . I stood my ground as he doubled up to me, my Corporal behind me.

"Chippy," I told him, "sound the fall-in."

Chippy looked quickly at me, turned and put the bugle to his lips. There is that in the bugle call to muster which is rhythmless and urgent. A call of alarm it is and, when unexpected, jerks at your attention with despatch and fury. I watched the ~~lad~~ lads swing to us, their eyes wide. Chippy broke off the call and took a pace to the right. Aie, 'twas army alright. I strode forward and heard Murph behind me.

"Shun!" I threw out with authority.

Well now, I have got them to their feet and even the cooks at the fire drew stiffly up. I kept them so, so you could count ten. Then I told them to stand easy for I would talk with them.

"Lads, if King George could see us now, there is a hope I have that the great injustice would be ended. Army still, we are. But King George is bedded in Buckingham Palace and we are up in the Blue Mountains, Jamaica. 'Tis far for even a King's eyes to see."

Not much of a joke, this is; but I have put much dryness in the words and it will pass for one. They laugh at it. I placed my back to a rock and talked easily to them, but giving the message clear and simple, there being no army regulations behind me to wall in their impatience.

"Murph and me have built a hut for ourselves. There's an even number of you here with the odd man out. Odd man's Charley Cotton. He will lodge with us. The forty-eight of you balance must pair yourselves and build your huts, two to each. One man will not find it easy to hew the roundwood for his own hut — or to find the thatch. Very well.

Count three; and I am off again with my talk.

"The land around is not friendly. Should each man try to clear his land for himself, eh, then we will be here until Kingdom Come and with nothing to show for our presence. So now, I will put something to you. It is that we all together, working an acre or two altogether, ~~maxing~~ digging out the rocks where we can, or planting around them where we canno'. That is all I have to say. Put your thinking to it and then take the vote. Dismiss."

I wave a hand to the cooks and give over my contemplation to the fine smell of ~~th~~ the mutton curry in the pots. I do as if not noticing the silence but my ears are fighting it as I listen for the first words. I have placed it in their minds that I ~~am~~ consider the business hopeless except we work together. All for one.

"Gor —! Just like the Bolshies — except that we got boots on!" cried out Johnny M'Cook.

There is a gift in his voice to shake men to laughter. I laugh the loudest so they will note ~~me~~ ^{it}. Murph's laughter is near to mine and even Charley Cotton has livened his face. I sweep my eyes around and ~~fast~~ ^{am} very happy and sure that they will stick all together for a little while at least. Together, we might give a good battle to God and His rocks. And this way, fifty-one, aie, fifty-two mouths may be easier to feed ~~thx~~ than one — aie, 'tis an old saying that two mouths are easier fed than one —

My thoughts have made the circle and are back with those I had sought to forget.

I love Cobina with such a love that Mr. William Shakespeare could have with the said profit given his Othello. He, was jealous of a man and put a ^{dagger} ~~a~~ to her. I, am jealous of poverty and 'tis a knife I am bearing her way also. I say I love her with all that is within me and will take it hardly to be disbelieved. But I should beat my breast to ~~be~~ believed? When I had turned from the street, it was by no pittance of effort. It was no' the action of a weakling. Now that I should be mocked with a banner of words — a phrase which just grew up on men and had taken upon itself the vaunt of truth — this Two mouths are easier fed than one.

Murph said: "Labe, the plate." I took the plate which the cook had been a-holdin out to me while my mind had gone a-strölling and looked up at Murph. As ever at these times, his face tells me nothing, but I know he knows to where my mind had strolled.

CHAPTER 7

Three months have passed and coldness is coming to the mountain nights. There is no shame in our joy to see the sun breaking through the mists near noontide. My thick Scotch tweed coat grows shabby from much wear. Our hands and knees are bruised and scuffed with fighting with the rocks and poor soil; but the fruit we can show for our pains has not set itself forth. Thankless is the task which fails to satisfy a man.

I needs be must give a salute to the way the lads did their duty; and even Nicky Ffolkes has come ~~xx~~ upsomewhat nearer the stature of a ~~xx~~ man by the fact that he kept his place in the lines while we tussled with the Valley of Salt. But the ~~tim~~ time must come when a man says: Enough.

Enough, it was, this evening that we sit before our hut, Murph and me, the ~~nig~~ night coming cold on us. Murph had been to the city this day to see whether there would be a willing shopkeeper who would stake a company of old soldiers until they had conquered a wilderness of stone. Murph is a man with a head for such businesses and words to make a saint doubtful. I have heard him in the bazaars of Cairo bargain ^{'proclaim,} ing at an Egypt-man; and I ~~examine~~ with full respect for my countryman that bargaining was born and weaned in the bazaars of Cairo. But Murph has come back to camp with his head ~~axhizing~~ a-hanging like an insulted hound. The old soldiers must find their own forage.

I turned up my collar and smoked a pipe. The fire was lively in the stonework we had built for our cooking place. My fifty sat about the fireplace and followed Charley Cotton through the vespers — for Charley had taken up the mantle of chaplain to the company.

Weary of earth and laden with my ~~my~~ care I look to Jesus for his voice to hear.

I put it again and again that the man whose soul is no' stirred by fine music can hope for no glory within him. It is the strangeness of the mighty thing it is, that, sorrow or joy, victory or defeat, life - aie, or death can be fashioned into ~~xx~~ such sweet notes that the heart forgets what was the occasion of the song and only stand in wonder to it. And it does much and ~~much~~ to love too. Mr. William Shakespear whom I greatly admire, called it the food of love. A man of strong eloquence he is; a tongue with salt and honey at the tip.

The man that hath no music in himself, Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds, Is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils.

"Nicky Ffolkes is looking down the hill, Iabe," Murph said, his heavy shoulders forward as he sat with his forearms on his knees.

"Be he the only one?" I asked him.

"He is the first one," he growled.

"So there will be a second?"

"A second and third and fourth — to a fiftieth if ^{we} be not all a herd of St. Elisabeth mules!"

The mules from St. Elisabeth parish are big and stubborn. They haul heavy on the guns of the artillery and wear blinders so they will no' see when the wheels are stuck to the ~~ax~~ axles in mud.

"They asked after us in the city?" I enquired, not meaning ^{exactly} ~~really~~ that.

Murph went down and up on his forearms without reply. Well, then, so he knows I did not mean exactly that. But suppose I even want news of her? Why, she is darkness and light to me and my friend knows ~~that~~ that very well. If I loved her less, I would have brought her to the mountains and bedded her under roundwood and thatch. It is because I love her so much and much that I suffer this getsamane of spirit. If I loved her less, I could sleep sound and dreamless and avoid this weeping inside me. I carry thirty-two years in my head; no longer believing that ghosts dwell under a cotton tree, me. I have been reared hard and had once hoped to die with my rifle a-kicking from my shoulders. I believe in myself and the matters before my eyes. A good bullet travels on wind and weather and not on the hopes in a firing pit.

Murph struck his knees with his fist. He whipped his head to me.

"Labe, it canno' be done as we are doing!" he said with passion in his throat. "We would have to live a hundred years to bring food to our pots from such a land! 'Tis two flanks we are fighting on — 'Strike me dead if it be not so!"

I keep a cool head. "Where these two flanks are, soldierman?" I ask easy, although I think I know on what he talks. I wait until the splutter of fury leaves him and his voice comes out firm and convincing.

"Look you, Labe — 'tis a poor land for ploughing, this, shallow soil and a regiment of stones to break your heart easy. Secondly, the lads are no' used to the stooping and digging; and what effort we put into planting a bushel of red peas could very well build a - a ship!"

But truthfully — with truth it could more than build a ship, Murph. Think you I have not been laughing at us these past months? But what do you say I should do now?

"So then, what is it you say we should do now? Throw down the hoe and take up our pen and write King George that he should form his regiment again? Or write the ~~Katz~~ Kaiser asking him to come out o' Dutchland and raise his standard again? That way, soon King George would be needing us, eh, man?" I mock at Murph. Then I leaned forward so our faces were near and pointed my finger like Mr. Gravehope, who had been the regimental schoolmaster.

"Now, you look, Nat Murph. There are all the lads here with us a-looking at me as if I still am right marker on the line. I ha' stood out, rightly or wrongly, and commenced the signallings like a fogleman preparing them for a bayonet charge. Now, what I should step back into ^{the} ranks ~~xxx~~ now and tell them to scabbard their steel for the enemy is too much for them?"

Murph pushed his bulldog face near to mine, the old fighting line to his jaw.

"Good and good. So then you will cool your seat and leave them to desert one by one? Is there gladness in you that Nicky Ffolkes has got his eyes turned down the hill? And hope in you that they will all follow and leave you free of responsibility?"

A question in answer to a question. When Peter asks if he has been a sinner, Murph will likely ask if he too has not sinned. The fisherman will be hard put to out argue Murph, in spite of his rearing tongue. Soul of me! But of course it is no hope of mine that they will all go down the hill! It is a beating of my brain I have taken these three — no, say twomonths ago to find out what to do. If ever a son of woman loved these lads, then Iaban Daniels is that man. The gladness and the hope in me had ~~can~~ come when I met them one by one at the track and waved them down into the valley!

I am a man of history; putting what is to come against our behaviour in the past. I know the history of our fathers and the mighty deeds they have done. I know there is no work that ~~ix~~ will fright their hands once their hearts have taken up the task. O, stand and hear me. *and how now have they been labouring.*

Hear how with pick and shovel they cut across a continent and joined two mighty seas. Ask of them in Culebra Cut and the locks of Balboa and Gatun — how they faced the deaths from yellow fever and the malariato lay the Canal on the Isthmus. Stand to hear how they took schooners to Cuba to pur their machetes to the roots of the sugar cane when the dandy Spaniard would not. Eh, 'twas the muscle and sweat of them which raised the great haciendas of the lords of sugar and sweetened the Cuban coffers with mighty lumps of taxes. And out all of this, there only came to them the portions to *be* he claimed by the hewers and the drawers. But —

Sing your songs, Brown Man! Sing that there is strength in you to cut their Canals and harvest their Crops on the small portions of the serf.

"Laban," Murph said quietly, "come, reason together."

So there is a matter of great importance rising in him to speech. Charley Cotton has placed a psalm before the lads — the Twenty-third it is — and they chant it from

~~it's~~ memory and with great love for such music. Nicky Ffolkes has got the topmost note, a sweet and tranquil rendering which holds the harmony together so the grace and thunder of the basses and sopranos promise to remind of the wind over the sheepfold, and his, the shepherd's flute. It is a chorale to be glad and yet humble that you have lived to hear.

Cubana would be mine if I had to take hell, but on my terms, where the stinking rats were. The good housekeeping terms. Houses and a woman who stayed only shorts.

"We must get those lads away before they are scattered abroad, Labe. I know you agree with me. But to do — what? To farm? Man, none of these can farm to a good living."

"What then should be done with them?" I asked in reasoning.

"Make them into fishers," Murph said. Then he sat back to wait until I could catch up.

It is a true confession that some time went before I knew for sure that I had heard aright. After that, more time ~~lx~~ passed before I caught breath again.

"A riddle you are giving me, Nat Murph?" I asked.

He sat forward again, shaking his head, his eyes bright in the fire's glare as he spoke with urgency to get his words home before I could gather myself.

"We will make them fish, Labe. There are clean seas to north of us and a bay I know of where a boat will no' fret at the weather. More of our men know of fishing than they do of farming. Put it to them, Labe, put it to them and take the vote on it. We will abide with what their hands say."

It was funny how his words met me. If he had told me straitway of her, I believe, I believe I would have heeded his words and spoken my answer at once. Doubtless, the answer would have been vulgar. My tongue is a scorpion when aroused and often in the past, I have been ashamed of the gutter into which it descends to find the befitting abuse which will shape the young recruits into soldiers. But I am talking of Murph and me and the fishing.

I would have heeded his words had my mind not gone to walk on the beach at Rae Town. As if the present had been chalked on a slate and was now wiped clean of a sudden, this evening ~~was gone~~ in the valley was gone, and 'twas morning on the beach. There is a darkness on the sea at early morning, and noiseless murmurings which you hear at the tips of your fingers. It is as if you looked into a vast room in which all of the lights are blown out, yet knowing without seeing that at the far end, there is a great and noble presence. A fine mist has come to the world, thinning out the stars to like the small candles which they burn in the sanctuary of the papist church outside the garrison gates. Soon you know the light in the east will swell and swell and day-cloud above the Palisades. But, for now, the world will stand ~~on the horizon~~ rests 'twixt and 'tween day and night, and there's a waiting back of the door of your mind for a thing to happen. Then quiet as dew forming on a flower, there is the stir of a wind off the sea.

The first time I heard it, my head told me, No. I would not be put off by such beliefs; a shame to my strength as a man, they are. I listened to the whisper of Cobina a-telling me 'twas the voice of God charging us that the coming day was for us to do with as we would — and I named it foolishness. 'Twas the women's foolishness which they took from the candles and the incense, born of the strangeness of their doings at the altar which I could not comprehend those times as I looked through the window into

this church of Rome. Although I confess that much of ^{my} attention at those times was on the face of Cobina while she knelt and did matters with her beads.

But this morning I speak of, the morning when I listened to the murmur of the wind on the water. Cobina told me such affairs which I likened to the Brer Anancy tales of my youth even while her voice was playing through me. There was God, the Tongue of God in the lap of the waves or in the sound of the wind running through the trees; that she looked eastward to the break of the Wareika Hills against the sky, and saw Him there too; that in the fishers' songs as they hauled at the nets which they had spread full ten fathoms up and down the beach — up and down to trap kingfish and snapper and bonitto — that God spoke to people out of this gathering of men's voices. All this she told me while I listened to the melody of her and watched the day lighting on her face.

Aie — and I recall the wonder on her face when she looked to the east and, indeed, there was old Wareika, solid as the mountain it is, coming up out of the mist like a strong swimmer; and the way comprehension widened her eyes when she looked back at me and remembered that it was true we had been out here all night, all night. So she must tear away with hurry on her to prepare the warmfood her father and his men will want when the canoes come ashore to the shore.

I stood there and watched the beauty of her going away from me, through the forest of hanging nets and sails, up the beach, across the littered street, through the unhinged gate into the poor place which was home for her. Then now, there was an oath gaining birth in me that since the God of the trees and the seas and the mountains would not give to her the garden that such a flower as her could be ~~finely~~ reared to glory, I, Laban Daniels, Sergeant to the Colours, would. Jesus of my belly!

I am stripped of such conceit and put in sackcloth and ashes at the gates of the temple. I am whipped by a plait of scorpions and set in brine for the cooling. My belly heaves with shame and humiliation; I wait to be led between the drums and to have my belt unbuckled.

I straightened from resting on my ~~forearms~~ forearms and contemplate around me. The psalm ended and Charley Cotton (Brother Cotton he was by then) was reading from the Book. Tell everyone 'tis a sweet and blessed thing to be up in the Blue Mountains at evening. The toad is not an unhappy being, despite his ugliness; and it is to his greater joy that his voice at a distance is a pleasant sound. I listened to him above the evening birds and the sound of falling water. An owl flew by on a screech, and tempted I was to cry out as a boy: "Salt-and-pepper for your father's and mother's tail!"

Do not misunderstand me. It was not because Nat Murph was dead on the target by his reasoning, why I would interrupt him with such childish foolishness; but because my head was shameful that this wisdom came from him and not me. I say, understand me. Nathaniel was talking such sense which I had long ago realised, but which I would not

meet face to face.

"We must leave the Blue Mountains and find another living which will keep the lads together. How? How to do so? I say the beach, Labe Daniels. I am fishing-breed of St. Thomas parish. So are ten, twelve, maybe another with worthless Nicky Ffolkes. I say we can form squads with ~~these~~ this baker's dozen as leaders and in no time, we will have all of you a-fishing good and plenty. ^{What} hat money we can muster, we will pay down on the canoes and I know where a beach is — a beach we can rent. We can earn our food and a living there. The lads could have their women with them. You — "

Nat Murph left his voice there and went back to thinking. Nobody had to tell me to where his words had been going. I, Laban, too, could have my woman, Nat Murph is a-thinking, but is silent out of his love for me and no wish to hurt my feelings. Perhaps, if he had not halted, I would have fisted him.

We were of the tallest of the regiment and stalwart in the ring. It will be of greatest memory to all, the day Nat and me stand up to each other. There will be such a shattering of bones and agony of muscles of which men will talk about for many years. I quieted the pull of muscles under my sleeve and rose with swiftness.

"Come behind me, Murph," I said as I stepped off for the fire.

It is ever funny to me how one man's thoughts can come to life in another's speech. 'Tis as if you were singing a tune in your head while going about your business, no sound coming from your lips; then, suddenly, there is a whistling or a singing aloud from someone else, and, lo and behold, 'tis the same tune you had been carrying in your head. It was almost like this now with Brother Cotton. For here he was now, a-reading of the psalm which deals with those who go down to the sea in ships.

"Halt, Brother Cotton," I said with gentleness, for I consider it unnecessarily brash to loudly interfere with the Word.

Then I said with authority, since I was on my own ground: "Lads, cover! Fall in!"

I watch them replace their headgear which they had removed for the psalm and scramble to their feet. They stood in such a formation that would have earned them pack-drill a few months ago. However, I let it go by. Not all have got the ramrod down their ~~back~~ backs as I have. Then I gave it to them straight — and quick.

"This campaign has no' succeeded," I tell them. ^{its another Anthem} "'tis another Dardanelles."

This, for the older men who had been at Gallipoli and who should now be my support against the young and easily discouraged. "We will withdraw for another place. Corporal Murphy and me have decided fishing should be the business. There is food and money in it and it is a place to which your womenfolk can easily come. Leave King George's land for his heirs and such as will scrup and holler only in their bellies. Murph and me ha' got a fine beach over in St. Ann parish."

I look around and mark their open mouths. But I mark too that a light is

*Surely we can square off easier on a smooth flat
we had a fine beach with a creek of needle*

beginning to dance in their eyes and I figure they are no' averse to leave the lonely mountains.

"At ease, lads," I say with friendliness in my voice to replace the other kind.

Then I put forth a grin as Chippy Dale put his bugle to his lips and blew a rare flourish such as is used at a levee.

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CHAPTER 8

This was Monday. By Saturday, we were out. By Saturday we had struck camp with wit and laughter bubbling about us and were marching down the mountains. We began the retreat at evening so as to use the cool of night. Murph, who had left the mountains since Tuesday to take care of the lease of the beach, would meet us with a truck at the road. ~~Charles~~ Charley Cotton, Murph and me agreed on this expense, for it would not be sensible to have the lads foot the eighty miles to St. Ann parish and arrive ~~there~~ there filled up on discouragement.

We made an easy march out of the mountains, the lads singing for step as well as well as their enjoyment, making much of Colonel Bogey on the level places. A quick march, that tune is, and right well for level marching; but a million of my countrymen will stand at my shoulder to say, that for easy marching on tracks which have known no levelling since the mountains were first thrown up, there is no tune written to take the place of a Mento. It is a kind of tune stirring to the hidden places of men and women, I warrant, and should not be lightly discounted for the flame it has put in many dead passions; and many of my people will not have it sung under their roofs. But, the lift and fall of such an air has eased the miles to weary men through the deserts of Sinai. I say it with memory; for I shared in the march from Kentara that time the Turks were a-threatening the Suez.

We are on to the road before the moon has reached at high point and meet up with Murph and the truck. I get the lads aboard and take my seat on the tailboard, Murph our backs to the truck. beside me, there is no place as good to think as the tailboard of a truck. All you see has already been seen by those up ahead, and if there is something to wonder over, you will learn of it from their conversation before you get to it.

I think a little, here and there, listen to Murph tell of his disposal of our coin; then I try not to think very much and instead, look about at the coastroad along which we speed as the night is fading.

We left the truck at the Bay of St. Ann which was as far as Murph, with a tired purse, could have bargained for. I got my lads into formation and we commenced our march for the beach. Murph, beside me at the head of the column, tells me there are four miles to walk to the village of Kendal which will be our market-town; then another four miles to our beach. There is nothing to ease the trouble of a long march like keeping your lads in step.

It is a level road along the coast. I smell the smell of the sea through the dark on our right, and watch as it comes up plainer. It is a sleeping sea, large, too large in my lubber's eyes for us to interfere with at all. I have ever had deep respect for so much water ever since I took my first voyage when we embarked for Egypt in 'Fifteen. I have seen the puny work even a high and mighty man-o-war can be on the

bosom of the ocean. Now, in 'Twenty-six, there is nothing less in my respect when I remember that soon I will sit in a canoe at the foot of a sail and give myself over to be used as it willed.

"It is beautiful with morning, Jesus, but it is," Murph ~~beside~~ said low at my left hand. "Wait until the day comes up, Iabe!"

I grunted no words. Murph might have grinned at me, sensing my uneasy respect for the sea, but I did not look at him.

"Nicky Ffolkes — a song! A song!" I called down the column.

Nicky Ffolkes took our paces in his ear, took the rhythm of our feet, I say, and 'twas Marching Fzk Through Georgia, he choosed.

That such a five-year whelp of iniquity could choose such songs without knowing our mighty history, I lift my eyes in wonder. I will bet and wager that he knows nothing of our sufferings through the bayous and the death we found before New Orleans. I will put my last shirt on it that Nicky knows ~~ex~~ nothing of 1779 and the deeds of the South Carolina regiment — that one which, mounted and afoot in the action against the Americans at Briar Creek, near the Savannah River, gave birth to the ~~regiment~~ Company which suffered his shortcomings for so many years. I wonder if his eyes would ~~wider~~ shine and widen if I told him how it was he was part and parcel with the men who sieged strong Charlestown in 'Eighty under Captain My Lord Charles Montagu, or of the battle of ~~Hobker~~ Hobker's Hill in 'Eighty-one. A dozen regiments had been our strength those days, and I take my place to ~~deaxarax~~ roar and declare that when we left America for our ^{down in} islands~~sax~~ the Caribbees, we did not leave with our tails between our feet. We changed our name from the South Carolina to the British Indies of Foot because ~~the~~ George, the Third, and his puny men at Whitehall, had made a shameful thing of it.

Sing, Nicky Ffolkes, blasphemous scalawag though you be. There is a sure and a large right to it that you should choose Marching Through Georgia.

Then when we had done the chorus three times, we settled into whistling the tune. Troops on the march are much encouraged to sing or whistle. At the command school, the tutors used to tell that such singing and whistling keep the men from thinking of the road, or on what they would meet at the end of the road. But it is plain to me while we go on that, whatever they might do, my thoughts will not leave my head. I have come down from the mountains because, for the first time that I can remember, fear had come to dwell with me.

Perhaps Murph knew that; and so his words which had marked my failure, had come from him without ~~ex~~ trepidation that my fists would seek him. I had put my hands to the plough but the plough had slipped from me. Now I would put my shoulder to an oar and ~~fi~~ fish the sea. Whether the sea would give us food and a living, none of us could tell. We had wasted one-half of the six months the King's coin had given us to live and now were

to commence all over again. I was never the one to be afraid of a race, but never before had I to pit my endurance against the obtaining of such a prize. So fear came to me in the mountains, whether I would ever live to have her. Doubtless, I went with Murph because a refuge was uppermost in my mind.

I had not asked her to wait. My courage had balked at such a test. I had taken my leave of her at safe distance so there would be no questionings, or answers either. I can put it this way in the language of books: My head, at variance with my heart, had won with pride over faith. Now my pride was in the dust and I was stumbling blindly on.

Look you. There was a moment last night in the truck when I would have stepped from the tailboard in the dark and let the lads go on without me. I would have turned my face to her and put a charge to the roots of all the obstacles I had caused to be raised in my mind. But the moment passed. I was no' a reed to be shaken with every wind of circumstance. My mind was made up. I would not take her from slum to slum. A fine home for her, or none, with me. A house, and a garden, too.

We have skirted the village of Kendal. We want no questions asked of the lads until we have settled on our beach. We have done some level miles and now we breast a hill. I hear with satisfaction how the boots of the lads behind me hit as one on the hill road. Civilian life has no' softened them yet. They march with swing and style just as they did in the Colour Company. Now it is clearing to daylight. Murph and me in the van are topping the hill and he turns his head to give me a smile and a lift of his hand. I know by this I will see his beach when we reach the crest — and I am all eyes for it as we halt at the top.

I have fought the King's wats on land all my life and have never envied the sailorman, cooped in his steel shell like an oyster. I know well the feel of sand under my boots and the gladness which the glint of the palms in an oasis can bring to a man who has marched with thirst. But this sight I see, of land and sea, was never seen elsewhere on this earth. Amen.

Come with me now. The sun has risen full clear. To my right hand, there is the sea, ^{as in a matins} ~~singing~~ softly singing ~~extant~~ in the wavelets which break in worship on the shore. To my left, the land mounts gently. The sea is of a blue ~~ness~~ like the sky, deeply stained with beauty. A beach of such white and golden sand that is as the bedchamber of a princess of Egypt, falls to the edge of the water. My eyes lift from the sea, crosses the road to the trees. There are trees of good fruit and sound wood, mango, naseberries, companies of tall coconuts. Green they are, filled with sunlight and water, and growing in earth that is of a glowing red. I do not believe my eyes for never could such a place be. I turn again towards the water and my eyes are at fours with Murph's. I look about at my friends and companions and see the confirmation in theirs too. Even Nicky

Ffolk who boasted of his Pedro beaches in the parish of St. Elisabeth has stilled his song to wonder with us. Murph waved his hand at all of it and I see the smile in his eyes.

"Murph," I said for beginning; but my heart was full, and 'tis an uneasy time to talk then.

He turns to face us all as the column crowd together on top of the hill. There is a laugh in his voice as he tells of his stewardship.

"A mile on the beach front and a mile back into the land — there is a lease on it for ten years. And then, if the owner-man would sell, first he must tell us of his price before he talks to another. You hear me, dribble-mouths?"

If our mouths were not as he said, it was true that they hung open. The memory, the bothersome memory that I knew as much of fishing as I do of latin and greek, had departed in the light of what I was seeing. I had heard men talk of the northcoast, and learnt from them that its equal was rare; but that it was this? No, no. I put my face to the freshening wind and watch the sea rising in song.

Many years have gone by since that morning. All this is new to my eyes no longer. But if I tell, believe my word that I stand to declare there has never been an equal to what I saw this day, in any of the other parishes. I say so to whatsoever is ~~hears~~ heaped on my head by my countrymen of the lesser parishes. Stubbornly, I tell it.

To hell and to hell.

Murph has got an old wooden house pinned on to the tail of the lease. In old days, there had been a trade in copra from the beach and the house, a storeroom for the shipments. Forty feet in length it is, stout in mahoe and yacca wood, and with doors and windows needing only a change of hinge. It would serve as a ^{blockhouse} ~~breakhouse~~ in which we could lodge until matters were straightened. It stood topside the road, with its back to the trees and facing to the sea. We marched to the house. I made the lads stow their kit and took no objection when Charley Cotton said there should be a prayer. I uncovered with the rest of them and sang out Amen with the best of them.

Afterwards, when we had told off a fatigue squad to set ^{up a} ~~put a~~ cooking place and shovel a sanitary pit, Murph and me went down to the beach. There was a clump of mangrove breaking the mile of golden shore with a bit of green shade. Drawn up at the roots of the mangrove, there was a pair of boats. I looked at the boats and thought how they could take eight of our lads apiece; and looked back at Murph in contemplation at the wonderful work he had done with the few coins we had mustered.

"But we must fish early and lucky — if we will eat salt after the week is ended," he said with dryness, reading my thoughts.

"Where are the nets?" I asked, remembering.

"Our funds did no' reach as far," he said with a grin. "There will be fifty soldier boys, less the cooks and the fatigues, a-casting lines for any fish foolish enough to take their clumsy offerings. There is also much bamboo in our mile behind the trees."

I waited to see if he joked. "Bamboo? For what?"

"To make fish-traps. I will show you."

Eh, there would be much he would have to show me before I could bring salt to our tables. But even while, for the first time, I was leaning all my weight on Murph, there was no shame in my lack of knowledge. I viewed the sea, tossing green beyond the blue line, with a sudden friendliness. It was as if I was home from a long campaign. My foot felt of the sand underneath and settled to firmness in it. Somebody had planted Iaban Daniels and he felt the growing inside him.

"There is satisfaction in you?" Murph asked. I forced my eyes to him. "The boats I mean," he added.

Cottonwood, I saw they were, painted and with a name on them. Day-cloud, and Hope. They were deep, with good leg room, and the ends drew to sharp points, back and front. I felt of the soft wood, resting my hands on the top and squeezing my fingers into the wood.

"Where is the front, Murph?" I asked from my mouth, my mind unheeding.

Murph spoke with a laugh ruffling his voice. "The bow is up here — the stern, oh, the back, where you stand. The place where your hand is a-holding as if there is fear in you that it will sail away before we are ready — that is the gunwale, soldier-man. Aie, 'tis a job it will be to learn you all."

I grin with him, fine words rising to my lips without my asking. "You know what, Murph? I will be a fisherman, I feel. A big, good fisherman. I will bring such a portion of salt to our table I will be called upon to eat double share."

"Or take a wife to have t'other share," he said.

There was nothing in his voice; nothing on his bulldog face, darker, but favouring Mr. Winston Churchill. He was a bulldog speaking his matter from his gate to all and sundry, without fear or favour. His tongue should be drawn at the roots and looped about his throat. Take a wife to lodge in the blockhouse with all the lads, while she watched me a-learning of bow and stern like a five-year recruit?

"You full of shit," I tell him from 'twixt my teeth so the words came as though somebody had rubbed them with a rasp. "Full of. Full of."

"Tighten your belt," he said, looking out to sea.

I waited for my anger to sink through my boots. I felt it go away and then I spoke again. "We will begin to fish, when?"

"Today-today. There is good, blue water and many fishes a-begging for the hooks. We must hustle, for there are nets to be saved for, and a couple more boats to be bought."

Murph is my friend; but he is tall nearly like me, and wider. I must take over from him so he will no' believe I lean on him altogether. I will not risk losing my platoon to him. So now, I shape him with orders.

"Hear me, Murph. With only two boats to our string, hardly more than a dozen o' the lads will be fishing at once. When the boats are at sea, such as who are not in them will commence a-cutting roundwood to put up our houses. I will no' have the lads living in barracks for a length of time. Each man to his own roof-tree soon as he can — or will. Then we will take it in turns to take the catch to Kendal for sale. No wisdom in selling straight off the beach when we have our own idling lads who better can take it to the village where there will be ~~good prices~~ profit. The manning of the boats, I leave to you. Nobody better."

"You could go to the city yourself for the selling. Better profits than at Kendal."

Murph is a stubborn man and harum-scarum enough to go over the top, believing his bayonet work a match for the machine guns. Does he think he is a cunning man?

"I will give the orders while we are on the beach, Nat Murph. You will man the boats and say what to do when we are on the water." There is an end to it.

Murph lodged his eyes with mine until there was nothing useful in staring at

earlier longer. Then, with our glances still warm, I watched the muscles at his jaw rise to a ridge.

"You are a fool, Labe Daniels," he said without the heat I expected. "A dam', stubborn, fool-fool man. Stay away from the city if you wish and lose your woman because of your stiff neck."

Murph was a man of words like most of my people are. It should be that his abuse should be more, striking me with ~~asorn~~ scorn and anger until our fists sought each other; or they should have quickened to life such illustrations as would remind me that Adam had made a wife of Eve before he had as much as sewed a skirt of grass for her. Then, at that time, he should have put ^{it} to me that my foolishness was large because I had my eyes fixed on a house and a garden before I would take Cobina to church — and what, if in waiting, I lost her?

Still yet, how ~~X~~ am I sure what I would have answered? I might have wounded him by reminding him that the matter was my own and nobody else's. Then with fury filling my head, perhaps I would have salted the wound by saying that even if I lost her, a face like a bulldog's such as his, would surely not lie on the same pillow as hers. Perhaps, and perhaps. Let it lie.

Howsoever, his easiness quieted the peculiar wrath in me and the moment passed. No more was said of what each was thinking. We made more plans for the fishing and so on, and returned across the road as Chippy Dale made the mess call on his bugle.

A road emits cunningly through
openings in the mountain and
set us through to
the beach

Meanwhile, we studied the sea.

mile, we studied the sea.
The early weeks of Bostabel, the wall into which we rammed our heads!

~~Key~~ Aie.

And, doubtless, it was something like this which stood in all our minds — all who had no knowledge of the trade. I remember, I remember now the panda-snake grin of Nicky Ffolkes when he watched the sneaky sure nods we recruits gave as we talked on our plans about at night around the fire, after vespers. How soon, we would earn enough to each build his house and have our women with us. There were ten or a dozen of us whose eyes went a-walking long distances when such talk came up. I knew well this ache inside, how it opened into bitter flowers with memory of a face; and knew very well what the dozen of the bitter flowers that opened in the dim noon of poor unlucky men us wanted with a painful longing.

But could I have them marrying on the ^{Strength}, without proper arrangements for their living? And make of this beautiful beach, a ^{Show} clutter of leaning hutments and their women quarrelling over the washtubs because ^{food} ~~there~~ was not ~~food~~ enough in their bellies to settle their distempers? Wait, ^{and} wait. A Rae Town must not come to my Boscobel.

But Nicky Ffolkes grinned his mean amusement at us, by virtue of the knowledge of fishing he had. His navelstring was buried under a rock in Great Pedro Bay of St. Elisabeth parish. He knew long before how the callouses would have to come to our palms and be grown over again before we could break our nets with the heavy draughts.

By the time the sense had come to me how to cut the mussel bait and cover my hooks with skill, the sense had also come to me why Peter, the Fisherman, earned good remembrance for his oathings. As for the use of the oar; I sat still ~~with shame~~ on the thwarts with shame when I viewed the ease with which Nicky Ffolkes played the wood in the water, while, I, known to men for my strength, fought furiously to keep from kicking my feet in the air each time my oar dipped.

It was not as Murph had desired. We fished early, but not with the sort of luck

he had hoped for. Hunger dwelt in our kitchen for much over two months as smoke came ^{thin} once a day only through the chimney. ^{as we lived on coffee and flour cakes. But} In the third month, we were baiting with more success and by the summer, we were bawling at the cooks if the morning meal was not on time. Yet, our going was slow since there was but little coin to put by; ^{and so} and it was not the fishing which purchased our first net. I will tell of it presently.

Of Cobina, I heard no word. But ~~truth~~ ^{to tell}, there was almost a certainty in me that at those times when Murph went to the city, he had been to see her. I have heard him, more than once, telling, perhaps for my hearing, what a blessing it was to be fishing a ^{silvery blue sky and blue water for roof, blue sea for floor} beach with gold and silver for sand, and trees about for walls, rather than on a beach whose sand was the colour of a Port Said hotel sheet, ^{The} and warehouses fouling your elbows. ^{I know he talks of Cobina in his town and} I make no remark, I think only; and nobody can know by my face that there is grieving in me. My morning, noon and night, I say to myself. My ^{eyes. Sanguis} breathing and my seeing. My heart. My love. Cobina.

X X X BREAK

^{Should} I must reach into the dim ^{room} cathedral of my soul and borrow the words of King Davie? It is a right ^{and} as it is a privilege that the words of the Shepherd Davie should be for a man's employment when there are no others to tell what should be said. It was in his longings, that much of his eloquence struck deepest.

As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so thirsteth my soul after thee....

There is no blasphemy in me. ^{On my knees, I declare so.} In chapel, I ^{will} swear it.

X X X

Our net, the ~~first~~ big seine, with cork of Canada floating the guy, ^{iron cleats at the boat's gunwale} twine and two hundred fine manilla, two hundred fathoms for the draw, — ^{did not come} this net never came from fishing. It came this way. ^{Upstart} ^{But down their walls} There is a call in my people for song. ^{and grow wings in the wind.} Wall them from freedom and double their burdens, their songs will yet flourish when all is nothing. It is a matter for ~~hallelujah~~ that such is indeed the truth, and a marvelously goodly heritage have they bequeathed to the world. It was no exception with our company at Boscobel. There were songs for our ^{the sea, boating and} caring at sea; songs when we laid back to the ropes, pulling in ^{which pulled} ~~our~~ ^{roundwood} from the bush; ^{for our boats} ~~songs~~ songs to ease the long marches to the ^{for laying} village with our catch. But the singing we made at the close of each day was the finest of all.

Aie, we took the ^{tomorrow and} trials and joys of the day and placed them with our hopes for ~~in~~ the morrow. In the ^{full} quiet of the falling evening, when we sat at the front of the block-house, there would come first the ~~soft~~ humming, from fifty throats, lifting to a stronger murmur when one of the tunes caught most of our fancies. ~~xxxxxx~~ The voice which had claim to the commencement of the tune would take up with the words; and then, off we ^{we fifty} were in such hunt for harmony, that often, you would ^{pause} fall quiet to hear the glory of singing around you and wonder at the richness about you. This was the case one evening.

The ~~xxxxxx~~ sun had gone behind the mountains and we sat out the weariness.

The sea washed ~~up~~ ^{the} up the beach with a flurry on the sand like a brush of sticks over a ~~muffled~~ ^{slackened} kettle-drum. With Murph watching my hands for faults, I was bending a ~~new~~ strip of bamboo to mend a broken fish-pot. Near me, Joe Black drove nails into the soft wood of a bollard pin while a couple of the lads sat a-watching him, their backs leaned to the blockhouse. Beyond us were such others, fallen into groups by their disposals. Three or four tunes had been worked about by these when, from Rich Beamish and Bully Ferguson, who sat near the cooking place skewering mussels from ~~the~~ the shells for our ^{sunup} early morning fishing, was coming a hymn which was catching our ^{one} fancy, so that, ~~one~~ by one, we were leaving off our own tunes to join this particular ^{one} air.

Lead Kindly Light was this hymn, and it is regarded by me as one of the ~~most~~ ^{best} of ~~all~~ ^{the} hymns that should have come from the pen of such a man as the papist cardinal who had once taken Orders in the Church of England. A hymn of humility and strength it is, and I cannot hear it, but must think how foolish it is to believe that there was accident in the arrangement which brought such a structure of beauty from the fingers of a man who had bowed before the altars of Rome and England. ~~It seemed just and right for me to believe that God was calling to Roman Rome and Canterbury that now the evening was falling, they should strike their battleflags and follow a night from the fold.~~

~~and~~ ^{and} One by one, we were each hanging up our own tunes until bye-and-bye, to follow down this hymn with Beamish and Ferguson. Then, as the voices joined, the tenors working up to their notes and the basses looking down their chests, I nodded at Joe Black, who carries magic in his fingers. So that he ~~went~~ went quickly out on the flank and like a fugleman, turned to face us while he squatted on the grass and his hands came up. It is a mason of worth and fame, Joe Black is, in the way he moulds voices with his hands. There were altos and sopranos standing in now, carrying the hymn with certainty. We made the notes move into each other with warmth and understanding for the next, and, in the fifth line, where, for many ~~bars~~ ^{strong} bars, there is a ~~great~~ ^{great} unison for all, we ~~hit them with such noble power~~ ^{we were noble} power to make the hills roll back the sound. ~~The hymn ended and there was an emptiness in me.~~ ^{we were waited for the glory to drain out of us} ~~Presently, I felt Murph's elbow in my ribs. I raised my eyes to his pointing finger and followed its direction to the automobile standing in the road.~~ ^{had} ^{up went} ^{halted} ^{be men again}

A huge and shiny thing it was, of more wealth than those others which used to pass on our road, ~~again~~ ^{driver} now and again. My eyes, which give to none for sharpness, made out a chauffeur on the seat wearing black visored headgear and the three faces staring at us through the rear window. ^{at the rear}

"Hi, be they tourists?" Nicky Ffolkes asked ~~of no one in particular~~ ^{generally}. "I used to see tourists in St. Elisabeth parish as many as ever. The men wear knickers and ~~breeches~~

berets like French sailors."

"And the women wear knickers and berets but you know they are women because they hide their knickers," Johnny ~~McCook~~ ^{M'Cook} said.

A ~~shout~~ ^{loud shout} came from the car and I held up my hand to still the laughter.

"Bravo! Bravo!" the shout went. I rose and removed my straw ~~hat~~ ^{hat} and bowed for I believe in manners.

"Tell them 'tis the Don ~~Grassack~~ ^{Grassack} Cossack choir performing black face, Sarge!" Johnny's strong whisper came to me. Likely this lad will joke at Old Nick when he raises the fork for him. But he is a good man, this ~~McCook~~ ^{M'Cook}. I tell him to put his foot in his mouth; but not unkindly. I watched the men in the car as they seemed to talk among themselves.

"I say — come down here for a moment!"

It is a voice full of authority. It is evident he is not used to disobedience and I barely remember that I am not ^{longer} in khaki ~~longer~~ otherwise, doubtless my heels would have clicked. I held my footing.

"Tell the General 'tis a camp of ~~Bolshies~~ ^{Bolshies}, this is, Sarge," Johnny said in advice. "Tell him 'tis the officers who must come up to us now."

"I say! We want to talk ^{to} with you!" There is impatience in the shout now.

Then I could not stop the ~~ang~~ ^{ang} thin and angry Richard Beamish before he had insulted the stranger:

"Well then, crawl up on your belly, Great Slug! We will no' mind it!" There was a great howl of laughter from the men at Rich Beamish's sudden bellow.

Beamish has twice been a corporal and has been twice courtmartialled. There have been times when I think something must be wrong inside him, for army beef has no' filled him out and his anger comes on him ~~almost~~ ^{almost} anytime. I began walking down the hill, then, for the lads had offered an insult to the strangers. I stepped down into the road, went to the door of the car and ^{politely} told them how-de-do.

There were three in the back seat with the driverman seated alone in front. ~~just as my eyes had told me at long distance.~~ The man at the end nearest me, with authority spluttering from his ~~angry~~ ^{angry} tongue, was Squire Groves, a Justice of the Peace as he told me when he had asked how dared ^{us use such words to him} me. I looked at the others, younger, and with less fat to their chins. Madding to let go of their laughter, they were. They were Mr. Garvey and Mr. Flynn, Americans from the easy drawl of their tongue, but Irish as a sprig of shamrock from their names and the laughter bubbling ~~at the~~ back of their eyes. They were staying at a hotel in Montego Bay taking the sun, and were now driving back from the city with their friend, the Squire, who was a man of my island. Nobody had to tell me that Squire Groves was a man of heavy purse, with more title deeds to his name than were needed for a shroud. I bear his splutterings quietly enough, for he has no'

the gift of abuse on his tongue like the brown men of the island.

"How would you like to bring your choir to sing at the hotel?" Flynn asked me. "We could arrange it with the management and I guarantee the folks staying at the hotel would make it alright *alright. for you.*"

Well, then.

From soldiering to farming to fishing to performing. I grinned, but deep inside. There was no waiting in my mind. Our fobs needed coin and if God choose to bring it to us through Bishop Newman's hymn, then I should argue with the mystery of it? I laugh to think I should argue. *with the mystery of it.*

Hear me, to Flynn: "'Tis a long march to Montego Bay, Mr. Flynn."

He waved his hand like a turtle flapping at lowtide. "Aw --- dont you worry about that. We will send a truck or something for you and the other guys. *Check?* How about, let me see, Sunday evening?"

XX I said "Sunday," *then* with an end of talking in my voice.

But when I looked back at Squire Groves, his eyes were going over me like a ~~company~~ company commander at morning inspection.

"You are an ex-soldier, aren't you? Disbanded?"

I cannot help the ramrod King George has fitted to my spine. It is my belief it will always be there to mark me as a man of khaki and brass.

"That is so, Justice," I told him respectfully.

"Hm," he gave me for reply, his eyes still hot with wrath. "X This your land?"

"On lease," I said. Brusqueness was coming on me. A colour sergeant is a man of great responsibility and even the fresh young lieutenants show a respect for him. I have been with the colours for many years now. *"How did you get to be a sergeant?" a slap on my face, "But I am an old colour sergeant who has dealt with fresh officers before."*

"Who is the owner?" he ~~asked~~ *asked* me. *along with it, Justice, to this beach," I said.*

He was a man who had not had other men laughing at him for ^{all} his lifetime, perhaps, *and I would not be worrying except the bailiffs came.* not to his face *anyway*. Rich Beamish had led ~~the~~ *led* into an earthquake of a deed and Squire Groves was all topsy-turvy. But his manner was making for anger in me too.

Truth ~~to tell~~, I did not even know the name of the owner of the beach. *And I would not be worrying except the bailiffs came.* Murph's was the head for such businesses and I had not asked. Yet, even had I known, I believe, and I believe I would have replied as I did.

"A -- gentleman," I said, and stepped back from the car.

He must have been a good judge of men to ^{have acquired} all his title deeds. Doubtless, he ~~had~~ read the signs of the storm rising in me. He rapped the door of the car and signalled that his chauffeur should go his way. I can recognise dislike in men's eyes.

Squire Groves' was near hate as he looked ~~back~~ *back* on me. *so I gave him my most gifted grin.*

"Sunday, soldier!" the man called Flynn shouted back as ~~xx~~ the automobile flung dust at me. I stood and waited for the lads who were crowding down the hill.

BREAK

So That was how we came to sing in Montego Bay that Sunday evening. It was Murph who suggested we shake out the old uniforms and wear them at the performance. There were but few pieces of sound clothing between us, but the tunics in the kitbags were sound. So, we shook them out and used ash from the fireplace to shine the brass buttons. There was but little joking to it as we brought the old glisten to the ~~brass~~ brass buttons I believe we fell silent because we were rubbing the rust from our memories too.

a thousand thousand

Not a pip less than ~~ten~~ score were on the smooth grass before the hotel the evening we sang. Overseas people, they were, from America, England and Canada, shivering in the half-naked clothing which the women from overseas seem to fancy while their men-folk sweat in black with burning cigars held between their teeth. Flynn had made them put up a stage with some palms in pots about. I grouped the lads out of sight while I took a peep at them. They laughed and talked enough to shame a company of washerwomen and as I listened to the chatter, ~~at~~ it came home to me that most of them were here because of a new sensation they would have. Down in the front, I saw the ugly fatness of Squire Groves, the fat man who had asked "Disbanded?", with relish. I spat at my feet.

He was in a monkey jacket like the officers wear in the mess, with a scarlet cummerbund like a ruler of the Hindus. He is champing at his mouth as a rutting horse, his eyes blue with the blue of rotted ice, and of the coldness. There was a sourness on him that hung him up out of that gay company like an undertaker that has ~~stepped~~ ^{a coffin in a sweet shop.} ~~lost his way~~ into a wedding feast. He is a bitter fruit, Squire Groves is. Even without the second sight, I know he has no affection for us.

well!

As to the jokers facing our stage, ~~The~~ Don Cossack choir in charcoal, I heard them say of us. The Bronze Bellowers of Boscobel, others said; the Growling Guardsmen, ~~the night~~ all the things we had already called ourselves. And as a thought found root in my head, I would have given a half of our fees to have had the blue and gold and scarlet of our ~~fulldress~~ ^{old} Zouave uniform to put around my lads now. But we would do with what we had.

So I had the lads divided to right and left of the stage while Chippy ^{Chippy} ~~ale~~ with his bugle, crouched behind a palm. Then, at a lift of my hand, there came from him the high, sweet flourish of the reveille and, ~~with the end of the last~~ ^{on} ~~note~~ ^{high}, Murph from the left and me from the right, marched on to the stage ~~at~~ at the head of our platoons with all our voices rousing the march of the Grenadiers.

Aie, then, the thunder of the applause when the march ceased and all the lads stood at attention before them.

I made a talk to tell these foreigners whom we were and what the ribbons on our chests meant, the lads behind me standing to such statues like the fine men ~~at the~~ ^{outside the} gates of the Horseguards Parade in London Town. After that, I stepped back into rank and

CHAPTER 14

I took Cobina as my wife back to Boscobel and she was ill received. It was no wonder to ^{and I} ~~me~~. I know the ways of men, and yhe scales had fallen from my eyes ~~making~~ was ~~truth~~ more clearly.

I do not speak as if she was given the back of their shoulders, or as if they made the noises in their throats which my people use to show their approval has not been given. Nothing like that at all. There was beauty in her face and singing in the movement of her limbs enough to rub and bother a man even in the ^{evening} ~~twilight~~ of his years. And please to remember with good remembrance that none o' the lads at Boscobel had grown far past their hot and eager morning.

Cobina was ill received because their Moses ~~had~~ who had hung up the tablets of stone, had not thought twice to set up a sepearte tabernacle for himself. So while they ceased their singing and raised themselves on their elbows to look down the slope at the three of us ascending to the blockhouse, there was the shifting and fidgeting of their feet as they stood up to the awakening of the appetite in them. The draw of their ~~breaths~~ breathing came to me when Cobina turned her eyes from watching of her footing to view the fifty who crowded on the ledge before the blockhouse. No word was spoken, but even then I knew that Cobina was a cause of hungry anger in in them. I watched them from my lowered brow, a-waiting to see how the cat would jump.

It was funny how they drew together as we went up the hill, as if they sought to put shoulder against shoulder for courage and comfort in the face of an enemy. I have seen it happen to new recruits under their first rifle fire; until the bullets had fallen into one or two and then the ~~knat~~ knowledge came to them that they should spread. I do not want my lads to spread. I must catch them so, while they stood together.

~~Once~~ Once her eyes stood at fours with theirs, Cobina did not remove her gaze again. She climbed with her eyes full bent along the line, and I could tell when each lad had her eyes to himself by the way a sharper fidget came to him. There was the little move from Bully Ferguson, a soldier long trained to stand still; the uncalled for blink to Reg Sturgeon; the way Joe Black shoved his neck deeper inside his coat. We mounted to the grassy ledge and halted so the evening sun was painting a side of our faces. From far behind me, there was the murmur of the sea, and close at hand, a family of nightengales were doing their vespers unheedful of us. All of us stood without movement for a questionable time until Charley Cotton ~~came~~ stepped out of the others and spoke.

"A long, tired-foot journey it seems to ha^{ve} been, Laban," he said. "I am ~~a~~ thinking 'twould not be unwelcome to say that coffee will be ready soon. Time you might

requiring dust off."

I tell Charley Cotton thankie, my eyes ranging over the company. "But I will not clean-up until I have spoken to the lads, Charley Cotton. Seem there be some who do their thinking where the lobster does his — behind him. Seem as though they prefer to put their interpretations on the appearance of the matter, and leave the substance of it to be wasted how it would. A stranger comes to the blockhouse and they sweep together all their welcome and heap it in the farthest corner. There is none to say, 'Come, taste our salt,' 'cept maybe Charley Cotton here. What be ye!" I bellow all of a sudden. "Boys — stoop for Street Arab boys? Perhaps, soon you will stone us from here! Then who will ~~throw~~ the first ~~stone~~ brick? You, Joe Black? Or Johnny M'Cook? Bully Ferguson? Or perhaps 'tis Rich Beamish who will leap for the first rock soon as Chippy Dale sounds the charge on his bright bugle! Then Reggie Sturgeon will use his boots as he does it on the football field — aie, what share will be yours, Nicky Ffolkes? You will use the whip-ray's lance you hold in your hand?"

I throw the chain-shot in their midst and watch them fall under it. Poor Nicky Ffolkes lets drop at his side the long whip-ray's tail which he had been curing with salt; and there was on his face, the guilty look as if ~~he~~ indeed he had contemplated as I accused him. I looked on the faces of the lads I had accused. All of these, I knew, had special strength in them and special love for me. Thoughts in the camp, were led by these and bringing them to my side would be an alliance payable in victory. Purposefully, I had lumped them with Nicky Ffolkes and whatever weaklings he could muster to hold with him. So now, these strong ones who had special love for me would hasten to stand away from the side of such as Nicky Ffolkes. Eh, man, I felt the resentment I had built in them coming out towards me.

Very well, then. I preferred them to be in open water rather than to be skulking among the rocks where, sooner or later, my line would be fouled. This way, I could play them with jerk and ease.

I rocked back on my heels and gave them my eye at an angle under the tilt of my cap.

"I do ~~not~~ ask for welcome for myself," I said. "But those of you who were born without manners should have gained them in the army. It is clear to me now, that Sergeant Iabe Daniels has ~~not~~ done his job with honour. You came out the pigs you went ~~in~~ in."

I felt Cobina stir at my side and knew the harsh words had hit her. But that did not interest me greatly now. What I was listening for, should come from Murph. I was having my tussle with men now. I knew to a fine point the wildness which could lay in them and was readied to jump on it the moment it came up. I listened for Murph and heard his grunt of agreement. Well, then, Murph was with me since I had shown clearly my anger ^{not to us, but} was for the poor manners they had shown to Cobina. He and me had come up the hill with

Cobina had met the wall of their silence. Hurtful, it had been to him too. But I did not want him to talk now. If he joined his voice to mine, there would be two of us talking our scolds at them, and that could lead to arguments. They would perhaps turn from me on to him. Then when they had gained their footing with the practise they had got from sharpening their tongues on him, they would spring on me and rend and tear my words to shreds. I needed that all their intention should be on me. That way, I could crowd them swiftly, for they have not forgotten the respect they once had for the chevrons ~~anzyxslaxxx~~ I once wore on my sleeve.

"Shut your flapping mouth!" I bellowed suddenly, my eyes fixed on Nicky Ffolkes. Nicky had not opened his mouth, but who would accuse me of lying when no eyes had been on poor Nicky, save mine?

"Shut your flapping mouth! You will speak for whom? You will be lawyer for whom? The lads here will talk when they are good and ready! Do they need such as you to be their barrister? — Take in your overlong lip!"

This time, Nicky had really tried to talk, for truly he was an amazed man at my the whipping I was putting on him. But now, all the eyes had swung to look on him and my shout seemed justified to them all. Nicky Ffolkes — such as Nicky Ffolkes — ~~g~~-trying to be a lawyer for them!

A turtle in the sand at low tide was Nicky. I left him there with his mouth ~~ag~~-gaping and all their resentment turned on him.

I half-turned away, then waited for a second until the pull of my silence brought their eyes to me once more. I spoke with firmness, but quieter; playing them into the pool with ease.

"Let's have it plain and square whenever you are ready, lads. Plain and square is what I ask. Broad, my shoulders are. As for me, I am ~~am~~-thinking that the coffee would not be a bad matter after all, Charlie Cotton."

I put my hand at her elbow and walked her to the root of an almond a small distance from the blockhouse. I left her there and walked back through the lines of lads for the blockhouse, entered, and returned outside with my blankets over my arm. I made them see the hurt and gravity on my face as I went back to the almond. There, I ~~spread~~ spread a couch for Cobina so she could rest.

But she did not. There was puzzle in her eyes, like the break in the quiet ripples when a stone is cast in a pool lying under a full moon. Her eyes were direct on me.

"I do not understand, Iaben. It is away from me. Why have you spoken so to the lads when they did no harm to you — or to me?"

An angel she is; and the ways of men are not yet known to her.

"Down, you should be sitting down," I tell her gently. "These are men, I deal

with. They are old soldiers who have lived without quarter. Leave them be."

It was as if she had not heard me.

"And even the one you called Nicky Ffolkes. Why did you speak without truth of him? He did not do as you say."

So, so there had been an eye on Nicky. Well, no matter.

"If there were no words on his lips, he had them in his heart, Cobina," I said as to a child. "I put my hand to his bolt before he could cock his piece. Sit ye down. You ^{our} will know ~~out~~ ways in time."

Plain as ever, I could see the puzzle in her eyes as she wandered them over the men and back to my face.

The evening was drawing down and from all around, there came the chirp and quip of night birds. A jasmine bush near to us poured a sudden drench of scent and I plucked the flower and placed it in her hair over her temple. There was a difference here to Rae Town. My woman was a darkly gleaming jewel set aright now; and I rejoiced, that the sight it was, I had lived to see.

She was warm and tender like the evening. And my heart was filled to bursting as I looked on the brow of her, to the sweet cut of her lips, the dark eyes in which were reflected the splendid rifts of the dying sun.

It was vespers before Charlie Cotton could bring us the coffee — after a spate of talking among all the lads; but quietly, so ^{their words} it did not reach my ears. Then while Charlie served us with the hot mugs, I heard the raise of their voices in the evening hymn and saw how the sounds of it took Cobina by surprise. I looked towards them and saw that Joe Black had himself taken over the conducting and that Nat Murph stood in the bass section. Aie — rich harmony was in their voices. Nobody had to tell me that this way, the lads were ~~saying~~ saying that right welcome we were. That Cobina could join our Boscobel. I chuckled softly at the picture which appeared in my mind.

CHAPTER 16

I knew these lads to the tips of their fingers. There was no surprise next morning when I found that some had gone over the hill. Nor the other mornings of the first weeks. All I did was to walk over the ground with Nat Murph and Charlie Cotton and placed pegs where each who had left, should live when he returned. For I knew they would return, each with his woman.

Myself, I did not spare to put in time with roundwood and thatch; for I would not agree that Cobina should curtain away a section of the blockhouse, but slept on our blankets under the almond. I declared to be under our own roof before the rains could commence.

Meanwhile, we agreed that our fishing should be by a single boat until our disturbance had quieted down. We found a claybed of rich red and agreed that this would make the walling of our homes. The Spanish walling we made, as our fathers had done it when our land was young: With the clay mixed to a firm batter and plastered in and about the frame of plaited ~~wattles~~ wattles, stout as a man's arm. Then over that was smoothed the finer clay which dried in the sun to the texture of glass. Then, thereafter, like flame-hearts in the forests in summer, our homes would be.

It was a summer of brave breaking seas and scented woods. Hog plums ripened and fell about the roots of heavily burdened mangoes; etieti apples glowed red and yellow in the ~~night~~ deeper wood where Cobina and me walked much together. There was a singing joy in me to watch the light which broke through her when the pigeons dipped their heads to a stream, or a humming bird passed with a flash and a memory for its passage. ~~Wazwentixixix~~

We went into the matters of life at Boscobel but little. Cobina seemed content to be quiet about it; content to help me plait the thatch/^{with} which we partitioned our house into three rooms, or to lay out the zinnias and gladioli about our door. And here, she asked her own way in one matter: That a mound of mint should be planted by the door for use in making tea. I knew it for a custom of the fishers, that in the odours of Rae Town — that in this poor place of living, each doorway had the mound of mint crowding such scents on the air that made the rooms heady with ~~the~~ it.

(It is a good thing and worthy to be noted that the mint is the begotter of a tea rarer to the palate than those of India or the China coast.)

Cobina wanted the mint by her doorway. I know, now, that my mind even then was uneasy. For, I condemned Cobina from her mint, and moreover, told Murph he should dig out whatever roots of it he saw about. There should be nothing for a reminder of Rae Town, at Boscobel.

Howsoever, let my foolishness lay until I must take it up again. I was filled

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with love for her and it drunked my sight to what she bore in her eyes. But let it lay.

Murph told me of our new troubles the day we took possession of our new boat. We leaned against a satinwood tree near a cave on the edge of our land, to which he had ~~sig~~^{make} signalled me with a nod of his head. He had gone to ~~the~~ Kendal this day to ~~pay~~^{make} the last payments on ~~installment~~^{on} our new boat — forty feet long, with lockers, which we had begun payments with the money we earned at Montego Bay — as well as to make a payment on our lease.

He looked at the mouth of the cave, but there was something else in his eyes while he spoke from his mouth.

"~~But~~^{we should have} I am ~~a~~ thinking, to ~~the~~^{the} roof of this cave shored up. Soon there ~~will~~ will be children a-romping about the beach," he said.

~~He~~ He spoke truth. The lads had come back to Boscobel with their women. There were now a score of cooking places where there had been only one — at the blockhouse. ~~He~~ surely, I know it will not be long before babies will be carried around; and that another mango season will have children ~~a~~ crying for mango-juice to be squeezed into their mouths. But why bring me out to our fence-line to tell me what is known to me already? It is time now that Murph should speak with his eyes too. Who does he think he is fooling?

"There is more to your mind than this old cave, Nat Murph," I say. "Tell it. 'Tis no good news, I know that already."

He is a brown brother of Mr. Winston Churchill, the lads of New Zealand used to say. There is the same bulldog quality in him when he ~~turns~~^{whirls} to face me.

"A son of a whoremonger who has no more roots than a mule has told me today that Boscobel is not for us!"

Quiet, now, man. Easy you should be, Murph.

"Tell it plainly, Murph," I said with calmness. "Who is the son who vexed you?"

"The man — Mr. Sloley — who owns the land. He would take ^{back} the lease now because he has been offered more silver for Boscobel!"

There is not much sense in this to me. ~~The~~ The beach had been leased cheaply to ~~x~~ us because nobody wanted land on the coast. Back, further in, the land was better for farming. Now who could have offered this Mr. Sloley so much more silver that he would face the wrath of the heavy-shouldered Nat Murph with such a proposal? It is perplexing.

"This offer comes from whom?" I asked.

Murph rubs his hand on the ~~exquisite~~ trunk of the satinwood. Cream-gold is the heartwood of the satinwood tree, with a grain shining with high glory and flowers of a fragrance to remember. I ~~am~~ thinking that ~~as~~ good silver could be made from these woods and calculate that a dozen of them under the saw would bring a fine wage to our camp.

A lapwing flew out of the fragrance as Nat Murph fisted at the trunk in anger.

"Master Squire Groves — the man in the shiny motor car!"

The Great Slug, angry Richard Beamish had called him. Fat and crawling like a slug and hiding under leaves while he ate out the heartwood. I could put my boots on him and sing while I squeezed ~~the~~ out the sap in him.

"He said what? Tell me all of it."

"He said nothing more than that Squire Groves had an eye on the land, and in his pocket a hand that could make Mr. Sloley heavy at the bank. After I had talked with him, I made a patrol. ~~Heard~~ I learnt there is much newspaper talk of tourists for the north coast. They say the American travellers would bring coin to the man who would put up a hotel on the north coast for this new sunbathing."

My perplexity has not been cleared. "Sun bathing? What may that be?"

"A new style. The wishy-washy whites will lie in the sun until they become as ~~brown~~ brown as us," Murph growled.

Aie — this Nineteen-twenty-seven has made us mad, I think to myself. I am thinking how men are wearing their trousers wide in the cuffs like sailors, and how the women are ~~off~~ flying aeroplanes. *Oxford bags and female aviators. Well.*

"So?"

"So Squire Groves thinks that Boscobel would be a fine place for his tourist hotel. Sloley will take out a writ against us that we be thrown off the property ^{weeks} within six ~~months~~" Nat Murph said.

I dam' and blast at this six weeks, in my mind. 'Twas like the King's gratuity ^{regiment.} with which they had turned us out of the ~~army~~ Six weeks more on my beautiful beach and my home with Cobina. After that, nothing. After that, perhaps I would be a watchman ^{spoil for the riff-raff who have never known authority and} at a city warehouse to be ~~assaulted by the riff-raff who have never known authority and~~ who would mock at ~~such an old soldier as me.~~ I could trim my line or put a patrol through a minefield in a manner that would make men throw away the Manual. So, and so, had been my life. I needed nothing I did not possess. Enough and more was within the garrison gates, until I had seen Cobina.

And even here, my ~~my~~ smug reflections found comfort that she too would have come within the gates to the house and garden of a colour sergeant who had married on the Strength.

Then, what?

our

Then a salvo of illluck had rocked ~~my~~ middles and what I had known, was no more. But, by God and my pride, my company had come steady again and a Boscobel for our refuge had been found. We had bought our boats and built our homes and stood bitch to none of ~~it~~ the riff-raff.

Then, what, now? Once more to strike our colours?

I say my boots would descend on that Slug at this minute without any losing of my sleep.

"Anything further, Murph?"

"Further, this writ will be taken out at the end of the week."

A bull should not be ~~grazed~~ over-goaded to the pen. Take your bamboo pole and ~~guz~~ guide him gently down the road and there will be no fences broken. I ask myself now: Why in hell and thunder should Squire Groves be prodding me so foully? I ask myself the question without once thinking of Sloley, whom after all was my landlord. But it is so that I find a man will never fail to know his enemy once he seeks within his own behaviour. Nobody had to tell me that the fat Squire Groves must hate me because of how I had used him on the beach that day when first he stopped at Boscobel; or that he hates the lads because they laughed at him in front of the Americans. A slug he was, and should be heeled; but for now, we were prostrate on the ground and he crawled all over us. I called him a name in bad language.

Nat Murph looked at me. "So Chippy Dale should sound the retreat?" he asked with nothing on his face.

"Chippy Dale should sound your arsel!" My soldier's tongue is on me, loud and foul. "No fat son of a lighthouse woman will run me from my Boscobel! Chippy will laugh at him with the brass! 'Tis the muster, Chippy will sound! Your Squire Groves will hear such a sound as will make him wet his trousers!"

A grin I will see in hell broke the leather of Murph's face. "My Squire Groves?" Soft his voice was. "My Squire? Eh, then I would gladly take him, labe, lad."

I say the grin on Murph is from hell, and I think I know what he would be doing with the squire. The women of the desert had spoken often with Nat, who had a way with them, no matter that he be ugly as sin. The women of the desert had been known to deal cruelly with the males of their enemies, and doubtless my corporal had learnt somewhat from them.

"Who will serve this writ?" I asked him. The matters of law, I know little of, ~~un~~ and leave all our business to Murph.

"A bailiff, doubtless. A man with the King's authority on him."

"He has the right? The lease to us is worthless?"

"The lease to us has been dirtied by a rich lawyer put to the work by the Squire himself."

The words came slowly from me. "The Squire be a fat but busy man. Fat men should be quiet if their hearts should not fail them."

Murph turned his head from me and looked in at the cave. I saw in his face that he was ready for it too. I had the violence rising in me like a spring. The Forty-Ninth of Shepherd Davie came into my mouth. It is a hymn of judgment and warning. I will open my ~~mouth~~ dark saying upon the harp, he sang to the Sons of Korah, and I had the harp now singing inside of me of what Squire Groves could hope for at Boscobel.

"Somebody should tell the man I will not countenance his interference. Somebody

he shakes himself for a shudder"
 should cry in his ears that mighty as his thews and sinews are, a spit of bayonet
 'twixt his third and fourth ribs will make his fine comb to fall!"

"He would not heed the telling, Iabe. Wealth has stopped up his hearing."

I moved from the ~~stagnant~~ satinwood tree and sought Chippy Dale, with Murph
 falling in silently behind me. Most of the lads were on the beach looking over the boat
 which Murph had trucked in. I sought Chippy Dale to sound the muster so I could talk to
 them. There should be caused to rise in them the same violence as in Murph and me. I
 tell you the ~~dark saying~~ ^{black music} was singing in me.

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CHAPTER 16

We settled down to wait out the week. We settled down that evening about the doors at Boscobel, with a silence on us that was as loud as if we had raged. But the women spoke much among themselves.

"It was a speech of violence you ~~made~~ made, Laban," Cobina said to me.

The river was in her voice, although it seemed to me that the stars in her eyes were clouded. I ~~sneaked~~ ^{had} the goodness of her stronger in my nostrils than the ~~scents~~ ^{scents} of the bush, night-blooming in jasmine and ~~x~~ cerosee and arum lilies. O, the glory of our women in the evening when the dark beauty of them seem to shame the poor inventions of the makers of verses. Mr. George Campbell, that great singer of my people, who took our mountains and valleys in his hands and shaped them with our sweat to love and fury to be a disturbance to me, put it that They come to me and take their toll and ever am I brimming full.

A-brim was my woman, and I was drunk with ~~her wonder~~ ^{her wonder.}

Still yet, although Mr. George Campbell has done full well with his words, yet I say the wonder of our women can be a ruin to many poets. Such an ocean of life ^{as} is theirs cannot be disturbed by a cast of pebbles. Ask anybody.

"It was that, Cobina. Boscobel I will keep, and keep."

"Violence will not brick your wall, man, but brick on brick with steadiness."

Marriage with Cobina had awakened to my understanding some of the simple wisdom she bore in her simple words. Time after time, she has brought me up sharp with an easiness that made my fund of loud knowledge seem a shallow pattern of foolishness. But tonight, I was ~~nursing~~. Jealous of my brave anger as an idiot his coloured bits of glass, me.

"I do not build a wall. ~~Standing~~ ^{Well,} by to see that this does not fall, I am."

"~~Oh~~, then it holds that steadiness will defend it as well."

"You will be gentle with a bailiff who is ~~hursed~~ ^{horsed on} Squire Groves' moneybags?"

The smile on her is as on a mother and it vexes me.

"So then, you will be ungentle with the law?"

"If the law shows there is unfairness in it!" I said angrily.

She turned quickly to face me full. "Labe, labe O!" In her voice, there is a ^{downwind} lost klung-klung beating its tiny ~~wind~~ wings ~~demonstrating~~ before a storm. "Labe, anger is weakness! There is a saying in the Church that thought should go before anger!"

"Qua! Qua!" I laugh the derisive laugh my people use to scour another. "You would perhaps that I burn candles instead for Groves and his bailiff?"

"Rather than cut coco-sticks for their backs — ~~oh~~, yes. Yes!"

I had sent a squad behind Rich Beamish to cut the stout coco-sticks from the wood in case the Squire had violence rising in him too. There could be no telling. Nat

urph had confessed to me how he had angrily told Squire Groves at Kendal that Boscobel would make a fine tomb for him if ever he came there with his bailiff. Murph had known exactly what my feelings would be.

"You will be warring, Iabe?"

My foolish laughter died out of me when she spoke the question. The ways of a man are not unlike a bull, tearing into a fence because the strands of wire seem too frail to hold him. Then, with a heave and a ^{twang he} ~~twang~~ is flung back.

A picture of consequences flashed across my eye and the old caution made me thoughtful.

"To war or to be in peace is the business of Squire Groves," I said slowly. "He it is who will make the attack or lay back in his trench. I will not hit first, Cobina."

Cobina smiled down on me so I grew down into a knuckle-kneed boy.

"I see that you gather your cudgels and you set men watching on the line-fences. Well, now, Iabe, if Squire Groves or his bailiff shows his face, will the men wait for them to talk before they commence the thrashing? Your Boscobel will hold a festival of bleeding heads and weeping women, Iaban, and then the constables will come to sit on our doorsteps. Stop pretending to yourself."

It was a time for anger. Otherwise, my mind would continue to think and I would see the truth in her words. When you can speak in anger, it is a fine and righteous feeling — like perhaps the crowing of the rooster-cock who fools himself that his fine voice will frighten back the dawn. Such a conceit lies in the male of everything.

In big anger, hear me: "What, then? Leave Groves to do what he will to us? Collect our kit in readiness to march out in hasty surrender? Woman, a joke you will make of me?"

"A man of thought I would have you be, Iaban," she said quietly.

"My thoughts have been of good quality long before I knew Cobina Lawrence!" I told her, like a blazing pinewood knot.

But my blaze did not light her up as doubtless I had hoped it would. Silence came on her; woman's silence, louder than a drum; loud enough to send you whirling this way and that way, seeking something to throw your fist at. But a waste it is; for all around, as you whirl with your anger, there is this thick, soft wall of silence making a trapped monkey of you. I looked on the dark velvet of her face, painted to a black rose by the firelight gleaming in it. And so as love for her moved about



my loins, so did anger destroy through me like a wanton's kisses.

"We will put a fire to the tail of Fat Slug Squire Groves or any whom he sends! I have had the lads cut their sticks and we will make a patrol night and day until they come! Then, such as be afraid, let them bend their heads so the Squire can befoul them and tell them what they feel be their own cold sweat running down their backs! Iaban Daniels has never run from his troubles!"

~~C~~-crying for justification, me, like a purposeful boy ~~x~~ crying for a harvest moon to play ballgames with. A stupid, mule-headed boy, whom Cobina must look at gently, speak ~~gently~~ softly.

"A man can stay away from trouble without dishonour, Iabe. Nobody asks that you run away from troubles, just that 'tis better to stay away from them. Hastiness is the easiest road to trouble. Ask anybody."

I slammed to my feet and reached for the stout stick the lads had brought in from the bush for me. It is of a mighty heft and sings when I swing it to the ~~blaythm~~ rhythm of a bad word. I went away to look for Murph.

CHAPTER 17

It was the early morning of the ^{eight}~~eighth~~ day that the bailiff came. Doubtless Squire Groves had told him of Murph's words, for he did not come alone. Rich Beamish on patrol on the east line heard the motor car approach and slow. He stepped out into the ~~middle~~ middle of the road and sat on the end of his stick like the nobs do at the races.

"Who be ye?" he asked as the motor car rolled to a halt not many inches from his chest.

Reggie Sturgeon, who paired him on the east line, told us afterwards what Rich had said, and what the bailiff answered. The bailiff was large, in khaki clothes, and wore a chequered cap. Much legal bleeding of the poor had placed on him the authority which is best seen in the larger privy rats.

"A bailiff of His Majesty's Court. I want to see one Iaban Daniels."

Thin and angry though Rich Beamish is, a fine soldier he nevertheless is. He ~~has~~ kept within his orders by doing no more than whistling around his fingers for me.

It must have been a sight not ordinary, to the bailiff ^{deputies} and the four ~~was~~ he had had brought in the car with him, when soon there was a crashing through the dark wood and then suddenly the road was filled with men. We stepped down ^{out of the dark wood} ~~into the reddish light~~ into the reddish light of the dawn on the road, the salty wind whipping at our clothes.

I moved to go through the lads up to the front, but Nat Murph held at my sleeve.

"Wait for awhile, Iabe," he said, his eyes bright.

Beamish had played his soldier's part, and much responsibility no longer on him, he was growing angry. The bailiff turned his large head about at us as he stepped from the car.

"Iaban Daniels?" he called like a court crier. "Daniels!"

Oh, then Rich Beamish's thin body jerked as he came off the stick and took strides to the car. "Iaban Daniels be not willing to see such a face as yours so ~~early~~ early! I be not as particular, but ~~prefer to~~ truth to tell would rather be a-gazing at your behind --- so, run, man! Turn and run --- ^{tumble-toad} you/~~fat~~ son of a bad word!"

There is a fat beetle of the countryside, whose living is made by burrowing his head at the base of animals' droppings and tumbling them along the ground until he ~~roll~~ rolls the load into his dwelling under any large rock. The tumble-toad, he has been christened, and every boot in the land is lifted against his fat uncleanness. Now we ~~see~~ see with Beamish's words the resemblance of the bailiff to the tumble-toad, and cannot hold back the ~~any~~ chuckles in our bellies.

But the wind takes up our soft laughter and makes of it a mean sound in the bailiff's ear. It is to him as if we muttered in anger against he and his men. The wind in our clothes and the uncertain red light of the early dawn might have made him believe we moved towards him. Whatever it was, fear entered his eyes at the things

he saw and heard. There was a hurried little cry from him at his men as he commenced backing towards his car with Rich stalking stiff-legged like a rooster at him. We waited ^{while} ~~until~~ he hopped into the battered old car, then it was backing and wheezing down the road as the driver sought a place to turn about. Then the laughter burst from us like a south wind in the summer. My, but it was a rare laughter that doubled to us ~~on~~ the turf and made the tears to roll down our cheeks. Then Rich was a warrior of a man to us, and his back must have tingled to the slaps with which we told him amidst our roaring laughter that well he had done.

Howsoever, ~~now~~ sobering-time came when the laughter had died out of us. We grunted and broke away, some to the beach and others up ~~the~~ the slope to their hutments. It was funny how most of the men sought their women when sobering-time came

I leaned to a corner of the house and watched Cobina ready the frying-pan for the breakfast fritters. Her face was smooth, the curve of her mouth, full, as if kisses had been lately on them. There are such movements in the turn of her body as make a song to sing inside me. ~~with the~~ There has never been such melody in another. Not even in that one like a lazing tigress (I say it with decent admiration) who shares a bed in Joe Black's quarters.

"We showed ourselves and the mighty bailiff ran," I say.

"He will be back with his host," Cobina said, her eyes on the affairs of her cooking.

"He ran with fear making a child of him," I grinned.

"The laughter of you will make a man of him," she said, her eyes not on me.

I am puzzled by this. I asked for her meaning.

"He and his men were not angry enough this morning," she said, turning the fritters in the sputtering oil. "The laughter I heard from you on the beach will make them angry enough. Then, back they will be."

"You must be one of Solomon's widows — the one to whom he willed his great wisdom."

She straightened from the fire to face me. ~~The~~ A hand pressed against her hair narrowed the frock about her ~~waist~~ waist, and I am thinking how it be that although she ^{is} ~~is~~ ^{many months married,} ~~is two months gone with child,~~ she is a bud-flower in her form yet. Her eyes were ^{reflected} steady on me. I got the feeling again that all my talk before was of foolishness and ^{me not neither of us families noted} that I had been waiting on her to tell me what to do. She spoke as if she was a-saying ^{for} ~~was~~ how warm/the day. ^{full of quiver & as I am, Cobina is an only child.}

"Tell Chippy to sound a recall and ha' the men on the lines again. Cut stout sticks, Laban, if you would hold your Boscobel today."

Then she returned to her cooking again and I stood like a small boy behind a

teacher who has dismissed him from her presence.

Even although it is myself that say it, I am a man of ready wit who is not afraid of righting his mistakes after he learns they are such. Nevertheless, when I waited while Chippy made the recall, I did not look towards the door where, Cobina, the cooking and washing-up ended, sat a-knitting.

I took the lads into my belief that the bailiff would return with more ~~men~~ men, and told them we should man the lines again. I told them that doubtless, the bailiff would return with the constables now; and that the men who could not stomach lifting a hand against the King's constables should ~~not~~ now fall out of the ranks. No ill would be thought of such a man, I said.

The load of laughter they overturned on me, brought a grin to me too. Many battles these lads had made with the constables in the days when they wore the khaki. To be told they should sit by their cooking places while Boscobel was taken from them by the constables, was a merry joke to them. I waved a hand in apology.

"I did no' reckon 'twould be otherwise," I told them.

The hours went past with none of us giving any attention to work, except the dozen lads I had told off to re-set some fishtraps for our food. Down towards evening, Nat Murph said the lads could soon return to their quarters. I asked how was this.

"Law does not permit the bailiff to do his serving after sunset," he said.

We stood by my door where Cobina poured coffee into mugs for us.

"Eh, so our sleep will be restful," I said with a grin.

"'Cept that this will be a criminal summons which the bailiff will be serving or an now," Cobina said quietly. "A summons ~~for~~ arrest for assault on the bailiff. They will come — even at midnight."

It came home to me that she spoke all sense; and when I looked at Nat Murph I saw it in his face that this was so. I slapped my thighs with my hat and moved away.

"Come along then, Nat," I called my corporal.

We were not sure how they would come, so we set the lads east and west of Boscobel. We waited in the night while the dew brought ^{goodness} ~~freshness~~ to the ^{scent of} ~~nostrils~~ cooling earth and the nightbirds and the little animals went on making their living in noises which were pleasant to hear. The sea went down to a dreamless sleep and a late moon floated up with a sudden lift, then seemed to hand stride while it ~~idled~~ idled among some playful clouds. I made the round of the guards, played on my march by a fluting nightengale; and it was a revelation to me to see how a man can enjoy the duties he hates, when he does it of his own freewill. For these lads on post were as chippy as if they were no' ~~were~~ missing their warm beds because of the task they were doing. They joked at me in whispers as I circled about them; and yet, I

declare until the day I die, a blade of grass could not have stirred under ^{these} ~~this~~ broken and unsteady ~~moonlight~~ moonbeams but they would have seen it.

I know this to be so; for when the constables crept up on us at some minutes after the midnight, their clumsy approach was watched by the lads long before they ~~reax~~ reached our lines.

They came on us from east and west, but we did not wait for parley. The lads sprang to silent work, hitting low so there would be no broken heads for anyone to be gallowsed about; but nevertheless with might and main to put them to flight. We were too many for them; there could not have been more than twenty of them with the tall English inspector on whom I rested my stick at the east line fence. He plucked at me with his baton; but the ways of war had come to me long before he had put away his slate and primer. I joined with the darkness under the trees and played such tricks with his ankles and thighs that must have left him black and blue for many days to come. He whistled the retreat — after failing to see my whereabouts for many minutes, while he was never far from my hand.

For a little while, I stood to take breath; then on the double, I went around the lines to see how the lads had fared. I did not see much to less than joke about, until I reached the west line and found the tall sergeant, Joe Black.

I know death well. It has travelled around with me, a-sitting on my knapsack so long that I know the instant smell of it. But now I meet it with a cold hand clutching my heart in terror. In those other places, it was part of the life. Here, under the trees at Boscobel, death had no part or lot with us.

It is ever peculiar to me that, at this moment, my mind did not dwell on the years which had found Joe Black and me together all about the world. Such remembrances did not come on me until days afterwards. At this moment, there ^{was} ~~was~~ before my eyes ~~the face of~~ ^{the face of} Deborah Black, the woman of Joe. She was a widow before her prime; with life in her that was no' fully plumbed yet. Now the matter would have to halt awhile; perhaps, forever, if the love she bore Joe Black was that which could not be given to another.

I sat beside him and struck a match. It was a swing of a baton with fury which had caught on the temple of Joe. Doubtless, the constable had struck with none of the fears of the gallows on him, like we had.

CHAPTER 18

Cobina went away long before the dawn. I remember with a remembrance like the black burn of ~~light~~ lightning on a tree, what it was which went before the disappearance of Cobina. It was the deed of Deborah, the woman of Joe Black. She was hardly known to me before. I confess that my responsibility here, as a sergeant to my company, had not been carried out with ~~make~~ note; for the wife of such a sergeant as Joe Black of the Pioneer Corp should have been well known to me. But how this was so, ~~IX~~ I do not know. Thinking, I am a-thinking that perchance in my mind she was a tigress from the ~~Suleiman's~~ ^{Suleiman's} garden who purred under no hand but that of her master — and is therefore sensibly left alone. But that is of no consequence now.

We had made a litter for Joe and bore him up the hill towards the square before the blockhouse. Our women had ^{all} drawn behind their doors and none should have been out when we got to the blockhouse. But, almost I stumbled into the bearer behind whom I was walking, at his sudden halt. I raised my eyes from seeing after my footing and against the clearer moonlight, there stood the figure of Deborah, silently barring the way ~~was~~ to the square.

Kill me, dead, and I will still swear from my grave that she could not have seen the face of the man whom we bore up the hill. Then how was it that she had left her bed to bar our ways and with a wave of her hand, turn the bearers towards the house which Joe Black had built for her?

It was a shaking thing to ~~see, her back to the moon~~ ^{see, her back to the moon} and her finger pointing the way to her own doorway. The lads did not turn to me for orders, but went the way she pointed. Then, strangest of all, there was no surprise in me when I found Cobina by my side without knowing when she had got there. Neither when her hand sought mine as the peculiar procession halted before the door of Joe Black's hutment and the litter was gently rested.

Charlie Cotton, who bore a lantern, stepped to the front with his cap held under his arm and I see by the set of his face that a prayer ^{now he would make.} ~~for the same~~ Deborah had stooped at the head of the bier and lifted the end of the coat with which we had covered Joe's face. Three breaths must have passed while she looked her fill. Then, as Charlie Cotton commenced the Lord's Prayer, she rose swiftly with a spitting sound through her teeth.

"Go away with it!" she whispered. "Take it away! Away with your prayers, I say! 'Twill no' bring back the life into him!"

The blasphemy was distress to Charlie Cotton.

"'Tis the word of Jesus Christ, Deborah Black!" he said affrightedly. "'Tis

the words to bring you comfort!"

The woman leaned towards Charlie Cotton. "Then if it is that you are a man who speaks for Jesus Christ, put life into him! Stretch on him as Jesus Christ did and put life into this dead! Call him forth from the tomb, you wombless begotter of words!"

I know that in all my born days, I had never heard the matters in another voice that I heard in hers this night. It is of the cold quality which speaks in the noises of a serpent before it strikes; and so was the turn of her body as she leaned further forward and moved her head around to see all of us. I felt Cobina shrink to me, and saw by the move of the shoulders of the men that their women, who had now joined them, were closing to them for cover too.

"A widow I am, now — the only widow in Boscobel! Eh, remember me, the rest of you when you ha' your men to warm you while I seek my own firewoodX — I say to blood! Take your prayers and leave me with him!"

The wildness whipped at us from her throat in such measure that I saw men step backward from ~~the~~ that place. And truth to tell, there was a yearning at my knees for flight too. It was then that Cobina, with a ~~movement~~ ^{motion} from the shelter of my arm, told me that the men should be made to go away. So I went away from before Joe Black's hutment and the others came after me with quickness, leaving only the women there.

We talked but little, each looking in at his own thoughts. After a while, we heard the women singing a hymn. Then after a while, it did not seem long before day-cloud was whitening in the east. By then it was quiet at Joe's doorway, so weary and heavy at heart, I sought my own place and Cobina. She was not there.

I sought her among the other women who sat hunched in sleep around the bier. She was not there either. I roused them and asked questions of them, but their faces in the early dawnlight held nothing of communication. I sought Nat Murph, a strange fear on me still from the look I had seen on Deborah's face at my questioning after she had turned her head from the bier to join the glances of the other women at ~~myself~~ me.

"Cobina is not in Boscobel, Nat Murph!" I said. "Cobina is ~~gone~~ gone!"

"If she has gone, 'tis not to a far distance, Labe," he said calmly. "She will not leave Boscobel --- and you."

"Then — but where could she be?"

The day had come up clear on us. A peadove cooed and a reply came from her mate. The groundswell washed with gentleness on the sand and Murph looked peculiarly on me.

"There is another thing which has come up to put ~~that~~ fear on you, Labe Daniels," he said. "Tell it to me so we can reason together."

I do not understand what the other thing is. Nat Murph is closest to me. He is my friend, such as few men possess. He has lain beside me on the slopes of Fusail, in the Valley of Jordan, when there was a Turkoman's bullet setting up a great noise in my

shoulder. A night and a day he stayed with me, a hot rifle in his hands; the precious drops from his canteen cooling the cloth on my forehead so the fever would not burn away my breath. He could have slid back down the hill with honour, for Fusail had been a tomb for many of the regiment. But he did not. Ask anybody.

"She looked at me, Murph — looked - looked and smiled," I said with a weight on my tongue so the words stammered out. "It was a smile such as I hope will be turned elsewhere."

"You speak of Cobina?" he asked with sharpness.

"Man, no! 'Twas Deborah Black! I enquired of the women of Cobina and a stonewall of faces they turned at me. But — she smiled!"

There was thought on Nat Murph. You hear him now, slowly: "Rest you mind easy about Cobina. If there was a wall of ~~faces~~ silence to your question, then doubtless they have hidden her behind the wall. 'Tis the way of women when they make their plans. But — Deborah?"

He paused and looked towards the mourning house. There was smoke rising from all the cooking places which told that the women had returned to their kitchens to make the morning meal. But no smoke rose from Joe Black's — or mine either.

"I do not know, Labe. She did not seem promising of smiles earlier this morning. ~~But~~ But perhaps the wound is ~~a~~-healing already."

Murph had not seen it as I had. Such a smile should not have come from Deborah Black with her man just turning cold at her feet. Such a smile was of the women who leaned on the fence outside the garrison.

CHAPTER 19

Cobina returned at high morning — but such a returning! We heard the motor a-coming and again we sought the line-fence. It was with an anger that was forgetting of the gallows that we now manned the line. Some few, such as Nicky Ffolkes, had turned coward, for the thought was strong on us that this time, there would be rifles with the constables. But Bully Ferguson, a rebel from the womb, and Johnny ~~McCook~~ M'Cook, who would joke at the Devil and his fork when his time came, and sweet Chippy Dale who sounded the muster with such flourishes that no drum-major would allow — such as these at my back made a mockery of the cowardice of those like Nicky Ffolkes.

Yet, I will not be untruthful as to say that some thought did not find a place in my mind, even when I was sending Johnny ~~McCook~~ M'Cook up a tall coconut tree to do a scout. A ~~sergeant~~ sergeant is a man of responsibility who must think on the costs to his platoon. When our fathers stormed the walls of the Sabbajees and tore the green flag from the mosque — the greatest mosque of all the ~~Gambias~~ Gambias — they did not charge with fury only, but took along their escalades too. My blood was hot with the killing of Joe Black; but this time, I was thinking of the odds ahead. We could not battle all the constables in the land, and they with rifles too.

Perhaps, it was the going of Cobina which made her words ~~live~~ come alive in me and stirred awakening to the foolishness of us. I heard the motor coming nearer and I swallowed the stiffness from my neck. I could not pit the lads against hosts which would sooner than later look along their sights at the puny sticks we carried. I called to Chippy Dale intending him to sound the recall and prepare the lads for a parley. No longer did we wear the King's uniform; eh, no longer did we enjoy his special protection. I waved Chippy to me.

But all this went for nothing as there came a cry from Johnny M'Cook far up in the coconut crotch;

"Cobina — 'tis Cobina, ~~lads~~ — at ease, lads! 'Tis Cobina with - with — Lord God!" He twisted his head to look down on our upturned faces, and for awhile I feared he would lose his grip and ~~break~~ break his neck, so shaken he appeared to be. "Charlie — O! Charlie Cotton — O! Cobina is a-bringing back a real pastor with pigeon collar and all! Man Brother Cotton — you will ha' to go over the hill — he will take away all your trade!"

Then there were we, ~~showing~~ showing our teeth in lame laughter, for M'Cook's joke while our minds race away ~~seeking~~ seeking a meaning. Cobina returning to Boscobel with a pastor by her side. What was this new foolishness for which my woman had given me fearful moments? To fret and worry about her while she sought a collared pastor for the burial of Joe Black? Could not Charlie Cotton ha' piloted him over the ~~river~~ river? Such stupidity is consequent of

a woman's thinking. I recall the wife of a Colonel who sent him table napkins of a snowy whiteness while we held the Turks in the Valley, those forty days of bullets and fever. "Shun!"

"At ease," I tell the lads, sharply, to take from them the quality of ugly stonework which Johnny M'Cook's shout had brought to them. I stepped from the bush to the road, the others following me, and we stood ~~there~~ while we waited the coming of Cobina.

But when the motor breasted the hill and rolled down to us, we saw that there was another in the car with Cobina and the pastor. The car stopped a pace from me. She it was x who came out first. Her eyes were steady on my face, doubtless seeing there the anger against her that was in me; and speaking to me by her look, that I should behave myself for there x were strangers here.

"I bring a Father, Laban, Father Ambrose of the Mission at Kendal. And I bring a lawyer, Laban, Lawyer Figueroa of Kendal. My husband, this is," she said turning her head back to them for my introduction. Then she was walking away, with the sun cast on the proud lift of her head, on the gait of her. And my eyes on her, there sprang into my throat the music of Solomon:

I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon.

I turned from the watching of her and the music ~~did~~ died down in me.

Figueroa was clever of mouth and had the ready eye of a fighter. He leaned against the car and I could see it plain as plain that he was sizing us up. But I rested my eyes on the priest, for here it ~~did~~ seemed to me was the head of the matter. The Roman priest stood up, a man of stature. His golden head was bared to the sun. I took his hand and found that his grip had strength to it.

"Mr. Laban Daniels. I have heard of you, Laban," he said.

"Well parson, 'tis my affair to ask whether you heard good or bad," I told him, "but I will no' press for it, since eager ears ~~ma~~ may cause hot temples."

He grinned at the proverb of my people and moved aside a little so Figueroa could shake my hand too.

"Yet eager ears test the strength of walls, Mr. Daniels," Figueroa said. Figueroa is of my people, with education; but his schooling has not made him forgot the wisdoms our people put in their barbecue ~~sakings~~ sayings. A good, that is. He is not as tall as the pastor but there is a good set to his shoulder. My spirit greets the young man, even though there is an easy glib to the speech of him. But 'tis his trade to be of easy speech.

"Aie — and it is sensible that a man should build a stout wall about his tongue, lawyer," I say, measuring up to him.

His eyebrows went up in applause at me. "Otherwise ---?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "Otherwise, then let him look to building stout arms."

He bowed like those in the theatre. "Your witness, Father," he said.

The Roman priest smiled at us. "I am out of my depth with you Jamaicans, Grant," he said; so I knew the lawyer to be Grant Figueroa. "I will stick to simple American." So I knew the pastor to be American. "Laban, here, has a reputation for stout arms. He picked one of our young ladies right off the altar steps, so to speak."

I put the ramrod down my back and gave him my eye.

"She came with willingness, Pastor Ambrose," I said.

He could be about my own years; a year above or below. But there was a quality in his smile that could make us into short-trousered boys; young and ^{as cold} ~~and~~ at the knees as ever. The ramrod seemed unaccountably stupid.

"What is, is, Laban," he said gently, puzzling me.

I waited, my eyes on them. Cobina had gone up the hill and now I could hear the voices of the women singing a hymn. I cast a glance up to see if the day would be fair. It is misery and uncomfortableness to hold a burial when the weather is wet. There is a sound to the coffin settling in the mud that is the last bottom of nothing. I looked ~~px~~ back at them. Pastor Ambrose spoke to me.

"Laban, your wife came to me at the rectory early this morning --- before daylight. She told me the story of Boscobel. ~~Much~~ Much of it was known to me already --- except the death of Joseph Black. So I am here, with Grant who is a sort of legal adviser to my flock. As a good Catholic, he gives his service free to the Church --- a sort of penance for the sins he daily commits in the name of Justice."

His chuckle is that of a man who does it because there is ^{rare} ~~was~~ humour in him. Some I have known, wear their laughter as the tiger wears his purr. But I cannot be as easy about the matter as he is.

"My wife came to you without my knowledge or consent. Very well, then. You know of Boscobel and your friend here is a lawyer who does not ask silver or gold for his services. Well --- what?"

The pastor must have known I mocked at him, but there was no anger on him.

"You are a quick man, Laban, a right ~~soldierly~~ soldierly quickness. You wish me to get on with it. Well, shortly, Grant and I did some casting around. There will be no trouble coming to Boscobel for the night's work --- except for the Coroner's Inquest." A cloud shadowed the fine eyes of the Roman pastor. "It is a sad affair, Laban; but the boy is gone and I will not speak to you the words of comfort which the Church reserves for such occasions. You will know better than I ~~what~~ how to resolve your mind. All there is for me to say, is: Let us draw a certain lesson from the death of Joseph."

The pastor is saying that a man of strength, I am, who does not need the soft words of his trade to wrap my sorrow in. Very well, then. ^{For} right, he is.

"So — this certain lesson?" I asked, with less of the cock-a-doodle-doo ~~in~~^{willing} showing in me, but ~~waiting~~ to quarrel with him if ever he should word against me for having met Squire Groves' campaign with violence.

"It is a lesson you must seek yourself, Laban," he said gravely. "Now we must deal with the living. Let us talk about the lease. Will you come into Kendal to a meeting and talk it over with the owner? Grant here will represent you — legally, I mean."

The lads had come now, crowding around us; and friendly Johnny M'Cook with the laughter in his voice was in good fun as he tried to introduce our fifty, name by name, to the lawyerman. Figueroa had moved away from Pastor Ambrose and me, walking into the crowd with Johnny. There was an intentness in his bearing while Johnny made the introductions, as if he sought to remember each name, and I wondered at his earnestness. It should make a wealthy man of him.

The pastor was looking at me, waiting for my reply. I knew there was reasonableness in what he said, but the mood on me was not to reason. The mood was to hurtle my fists at things because of the grieving in me at Joe Black lying cold up back there on this shining morning, and because of the disapproval I saw plain as plain in our womenfolk. The lads were not the one to fret on what had happened. Soldiers, they had been; and on my oath I declare that when once a man has worn khaki and brass, he will not shy from a little shedding of blood. But the women had come to us for nurture and comfort. They could not see that peace and comfort was only for the strong. You must ^{stretch} ~~apen~~ your sinews and open your mouth in a great roar to make your strength known to men. And no multitudes of Cobinas or Deborah Blacks will make me begin to doubt whether my strength is enough to bear the brunt and the fury of the day. Words rose up in me.

"Parson-O," I say, with thoughtfulness, "up the hill back there, the women have used sarsaparilla-bush and spices on a cold bit of man, readying him for his burial. Listen, if you listen well, you will hear them ~~singing~~^{singing} Nearer My God To Thee. They are not ~~dirging~~ for Squire Groves, nor the Boscobel ownerman, Sloley. 'Tis a man who marched with us, for whom they sing their hymn. Then how come should there be gladness in me because you say there will be no troubling coming to Boscobel? I should hurry to the funeral of one of my disciples, ~~s~~-praising Caesar with bows and handclappings that the measure of his punishment has not been greater? Eh, it is strange."

Pastor Ambrose had a little smile playing about his mouth. A man of stature, this is; I sense none of the satisfaction which comes to ~~manzmenzaken~~^{me those times when} my shafts sink home. Rather, the pastor by his smile is saying I should look to the better stringing of my bow.

"No, Laban, you shouldn't. The applause should be for yourself that great Caesar has stayed his hand out of deference to you."

He said it with a gentleness that held no sting. Nevertheless, I knew it for what

it was — a rebuke to a long-tongued man. The voice of the lawyer broke on my silence.

"I have just been talking to Mr. Murphy here."

Pastor Ambrose turned. "Ah, yes, ~~hm~~ birds of a feather. The legal man of Boscobel."

God o' Bethel! What has Cobina not told her priest in the little time she had with him this morning! He knows all about Murph too. Eh, I am thinking she must have a ~~deal~~ mighty ~~quality~~ of practice in the Confessional.

Figueroa spoke to the pasron and me while Nat Murph and the others listened.

"I was explaining to Mr. Murphy how it was that a loophole was found in the ~~ix~~ lease to slip Squire Groves into Boscobel — and he agrees it was cleverly done. But I told him I believe a way could be found which would close it again and he believes with me that it would be worth trying."

Nat Murph made his eyes four with mine and nodded at me. I did not reply. I took it ill that he should agree to anything so quickly.

"But Laban does not agree with us, Grant," the pastor said, his eyes on me. "He thinks it would be great weakness on our part to parley now."

"Oh," Figueroa said. I say he has a clever mouth, with little lines marking the corners. "Well, then, we have a divided opinion here; whether we should have a Boscobel cleared of Squire Groves, or whether to spend the rest of our days patrolling the line-fence with staves — with our women afraid to venture outdoors — " he laughed aloud as he turned to face the lads crowding on us. "Whom~~here~~ are married? Whom~~here~~ are of the band of martyred gallants? How would you like to have your women penned indoors all day? Hands up, the heroes! ^Show your hands — you — you — ? you — ?" His fingers stabbed out at a few of the lads while his eyebrows rake upwards with ~~wicked~~ mocking. Then he dropped his voice and his eyebrows so he seemed to have gathered ~~in a sharp contemplation~~ his wits in a sharp contemplation of the kind of heroes my lads would be. "Seem to me, my gallants, soon you will be forced to find new quarters when your ^{lady} loves commence to ^{have} ~~come~~ storm and to fume like wicked little hornets trapped in a gourd —"

Take it from me, O, that the papist lawyer has the gift to rattle down doubt and ^{his} confusion on ~~the~~ fellows in a manner wondrous to ~~behold~~ behold. He leaves them there, a-flailing, like groupers at the bottom of a boat, then turns to the pastor, his head on one side and a nice grin worked about his mouth.

"Padre, here, wouldn't know what I mean — he not being a married man like us lads.

"But I do know, Grant," Pastor Ambrose said above the laughter. "These tales are brought to me, you know."

The pastor made his eyes meaningful and there is another burst of laughter from those of the lads who are Catholics. And I know that the joke was that he hears the tales in the Confessional and that who knows, but Figueroa has a fuming wife.

All this time that I am watching and listening, my mind is keeping up with them. 'Twixt these two, they have the lads laughing. My mind is looking about me to see to what

purpose they shape us. Nobody has to tell me that the pastor and Figueroa ha' got a plan for us.

Figueroa gave his hands a little clap together. He grinned at Nat Murph.

"So it is agreed that there should be a parley, Mr. Murphy. Now let's see — who will represent Boscobel at the parley? Of course, I will join you if I am invited."

I tilt my straw hat back so the sun comes hot on my face, and prepare to battle the lawyer.

"Agreed?" I say, "how come you say there is agreement?"

Figueroa turned quickly to me. "Eh, Mr. Daniels has hit the nail. Sorry, Mr. Daniels, we have been forgetting that there has been no general agreement — yet."

I made to speak, but his lawyer's tongue had already gone ahead of me.

"We will take a vote," he said quickly. "We will do it the way — the truly democratic way which I understand is the way matters are run at Boscobel. We will take a vote. Those in favour of not penning the women in, so their tongue will not work mischief and ruin a man's peace and comfort — say Aye!"

I made to still the laughter which accompanies the shouts of Aye! I raised my hand and said a word that they should hold awhile. I tried to lift my shout above theirs, a-telling them to steady their behinds. But can the voice of a popgun pitch above the roar of ordnance?

So it was on the beach. With the lift and shake of ~~sxxx~~ sense and laughter Figueroa had given them on his line, my lads were hung up in the sun to dry just as how they string their nets on the poles down on the beach.

My eyes walk around ~~my~~ on their faces, stopping here and there to stoop and peer in at some I have known long and well. Bully Ferguson's rebel mouth was flat against his teeth with ~~grinning~~ smiling, his hands in his pockets and his shoulders strained back the way he does when he is pleased. Reggie Sturgeon, the angel at right centre, whose boots on the ball was likened to the wonder of a great artist's brush when it touches the canvas — Chippy Dale, the little bugler of A-Company, who once took his breathing by my own time — aye, and even the thin and angry Rich Beamish — it seemed there was not anything else in the world which would bring more gladness to their hearts than to hold a parley with Squire Groves and his monkey-man, Sloley.

But I swallowed on my anger. My own charge was being readied to go off under me if I did not move with care.

It is a matter of great responsibility to be a sergeant of the colour company. A knowledge of men must be in you as sailors hold a knowledge of wind and weather. There is one manner of salting their wounds to bring oaths in their agony. There is another, when the ointment should be soothing, so that they will know there is love for them in you. To march, or halt, is a matter for the sergeant; but there should be sense in his commands.

I remember with a remembrance that comes clear to me how, in the history of the re-

I am quiet now. There is a flash of a look 'twixt the pastor and the lawyer and I see the cleverness of Figueroa's mouth change to grimness for a little. But then, right afterwards, there is admiration in me for the stallion lift to his head he gives as he meets my eye.

"Surely, ^{men,} ~~men,~~ surely," he is saying. "It is a fair thing your sergeant asks — that you remain at Boscobel. We will not vex ourselves with anymore now. The sun is high and a man's thinking is not at best in such heat. Sufficient to say that I will arrange for the parley and will be back this evening to tell you of it."

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CHAPTER 20

We dug the hole for Joe Black at the foot of a great cottonwood. Such a spread of tree was it, that our company stood within its shade with much room to spare. It was said, softly, by all, that Joe, of an evening, could very well march his own company of ghostly soldiers up and down in columns of fours without having ~~cause~~ cause to step beyond its shade. The feeling is ever strong in my people that the ghost of a man should be treated with respect for what he had been on earth.

So we put Joe Black under the cottonwood wearing his old tunic, and the brasses shining as if he was dressed for a review. We paraded in the bits of uniform we still possessed, Chippy Dale with his bugle. We carried the hymns with roll and depth as befitting the sorrow of the matter, and listened in silence while Charlie Cotton recited ~~the~~ I am the Resurrection and the Life. Silence broken only by the sobbing of Deborah Black. I watched, without appearing to, how only the arm of Cobina seemed to bring her comfort. She was wearing the funeral fall of black muslin draped over her head so her face was hidden from us; but the body of her was sheathed in such ~~wantanz~~ a wanton black that I thought was not becoming to one but lately bereaved. Yet, still, doubtless my judgment will not be fair. I take to Deborah hardly at all. There is ever a question in my mind at her.

Last Post

Chippy sounded the ~~Last Post~~ after we had straightened from the shovels, wiped our foreheads and stood to attention. It is a cry of loneliness which none but a bugle can put into a man. By land or sea, I have never heard the Post without a-sensing the vast breadth of space around the world we march in. And I have often dreamt a dream that the bandsman who took up those notes and strung them down into his instrument to form this last call for the day, must have received a goodly deal of help from a ~~Who~~ Drum Major, ~~Who~~ was not of this earth.

I waited for Chippy to end the final note which is like a lonely cry. Then I nodded at Charlie Cotton to dismiss the parade.

Ferns and gerberas and gladioli, wet with spring water, we placed on tough old Joe Black's mound.

"It was well he was a Pioneer," Johnny M'Cook said at my elbow, "for truly he is a pioneer here today. The first of us to turn down his mess-tin at Poscobel."

Johnny M'Cook was not laughing, although there was some jest in the way he had put it. I grunted ungraciously and went to my ~~quarters~~ quarters. Cobina did not come for hours after.

That time, the toads were clucking upwind on the evening and the sea rolled a vesper on the shore. I sat beside the door, my tobacco-board on my knees and a twist under my knife being prepared for the pipe. My fingers were busy with ~~blade~~ knife and

tobacco-twist and there was a certain pleasure in me as my knife worked up and down on the heel of my palm, cutting the twist in the orderly whorls I had learnt from a navy-man. I hold a respect for the navymen in the knowledge they have of tobacco. Fragrant was the twist, a-working its scents up my nostrils so I should be content and find a rich blessing in being alive. But there was no contentment in me.

Cobina had not been to the house all day, being with Deborah Black preparing Joe for his burial. I ate at the blockhouse, an unlawful happening for a man who has stood up ^{at the altar} with his woman. I did not look up when she approached the house, but my eyes rested on her face with cunning from underneath. There was calmness on her, like the sea in the stillness between the change of the winds. Smooth like glass, the sea is then; but any of the lads can tell what great businesses of life and death are worked beneath the smoothness of it. But I could not tell of Cobina.

It is said by the men of the cold north that there is a quantity of emotion in my people. I do not take exception to the saying; for it is known to me that war and peace go together in their ~~natures~~ natures like heavy summer showers drowning the earth even while the sun is shining down. I have felt the movement going through me and have stayed my hands from violence only by the grace of God; and the sudden calm that often descends on me soon after the storm, has made me wonder in my thinking moments; to what is such a nature due?

But understand my words: I do not wonder at these in any sorrow for my nature. I hold and hold with my people that life without fire is a sickly condition. That in tears, a man ~~should~~ should cause a flood to rise; and, in laughter, he should howl good and plenty enough to hoot the devil from his fork. But I am a-telling of Cobina.

And I say that however this business of emotion goes, there is no stone-image of Egypt-land to equal the face of our women when they desire that nothing of their thoughts should be told. A rush comes up in me to beat at this smooth stone of beauty with my bare hands!

"It perhaps should be the thing to do — that you should put Deborah Black to bed and hold her hands until sleep came to her!" I said, with harshness, whipping my head up.

Talk to the stone goddess, Nefertiti, brown man. She swept by me like a queen, her head high. I had the heart of her passing before my eyes for a breath's ~~space~~ space, then the strength of her back and the kick of her skirt had disappeared beyond the door, leaving me with my anger outside like a ~~boy~~ boy spurned by a playmate. I rose. The board with tobacco and knife fell from my knees to the grass. I stormed into the room after her.

"It was a beggar at the gate of the almshouse you passed a while ago?" I shouted at her. "It must have been that!"

I am talking to her back. For she stands looking through the window while she removes her hat. I put out my hand and turned her roughly to me.

"Face me when I talk to you!" I shouted. "I am not playing chase!"

I would have preferred, by far, to see gathering fury in her eyes. But, dark as the sea at midnight, they looked back at me as if I did not exist. They are eyes to shame a man or stroke his manhood to mighty deeds. I cared not just now what they did to me. My anger was now the soul in me. I spoke with my voice in my belly.

"A woman should leave the matters of business to her menfolk. Perhaps your church did no' teach you that. So you took it on yourself to leave Boscobel and to bring in your priest and his lawyerman. So I am shamed by a lawyerman taking a vote against me from among my own lads. Meantime, all day all day, I must bum at the blockhouse while you hold hands with that woman of pestilence, Deborah Black. It should be that I put a whip to you?"

Cobina stood with her eyes steady on me and the lift to her head made my anger more.

"What do you say?" I shouted. ~~XXXX~~ "Is it that you think there is ~~xxx~~ more owing to her from you than from the other women?"

"Yes. I think so."

The calmness of her reply is a sting to me.

"Then you are a fool!"

"I think you to be the one whom Joe Black followed to his death. So it is a small thing if you sit in the blockhouse while I talk to Deborah so she might forget that her man will nevermore sit by her ~~x~~ fireplace — or even in the blockhouse either."

I will not say she spurned me with her words. Rather, it was as a patient mother explaining and explaining to an impatient boy. I stood a ~~xxx~~ half again of her own height above her. The shoulders of me compare only with Nat Murph's. I had picked her from the Roman chapel like a baby, and walked her through the door with no change in my brea thing. But, now, she was a patient mother a-scolding me for my ~~sxx~~ childish sins. I reached for her.

"You should not offend me!" I said, a grate in my voice. "Likely if you offend me I will take a whip to you!"

I had her face close to mine and now her eyes were plain and clear to me. But, if I looked for fear there, I should look elsewhere. Fine parchment, like the scrolls of the Regiment, is her skin; ivory, rubbed to ~~priishadxxxxxx~~ dark polish and cut by a master hand, loving in its task, and placed on my altar for a constant reaching ~~fx~~ at. But should there never be a certainty? Had Joe Black never been certain of his woman, Deborah? Or Bully Ferguson of his ~~xxxx~~ ^{broad} and strong ~~sxxxx~~ Amelia, a rebel, like himself, among the women? Aie, or no man of any woman?

I am certain of Nat Murph, and Johnny M'Cook, and Chippy Dale, and any of the other lads. I know to the last bullet what they will do when the time comes for doing. But I ~~am~~ could not have told that Cobina would have gone to her priest, or that all my ways would have been told to Lawyer Figueroa, even to my voting. She had told Figueroa how to run his race — to get to the fore — as I had told her I had got to the fore with the lads when first I brought her to Boscobel. She had lent the lawyerman some of my own ~~and~~ powder to lay a charge under me.

"Put me down, Iaban Daniels!" she said. I had not known I still held her from the floor. I put her back to her feet, quickly. I saw now she was angered too.

"The whip you bring to me should be put at your own lazy brain! Can you fight all in the constables in the country even if you make widows of all the women at Boscobel? Think on that —! And leave me alone so I can clean up where you wise men ha' made such a mess. You and your matters of business! If it had not been for Father Ambrose and Mr. Figueroa, the constables would have been here this morning with rifles! You could fight the rifles with your sticks? Eh! Small boys a-playing at the Redcoats and the Indians! I could laugh at you, Iaban Daniels — I could laugh at my husband to his very face!"

I know that Cobina cried out in her wrath at me because there was no other way she could speak to me. I would not hear her in peace, so all she could do was to act out her part first. Then, if it was counter to mine, tell and explain to me afterwards. I was indicted, that my mulish ways had driven Cobina to such a method. I had never known her anger before, and it disquieted me. The flash to her eyes grew and grew into a flame.

"Dont go to the parley, Iaban Daniels! Dont go! Take your wise men with you and gather a rock-heap at the line-fence. Cut more sticks and place your guards about and about. Meantime, the other women and me will sit with Deborah Black and learn how we should moan and shake when our times come to be widows!"

Even Deborah Black in her sorrow thinks more of Boscobel than you. Yes - I went to Father Ambrose and Lawyer Figueroa, but before that, do you know where I visited? Then, I'll tell you. - Groves. Squire Groves. I didn't get much - help Reve - I didn't expect to - but it was Deborah, when even in her grieving, she had thought of Boscobel first and she suggested I see Groves.

CHAPTER 21

We went to the town, Murph and me, to sit at the table with those who would take Boscobel from us. Here, we saw Squire Groves and the mealy-mouthed ownerman, Sloley who had given Murph a lease with a hole in it. By this time, violence had gone down in me; but my anger was yet hard and I could have struck them down with but little call on my temper. Howsoever, I had given my word to the canny lawyerman and Cobina's parson.

So I went into the room behind the Roman chapel at Kendal, where this meeting would be held, carrying nothing on my face.

It had been told to me by Figueroa that the trouble a-hanging over us at Boscobel since the time of the fight in which Joe Black was killed, would depend ^{for} ~~on~~ its fall on the outcome of the Inquest.

"Put yourself out to be reasonable at the parley, Daniels," he said, the lines smoothed out around his mouth, "and, I guarantee that between the padre and me, we can have the Coroner bringing in a verdict of non-censure." "X" will be able to state that the troubles at Boscobel were due to a misunderstanding of the circumstances --- but that it is all over now."

I, who remembered the statements we had to give and sign to many strange constables who had come to Boscobel the day after, the fretting of the women that their men might be taken from them, the bother and fight we had to put to the men so they would not neglect their fishing --- all these made me a man not hard to be convinced that peace for a time would be a welcome situation. And there was another thing. I have pulled trigger in the King's name often, and know that in the line of duty, there is no worry to the man in uniform when a life is taken. So I could expect nobody's punishment for the death of Joe Black. I knew that in the long haul, I could not carry my lads ^{victory} to ~~win~~ against the constables. Were it Squire Groves and his men we were fighting ~~only~~ ^{only}, ~~is~~ ^{is} ~~all~~ --- then I could have ~~toed~~ ^{toed} their behinds. But the King's constables?

But that is well and good. I ~~proclaim~~ ^{and} ~~proclaim~~ that law and order is a thing to be respected if a man should live above the Arabs. I have no anger against the constables; but my anger is hard at those two across the table from me.

There is a cool, green cloth on the table, at the head of which sits Pastor Ambrose. The Squire and Sloley were together, Murph and me on the other side. Figueroa sat at the end across from the pastor.

We had the Lord's Prayer from ^{Pastor} ~~ambrose~~ Ambrose to begin; and while the pastor had his eyes closed, I raised my head to look about. It is a good and sensible matter to view a man's face when his eyes are closed. Such a reading of him you get, as could never be seen when his eyes are opened and draw your own sight to them. But I meet the Squire a-peering at me from out of the fat of his face and, beside him, the sly blinks of Sloley --- like a pair of patient cats waiting before the hole from which will come the

innocent little mouse. I give them stare for stare, then swing my eyes down the table and am no' surprised to see that Figueroa's eyes are opened too and that a small laugh plays hide-and-seek in the lines about his mouth. Murph beside me, grunts. So I know ~~he~~ he has been a-looking too. I took my eyes to the crucifix on the wall behind the pastor and wondered whether the Figure spoke for shame at us.

Pastor Ambrose said Amen and opened his eyes again.

"Now, gentlemen," he said.

"Just a minute, Father Ambrose," Squire Groves said.

I cracked the knuckles of my hand so anybody could hear them. If there should be a wrong word from the fat man, then let heaven take the case. I would put my fist at him with no whim to be easy with him.

Pastor Ambrose turned his head. Anybody could tell he was the calmest man there. Figueroa was a lean hound, a-quiver at the flews. Calmness was not for the other four of us.

"I have come here today at your request, and your request only, Father Ambrose," Groves was saying loudly. "Let it not be thought for one moment that I am the one seeking a settlement. The issues are plain and square from my point of view. Mr. Sloley desires to have the lease cancelled and it is his right if he so desires."

Pastor Ambrose wore his black gown with a small round black cap on his head. He rubbed the cap a little. There was heat in the room. It showed in the steaminess of Squire Groves' red and puffy face and in the wet marks on his linen. I am a-thinking it would be wonderful for me to have the Squire in my squad for just a single pack-drill. Bully Ferguson had come to me with the yams of Lucea parish heavy at his girth, and the fish-teas of Negril beach heavy at his jowls. I had made him fit and proper to ~~march~~ march in the colour company where a man ~~exam~~ can only be to a certain width. Ask anybody about it.

"The settlement ~~had~~ has been sought by neither parties, Squire Groves," Pastor Ambrose was saying gently. "It is my own idea, I assure you."

Well then, there has been a clearance there. I rock a little on my chair.

"All I ask is that we all agree on a spirit of give and take," the pastor said. "First, we examine not who is right, but what is right. It is my considered opinion, gentlemen, that both parties are right." At the move from Groves' shoulders, I work at my knuckles again.

Pastor Ambrose clasped his hands on the table and looked around at all our faces while he spoke; "A lease was signed and the lessee desires it to remain in force because it is to his advantage. The owner desires it to be invalided, because it is to his advantage. From which quarter comes the wrong? I confess I cannot tell. I cannot tell who is right."

Now, here is a strange business, I say to myself. Cobina's parson is saying

his powder is wet even before he has filled the magazine. I could laugh at his foolishness, if I were not angry at it.

So, I thump the table — and am gaping like a landed fish as I realise that Squire Groves is thumping at the table too. We are alike? He and me? Each of us pulled back our fists as if wasps had got to them.

"We will speak one at a time," Pastor Ambrose said dryly. "Squire Groves is a busy man, I know. Mr. Daniels has his fishing to do. There will not be much time for either of you to indulge in much talking. Squire Groves?"

Very well. There is gratification on the fat man's face that Pastor Ambrose has placed his rank above mine and that he will speak first. It could put me out to be so treated by the pastor. I jerked my head to look angrily at Figueroa; do they no' know I should not be pushed?

I meet a fine wink from Figueroa and see that the lines about his mouth have deepened. I fight back the words which rose in me as Squire Groves cleared his throat.

"I uphold the law of the land and demand that you do the same, Father Ambrose," he said. "The law has declared the lease invalid and they must leave Boscobel — or whatever they call the place!"

"Then wire the city for more constables!" Nat Murph threw out of a sudden.

Brown man, brown as mahogany and with the toughness, wire your lips together and leave such answers to Laban Daniels.

"Then we will send for rifles too, ~~mm~~ my man!" Squire Groves shouted.

Like a turkey-cock he is; a red and steamy turkey-cock. Somebody should tell him that Nat Murph is a handy man with a bayonet blade. My, but how the Squire is ranting. He shakes a finger at Murph.

"Boscobel should be made into a Development — a tourist Development! Not to be left to a group of hodge-podge fishermen~~xx~~ who will do nothing but clutter the place with their dirty nets and their squalling brats!" I see Murph's shoulders strain.

With Murph's hammer going hard in his mind and forcing him on to violence, I myself, come quiet. It is my responsibility that my lads be not ~~amz~~ out of order.

XXX "Come, quiet, Murph!" I said with sternness. "Quiet yourself, man!"

Squire Groves spared an angry look for my corporal before he faced me again. I could strike him easy. He does not know from my voice that I could strike him easy.

I say: "Well, pastor, I do not know the law of the land very much. And Murph here is not anxious after what happened with the lease, to brush with the law for now."

That way, I have taken the attention of the Squire from Murph and fixed it on me again. I am full of anger, and moreover, had not come in a mood for much talk. Truth to tell, I do not hold myself equal to much talk ~~xx~~ at a parley table, for my ways had never been so arranged. If I could be standing before the ranks of my lads, flung fifty paces to right and left of me, with the scabbard at my side and the chinstrap firming

my cheek — aye, then the salt contained in me would rise to such proportions that I deal out words which would could/make the rawest recruit ache with the strain to be up and away back of his gleaming bayonet. I say I have done so and so; and am full of capableness to do it again and again. But — this?

"This law of the land, Squire Groves," ~~Exther~~ Pastor Ambrose said, "is but partly found on the statute books. It is mostly a law we carry in our hearts. Because it is not put down on paper, that is the reason why we must repeat and repeat it to ourselves at moments such as these, so we will not forget. There is a grave danger, always, that the people such as you and me, for whom there should be not as great a need for it, should be particularly careful. If our example is poor, then the others will become careless too. I said I did not know who was right. Indeed, I do not. But, together, we can find out what is right."

He has our attention with the quietness which is in him in the midst of our strife. I do not know how. Once, near the Mons, I bivouacked my platoon in a chapel. All that night, the guns grumbled and roared and the passing shells shook us to the soul. star shells commenced bursting for the Then as the ~~bazookas~~ ~~rept~~ ~~past~~ ~~xxxxx~~ attack, Charlie Cotton, who had gone to earth by my side, touched me and pointed. Soon, we had all discovered it — the gilt painted Cross high above the Frenchies' altar. ^{flare} Aie — but in the light of the shells it glowed a soft light. And I stand to oath that it took some of our terror to it. My lads did not misbehave in the attack.

Sloley has not spoken at all. There is no cause for him to speak. Squire Groves' moneybags will tinkle speech for him. I believe I could bend him with one determined hand. Pastor ~~Exther~~ Ambrose said:

"For, now then: Who will benefit mostly from Boscobel as it is? Or on the other hand: Who will suffer most from any change in the original transaction? Let us answer that, and then we will know what is right."

It is easy. Every mind, willing or unwilling, is hurrying back to Boscobel to look again at the row of our hutments, whitewashed in their ~~little~~ flowerbeds, standing on red earth with the green grass hoed back from about our doorways. No mind will say, blind, blind, to the lines of our nets a-shaking in the wind. I see the living we have made for ourselves, shaped in the three of our boats, one new with lockers at stem and stern. Out with them, Groves would say. Away with the labour of our hands. Turn my lads away and we will wander over the mountain in ragged twos and threes to the stinking ~~alley~~ alleys of the city. I should spit, that any could fail to answer who will suffer most.

But Squire Groves? I say I could rise and gut the wickedness from the fat man who now thumps the table and snorts like a great bull in the Spring of the year.

"Since when is this country run to any unwritten law?" he howls. "Since when

must a man give up his legitimate rights for empty philosophies? Since when —?"

"Since a man called Joe Black was killed!"

O, the power and glory of a man who can bring the rightful words from out of his mind at the rightful time. It stills the noise of fools and puts good heart in the wavering. I go down to the Book and say that stout use was made of this power and glory by the Christ Himself. Let him cast the first stone. Render unto Caesar. Words which put such confusion among the long-tongued ~~Exarizans~~ Pharisees that they became as boys, from whom at the last moment the ripe plum has been snatched.

Since a man called Joe Black was killed.

Figueroa said the words quietly, his fingers toying with a pencil as if he had not just dropped a salvo in our midst. I think Squire Groves must have put a wrench in his neck with the turn he made.

"What are you talking about!" he bellowed at Figueroa.

The lawyer lifted his eyes to the head of the table and Pastor Ambrose nodded. Figueroa shifted in his chair and leaned back, one long hand hung over the back of the chair and the other toying with the pencil.

"The priest told you of the unwritten law, Squire, and you questioned it. Now, I, a lawyer, will also tell ~~of~~ you of this law, but to a purpose which I think you will ~~unde~~ understand. Briefly, it is this:

"Joe Black's death has put a different meaning on all your plans. If you insist on taking over Boscobel, then, I say that Black, in death, will be infinitely more powerful than all of Daniels' fifty men. Black will haunt you to destruction. In other words, there will be fifty ex-servicemen to wander the length and breadth of the island, ~~telling~~ telling everyone how they were ~~at~~ evicted from their homes by you so you could erect your hotel — and how Joe Black was killed in the process. A man of your ^{high} standing must keep his skirts ^{well} down. It will not be hard for it to be ^{even} said ~~thatx~~ that you killed Joe Black so's you could go ahead with your tourist Development."

There was a quiet wind going through his words. Like the easy wind of June, walking through the tall coconuts with tiptoe and whisper. But look to it. July and August are ~~a~~ coming and ^{so} the wind of June is on a mission, ~~w~~ warning of the rush and fury a month and two behind it. A warning that houses should be battened and the bananas taken in for soon the black clouds will come ~~showling~~ howling in.

I feel the knot of anger loosening inside me.

CHAPTER 23

We heard of the survey at about the same time the tax collector from Kendal came to measure the bars of our nets. It is a matter of the law that fishers make their nets to a width which will not trap the very young fishes and so prevent proper replenishing of the sea. A sound and wise law it is; and I am ~~am~~ thinking that much could be done for the human race if such a law could be found to bar our own young from being enmeshed in the evil temptations around us. But such a thought is for wiser heads than mine. Let it lie.

The collector was a man of England and wore a khaki topee. ~~He~~ His face was weathered and he bit the ends of a fire-red mustache while he worked at our nets with his ruler. I met him face to face when he was finished and asked him my question.

"Nobody told me anything, Mr. Daniels," he snapped like a turtle. "This is a routine matter."

Well, then, whether he had been told or whether he had come of his own free will, Boscobel was not a refuge for unlawful men. I had found out what the law required and had seen to it that we had not purchased smaller mesh than the law required. The collector drove away in his motor car with nothing ~~wh~~ with which he could hold against us. But I wondered ~~why~~ why he had lied to me that nobody had put him up into making this check on us. Howsoever, my thoughts did not tarry there, for Nat Murph beckoned me away from the press of lads who had been watching the measuring.

We went up the road to the crest of the hill which borders Boscobel. Then Murph pointed down. "Look there," he said.

Beyond the hill, on the beach next to Boscobel, I saw a truck standing on the road. There were six or seven men moving about, and two in topees peered through what seemed to be range finders.

"Surveyors," Murph said sharp. "I talked to one of ~~the~~ ^{their} men who was cutting the shrubs for their sighting. He said the surveying was Squire Groves' orders. He has bought this piece of the beach from Sloley."

"How come such a thing?" I ask, without much sense, ~~in~~ so surprised I was.

Murph said: "Groves is ~~playing~~ playing at draughts. We took his king and now he has made another move. ~~taxxxek~~ "

"He is seeking another king?" I could not keep the anger from my voice.

"~~He~~ He is on the eight-line, Laban," Murph said. "We cannot stop him now."

"He is a man with a fat belly, soft and yielding to a sharpened knife."

"Man, quiet yourself," Murph said calmly. "What he does, does us no harm."

"But such may be the commencement of much harm," I told him. "Presently, another hotel goes up. Then another. Then another. Soon we are pressed in by a dozen so the beach becomes another Rae Town!"

"When that time comes, we will steal a sixteen-inch ^{incher} from the Fort and turn it

on them," Murph said, grinning. "Meantime, we go to sea in one hour. There's gear and tackle to see about."

In ^{lights} one hour will come the dark before the rise of the old moon ^{yellows} ~~yellowed~~ the beach and ~~lit~~ the sea so the fishes frolic into the nets. We went down to the beach and joined the other lads who would be putting out too. The new boat with the lockers was mine tonight. By this time, the art of fishing was holding no fears for me, and now I captained my own boat. ^{Reg Sutrgeson,} ~~Chimney Dealer~~ Rich Beamish and three others of the lads were my crew tonight. I helped them store the great seine in the bows, arranging the lead and the corks in the folds so there would be no hitch when we had to ease it overboard. The lads fitted the balliards on the gunwale while I saw after the rudder sheets and ^{Reg} ~~Chimney~~ did the job of storing our water bottles and the bailers. The boats pushed off when Charlie Cotton had said the prayers for us on the beach. Behind us, he lit the lanterns which will ~~x~~ guide us in after we have laid the seine.

It was a calm night, ^{with a} ~~and~~ wonder of stars, and windless. We took to the four oars to put us beyond the reef, then stepped the mast to ~~x~~ catch whatever little wind might be ~~gzi~~ going. I sat back in the stern, the sheets wrapped about my wrists while I baited the trolling hooks. The dip and shake of the oars and the soft creaks they made at the balliards pin when the men came forward on the stroke was a rhythm I listened to with pleasure.

Since I have become a seafarer, I have learnt some of the gifts which the sea gives to those who venture its bosom. There is a strong mood of give and take ever on the sea. But until the time comes for the reckoning, such gifts as it offers to its own are sufficient and more than sufficient to make it worth the venture. I ha' put myself within the ~~x~~ sweep of its sighing loneliness, and listened to the silence with which it encompasses its greater secrets. I have smelled the musk of it, until I thought there were no other scents in the world. ^{Times} ~~Time~~ have been when I have reached for the organ of my soul and played the awesome music of the ~~hundred and seventh~~ ^{Hundred And Seventh}, which Shepherd Davie put about the yearning he never lost for such knowledge as I have gained. And I say, then, without any blasphemy, that when from this cathedral in me, I roll out that ^{that} portion about they ~~which~~ go down to the sea in ships, I believe within me that Shepherd Davie is a-nodding and saying to himself: 'Tis the man, this, who should sing this ~~mightiest~~ mightiest of my hymns; a man for glory, this is.

Cobina is growing heavy with my child and I am ~~thinking of~~ a midwife more often these days. There has been peace on me since the parley, but I confess to some anger at the ways of Deborah Black. She has not left Boscobel; and it was not my strong wish that she should go. But I have often found myself bearing a hope that one of the womanless lads will find favour in those strange eyes of hers. There is that in the quality of her bodily movements that could, and did rouse a compelling beat in many of the lads; but there was no more to it. Deborah showed no desire for anything than to be near Cobina, althor

lately, I have begun suspecting that Nicky Ffolkes is running close.

Which is a matter that makes it harder for me to say my knowledge of women is worth a cracked sixpence. For, lo and behold, Nicky Ffolkes is not of note in face or form, being like a guango tree after a ~~summer~~ rainless summer, and sly as a galliwasp. But I am talking of Deborah with Cobina.

The widow of Joe Black speaks often with my wife ~~about our coming child and so, I~~ ^{regret} ~~believe that there is still some sorrow on her that Joe had not proven before he died.~~ Yet, although she has not said it, I believe that Cobina would have preferred if Deborah stayed closer to her own fireplace, rather than sitting at our doorway, each morning to evening. Nowadays, Deborah did not square her eyes with mine as often as before, and her smile did not mock at my manhood as before. But I know a strange thing. I know that sometimes I have felt eyes on my back and when I turned, there is the widow of Joe Black. I spoke of this to nobody.

We beat out to sea under the light wind which has freshened up, trolling as we run. It is a night for kingfish and mackerels, and they kick in a growing heap about my feet in the bottom of the boat. When the school was run out, I spoke to Rich Beamish to stand by on the seine while I worked the rudder for shore. The school must have taken us further to eastward than I had reckoned, for I found the light far on my port. Howsoever, we made for the shore with Beamish paying out the seine. He must have paid out nearly all of it, when I heard him oathing.

"Back up! Back up!" he cried out. "The net is a-foul!"

Now, here is a strange thing: that in this stretch of clear water which we know like the palm of our hands, the net should be a-foul.

"A-foul of your neck, Beamish!" I said angrily as the lads backed water. "Likely you have paid the net like a cobbler —!"

But just then, I felt the keel grating and I knew that the cobbler had been myself. I had steered the boat onto the east reefs.

But all this was without sense; for could not I see, plain as plain, the shore light dead on my bows? Then how could we be on the reef?

"Easy all," I said with calmness. The lads shipped. The boat settled.

"Reg Sturgeon," I said: ~~Chinny Dale,~~ "sound to starboard with your oar. How fast is the net?" I asked Rich Beamish.

"Fast as yesterday. Fast as last month. Fast as a German in hell."

It was no time to argue. It would be a matter of diving overboard in the dark water with ^{hopeful} sharks never too far away from the seine. Our seine would have to lay fast until morning.

"Dump her as she lies, Rich," I said, keeping the anger at myself out of my

oice. I heard the splash as the seine was put overboard. Corks, and a spare balliard
 would mark the position for us until morning. Then with ^{Reg Sturgeon} ~~Chippy Dale~~ sounding in the bows,
 we worked the boat ~~2~~ from the reef.

We pulled for shore, my eyes on the light. It was then, as we got nearer in, that I saw our landmarks clearer against the stars — and nobody has to tell me that the light was not hung on the accustomed tree.

"Somebody has been playing chase with the lantern, lads," I said quietly.

They jerked to a halt on the ~~oars~~ oars as their heads swung around to the beach. I gave them time to do their oathings, slowly, for truth to tell, I was happy I had not been made a cobbler before the lads for clumsy steering. We hauled the boat to the beach and straightway made for the light; full half a mile from where Charlie Cotton had hung it. We stood about it, staring at the light which showed the gape on our faces.

"Must ha' been a duppy-ghost who moved it," Beamish said after awhile.

^{Reg} ~~Chippy~~ pulled his head around quickly, as if he expected to see a shroud. I grunted.

"A duppy-ghost from over there," I said, pointing to where Squire Groves' surveyors had been working earlier.

"I would twist certain parts of such a ghost, if I had seen him ~~a~~-moving it," Beamish said slowly.

"Likely such a prank will cost us a whole net, if the sea rises before morning," another lad said.

"It will not rise," I said, reading the signs in the sky. "Let us put back the light before any of the other lads also foul the reefs."

I left two of the crew to guard the lantern until the other boats had come in, then I unlatched the rudder, shouldered it, and, ^{Reg} ~~Chippy~~ with me, we walked up from the beach. We were nearing the lines of houses when, through the trees, I saw a movement. I stayed ^{Reg Sturgeon} ~~Chippy Dale~~ with a hand on his shoulder. I did an old soldier's trick, dropping to my belly to put the position against the stars. The movement had been at Deborah's dwelling. And as we waited, I heard her door close and the shadow moved away towards the blockhouse. It was Nicky Ffolkes.

I waited until he had entered the blockhouse, then I stood up beside ^{Reg Sturgeon.} ~~Chippy Dale.~~

"Tis a night to be deaf and dumb about, ^{Reg Sturgeon,} ~~Chippy Dale,~~" I said slowly.

"Such a night as you say, sarge," he said with steadiness.

I touched his shoulder and made for my own dwelling.

CHAPTER 24

The affair of the dynamite came soon after foundation stones were laid for the hotel. From dawn to dusk, the sound of hammering and the rattle of winches was my annoyance. I took it well, though, showing the vexing of my spirit to nobody. I had the firm belief that the bad happenings at Boscobel were the arrangements of Squire Groves for my annoyance — the measuring of our nets by the tax collector, the moving of the lantern. But, this morning, Nat Murph was shaking me with his words.

"There is a dynamite-man in the camp," he told me, his eyes wide. We stood under an almond near the cave at the line-fence. The sun was an hour above the mountain at our backs. I heard a john-to-whit bubble his song and a tody-bird flashed like a jewel from a tree to another.

"A dynamite-man?"

"A thousand dead fishes are washed up on the beach! On our beach! The men working over yonder — at Squire Groves' — said there was an explosion to sea last night!"

Nat Murph had taken to walking over and talking to the workmen. A gifted tongue, has Nat, and 'tis well to have an ear in the enemy's camp. So I had quarrelled not at all with my corporal when I found out he had made friends there. When the time became ripe, perhaps I could learn much from his walks. I looked at Murph ~~taxeyex~~ for a few breaths, then I laughed softly at him.

"So the workmen heard an explosion, dead fish float in this morning, so Boscobel has a dynamite-man. Nat Murph, have you ceased wetting your bed? Or should we put you back in diapers?"

He half-closed his eyes on me. "I should sprain your jaw with my fist?" he asked.

I grinned at him. "Hold your great temper. But do you say all this points to a dynamite-man in Boscobel? Why not a dynamite-man in Squire Groves' camp?"

"Make it plain," he said like in Habbakuk.

"Plain as plain. Groves will let off his dynamite, then report to Kendal that we ^{likely,} use dynamite here. Then, ~~likeliy~~ the constables will close down the beach and we will ha' to leave Boscobel. Do you see it?"

Murph looked long at me. "Foolishness," he said shortly.

"The measuring of the nets? The moving of the lantern?"

He thought on them. "Perhaps." Murph is a reasonable man. "But — dynamite? No. No. The measuring of the nets, perhaps. But this is not of Groves' ~~patern~~ cut. No. There is a ~~xx~~ rascal in our camp. You should sound the fall-in."

An obstinate man, my corporal is too. I strode away from him towards the beach.

"Then find your rascal if you believe so," I said over my shoulder. "I will ha' Chippy Dale sound the bugle."

The beach was strewn with dead fish and the gulls were wheeling in. I watched the cut and swoop of them and thought how I would like to have Squire Groves under the snap of their beaks. It is a sad and senseless matter to put dynamite to a school, for even the

agest fishes are blown up with the catch. Rotted fish would soon stink our beach. A year, and Rae Town would not be too far distant from us. A year, and the one-armeds would dwell on our beach and their women blaspheme along the shore. I took up a youngster, looked at ~~the~~ the white of its eyes, and flung it back into the sea.

"Laban, a dreadful thing, this is," Cobina's voice said at my shoulder.

I turned my head slowly and saw what I looked for. There was a quality to Deborah Black that puts a man to rattle even when she stands without movement. The slant of her eyes were wide on the death strewn about the beach. She looked back at Cobina.

"'Tis not well that you see this, Cobina, ~~and you with child~~. Death is not for you.

I am a man of manners, and upholdx nothing that stands against good behaviour. I vote with Mr. William Shakespeare that Consideration should whip the offending Adam out of a man. But there will be some agreement with me if I say that: if every day the bucket goes to the well, one day the bottom will fall out. It is a proverb of my people with much sense to it. Now the bottom was falling from my bucket.

"Woman," I said, a peculiar wrath on me, "'tis my child she bears and 'tis our own worry if the child comes wrongly because she looks on death. Take your old witch fancies and bury them at your own fireplace. We do not want you nor them, here."

A man of manners sometimes must use the bludgeon of plain talk if he will no' be shouldered about.

"Iabe-O," Cobina said like a child, her hand on my arm, "Iabe, there's a wicked way to use herXX !"

But I hardly heard her voice. My senses are put on Deborah Black, throwing everything into seeking to find what lay back of her smile at the insult I had given her. She looked me down my face and along the width of my shoulders like a buyer at the Cave Valley market a--speaking a likely looking stallion. Then she widened her smile so the tongue of her appeared to me with a certain meaning, before she turned without a word and walked back up the beach with the wanton stride that might have paced the cat-walk of the Suleiman's garden.

"You hate her, Iaban," Cobina said low and hurt. "I know — it is in your eyes."

I turned my eyes away from the going of the woman. "'Tis more than the other lads would do, then," I said.

"The woman is not doing wrongly, Iaban. She has the gifts which God gave to her and if she flaunts it, 'tis from anger at you."

"Then she is in anger all the while," I said, a beat at my throat. "Deborah Black is a wanton and you should ha' nothing to do with her."

Cobina fixed me with her eyes; well below my shoulders were her eyes. "Deborah Black is alone. My friendship will not be taken from her."

I believe this peculiar wrath was riding me with the kick and whip of puzzle and fear. It is a shaking matter when in ~~xx~~ your anger there is puzzle and fear also. Yet, why should there be fear of Deborah Black in me? I will confess that my eyes recognize

the wildness which such a woman can cause to spring up in any man, but I was no more ready to take her to my bed as I would a panda snake. What then?

"Out it ~~x~~ away from you," I said gruffly. "Let us go up. I would talk with the lads."

Chippy Dale blew the fall-in on his bugle so the hills around caught the echoes and flung them back at us. They came to the summons readily enough; but the snap this call would ha' put in their feet a year ago, is there now not at all, not at all. Most of the shoulders before me have lost the brace they once carried in khaki.

"Lads," I said, when we were all gathered, "a grievous happening has happened. Nat Murph here will tell you of it."

I moved back to let my corporal take over, ~~prax~~ not heeding his grunt of surprise.

It was befitting that I should speak to the lads, as his sergeant; but this day, I put Nat forward. Not meeting the hard look he gave me, was I, either. Then he grunted again and faced the lads like a watchful bulldog.

"There will be no pretty talk among us," ~~Exkaxex~~ he growled. "Perhaps such women as whose ears burn to certain words would do well to leave."

I grin to myself that he could believe the women will leave after what he ~~x~~ has said. The woman of Bully Ferguson hammered at Nat Murph:

"Why the blood dont you keep a-preaching, Nat Murph?"

A woman of St. Ann parish, she is; wide of stride and settled in the hips in a way which tells me she will shape many arrows for Bully Ferguson's quiver. The oath she uses is by way of a walkout pass to Nat Murph. His mouth tightened and he hunched his shoulders.

"Some mother's son has been using dynamite on the fish. Iaban here reckons that ~~wi~~ we will not find the man. I say we will find him. You know, I been a fisher before I took to khaki. Morant Bay in St. Thomas parish as some here know. I ha' seen some smart fishermen who could not ~~x~~ wait for the slowness of net or line. So they took to the dynamite sticks. ~~X~~ Now they are a-baking bricks for the government in the Rae Town penitentiary."

Nat paused and pushed his hands into his pockets. A bulldog he is, a-growling and a-worrying at something as he pushed his head forward. He said, like hell: "I ha' seen others who used the sticks and yet are no' making bricks for His Majesty. They could not. Two raw and bleeding stumps are all their hands are, now. And the dynamite is not even satisfied with stumps sometimes. Sometimes, it opens a man up, so you can look inside his belly and see the things wet and shining." He rocked back on his heels and his head came up. "I tell and tell Iaban that we will find the man who is a-using the dynamite, but he will not believe. So, when the time comes, I will make him put his hands into the wet and shining hole like ~~an~~ the unbelieving Thomas."

Murph can put a dreadful stack of things in his voice; and he did so now until everywhere, we could see it was illreceived. Even Bully Ferguson's woman lightened about the mouth. But I had given him the fall-in he wanted; and now I would put him aside. Two bulls

like Murph and me could not reign in ^{a single} ~~the same~~ pen.

"A question though, Murph," I said, stepping forward, conscious of Cobina's eyes on me. "A question. Since all the fish we catch at Boscobel is sold at Kendal in one lot, and since all the money we collect is distributed evenly as wages, then how would it suit a man to do this thing you speak of? He gains less than nothing for it, I would say. Unless he be a crazy person who simply delights in killing."

Murph's eyes are on me and the corners are wet with surprise. But I look on the lads as if it were to them that my question had been directed, and as if I expected their answers to agree with mine. I strike at Murph again.

"Eh, I more believe we should expect to see those stumps of which Murph speaks, among the men on Squire Groves' ~~pay~~ payroll. If I had wanted Boscobel, and another had been in possession, like it is with Groves and us, I would not be averse to bringing the law on Boscobel, if it would shoo away those I wanted out of it."

"From the ~~K&K~~ book, that it, Lawyer Daniels," Johnny M'Cook sang out. "Sound talk there!"

Then Charlie Cotton, who would bring heaven to earth so as to keep the wings of his ~~angel-lads~~ from being dirtied, nodded agreement with me. And one by one, the lads whom Murph's hard words had rawly rubbed, clung to the opening I had made. One by one, they ^{had} nodded at me. Murph looks at me with a hurt question in his eyes, as if asking why ~~did~~ I not show him the length of my fuse when we had spoken together before. I do not meet his eyes. The lads are looking on me with admiration for this wisdom; as they had looked on Lawyer Figueroa when he had led their thoughts on the beach. But —

"Yet still, there is no talk to prove that fish could no' reach Kendal by a man who would hurry to be there, and back before his absence be noticed."

It was Deborah Black who had spoken. She could ha' done nothing more to rouse me. Women who lift their ~~x~~ voices in public speaking take the same thought from me as smoking women. I hold it to be unnatural, and not to be countenanced by men. But when such a woman be Deborah Black, then I boil with vexation.

"Shut your mouth!" The shout of me dropped a bomb of silence in the company. Deborah shrank from the flash in my eyes like a pup who had ~~x~~ felt the boot. I saw her shoulders go hard into the chest of Rich Beamish who stood behind her. Thin and angry Rich grew into a giant at the touch. I faced his wrath.

"Where is your right to heckle ~~Black~~ Joe Black's widow so?" he shouted back.

Eh, now!

"My right as leader o' this camp!" I bellow.

It was without cleverness to make such an answer; for I had noticed how the soldier's brace had gone from many shoulders since the Disbandment, and should have known that the ~~xxx~~ chevrons I once wore had long ago lost real meaning. But can a man be clever when he is angry? Show me the man, then cut my throat. It is the anger of a fish ~~x~~ which keeps him in

one trap when a little cunning could have him laughing at the poor construction. The silence went with the voice of Bully Ferguson, a rebel from the womb:

"Eh, Laban Daniels, put such talk away. The King did not have a hand in the vote we took here. 'Tis we who made you leader."

I stood on the edge and fought my mind. I looked about me and saw the darknight laughter on the faces of those few who did not care much for me; and saw too the distaste for such a situation on the others. I put the meanness of Nicky Ffolkes' face against the sorrow on Reggie Sturgeon's, who stood beside him. I could not cast aside my responsibility because of my dislike for Deborah Black. I put up a hand in a wave.

"The offense is mine, lads. Let it lie."

Aie — I had come a long way with them and they knew my moods. It was a blowing of their sergeant's steam and now he was running free again. Let it lie. Very well.

Except that they had not seen the ugliness which I had noted ⁱⁿ Deborah Black's eyes when the lads forgave me.

Charlie Cotton stood out in front of us. He spoke loudly, his narrowed eyes skipping down the line of our faces. "Very well, then. But it seems to me that you all grow backward backwards. Soon you will be puking, and feeding from the bottle again, you great infants —" he waved his hand at us as if he would sweep us to the potato peelings. "You stand here a-pecking at each other like moulting hens — while a fire is a-building under your tails!"

Pastor
/Charlie has dropped the cloth and is a-soldiering again. We look on him, our mouths agape.

"Where is this fire, Charlie?" I asked.

He hooked his ~~thumbs~~ thumbs at his belt and looked down his nose at us. "Whoever did the dynamiting — that is no' of great importance now. Not while a whole regiment o' dead fish lying on our beach is there to provide ~~many~~ passing constable with evidence sufficient. Go clean up the beach before you stop to quarrel —!"

Eh, it flashed on us what wisdom was in Charlie Cotton's words. Murph, the old fisherman, was ~~his~~ first to shout agreement. Then we were all bolting down the beach in a hurry to clear the evidence. But all the while with my running, there was passing through my mind the certainty that, with Charlie's words, a way had been shown how I could prove if my thoughts were true.

A truce in our opinions was found by Murph and me. We got the lads to agree for a watch to be kept for anyone who tried to go out to sea alone, and put a watch on Squire Groves' hotel too. The first, I did not like; but I could not have the second, which was mine, without giving in to the first, which was Murph's.

It came home to me what a man to go ahead with his business, was Squire Groves. The white walls of his hotel piled up like November clouds of a morning when the wind is northing. Same time, there were men a-dragging the beach of mangrove, planting soft grasses to be for his lawns, laying out beds of cannas and June roses. A place of beauty, it was; and although I loved Squire Groves no more for it, yet I think and say a man who helps the handiwork of God should be admired for it, whatever his purpose be.

However, there are evenings before the blockhouse when we sit and talk in general of the matters about us. That time, the burden of our talk rests often on the affairs of Groves and his hotel; and I expressed publicly, once, what was coming to roost in my mind these days.

"One will bring another," I said. The late sun reddened the beach beyond our feet and my pipe was drawing clean. "One will bring another and we must look for others to come a-seeking the coast for places to put their hotels. Then Boscobel will be a flatboat, with foaming waves of white buildings pressing hard all about our gunwales."

"If we move too much around, then likely, over the flatboat will go," Johnny M'Cook said, gesturing with his hands like a flatboat going over.

"Words of wisdom there, Johnny M'Cook," I said.

"Such moving around as being done by our friend who would help our catches with the dynamite," Murph put in clearly.

Silence comes on us, not longer than the beat of a tody's wing, but enough to ~~mk~~ make me hear the uneasy questionings in all their minds. It is a camp divided; I feel it. We have set a watch on our own doings and are beginning to put our minds into finding a good reason for this watch. I ~~w~~ had not liked it, and would have told him so, 'cept that my words were not for now of great moment with Murph, since that day when I had tried to make a mockery of his ideas to the lads.

Perhaps it was wrong and of childish petulance not to have told them all, how, later that same morning when we discovered the dynamiting, I had kept a lonely watch from the bush and seen the constable who slowly rode his bicycle, looking hard on the beach as he passed. It was Charlie Cotton's words which had wised me to this pass. If one in our ~~wn~~ camp had done the dynamiting, then no constable would come by, a-looking for evidence. Constables did not ride our lonely beach without purpose. If a constable came a-looking, then it was likely — a greater load more than likely — that he had been put up to it. Then if he had been put up to it, it meant the job had been done not by someone concerned with increasing his catch by the dynamite sticks, but with creating evidence against us.

drops behind the angry Cockpit hills of Trelawney parish — take me out, I say, and ^{are} do me on the wheel, and still I would hold there ~~is~~ never found such wondrous sights outside this land of mine and of my fathers. Amen.

I call to mind those sad lines of the exiled singer of my people, Mr. Claude ~~McKay~~ McKay, who went to America; and can weep with him when his heart cries from the grey prison of Harlem, Tell me, far off sunny southland, do you think of me tonight?

A man of power he is too, with words.

"Cobina," I said, "There is trouble a-brewing at Boscobel."

Hued of cinnamon and filled with cloves and the scents of flowers in the ^{dew} ~~dark~~ is my woman. I mark the sweet curve of her mouth and the warm arms of her, and I must swallow down on my love, lest I act like a hastening boy.

"I have been holding talk in my mind with this trouble, Laban. I have talked with Murph too," she said quietly.

Sometimes, sometimes I think of Murph as a prickly calabash tree, the bark of him gnarled and tough for his age, the trunk ~~thick~~ thick as a man and a half; but up and down the trunk, cruelly rough as the feel of it to the hand is, there are tender shoots of soft, green leaves growing out of the roughness. ~~new~~ Like the poems they put in the regimental manual to teach us the words to the marches. So it is that 'twixt the wordings which tell of the firing of the Maxim, or how to sow the mines which reap in dead men, I mark the lines of beauty which make up the Men Of Harlech.

Doubtless, the oathing Murph, with the fists of him hanging heavy always, like a burden he should throw on somebody — doubtless he must have been a softly spoken one when he talked with Cobina. I must go quietly, lest whatever she and Murph had agreed on should be spoken against by me. Let Murph hold to his beliefs; I will hold to mine that the light ^{was} moved down the beach and the dynamite shattered our young fishes because Lord God Groves willed it so.

"The trouble is not from outside, Laban," Cobina said. "'Tis a house enemy, an enemy within our own camp. Groves has got his beach and Father Ambrose told me he was sure there would be no more interference from him."

"Then Father Ambrose should awaken earlier," I said, more blunt than I had meant to. I use the phrase of my people which says a man should rise and watch the birth of the ~~day~~ day-cloud if he would gain his measure of wisdom for the day.

"Such a belief as you carry, can lead us into unsafe waters, Laban," Cobina said, turning on her side to view me with earnestness. "Another dynamite-stick bursts in our fishing-ground, and you may be a-leading the wild ones in a march on Squire Groves' new hotel. Then where are we?"

"What puts such a sureness on you that this enemy is of the house and not of the ~~woods~~ woods?" I asked, anxious to know how the tender Murph had put it to her.

She turned her head to look through the window where, on a bit of level land near the road, the lads were practising their running starts. We have agreed, the lads and me, that there should be a sports' day on the next King's Birthday and now the lads are working at their hundreds and quarters to see who will top the lists. I look ^{out of the window} with her and find beauty in Reggie ~~Sat~~ ^{the} Sturgeon, leaning into the wind as his feet pump with power into the first half of ~~his~~ hundred yards; but confess to a finer sight in the rippling hound's run which ~~is~~ the quarter-milers employ in their sally. It is a gift that is a cause for wonder in all the places of the earth that the Jamaica-man should run his quarter with such speed and ~~power~~ power. I tell you, it is as nothing to me now, when the wonders of such of my countrymen as Mr. Herb McKenley and Mr. Arthur Wint are put ~~to~~ to me by strangers. For I know that to run like a racehorse is a matter dreamt about by all the male children of our land. And what is a man's dreams but the advance party of the forces of his will?

"There are ways a woman learns things, Laban, a way which would bring laughter from the men if ever they knew."

"Aye, liley to call a portion six, and another portion half-a-dozen, and see a difference there," I said dryly.

"There is a difference," she said quietly.

"There is a foolishness," I said.

"There is a difference in that ^{six} six could be ^{of} of a hundred, but half-a-dozen is the half of a dozen."

There was no smile in her eyes. "Which me mine?" I asked. "The six, eh?"

"You see what you want to see, Laban. I see Squire Groves being the man of ^a name and fame, too large to be risking for such a matter."

"Let us now praise famous men," mocking her with the words from the Apocrypha.

"We should not praise them yet, Labe, ~~man~~," Cobina said in the quiet she could bring to her throat to confound my adult ~~foolishness~~ childishness. "We should not yet, for my Labe is not ready to take his place at the head of those we praise. We must wait for his time to be full."

I reached with an angry jerk for my pipe, but put it away with double the anger when remembrance came to me that I had forsworn the tobacco until after the King's Birthday. A runner of distances I am, my long foot and the large room of my chest more proper for the half and the mile. ~~than~~ I kicked off my boots and took up the running shoes I had saved from army.

"I will run awhile," I said as I fitted them.

"Run good, Laban," Cobina said.

I took my way down to the flat which the lads had ~~razed~~ cleared of bush to be our field. I waited for Murph to come around the track, talking gibes at the others as they passed. Then I fell in beside Nat Murph and jogged with the weight on my heels to trim my

muscles of the fat ~~it~~ I had gathered in the months in which my legs were folded under the thwarts of the fishing boats. .

~~Murph and~~

I marked with care how Murph moved with his elbows close and with the long kick which would give me worry on the King's ~~21~~ Birthday. A mighty man in the distance he is, and our honours on the sports' shield of the regiment were divided equally. Doubtless, he will be ~~six or seven~~ before or behind me when we end our mile on the Birthday, but doubtless too, a bayonet will be hard put to cut between us at the finishing line. Now we grin tightly at each other as we jog shoulder to shoulder, each marking the other with care. We are rounding the bend, near to where the sprinters are practising their starts, when ~~x~~ we hear the quarrel.

The lads who run the short distances that are all burst and fire, I have always known to be like nervous cats. They live their little glory with such speed, that much depend on how they leave the mark. I have known some who always lightened their stomachs behind the stands, just before they go to the mark, and ^I have thought what a grievous stupidity it is to take so much trouble, when everything will be over for them in a matter of seconds. They do not have the hallelujahs in their ears which we, the men of distance, ~~we~~ hold, while we hammer around for laps and laps and the crowd going mad with cheering. Wrongly or rightly, the cheering of the crowd is a music I enjoy.

But, I say we are going around the bend when the quarrel of Reggie Sturgeon and Nicky Ffolkes comes to my ear. It seems they had shouldered each other at the starts, and now their tempers had risen to quick and full pitch.

"You heavy-footed monkey!" Nicky was bawling.

"You St. Elisabeth mule!" Reg cried.

should
"I ~~will~~ put your jaw in splints!"

"I should board-and-lodge your nose with your backbone!"

"Like your mother in a grassyard!"

"Like your sister in a lighthouse!"

"Touch me, if bad you are!"

"Touch me first, bull-conqueror!"

A wonder for his words before a fight, is the Jamaica-man. Chest to chest they stand, clothed in shaking anger like young trees in a wind. Then as their fury grows too big for words, up comes the finger a-pointing in t'other's face and the other's hand will jerk up to push aside the finger. Then stand good and hear the thud and smash of hurrying fists. Hold firm, I say, and watch what havoc the flash and rip of knuckles can do and do to a man. Amen and amen.

But I hear Reg Sturgeon to Nicky Ffolkes: "I should touch a pot-licker?"

Eh, a stone has fallen in a pool and all the little fishes hurry for home.

A pot-licker sneaks to the kitchen when all are a-bed and takes his meals of the leavings. Such a saying is worthy of killing. A man should master his tongue even when anger rattles the root of it. There are many strapping ^{lads} ~~larks~~ at Boscobel who are without women and it is not a matter of wisdom that such words should be used. Likely, there are husbands at Boscobel who have been keeping the thought to themselves whether a pot-licker has visited their household while they were away hauling the seine in the warm, dark nights. But can I clear their minds by hollering: ''Tis at Deborah Black's that Ma Nicky Ffolkes does his lick-
ing ?' Then Joe Black should rise from his burial and lodge his bayonet in my belly.

"Take Nicky, Murph," I tell my corporal quickly. Then swift as two ghost in the Ninth Night, we are at Reg and Nicky and have felled them to the ground.

"Such a kind of fighting, we will not countenance at Boscobel!" I tell them harshly.

"Decent we came and decent we will be!"

My eyes dwelled on Reg Sturgeon. "Reg Sturgeon," I said, "'tis in a manner of anger and abuse I know you spoke to Nicky Ffolkes. Tell him the manner has left you!"

I let him scramble to his feet.

I hefted my fist at him as ~~he scrambled to his feet~~. "You will tell him? Yes or no?"

Reg is a small man, with his bones set for speeding on his hundred yards or to boot a football with magic in his toes. Tell it from the rooftops that a fist of mine can bring much sobbing to him.

"It is no' meant," he said with little grace, but cooled of his temper.

I whirled on Nicky Ffolkes, my fist ready still.

"It is no' taken as an offence," Nicky told him quickly.

I looked around at the other lads who had gathered at the trouble. I saw what I could of their faces and put ~~in~~ it in my mind. Charlie Cotton spoke at my elbow.

"The evening is down, labar. We should hold our hymn-singing now."

I looked on him and nodded. There is wisdom in Charlie Cotton that needs no turned-around collar to bring to him. He speaks much in the temple, but the market-place is well known to him. He has a knowledge of the worldly thoughts of men and he has read what I saw in their faces. Reg, of the magic foot, has kicked a stone into the pool, and we can see the swirling round and round. I nodded at him.

"Aie — that we should, Brother Cotton."

CHAPTER 26

A constable came with a summons to us before ^{that} ~~the~~ week ended. A mounted constable he was, and rode his animal right up to the front of the blockhouse where we sat. It was just before sundown.

"I want Laban Daniels," he said, a-sitting his horse like a general. I noted the gathering between the eyes of Rich Beamish and saw Bulvy Ferguson's hand a-searching ^{around} ~~around~~ him for a stone. I rose quickly and went to his stirrup.

"'Tis Laban Daniels you see," I told him.

He reached in his saddlebag and pushed a paper at me. Then he must have sensed the lads were not welcoming his presence, so he wheeled his horse without words and rode back to the road.

I opened the paper and saw it said Laban Daniels et al should appear at the Petty Sessions the Monday following, to answer charges of Suspicion of breaching King George's Peace In That Fish might have been Dynamited at Boscobel. I asked Murph about the latin words.

"Meaning they are charging us all, Iabe, but will talk to you alone in court."

Charlie Cotton said, with puzzle on him: "But the beach was cleared! How did they know?"

"'Tis on suspicion only, Charlie," Murph said. "Iabe will be called up, and admonished and discharged of the offense. A warning, they are serving us. Somebody must ha' passed the beach earlier and seen the fish there."

Rich Beamish cursed the warning. "Then we will all go to Kendal courthouse --- the dirty suckers!"

I stood and heard, without listening, the shouts of agreement from the lads that they would be for Boscobel too. I remembered the constable riding past the morning of the dynamiting, with his eye close on the beach. I almost told the lads of it; but the explanation Murph had put on the matter, would be theirs also. They thought with Cobina and Murph that Squire Groves would be too big a man to be in such a back-of-wall business. They were shouting like children going on a picnic. An accident had landed suspicion on us, they said; but they would not stand by and see their sergeant face the court alone. What anger there was, was laid only at the reasoning which had put the blame on their leader alone, and not on all of them.

But as for me, I saw the hand of Groves in it. It would be a sensible thing for him to have it on the court records that we of Boscobel were suspect of breaching the peace. It was he who had sent the constable to search our beach, that I was certain. Now what would he do after this? Eh, one morning, a few weeks hence, perhaps in the early hours of the Sabbath since he would know we did not go out on Saturday nights but slept at home, another constable would ride the Boscobel beach and see a graveyard of ~~fishfisher~~ fish. Eh, then out, Laban Daniels and all your company. It is a strict law of the land. I laughed out loud.

They thought I laughed at the stumbling laws which could put only suspicion on us, since we had destroyed the evidence. So most of them laughed with me too. But Cobina's eyes were steady on my face when I looked at her. My glance went to Deborah Black's face also, and saw there the smoulder of her gaze seeking all about my face. I made my laughter louder and merried all the lads with it.

A Company marched into Kendal that Monday morning in such numbers that the constables put on their riot helmets and broke out the long staves from their armoury. Murph and me marched ahead, those behind us whistling Colonel Bogey in a high, sharp manner that made the constables fret at the smallness of their garrison. But the lads meant to have no trouble.

We waited in the courtyard until the Crier called my name. I took off my cap, pushed it under my arm and went into the room. I went to the place which the orderly pointed me to stand and turned to face the Bench. And then I held tight to myself, lest I blaspheme in the King's court. For, lo and behold, who faces me from the Bench, but the fat Squire Groves!

A justice of the peace, he is, and entitled to the trial of such offenses as come into the court of Petty Sessions. There was a swelling murmur at the door behind me where the lads crowded and the Crier had to shout for Order again. I called for peace within me. A grown man, I was, and should know by then that much of the earth will always be unlevel. Still yet, a situation like this does not fatten my love for Squire Groves.

The Clerk read out the charges against me — suspecting that we at Boscobel had broken the fishing laws. "Will you make an unsworn statement or will you give evidence on oath, Accused?" the smooth-faced lad, who reads for the King, asked me.

I answered as Murph and me had planned.

"I am not all of Boscobel, man. I will do nothing but wait the Court's pleasure."

Wait the Court's pleasure! Wait the dirty boots of Groves to land at my belly. When Murph and me had planned, we had not reckoned that I would be standing cap-in-hand ^{before} ~~before~~ Groves. There is humiliation withering my insides. But I am the lamb to be shorn for my lads. I hold myself to attention as if I faced the Colours.

The Clerk whispered to Groves. Groves whispered back and the smooth-faced lad sat down. My judge cleared his throat.

"Iaban Daniels, the Court views with displeasure that you have ~~exacted~~ elected not to speak. It borders on Contempt — a matter for which you may be imprisoned without a fine."

He is a turkey-cock flapping his wings proudly at his own barndoor. These twelve paces from him, doubtless I could open his fat throat with a flip of my fishers' knife. But —— bless you, Squire Groves, carry on, carry on.

He clasped his fingers, pointed them at me.

"However, the Court has no wish to be severe on you. This is by way of a warning to you and your men at Boscobel. Go back to your beach and say this to them: If such an accusation is ever proved against them, the Court will order imprisonment against those found

directly guilty and will order that the entire village be removed. So, it is up to you to clear out those elements from among you who flout the law. That is all. You are admonished and discharged from custody."

So then, mercy has been shown to me by Squire Groves. I must remember in my manfullest moments, that I thrive because the turkey-cock has been ~~xxxxx~~ merciful to me. My God and Father — was ever a man so tried?

A thing rises in me over which I have no control and I howl at him:

"Then 'tis a prayer you should pray nightly that such should happen again! That at that time, we should not rise early and spring the trap which has been set for us! For then, you will have the Boscobel you covet!"

I have stuck him good and proper. I hardly hear the uproar the lads raise at my shout, in watching Groves turn red to purple and his eyes ~~pop~~ popping with anger. Months afterwards, ~~they~~ told me that was the time when, Figueroa, whom I had not noticed in the well of the court, bounded to his feet and signalled to the three constables standing behind me. All I knew then, was that I am swept from my feet and hauled outside the room before I could say Let be.

At first, I heard Figueroa a-talking with urgency in his voice. Then my attention went to Rich Beamish and Bully Ferguson at the door, rearing like St. Elisabeth mules to get at the constables. But Murph and Charlie Cotton were between them and me, standing them off while they called on the other cooler lads to flank them and march them out of town. By that time, my senses had returned to me, and I saw that my way way had been childish and foolish.

Figueroa was speaking with oil at his tongue roots, moulding and shaping Squire Groves into believing that sometimes a strong man says words in temper and is sorry for them before the sound of them has died. No contempt to the King's Bench was meant, the smart lawyer was saying; and I found myself in agreement with him that my respect for the Bench still stood. But I hope and pray that Figueroa understands that, for his ~~quix~~ Squire, the contempt I have cannot be told in good words. A man to have set his derrick for another, then put out a foot to trip this other when all this other had been doing was to try and escape his derrick — I cry from the housetops that such a man is a slut's son! ~~Howsoever, I fought for peace within.~~

Howsoever, I fought for peace within.

When the constables got the nod from Groves that they should release me, there was only Murph and Charlie Cotton there. We went from the building and marched through Kendal, found the lads fuming ~~and~~ outside the town.

"'Twas a handy piece, a handy piece you served him, Iabe," they told me. "Almost the fellow burst with it."

Bully Ferguson was weighted with sorrow, though. "We should have shaken the constables from their trousers, Iabe, had it not been for this Murph and this Brother Cotton."

"Let be, Bully," I said. "It was time enough for one man of Boscobel to disgrace his

training — but not for the rest of you lads."

Charlie Cotton lifted his head at me. His mouth was firmly set.

"Yes, Charlie?" I asked.

"Nevertheless, labe, and lads," Charlie said, "we should not be unmindful o' certain matters. And I would not march back with an easy conscience if I did not remind all o' you that Squire Groves has not been without stature today. He did not take the offense he could have taken, at our behaviour today."

Now then. I know this to be ag a gentle chiding from our pastor — a chiding that our way today has not been according to the Manual. A few of the lads nodded and passed on their nods to the others, until most were agreeing that Groves was not a slut's son.

"How come, Charlie?" Something inside me asked the question. Murph and Charlie turned sharply to me. A ridge stood out on Murph's cheek.

Charlie spoke with dryness. "Those of us who were not leaping and prancing like young colts in a rig, could well and truly hear Lawyer Figueroa acknowledging to His Worship how he knew the Bench had the power to put us all behind bars for the uproar we had made."

"Eh, the Figueroa could have saved his breath," I said loudly. "Groves knows well that we had a right to be noisy, since it was not us who threw the dynamite!"

"Oh, ~~bix~~ bite it," Murph said wearily. "Nobody knows for sure which hand threw the sticks, Let us march; 'tis getting late."

I squared my eyes to fours with Murph's for a breath or two. Then I put a grim ~~smi~~ smile about my mouth at his hard head, and moved on to Boscobel.

CHAPTER 27

We opened the King's Birthday with honour to him, and I am proud to say it. Listen. 'Tis the second year we are out of khaki; and there has been no cause for a happy remembrance of this day. We have fought our battles with poverty, with little help — eh, God — with no help from the men for whom we had borne the blood and sweat in the deserts of Sinai.

O, forgotten is the charge on the Sabbajees when our fathers died across the double ditch and the stockade, yet sent their ghosts through fire and steel to rip the green flag of Kismet from the biggest mosques of the ~~Barkhanta~~ Marabouts. O, put from you the remembrance of the lives we swopped for glory up and down the Gambia Settlements. Should I chest like a boastful boy, at the book-keepers of the Empire, and say: Tell me, of the credit we gained when with two Mills grenades a-hanging at our belts and dressed in light battle order, we marched for six hours across the plains, swept by shell fire and machine guns and swept the Turks beyond the banks of the Wadi Bakr?

I should wake the dead lads to mutiny, with words like the thunder ~~fat~~ of the great psalms, a-calling on them to remember, how, shoulder to shoulder, in a weather of shrapnel, we marched in parade order down the Valley of the Jordan, while the English general stood on his headquarters hill and cried to his God in wonder at the bravery of it?

~~Ex~~ No. It is past. Let be.

This morning of the King's Birthday, I gathered the lads in their ragged tunics before the blockhouse and had Chippy Dale sound the General Salute. There is sunlight glinting through the ~~tree~~ palms to the medals, which we had swopped for our blood, shining on our chests. Then, with the old glory for a moment in our throats, we turned into the Island Anthem.

Put from you the bitter memories, Corporal Nat Murph. Ease into it softly, Bully Ferguson. Let the first bars come out with quietness, for 'tis a prayer for our island's health we make now. There should be softness on the notes while we kneel in our hearts.

God shield our island home, From all the storms that roam
Darkening the west...

Breathe through our golden hours, Thy perfect rest ...

Aie — the voices ~~in~~ run out like a gentle stream and the lads shift their shoulders and clear their throats softly. Johnny M'Cook, who has taken on the mantle of Joe Black, lifted his hand to those on the left who will now sing God Save The King in counterpoint to the last verse of the Island Anthem. It is proper and fitting that this song of the King should be sung second to ours; for I held that in the matter of loyalties, our knees should bow first to the land of our fathers. But now, the lads are ready for Johnny M'Cook's hand.

Then now. Come with your rush and thunder. Open the floodgates to the eager music within you. Shed humility like a worn cloak and hammer at the gates of the King's enemies.

May they the right defend sang the clear sopranos; Send him victorious came down the strong basses on Johnny's right hand; Each man his country's friend went out the altos and sopranos; Happy and glorious roared the warriors ~~hailin' Johnny's fist~~ ^{by} standing in the sweet fist of Johnny M'Cook; Toiling for one grand end, brothers indeed declared the ^{quickened} ~~quicken'd~~ sopranos to the lift of Johnny's finger, the basses sauntering easy as ever on Long to reign over us. Then all stood to waiting, our eyes on Johnny's hands, watching the slow upping of them as he gathered us into ~~hixthem~~, tasting the sunlight hot on our lips, and the brush of ~~our~~ our clothing as we filled our chests with air, loud in the silence.

Then the hands moved down.

burst

And a golden unison ~~went~~ out of our throats and built domed temples in that place. God Save The King! swelled all the organs with all their stops out and the organists bowing and nodding at the mighty happenings under the keys and even hoping that the pipes would split under such a load of music for what a tale, ^{then,} ~~they~~ would be told!

We stood quietly for awhile until the Anthem died down out of us and out of the hills behind Boscobel. Then I told the lads to dismiss. But they stood looking past me to the foot of the hill. A grin broke on Johnny M'Cook's face.

asked.

"court-martial you would be risking, Sarge?" he ~~asked~~ "The General Staff is on parade."

about and saw Squire Groves. I saw him first, for there is a strong dislike of the man in me. ^{Ambrose} ~~the~~ Pastor ~~xxxx~~ and the smart lawyer were with him. No motorcar accompanied them, so they must have walked across from where Groves was building his hotel.

"Morning, Laban," Pastor Ambrose hailed me. "When will the games begin?"

I took a swift glance to where Cobina stood among the other women; and nobody had to tell me that she welcomed the visitors. Doubtless, she had told her pastor of the day and he had picked up Squire Groves on his way. I have learnt that the men of the Church set great store by forgiveness; and no doubt the papist priest would be practising his preachings on me. I am a man of some stature and ~~does~~ not hold to malice. My Company knew, that, in the Regiment, I was not one to hug a grievance. But I must tell plainly, that, in such a nature as is mine, forgiveness is easier given to one whom I have beaten. I have not beaten Squire Groves, yet. He is not entitled to my forgiveness. A hand must have thrown the explosive into the water and I know ^{the hand.} whose coin paid ~~thaxhkhndx~~ Nor have I forgotten that this fat fellow was but lately my judge.

I saluted Pastor Ambrose and Figueroa with a wave of my hand and looked on the red turkey-cock with them, nothing much on my face.

"'Tis about begun," I said to the pastor. "You staying?"

"That we are, Labe," Figueroa cut in. "Might even run in the Old Boys race myself, considering I am a sort of graduate of Boscobel."

~~In Figueroa, I am reminded of a hatchet;~~
~~the sharpness of his face, the clear, swift way he~~
talks. I like the grin on him. Much can be told of a man by his grin. A smile is easy to make. A grin takes something besides. Groves is a man with a smile and he puts it on Cobina now.

^{below}
"Then take your places ~~below~~ the road beside the beach, man," I told Figueroa.

We did the sprints first, with the high and long jumps. I must tell, too, that

Squire Groves made himself pleasant and was as if taken ^{with} by Cobina. They spoke together much and I saw her point to the boats and the nets as if she explained how we lived. Presently, I found that Pastor Ambrose stood by me.

"Laban, I did not come out here just for the games," he said. "Word has come to me that you suspect Squire Groves of the dynamiting."

A hammer of God, this papist priest is; direct to the point he goes and next he will be ~~me~~ saying that, even if it is so, then Laban, my son, forgive the good Squire. I know a little anger. He sees it on me, and suspects the reason.

"I was not told by Cobina," he said quietly. "I heard from - other sources. I am afraid you are quite wrong, Laban."

We stood under a lime tree and the fragrance of it with the smell of the sea is a memorial to me of our talk.

"Is it that you lodge day and night with Groves and reads what is in his mind?"

My guest, the pastor is; but I do not remember it, in my anger at his disturbing of my judgment. He takes it as if I had not spoken unmannerly. He talks easy to me, our eyes squared off on each other.

"My informant tells me that you contemplate injury to Squire Groves. I hear you have seen on his beach at nights."

Now, I confess, a gaff was needed for my anger. I was a small boy caught in a mango-walk.. I had played at detective and been laughed at. While I watched Squire Groves' beach in the night, he had put his men to watching me. Now he sat there like a bloated turkey-cock a-talking to ~~some~~ Cobina and laughing at me through this Roman priest.

"Is your Squire afraid?" I jeered at Pastor Ambrose.

"I have not spoken of it to him," he said, a quiet man.

"Then you should, Pastor," I said. "Tell him that likely, I will put some of his own dynamite at the foot of his hotel and blow them both sky-high! Then he will no' be around to offer me his mercy again!"

He moved his head at that. "Do you know what you are saying, my son?" he asked, his eyes peculiar on me. "You should not speak in anger."

But that I could. Sometimes, it is in anger that the satisfying sayings come. Otherwise than in my anger, I could not have struck at Squire Groves through this gentle man of the cloth.

"I speak as it comes to me! Somebody has been using powder on ^{my} ~~any~~ fishing-ground and my mind tells me who that Somebody, is! It should be good business for Somebody if the constables move us from this beach because of the breaking of the law. Very well. I will hold my peace until the evidence is before me — then I will strike Somebody with vengeance! Hear me!"

Pastor

~~But~~ Ambrose kept at me, kept at me with those steady eyes of his. "Is there any cause for your suspicions, Labe?" he asked. Surely, a calm man he is.

"There is the cause which comes from the knowledge of what he is."

The pastor smiled. "Tell me what he is," he said.

En, move away, priest. What is he but a ^{bloated croaker-lizard, who,} ~~bloated croaker-lizard~~ belly-filled with eating, yet lies along the rafters with his yellow tongue out, seeking more little flies for his gullet? I walk my eyebrows up my forehead to be a mockery to his question. Then I waved my hand towards the field to tell him that Nat Murph and the others were ready for our race.

"I will keep my peace until the evidence is before me," I told him again, stepping down towards the starting point where the other lads waited.

Murph and me had the outer edge on the starting line; and I reckoned that the people who stood on the banks above us, thought it fitting that we should be standing together away from the lesser lads. A round dozen of us ~~would have~~ ^{of} were in this run ~~at~~ two miles — to be taken along the line of the beach to the foot of the hill between Boscobel and Squire Groves' land, then round a clump of Casarinas; and beating upwind to the starting line again. Ten times around would be the distance. While we waited on the mark, our limbs flexed at ease, I spoke to Murph from the side of my mouth.

"Cobina's Roman priest is in agreement with you, Nat Murph. He thinks it is a wickedness in me to suspect Squire Groves of heaving the sticks at our fishes."

"How comes he knows what you think?" he asked after a while.

"A man of God — he hears what the wind says," I said dryly.

"Then the wind has more sense in its whispers than all the loud words of Sergeant Daniels," ^{he} ~~Murph~~ flung back at me.

En, my Murph is sharp with me. I grinned.

"Doubtless the wind has a name too," I said.

He looked quickly at me. "Then it was not Cobina?"

I shook my head. "The wind warned the pastor that likely I would do violence to the fat turkey-cock.*"

Murph's eyebrows drew together. I watched him in an effort to see what he was thinking, but plainly he was puzzled too.

Figueroa called that ~~x~~ we should stand ready. I broke up his thoughts. "Come now, start a-praying that I do not leave you too far behind," I told him, jeering.

"Spread-foot mountain-man," he said in wonder, "you would tussle with your master?" ^{flag}

We took the drop of the ~~starting~~ ^{flag} together, loping easily away and leaving all the hurry to the brash lads who thought they saw glory ahead in beating the pair of mighty milers. Going down to the Casarina clump, the track was marked out on the edge of ~~the~~ the sand beach. And as we tried our kick in the heavy going, nobody has to tell us that it was on this stretch many of the lads would break their hearts. So I was not surprised when Murph pulled in his stride with me, leaving much of our going to the drive of the wind at our backs. They rounded the clump many yards ahead of us; but I knew that going

up on the harder turf and running into the wind, there would come to their legs the first tightening warnings that weariness was ^{a-mustering} ~~amassing~~ up on them.

Running with my thoughts, me.

It is plain that the somebody who spoke with the priest is a possessor of malice towards me. To say I contemplate violence towards Squire Groves, when whether that was so as much a fact as was this would still be in my own mind, was as surely a fact of malice; ~~as was the present~~ present act of mine in putting one foot before the other to carry me to the end of my race. Who could have known, without visiting my soul, whether I would bring violence to Groves for what I thought he was doing to Boscobel? The woman of my bosom had not done so; and she was the only one who, by any reasoning could have watched me in my sleep and seen vengeance ~~a-~~hanging out his funeral suit on my brow. ^An enemy was about. My powder should be dry and ready for the flash.

I gave Nat Murph a yard ~~af~~ ahead of me when we were ending the first mile. It is his manner, I know full well, to make the commencement of the second mile into a test of those against whom he runs. It is a manner which works well for me too, being of great assistance in killing off the weaker ones who bemuse our footing. So I gave to him as he stretched his stride. I ran in his wake, feeling joy in the way the springs answered in my muscles and the sweet ease of my breathing. The people on the banks are talking of Murph and me.

It was something for ~~ta~~ thought that, since the first dynamiting, no more had been ^{Groves} sone. It could have been that ~~Groves~~ did not like a fishing such as this, where his lines were handled by another. Or, hearing that sometimes at nights I patrolled his beach, he was lying low. Whatever explanation there was, it behoved me to seek and find it.

Those on the banks must have talked a lot about Murph and me. It was a race we made ~~i~~ it. He had not come back, as I had believed he would, near the end of the fifth lap when we had put the others behind us. It came to me, then, that Murph had changed his going and that the pace I had given him when he stretched his stride would take blood and sweat for me to work off. Murph had fooled me proper into believing he would run this race as he had done ~~all~~ the others we had battled out together in the regiment. I put more distance in my stride and called on more power.

I felt myself go from strength to strength, the forces within me paying the toll without any strain on my purse. The noises from those on the banks were now rising to a steady roar as they marked that here was the piece of the fare.

There were five laps to end. Now, for the first time, Murph and me were doing a two-miler with all our stops pulled out and a full mile to do. It must have been a vain

and foolish thing ~~to do~~ for us to have done. When we turned into the sand for the downward run, Murph still had his yard on me. We never slackened at the sand. We pitched into it, fighting the pull it made at our feet at the commencement of each stride; disliking the thought of the ropes such a fighting would wrap about our muscles, but caring no longer for anything except to finish this race in front. We rounded the clump and went up against the wind with less trouble at our legs, but more in our breathing. Those on the banks were roaring now. Perhaps I had gained a few inches on Murph. We ran so our tracks could be a surveyor's line for straightness, ^{Murph's} ~~like~~ on the inner edge. On the inner edge, he slew me at the turns, cutting in close to the line while I must flounder around him.

"Last lap!" Figueroa shouted as we turned into the sand.

~~The~~ sand. Murph and me had fought on it before now. One evening, a thousand years ago, I had torn and hammered at my friend for no other reason ~~that~~ than that my blood needed letting, so full of the vapours was I. Now we were on the sand again, and at battle again. But this time, the very sand was against us, staying our ankles with cunning holds and beating at the sinews of our thighs. I was breathing loudly now and doubtless, the same distress was on Murph; for I saw the veins stand out at the back of his neck and the sag at the base of his jaw. I was running as if on a treadmill, striking high at the knees in a sprint.

We went to the Casarina clump for the last time. I knew that here, it would be won. I spoke and spoke to the man inside me, that Murph should not kill me on this clump. I would beat him here. Here it would have to be, or not at all. My eyes were fastened on the clump, until I judged the distance to be but a score of yards to the turn. Then I left my body on the track and put my mind into the body of Reg Sturgeon. I remember how he fixed himself at the starting line, the whole of him a-quivering like an eager hound. And, all this while, I am counting one, two, three, slowly. And, at three, I am finished with ~~the~~ the distance to the clump and ready to commence the turn — with the mind of Reg Sturgeon in me.

I believe I must have gained something of the bullet Reg makes of himself at the starting line. I could sing a song of Casarina as I ran, so light was everything in me. Green and feathery casarina blooming in the hot sand, with yellow buttercups clustered at its roots like nuggets at the foot of a ~~queen~~ Queen. I went around the casarina clump with all of me crying that in the face of the Christ-God, I must whip Nat Murph here. I put my body in the same box as his — a couple of dice in a box — and left it to Chance to shake us and let fall first the one it would. And when we ~~had~~ broke the turn and went up the grass track, I was almost abreast of Murph.

Aie — then such a finish there was, it is my belief that men will sing about it when they talk of this day. ~~Examine the humble man~~

I am no' a humble man.

We ended that race on a roar like the sea on the rocks of Annotto Bay when the wind is northing. We stood into the last of that quarter, bent on ruining ourselves just so if one could best the other. The rest of the field was as if they had not started with us. Scrub mules interfering in a purse put up only for thoroughbreds. My bones ground out a dirge of weariness that begged and begged if I would let up ~~now~~ even for awhile. But the spirit blowing through me like a hurricane, whipped and howled at me, Not so. Not so! I would fall to my face and be dead there before I gave up to Murph.

It was not too clear how the last part went. I know I put my head down and watched ~~in~~ the turf passing under my feet as if I ran along a seine-line which was being reeled-in in my belly. I saw each root of grass clearly as if I was reading words out of a book and thought, without rhyme or reason, of the saying of the prophet Habbakuk: That he who run may readeth it. But 'twixt all these inconsequences, I am ^{murdering myself} ~~roaring~~ down this stretch, Murph and me, foot to foot, the broken breath of us loud in that place until the white tape wrapped about our chests and slipped backwards about our waists and I let go of my breath with one last groan. For now the race was over.

We listened to the hallelujahs with our arms around the others shoulders, ~~Ma~~ Murph and me, gasping like landed groupers. I hear Figueroa swearing without regard and saying that Murph had lost, but only by the shortness of the hair on his chest — that I had won only because the last breath had swelled my chest in time. Then Pastor Ambrose was on us Figueroa ceased his oathing out of respect for the cloth. A light shone in the pastor's so he was a small boy again as he pumped our hands.

"Laban — Nathaniel — you were magnificent! The finest I have seen in this land of fine runners!"

"Squire Groves thinks it one of the fastest times he has ever seen!" Figueroa shouted.

"Indeed — that I do!" I heard Groves say.

I am a man of years and used to authority. I have spoken orders which sent men to die and it should be far from me to be as a pouting boy. But mark it, and ask anybody: Anger makes children of us. There is no wisdom in anger; and the foolishness in it is worse than the foolishness which comes from an absence of sense. A thing to be grieved over, anger is. My foolishness did not tell me that, as I served another, so I would be served. Forgetfulness was on me that such is the law and the prophets.

So, when I hear Squire Groves a-talking of my running, I filled my tired lungs with air. I am gasping, with my arm about Nat's shoulder, but I turn with the speed of a striking panda-snake. I square my hot eyes with ^{those} ~~the~~ beaming ones of the rich man.

"Then the fat fellow must ha' a long memory!" I throw out wickedly. "My mind is telling me that 'twixt filling his moneybags and grabbing for the lands of others, there would be no time for him to witness such as a foot-race!"

"Laban!"

It is a cry from Cobina; and then the stillness came down on all about and I heard ~~in~~ the wind ~~a~~stepping through the trees. Murph grew under my arm like the back of an angry cat; his shoulders came up and all of a sudden, he took my wrist and removed my arm roughly from his shoulder. I turned to him but he stepped away. I heard a murmur from Cobina and saw that she too ~~was~~ was leaving the beach. I found Pastor Ambrose's eyes bent on me ^{with} ~~in~~ pain in them. Then I took my glance to Squire Groves' countenance and found that my insult had scored a bullseye to his pride. Like the starched front pleats of a shirt, it is, and the blood only returned when a woman's shrill laughter splintered the silence about us. It is a laugh that I will know in hell.

"Shut up!" I yammer at Deborah Black. "Shut it — and take your bad-word-self from here!"

The growl from the men at my elbow was for ^{my} ~~the~~ ill-use of a comrade's widow. The smile on Deborah Black's face takes me back to the tigress in the easterner's garden. There is a ~~triumphant~~ satisfaction in her, in the way she smiles with the tip of her tongue at her teeth.

"Blood! Since when a Jamaica woman can no' be allowed to laugh at the stupidity of a king!"

The shriek at me was from the warrior woman of Bully Ferguson. I wheeled from the company and made my march for my own fireside.

The days which followed the King's Birthday wore hobnails in their progress over Boscobel. I believe, I believe that many of us bore their marks for much time afterwards. A few of us, for all time afterwards.

But that is to be told. Let be.

Boscobel was a house divided, with some to the colours of Deborah Black and others bearing with me. A few stood neutral to the matter, one of these was Nat Murph; and another, Cobina.

This swift division, following on the sport's day, did not make for sense to me. I knew my lads, knew their ways to a T. What I had done to Squire Groves on the beach, ill-mannered though it had been, should not have caused their eyes to view me sideways, or their talks to be held in corners and broken off when I came within hearing distance. Neither did it seem reasonable to me that so much should be made out of my burst of temper on Joe Black's widow. Not until too late did I realise that the days wore rough boots because I put them on myself.

We fished the dark sea with little words passing between us. Many a night, only the strike of our gaffs at the throats of struggling fish, the wet drag of our net-ropes at the gunwales, or the licks of our sails in the wind disturbed the silence. We passed back and forth in the camp with scarce an howdedoo. And even Charlie Cotton's shoulders hung heavily when, for evening after evening, a poorer number of voices joined in the singing of ^{and} respers. But through it all, Deborah Black moved with warm countenance ~~and~~ only her eyes were cold. Something was happening that was pleasing to the widow of Joe Black.

I am a man of caution who has been taught not to march without his flankers. After the insult I had given Groves, it came home to me that he was an enemy of mine now for sure. I should be watched. It did not seem foolish to expect that the dynamiting would begin again. Therefore, I put it to the lads that half of us would watch the beaches at nights, while the others fished. Then, right away, at once, it was made plain to me that Boscobel was divided; for there were mutterings against my plan. Clothed in my right mind, I would have used easier words to them, feeling my way into their minds until I had them with me.

But no.

No. I turned a battery of strong language on them, kicking and rooting at their protests with but a single thought — to chase them into the same corner where my ideas lurked. I had forgotten I no longer had the Manual for my backing; that the Regulations did not apply when we were out of khaki. Soon I heard them bawling at me that I could do all my own watching.

I gathered those who stuck to me for old times sake, and patrolled the beach, leaving the rebels to the fishing — but selling the catch in the name of all Boscobel as we had agreed on from the time we went to live there. That was how we had contracted with the Kendal brokers and we shared the profits evenly. The state did not last long.

One by one, they dropped out of fishing, declaring with iron in their throats that they would not work for a bunch of pissy-arses who wasted the nights walking the beach while they sored their muscles on the seine ropes. But, mainly, there were the dark looks of some of those who declared that a man's wife should not be left long alone with pot-lickers about in the warm, dark nights. So the pebble cast by Reg Sturgeon in his squabble on the beach with Micky Ffolkes was sending all the little fishes scurrying confusedly in all directions.

Soon, each was eating from his savings and the boats lay idle on the beach. A wry word or a doubtful action would ~~not~~ ignite a spark and blow up Boscobel. Our hands must be put to use, and early. This I know. But — how?

And then the hurricane came.

There is a sea about us. The Caribbean sea. Blue and lovely it is, with water of a rich green where there are mighty deeps and an ever-gentle wind blowing constantly and containing such health that men, long ago, named it The Doctor. A quiet wind it is, I say, and I have seen it nudge the palms and poinciannas to such playfulness that I am reminded of children at a frolic. The little waves tumble to the shore and run up the white beaches with a glad murmur as if tired they arex from their leagues of wandering and happy ~~to~~ at last^{to}/have come home. But these are the children of giants.

And sometimes their mothers pursue them.

That time, with a brawling hitch to their skirts and the wild songs of shrews in their throats, they come in black and fury, ridden by the winds of their passions.

Break for the hills.

There are four months to the season of the high winds among the islands, and men ^{grim} have made a ~~saxxaxf~~ rhyme about it: July, Stand by; August, Save us!; September, Remember!; October, 'Most over.

This is the month of August, the third morning, and Nat Murph beckons to me. We go to stand before the cave at our line-fence where Murph likes to be when he would speak seriously to me. It is a hot morning with a peculiar stillness. Black clouds are low over the sea but the sun is shining on the beach so, over the sea is like a darkened room into which we look. Boscobel is a camp of idleness. The lads squat in the shade at their doors, their forearms on their knees and their hands ~~hanging~~ empty.

Murphx said: "I dont like the look of the weather. A blow is coming on."

He was a fisher on St. Thomas beach before he joined the Strength. He knows weather. He talks some more while I am thinking. Foremost in my mind is a thought that this wind, if it comes, will blow my divided Boscobel together — if I do it right. I have noted how countries in times of war, trample their differences to meet the common enemy and I think ^{Boscobel} I can unify and command ~~myziak~~ again ~~with~~ without any hurt to my spirit. There would be no call for me to talk down to Deborah Black or pass the salt f^or Squire Groves.

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I heard Murph saying: "We could have the lads take their wives and babies over to Groves'. The stone walls of his hotel will ~~be next to nothing~~ withstand any blow. Most of it is already ~~roofed~~ roofed. He cannot deny them shelter with a hurri —"

He stopped when he saw me shaking my head; when he saw that I had been shaking my head since he started speaking. He wrinkled his forehead. "What's that for?" he asked.

I mocked him a little with my raised eyebrows. "That means they will not go there, Murph."

"Eh —?" Murph is a man who does not know whether he should be puzzled or angry.

"None from Boscobel will beg shelter from the Slug, Murph. I — you and me, Corporal Murphy, will take care of our Company."

Murph knew he should be angry now. "Is the heat gone to your head?" he demanded angrily. "Where will we find shelter from a hurricane?"

"Just where we would find it if the Slug had not been building this hotel over the way. Just where those of our people who have no stone buildings to run into, always go. To the hills, Nat Murph."

My corporal stared at me. It was as if it was written on his brown forehead, what he was thinking: that Laban Daniels was a stubborn, pig-headed fool.

"Laban Daniels, you mean you would have the women and babies out in the weather because of your own quarrel, rather than get them into safety?"

So Murph was not thinking only that I was stubborn, but was searching deeper, laying me open wider. I did not like it.

I shrugged easily. "They will be in no danger," I said like a stone.

That roused him more. "You dam' dangerous fool!" he whispered as if he tapped home each word with a hammer. "You ever been caught in a hurricane?"

The big wind does not come every year; nor every ten years; nor sometimes for a lifetime. And sometimes it may strike across one section of the island only. Once, the tail of a hurricane had leaned aside to swipe at our garrison near the city; but the spent force of it had done nothing but topple a shed and drench the polo field. I give no answer to Murph.

His eyes narrowed on me. "Or is it ^{because} ~~that perhaps~~ Laban leader-bull Daniels has not yet proven, he cannot understand what happens inside a man when he sees his baby beheaded by a lying branch?"

If there was not Boscobel on my mind, Nat Murph, my fists would reach you. But say it at another place and time. Say it then, if you are a bad man.

I stilled the muscles at my shoulder. "No doubt the Slug would understand what happens. You could use such an argument to him and he would perhaps provide a suite for you."

It was Johnny M'Cook, with laughter ruffling his voice, who had told us at Boscobel the stories he had heard of Groves and his women. There were perhaps a score, Johnny told us, whose bedrooms the Slug had entered without first passing through a church.

"No doubt — and there should be shame on you that he would while you do not."

A thought had entered my mind. I took a quick look ~~at the sky~~ upward. Well, now, perhaps.

My shrug told Nat Murph I had given up. "Well, go on to your Groves, Nat Murph. Find out whether he will permit his friends of Boscobel to be the first guests of his hotel. I will hold the Fort until you get back."

I waited until Murph was over the hill. The finding of Groves would take time. And even however quickly he found Groves, nobody can tell me that the Slug will say yes to Laban Daniels occupying his Royal Suite. Now I must think of the thrust and stir which I must bring to my tongue to shape the divided lads into following me.

We

The black clouds swooped down on us and the winds struck. ~~The~~ had battened their houses as best as we could back at Boscobel, then they had hurried after me into the hills behind our camp. There were rock-holes there, capable of holding a regiment if cannily dispersed. I had placed them in good shelters, with the women and babies together in the roomiest cave. Then we strung ropes from one cave to another for guide-lines in case any of ^{had} the caves ~~and~~ to be abandoned.

Just before the wind ~~str~~ came, Cobina asked after Murph. I had hoped nobody would ask after my roaring bull of a corporal, but doubtless, he was sadly missed. She spoke to me in the cave of the women and I pretended as if placement of the posts for the ropes was holding all my attention. However, the wind came soon afterwards.

There is a quality of roaring anger in the big wind that shakes the bravest man. Dark as a cup of coffee it is now, only lighted now and again with long licks of lightning which show the great trees bending and whirling and the mighty body of water pouring down on the faces of the women wide open with their shrieking. But above all, is the roaring of the wind.

The wind is a giant walking the earth and his footfall is something shaking. He puts his heel to a huge acacia and it comes up out of the ground, roots and all. He leans to a cottonwood, fifty feet ^{it grew,} ~~tall~~ and it snaps like nothing at all. He plucks a dozen coconut trees in one fist, the powerful reaper he is. Rocks, bigger than houses, he rolls through the alleys he has cleaved out of the side of a mountain. And over all, is his roaring fury.

The wind passed on, leaving a broken world, but we had lost none of our company. And the eyes on me as we gathered for prayers led by Charley Cotton, told me the house was whole again and Laban Daniels in his accustomed place. We made a mighty chanting of the Te Deum.

We lost most of our houses and all our boats.

The blockhouse had lost its roof and a portion of the walls, but we patched the broken walls with plaited thatch and made a roof of boughs and it took in all those who were homeless. But in the matter of the boats, our hands hung down. Then I must tell of Murph.

Murph met me in the clearing before the blockhouse when I led our people out of the hills after the storm. None of his attention was given to the questions from our company as to his whereabouts during the wind. All his attention was gathered in his eyes and his eyes were gathered on me.

We stood like that while our company wandered away from us to go look at what was left of their dwellings. Then we stood alone. He spoke.

"You waited?"

I gave no heed to the grate in his voice. ^{brushed} My voice ~~brushed~~ lightly at him.

"The wind would not."

Angry eyes looking out at me from a brown bulldog's face.

"I can put two and two together, Laban Daniels!"

"So that you get twenty-two instead of four, Nat Murph," easy as anything.

"Women and babies put on the block to pay for your ambition!"

^{fury}

Such a whispering ~~anger~~ in his voice. I brought my fingers to my cap in a sloppy

salute like a five-year man.

"Sergeant Daniels reporting, sir."

~~Elizabeth and her account~~

All correct and accounted for."

My mockery runs off him like water off a duck. "Yes, that's true, Labe," he said quietly. "Thank God that's true."

He would leave me now. I halted his turning with a question.

"You met a willing Slug?"

His head turned half to me. "The slug is slimy and he crawls, but he is not a killer, Laban. He has no ambition. He crawls. Have you forgotten? Yes — the Slug was willing."

To build our dwellings again was not a task, in the ordinary, which would disturb my sleep. The red earth and the roundwood and stout thatch which our fathers raised to such homes to sing about in smooth walls and shining floors, white-washed rafters and cool eaves to sit under when the fireflies danced and the story-teller spun his web of fancies, all these were at our elbows. No ~~task~~ task at all to worry about.

It was the thought of how to obtain new boats again which stretched out before me like a long, hard road, laughing hugely at our puny knees. To buy our boats, we must have coin; to procure our coin, we must fish; to fish, we must have boats. The road is amused in a shock of white teeth at the wobble to our knees.

Before a week had past it came plain to me that Boscobel would be breaking up soon. Before the wind, we had been eating out of our savings and now there was little of this.

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left to keep us in food. The rains which came with the wind had soaked into the earth and the strong sunlight which followed was pulsing the earth to new life. I took Chippy Dale and Joe M'Cook and a few others of the finer lads and pointed out that with hoe and sweat we could provide our tables. So, along with those who followed my reasoning, we made furrows to take potatoes and yams and quick growing vegetables. But the others, and sad it was that these were more than half of our company, they put the matter roughly from them, ^{saying} that this planting would not bring the coin which was necessary for our boats. They sat back on their heels and narrowed their eyes looking out to sea, thinking, thinking, what the next move should be when they left Boscobel. For it was plain that they would be leaving.

Murph was not in the group which took to the hoe with me. He was not with the others either. Often, he was away for whole days at a time, and spoke only with Cobina when he returned at evening. If a hurt waggled a tiny finger in me that Murph had moved away from my shoulder, nobody else knew of it. I met Cobina's eyes easy as ever, as if I had no curiosity for what she talked with Murph about. But the evening that she told me — O.

"Our two boats will be trucked out in tomorrow, Laban," like nothing she said it.

"They come from the government scheme for assisting those who lost in the hurricane," she said. "There will be nets too. You should tell our people about it."

Things within me scrambled to their feet again from where they had fallen from the shock. "Who arranged this?" I asked slow and dazed. "I did not know of it?"

"The news came to Nat while he visited Kendal. The news that the government was assisting hurricane sufferers. I sent a letter to Father Ambrose. You should tell our people about it."

My fingers held on to nothing until the muscles ached. "Why didn't you tell ^{me} about all is before?" I asked her softly.

"You had enough on your mind with what you were doing," Cobina said. She rested her head on my sleeve. "Now you should go out and tell our people that the boats will be here tomorrow."

There is more Cobina is keeping from me. Her eyes are looking past me and there is a bit of trouble she is having with her throat. I shook with a cold merriment as if I mocked at her and Nat Murph and all their works.

"Then you had better tell them yourself, Cobina. You and Nat Murph should go stand before the blockhouse and make a speech about it. Tell them of the great team you are and how together you saved Boscobel. I shall be down on the beach — listening for the thunder of their applause."

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The wind was northing this late November. The sea was dark and unfriendly. We hung our nets and mended the holes and counted our silvers and coppers. The end of the year for a fisher can often be a time of famine. Chilling winds, black water and big spaces of sea empty of fish, turns his purse inside out. Sometimes a boat must travel to beyond sight of land to raise even the poorest return. It is ^{ugly} ~~anxious~~ time, and there are weeks when to push out from the shore is ^{to} aim your prow into eternity.

Cobina's time was drawing near. If her eyes did no longer light at my approach, I put it down to the stronger kicks which were now grieving her womb. I declared to myself that there was nothing more to it. She would be bedded by Christmas, D.V., and our life would spring again.

So does the man who bears no humility beats his own drum and jigs to it.

I had never commended Nat Murph for the job he had done in getting the boats from the government; I held no gratitude in the memory that in the telling of our people about the boats, Nat Murph and Cobina had worded it so that all the credit had come to me. And it had done no good to my hate for Squire Groves. Not after Nicky Ffolkes, with an air of indignation, had whispered to me that it was Groves who had recommended our case to the government. Nicky Ffolkes explained ~~that requests for the hurricane~~ ^{that requests for the hurricane} relief had to be supported by an affidavit from a Justice of the Peace, and how Pastor Ambrose had obtained such a paper from Groves. While I thought aloud on what lay behind Groves' help, Nicky, the rat he is, had supplied me with the workings of another rat's mind.

XIX "So long as even one of us remain here, Sarge, the Squire will never obtain this beach. And the Squire knows that Sergeant Iabe will never leave this beach," Nicky said, his eyes like buckets of swill. "So the smart Squire sees that Sarge gets his boats; then later there will be the dynamiting again and Sarge will stand cap-in-hand before the Squire again. But this time, there will be no returning to this beautiful beach which the Squire craves."

Yet, even the thought of losing Boscobel was not as scouring to me as the knowledge ^I that Groves believed it was ~~me~~ who had sought succour at his fat hands. It made a grim fool of me and soon the lads were avoiding me again. Now for weeks, we had not gone fishing and things were bad again. I was speaking with Cobina this day.

"Cobina, there is Four Pounds to be paid the midwife and there is but little of this Four Pounds in the box. We should be fishing again, be the seas rough or not."

My voice was rough-edged. Under the skin of me, I knew that the absence of light in her eyes was not due to the approach of her time. Cobina had seen me stalking about the camp with my head held haughty like a coalseller who has been made a Justice of the Peace. The boast I carried inside me, was, that I would not say I am sorry to the lads as I did the first time I put my tongue on Deborah Black.

She held me steady with her gaze before she spoke. "The wind is northing heavy. Can this fishing bring death to someone? You forget I know the sea, Iaban."

I laughed like a man of valour. "Eh, then I should be afraid to die? Or I should not want to die?"

"I do not think of you," she told me quietly.

It is a moment to prick my balloon.

"I think of the women who will be widows because Cobina Lawrence needs a midwife," she said. "I will birth the child myself."

I had taken her from under the veil before the papist altar. Easily, as a child, and her years was as a child to me, I had lifted her from the altar stones and placed her to be my wife. It was as if yesterday. Now, I hear Cobina a-telling me that she will be midwife and mother in one. Doubtless, my laughter was unseemly.

"It is a proud thing to say, Cobina, but do you know that women have died because of doing what you suggest?"

"Well, now, I will ask you. I should be afraid to die?"

She talked as if she spoke of going to the Fair. I am the one who is torn. I could answer, without thinking further, that a woman with such as I see in her eyes would never be afraid to die. But the fear that entered my mind swelled my anger more.

"You will have the midwife!" I shouted. "You will not bring my child like an animal!"

"There will be no midwife if it means you will take the lads to sea in such rough weather," she said calmly. "When the matter suited you, you thought it alright that they should stay on the beach. Now you commence to feel the pinch of your own affairs, and there are reasons and reasons arriving in your mind why ~~they~~ now they can brave the weather. In your mind, the sea has gone down sufficiently now for the affairs of Laban Daniels to ride smooth on it. I will not be a cause for widowing."

I struck the table with my fist. "Then how will you prevent what I choose to do?"

She smiled at me as a mother on a ranting boy. Her voice never lifted to match mine.

"How, my Laban? How? I will tell you. I will be a walkabout. I will lodge at every kitchen door on Boscobel, telling the women their men will die because my husband who thinks he captains at Boscobel, will put their men in some little conch-shells of boats to fish the rough water for fees for his wife's confinement. I have not fought you before, my husband. But such a fight I will do for this, that doubtless your Boscobel will break."

Quiet and easy was her voice, but the truth of her words and the strength in ~~them~~ her to do what she said, is plain as plain to me. I blew a slow breath of fury. My hands were fists. Cobina tightened her lips and leaned towards me.

"What you wanted, widowed Deborah Black. Hear me out, I will not be stopped. My unborn child will not, even while it is in my womb, put itself up to bring death to others. Truthfully, I would that I could have my baby like other women, with a midwife to stand at my waist — but not if it means what you know it means."

O, then I stormed at her. ~~XW~~ "Then where will the money be coming from? If they do not fish, they will die just the same from starvation! What if they risk their necks? Will I not be risking too? Where will we earn a living otherwise?"

"Your man's head ~~should~~ should make that out," she said.

Oh, does she think, with the lads divided, and we not in the mood to sing, I could order them to march for Montego Bay and sing another concert for the foreign people? Her eyes ~~stand~~ on me had perplexity in them as if a book was opened before her but with the print in another tongue than hers. She shook her head slowly.

"A rock you were, Laban. A rock about which the men gathered for shelter when the storms brewed up. That, I remember at the garrison. Such a sergeant as was keel and anchor to the lads of A Company. I have seen them close around you to learn the paths they should take in their lives and love and pride set in, fit to burst my heart. But, this, I do not understand. It is as if - as if - a norther had blown through you, making my Laban unwarm and turned within himself. Laban O, Laban, you can bring the lads together again. A word from you would suffice — I know that."

A word from me. Pardon, I should beg of the wanton Deborah; bow my knee and plead how sorry I am. Or go about with cap-in-hand and say I was wrong about Squire Groves.

"No word will come from me!" I grated. "My man's head will make out nothing!"

The flame came then to her eyes. There is but little knowledge in a man to understand why the flash and fire in a woman's eyes brings such great admiration from him. A prince of the sword must have stood at one time down the road of Cobina's ancestry and brought this warrior presence which comes on her when the bugles sound for war.

"Then my woman's head will find the way! I will do such as will make you come at me with your buckle and strop! Then I will take your whipping and laugh at you that you but chastise yourself!"

I stepped through the door of our house, stalked off into the dark night, angry with myself as with she. I might forget she stands in a family way and strike her to my everlasting shame. What could she mean by her words but that she was holding a big stick to my head? Putting it to me that if I could not support her, then she would seek her own support. Putting it in the manner of the Rae Town women who nudge their men into usefulness by declaring they will put their bodies to auction if sufficient food and clothing is not brought to their door.

I broke from the house and strode with the power of my anger making a giant of me, walking with long steps and speed to make you wonder, down the lip of hill, over the bank to the road. Then I turned my face uphill again, striking for the woodland behind Boscobel because here, I would have a tussle with the tilt of the land — and fought and drove my way up, until I stood at the peak and breathed heavily with the wind hitting on my chest and the lights from Squire Groves' construction twinkling uglily in my eyes. At this moment, I could have roused my savagery to send me tearing into that swash of valley and batter his new walls to rubble.

But the true meaning of Cobina's words did not come to me until a week had passed.

The month had turned grey, with platoons of dark clouds drawn up over the sea each morning. Soon, we knew, they would roll closer and closer in until they halted overhead and broke upon us, hammering down our impotent anger at them and putting racing rivers around and between our houses so our Spanish walling melted at the base and the thatch moulted at the edges. But come the sun again, and a new Jerusalem a man would see ~~about~~ around him. Clean-washed is the beach, music is in the throats of the birds sporting with wheel and turn through the Sunday-dressed trees. But this day of which I talk, it was in the grey of the month.

I had gone from Boscobel to Kendal to see how our credit could be until the weather cleared and until we could fish again. But the shop-keepers were no' disposed to place credit on a company of ragged fishermen with reputations for violence.

Figueroa hailed me as I was moving out of town. We met on the sidewalk.

"How's the morning?" he cried. A wind blows wherever Figueroa walks and you must hold to your thoughts while he talks, lest they be blown away. He had on a coat of linen with some law books under his arm. A clever face is his; and my spirit has taken to his.

"Hearty, man," I tell him, for your troubles should not be told from the housetops.

His long face is creased with welcoming. Doubtless, he has forgotten my hog-manners at Boscobel on the King's Birthday.

"'Tis a sensible business, Laban," he said, shaking my hand. "A man should know when he makes a mistake and do what he can to rectify it. I am particularly glad for the other lads sakes."

En, now. Here is a mystery of Figueroa's. I am a-thinking how to answer so my unacquaintance with the happenings at Boscobel will not tell him that the house is divided. I laugh with an ease that was foreign to me.

"If Lawyer Figueroa says it is sensible, then my mind goes to rest."

Small wrinkles of laughter crease the clever corners of his mouth. "Not only me, ~~Laban~~ Laban. Father Ambrose will also tell you that you ~~had~~ have ~~done~~ done the righteous thing — forgiving your enemies, soldierman. By the way, he is there now — at Groves. How is Cobina?"

So, then. Figueroa is saying I ha' forgiven Squire Groves. Here is a joke for my secret belly.

"Hearty, Cobina is," I say, my mind working hard at his words. But there is nothing for me to work on, for we are saying our partings since he has to hurry to his chambers and I have to hurry to Boscobel where forgiveness is shining through us, like boys scrubbed for Sunday school.

The road to Boscobel is overlong today as I walk with swiftness to be back. On the level stretch just before reaching the hill which falls to our beach, I turn from the road and take a route through the bush so I will not come up on Pastor Ambrose who is at Groves' beach. I steal through the scented shrubs, rich with the yellow-throat warbler's music and the cooing of peadoves and pluck hogplums from their clumps with the thought that God had

been walking through His garden when He learnt of the fall of Man. If the sense that Figueroa had talked of, had truly been in me, then I should have stopped to reason with myself: Why have I a hatred for Groves? Had I proven anything? Could I swear by the Book and the Key that he had ~~done~~ done to Boscobel what I thought he did?

I will take off my shoes and walk the holy ground to Mr. William Shakespeare. I borrow the sad wit of Shylock which shriveled his soul even while it burned his hearers:

So can I give no reason, nor I will not, more than a lodged hate and a certain loathing I bear Antonio.

As happens sometimes in the grey of the month, the weather had cleared for a space. Soon it would close down again, but for now, a window has opened, ~~in the sky~~ letting in the sun. I left the bush below the crest of the hill where I cannot be seen from Groves' beach and walked down into Boscobel. All ^{red} ~~grey~~ and green and blue it is in the late sunlight; a place of such beauty that pours mighty choruses down the halls of my being. On my left, in the green of the woodland above the road, there peeped out the red clay of the houses under the thatch. At my right hand, the sea was shining blue until, at far sight, the shadow of the north clouds, grey and black, draws darkness down upon it. I think a little on the weather, for my angry mind should be rested. Somebody stepped from the bush to the road in front of me.

Nicky Ffolkes had been a privy rat in the regiment. Now out of the army, he struts with equality before his sergeant and is taken to be mate by a tigress; for nobody has to tell me, from the sights I have seen, that Deborah Black has shown him her bed. I could spit — but Nicky Ffolkes can be a useful man.

"Nicky Ffolkes!" I hail him. He had been walking slowly and it is my belief he had seen me coming and had slowed his steps so I could catch up with him.

When the house is divided, there is a picnic among the rats. Men a-seeking grist for the mills of their wrath will not ask for pedigree papers of those who can feed the rollers.

Nicky Ffolkes stops quickly and turns to me. The narrow face of him now wears a moustache ~~moustache~~ for the manhood Deborah Black has brought him.

"Eh, Labe, man, how's the afternoon? You come from Kendal, yes?"

Before, it had been Sarge. Now Nicky Ffolkes is my friend and 'tis Labe, man. I could kick my boot to his behind and feel joy in the howl of him. But I smile at him.

^{make,}
"So-so, Nicky. A walk you ~~make~~ now?"

"I have been to see how the lads will fare," he said.

I keep surprise out of my voice. "Fare? Where?"

He looked sharp at me. "Over at Squire Groves' beach," he said.

What are my lads doing at Squire Groves' beach, Nicky Ffolkes? I want to ask.

Instead, I say, "Oh."

Nicky looks at me from the corner of his eye. "A goodly more than half of them will take the jobs."

Now then. A little at a time, out the story is coming. I have got my guard up, but I must bear arms with secrecy. Nicky must not know I am answering him carefully.

"Which half be you, Friend Nick?"

He looked at me fully now. "The said half in which you be," he said.

Now, I am a man of perception. Not with the quickness of Figueroa, nor perhaps of the quiet stream which runs deep in the person of the papist priest; but I have never had reason to be shamed at the slowness of my wit. Nicky Ffolkes would have had me, had me good and proper, had he not put a strange boldness in the way he turned his head to make his eyes square up with mine. Something not good, is in the air when he faces me so stoutly and when he leaves the camp of Deborah Black and says he stands with me.

"Good it is, Nicky. Good it is, man, that you are by me," I tell him warmly.

He came back quickly at me. "I say and say again, Iabe, that Cobina should not have asked Squire Groves to take the lads to work at the hotel, knowing how you feel. Come Christmas or not, we would have lived without his coin. I say and say again that better a man should have an empty honour in his hip pocket than shame-money pulling down his fob."

"There is where we run together, Nicky," I said, my mind on Cobina. "It is a good thing that we have spoken together."

There is a hood on his eyes which comes down now. "And to have done it in secrecy, telling only some of the women that she had written to Squire and the pastor, asking for jobs for the lads so they would not have to go a-fishing until the weather was fair — I say and say again that it is a sin against her husband's honour as camp leader."

"Say it again, Nicky, lad."

"So I say, Iabe, man."

"True. So you say, Nicky. But you should have said it to me long ago — from the time it came to your hearing."

No wind reaches his sails for two-three breaths. Then he was heeling to the breeze again.

"So I should have, Iabe, man. And I cannot beg your pardon often and often enough."

I smile at him so my feelings are hidden. Aie, Nicky, the toe of my boot is talking to me of you. But a grown man must have wit. If it is not born in you, then buy it with experience.

"No matter, lad. It has come now. We will walk."

"We will walk, Friend Iabe."

So we walked down into Boscobel together, me and my privy rat. And I noticed how empty of many of the men the camp was, while those who were left looked away from my face when I entered the clearing before the blockhouse. They ply the wooden needles over the holes in the nets as if all their minds are on the cords. I passed Cobina sitting in the late sun --- and said not a word.

CHAPTER 29

One by one, the lads went a-seeking money for their fobs at Groves' construction. A fortnight, and there were left with me only Nat Murph and Charlie Cotton — and Nicky Ffolkes. Nat and Charlie had not gone because they agreed that the boats and the nets should be minded. But Charlie does not fail to tell me in his quiet way that Boscobel will be better for the lads to be earning their ^{silver} ~~silver~~ and ~~like~~ losing their idleness besides. I can see how right he is by the way the lads return each evening from building Groves' hotel.

Full of laughter and boyish pranks they are with the thought of pay-day a-coming; and often, these days, we hear them singing as they march back over the hill, coming home when the nightengales are a-bedding. Then Charlie Cotton's face becomes like the painted saints on the walls of the Roman chapel outside the garrison gate and I see him reach for his bible and Sankey hymnal. To tell the truth, it is ~~fitting~~ welcomed by me that his vespers are being sung with power again.

Murph

Nat^{is} not an idler with his brain. Before long, he had talked the lads into making a donation for the preserving of the nets and boats while they worked at the hotel. So it came about that Charlie and he and Nicky Ffolkes drew wages too. I would have ^{nothing} ~~ought~~ to do with it.

When I told him so, he leaned forward as if he would fist me. Then he walked quickly away with a ramrod shoved down his back and I straightened with the breath going slowly out of me. I would have liked to have hammered at him. I did not know then that, quietly, he had spoken to Cobina. This I ^{learnt} ~~learned~~ afterwards.

"It is for the little one, Cobina," Murph said, showing her the silver which should have been my portion. If I could see him, there would have been the candles which burn in the back ~~back~~ of his eyes when he talks with Cobina. Murph was my friend, such as no man had; and if he worshipped at the same altar as I, yet I know the paten will no' be touched by his hand. If I am allowed a bowman when I come to cross the bar, I would say, Put Nat Murph up forward, Lord God. A man he is to face it with.

But let that be.

Cobina said to him: "Then if my husband will not take it, why, Murph, then nothing it is to me either."

"But the little one, Cobina! There must be a midwife! Suppose — suppose — !"

She laughed; and I can hear it at my ears now even with the trees rustling and the birds easing their throats.

"Come on, old Murph! Then I will tell you. Since you will be a godfather — why, ~~z~~ then journey to Kendal your ownself and pay the woman for me. Tell her to keep her bundle for travelling, ready, for the kicks of the newcomer are getting too strong for me."

She must have stood there like a queen, the light through the trees laid on the tawn of her face. The brownness of her is like the mountains ~~at~~ at dusk, like a draught of

mountain coffee with the sun in it; like earth under the plough at April; like the deep words spoken by mahogany wood under the ~~haz~~ hand of time. I would say like ~~ma~~ mahogany in a church when the lamps are lit for evensong. O, come with me and have the wonder of her presence in your eyes.

But I must talk of the other women, and afterwards, of Nicky Ffolkes. Forgotten is the matter of Deborah Black and her widowing as the women don their laughter again, with peace and plenty on Boscobel. The clink of silver has a wondrous quality to those who have not heard the sounds for a long time. Deborah is quiet, like a cat that has lost the ~~and~~ need for spitting and snarling. But she walks the tigress gait of her past me for my disturbance and sometimes, her eyes reach my face from under the 'kerchief about her head. At those times, I see the mocking light in them and I warn myself that I must watch myself.

The women had come together because of what Cobina had done for them. I have not spoken to her of it; had not spoken to her at all. We are two strangers, sharing our board with cold thankies and our bed with space between us. It was an unnatural arrangement; but what should I do? ~~Playxt~~ Make like the forgiving Father Ambrose~~X~~ and take her to my bosom although I am vexed at the shaming of my pride? ~~GZZZXXXX~~ Go to. My spirit is not filled with rickets. I would rather stand alone than grovel with company.

But Nicky has become my company. We walked the boats together for a fortnight, seeing that the inner seams were wetted against the heat and that the nets were stowed away from sea-roaches, the tiny hardbacks who would cut their mothers open if 'twas thought there was food for their red bellies within. All this while, the norther was backed up in the sky, up Cuba and Haiti way and the air at evening was thin and ~~draw~~ cold. We watched the weather bearing slowly down on us, as if we dwelt in a white room with the walls closing in on us. Then, one morning when we woke to Chippy Dale's reveille, we saw that the sky had fallen to just above our heads.

Nat Murph cocked his eye to it and came over to my side.

"The lads should take the morning off from the hotel, Laban. The boats and nets should be well stowed."

We have not spoken of "the lads" for many a ~~dayx~~ fine day. The day that trouble ~~isem~~ looms, my corporal says I should do the assembly. It is a good and loyal thing that Nat ~~urph~~ does; but can his loyal words breach my wall of pride?

Murph and the lads can wallow for all I care. "The lads can roll their heads like marbles for all Laban Daniels cares," I say with the words swelling in my throat. "Go tell your Squire of it. Go tell your employer."

Strike me, Nat Murph. A prayer is real in me that you use the muscles which jerk under your sleeve. Then I could smash at you with all the grand vigour which rises in me.

"Murph?" It is Cobina's voice behind me where she has stepped out of the house. "Think you the lads should see to the boats and the nets?"

I turn to see her glance passing over my head and reaching to Murph's face. Her lips are set with firmness.

"The wind and rain will come today," he was saying, walking around me towards her.

"Then the lads should be told of it," Cobina said. "Chippy should sound the fall-in.

Well, then! So Cobina has taken the sceptre in her hand!

"It looks so to me, Cobina," Murph said slowly. "It should be done." My corporal he still is and is waiting for the word of his sergeant.

"Then tell them," Cobina said sharply. Ebony, that has been smoothed and polished, is her face. Murph kept his eyes on me waiting for the words it was my right and duty to speak. But he could wait until judgment day. I put a sword in my glance and met his eyes with a clanking hostility. A ridge mounted at his cheek.

"Very well, Cobina," he said. "Then I will tell the lads."

I headed a way from them, walking eastward out of the camp into the bush. The deep bush is a place to whip childish anger out of a grown man's body, you tell yourself. To clamber your knees through the barrier of vines and bruise your shoulders at the strong branches while you slip and claw up the side of the mountain, is a way to root a certain foolishness out of you, you say; honesty being in you at the moment to see that your way is childish and foolish.

But sweat, and the straining at your joints, cannot right the matter that has gone wrong inside you.

I pulled myself up the hill behind Boscobel, feeling the stress of the climb and tasting the salty sweat about my lips, forcing a road through the heavy growth of macca and thorns which grew out of the rocks. Behind me, I heard, clear and sweet, the high notes of Chippy Dale's bugle in the fall-in. The thorns grew inside me too.

On the head of the mountain, I looked out over the treetops to where the beaches were spread out at my feet. Centre was Boscobel, with ~~the red-clay~~ ^{our red-clayed} homes standing in line like a Company in full dress for a review. To the left, the beach went on and on until it swept around an arm of land, bearing its golden sands away towards Montego Bay to be the plaything of the foreign seekers who follow the sun to our island. At my right was Squire Groves' place, the whiteness of his buildings standing out against the dark clouds piling in on us. There, in the proud lift of stone lay much of the anger in me.

I know. I know such reasons as I put forth were hardly worthwhile for an explanation. I know, Lord God, I know that doubtless Pastor Ambrose had it straight from the Footstool that Groves was not a man with evil in his heart. A man nearer to the Footstool than me, was the papist pastor. Forgiveness, was his shield and buckler while I pinned my hope for the day in my angry thrusts. All this, I know and know.

But — stay with me and listen. Has a dispute never taken root in you for which there was no explanation? Is there no gift of strength in you which at sometime turns in upon itself and make of the gift, a curse? If no, be the answer, then the grand ghost of Mr William Shakespeare should rise and strike at your ugly hypocrisy. The web of our life

is of a mingled yarn, good and evil together, he said, and 'tis a truth which sets no argument. I am cursed with strength; strength of spirit as of body. Sometimes, at times, I ride the wings of the morning; and, coming face to face with the dusk, as I must, the lift ~~span~~ I had at my starting out cannot understand that dark must fall if another morning would come. I would tear through the dark, as I had through the light — and then be angry beca use my foot meets up with a stone.

Listen. Put it this way. My span has been served in the King's army where the chevrons I wore on my sleeve, made me a princeling to my Company. I saw to the keep and care of my lads, and commanded that they hold our pride high. In the sureness of my goings, I rode on the wings of the morning. Then came the fall into darkness where the Manual ~~Manual~~ no longer lit our paths. I am no longer the Word to my lads.

I am plain Laban Daniels who led his lads into the mountains and led the retreat out again. I am Daniels, the poor fisher, who ran for cover to his Boscobel. I ~~he~~ took a wife to myself and thought to sit under my own vine and figtree with nothing molesting me. Then another coveted my possessions and I commenced hating Squire Groves. Hate is the blinkers which the devil puts on us the better to ride us with. That time, we are blind to the precipices and gallop with a mulish stupidity.

But, it is a fine feeling in the gallop. The run and free surge in the muscles, the draughts of air at the nostrils tingles the blood and satisfies the great need to be forwarding, forwarding. To stand still, many questionings will catch up with you. Better to run, than stand still and burn. I say Groves is a fat beetle and should be stepped on. It is he who has shamed me with my failings by taking my lads on his payroll. He fills their pots and brings laughter and song to Boscobel again.

I went ~~went~~ down the hill at late afternoon with the sun sheeting through the trees. Soaked to the skin, I was and I stopped by the cave on our line-fence for shelter. It is dry in there, but I look on the fault in the earth about the roof of the cave ~~and~~ which Murph had warned of, and I thought ~~I thought to myself it would be better to have my wetting~~ to myself it would be better to have my wetting than have the roof falling on my head. I went from the cave and down through the trees to the road. The world had turned milky under the cold, white clouds. The wind had died with the coming of the rain. I can read the weather signs, and this norther will be more of rain than wind.

The lads have hauled the boats far up the shore. I duck under one of these for shelter. I dozed off in the warmth, and awoke at brown dusk only because someone shook my shoulder.

"Laban, man — up, up! I been a-looking all over for you!"

Nicky Ffolkes it was, bending under the boat to talk with me. He was quite soaked through, so I doubted not that he had hunted me high and low in the rain. It must be a great happening to have sent Nicky Ffolkes seeking me in such weather. I sat bolt

upright, my mind racing to Cobina.

"Cobina — she is taken with the birthing!"

"Quiet yourself, man," Nicky Ffolkes said with a froward familiarity. "'Tis not Cobina, 'tis yourself — you and me and Squire Groves."

I rocked back and forth from my waist to ease the cramps and stretched the muscles of my shoulders. I yawned and spat in the sand. I had mingled with ~~mongrel dogs~~ a privy rat and should not complain now if fleas were at the hem of my garment. But it would be well if someone would tell Nicky Ffolkes to watch his manners nevertheless. I am not a man who is calm under many provokings.

"What is there 'twixt you and me and Groves?" I saw the shine of his eyes turned on me in the browning light.

"A matter of dynamite," was what he said. He said it after a glance over his shoulder. There was a gathering in me.

"Talk more, Nicky Ffolkes," I said. "Talk more to me."

"It is a night when few are abroad, Laban, man. A water-bird has whispered to my ear that Squire Groves will drum the fish tonight."

I say again that, when the house is divided, there is a picnic among the rats. And a man who seeks grist for the mills of his wrath cannot ask for pedigree papers of those who mind the rollers. I came out from under the boat and stood with the rain falling softly on me. Nicky put his hand on my shoulder as if he were Murph. It didn't ~~bother~~ bother me.

So Groves will fish tonight! The Squire will strike for my final disgrace tonight! And, tomorrow, a constable will cycle along the beach and see the destruction that has been wrought. Then, out with you and your baggage, Laban Daniels. Go out from Boscobel. The law of the island holds that a man is a fellow who seeks his catch with powder-sticks under his bows. My training of caution made one last effort to speak to my ~~angry~~ ^{angered} mood.

"This water-bird, Nicky Ffolkes. I am acquainted with the voice, eh?"

"It is a bird that should remain nameless, Labe, fellow. But it is not an affair of chasing a wild goose. While I searched for my friend, Labe, I put my thinking to it. I know a way we can find out the truth about it. We can visit under dark to Squire Groves' camp."

"How will this find the truth? Will they write on a board and hold it up for us to see?"

Nicky Ffolkes giggled at my poor joke and I could kick him for the nasty sound of it. But that is not for now.

"When Groves goes out for the catch, he must start from somewhere. Then where would he start from, but from his own beach? Eh, Labe, we will see them start out, then we will run back to Boscobel for witnesses to stand on the beach and see the explosions. Then we bring over the lads to his camp and stand ~~here~~ there waiting for him until he and his men return. Then let Lord God Groves swear himself blue that the dynamiting was not done on his orders."

I should say now: "Well, Nicky Ffolkes, what I think is best is that we should have someone run to Kendal too and fetch Pastor Ambrose in his motorcar. A powerful witness he would be for us. Even better than all our own lads with reputations not overly good."

That is what I should have said. But when Pastor Ambrose comes and stands with us waiting on the beach, will he ~~stand~~ stand by too when I fall with fists and boots on the men who are returning from their dynamiting? God blind me — but he wont. He will hold up his hand for a blessing. He will say, Lads, the law will take its course; leave be.

And I will want to take Groves' people — and Groves too, if heaven sends he be on the beach — to spend the rest of the night in the blockhouse until morning when we turn them over to the constables.

I said to Nicky Ffolkes: "There is a sound head on you, Nicky Ffolkes." I hitched my sodden trousers at my waist and looked towards where the hotel stands below the brow of the hill.

"We will go over there at the turn of the night, two o'clock say, and catch the good Squire ~~when~~ on his beach," I said.

But Nicky is shaking his head wisely at me. "No. No, labe, foolishness. How does Groves knows we will not be out on our nets at that time, too? No, man. He will do it ~~earl~~ early. We should be there by nine o'clock say. Nine, sharp, you and me will leave Boscobel and descend on his beach like a pair of ~~x~~ cats, eh, labe, boy? Then we wait to see them off. You and me alone. We will not want others with us to make a noise and warn them off. Just you and me alone, Sergeant labe. Then, when they are gone, we go for the lads to await their return, eh?"

His giggle was a thing for which I had no use. But I will not ask for his papers. Nicky has grown into a useful man.

CHAPTER 30

The rain-head had burst its ~~fit~~ first fury and had settled into a steady drizzle. Thus it would go for the best of a fortnight, sprinkling a bounty for the farmers o' the island for the crops planted in October month. It is a good and blessed arrangement and worthy of thanksgiving. Perhaps Charlie Cotton had this in mind. For as I strode past the blockhouse, I hear him a-leading the lads in practice for a harvest hymn.

"Fair waved the golden corn in Canaan's blessed land" Charlie Cotton gave out. In my mind, I could see the lift of Johnny M'Cook's fingers as he called to the sopranos to come in on the note, holding down the basses with the spread of his left hand so they rolled with the soft thunderings of the sea when it swells to the day-cloud at dawn.

"When full of joy some shining morn, Went forth the reaper band" came from Charlie Cotton again, his tongue lingering over the words from the Anglican hymnal.

The harmony reaches out towards me now as the altos and silvery tenors give themselves over to Johnny M'Cook, to be moulded ~~into~~ with the others into the shape of worship which Brother Cotton had put into the words.

I walked by, bareheaded in the rain, down past the line of houses. Behind the doors which have been closed against the weather, I heard the women's voices singing their own home hymns. Behind closed doors is all of Boscobel tonight, save for Iaban Daniels. I must pace up and down in the wet, not caring to be under the behaviour of any roof tonight; not caring to be in the light and joy of peaceable people. Let nine o'clock come. Then I will rouse them from their hymn singing with such a call as will lift the violence in them.

There is no light in my own house. Cobina sits in the dark. There is no light in Deborah Black's either. Wonder --- I am a-wondering whether my friend, Mr. Nicky Ffolkes, visits with the widow tonight. Aie --- strange company comes to a man when he slips his old anchor.

I had been pacing back and forth for some time before Nicky appeared at my side. He came out of the night from somewhere behind me and said: "Time now, Iabe. We will move down to Squire Groves."

There was an edge in his voice which told he had not won any new courage with the new manhood he had ^{gained with his marriage} ~~wrested from the widow's bed~~. My Nicky is still a privy rat and I should wonder that he has not cowered away tonight when he had the chance. Instead, he has come out into the rain and the dark, a-saying it is time for our patrol.

I grunted at him. We cut down to the road, taking the easy way to the crest of the hill. There, with the whiteness of the hotel standing up to us out of the dark, we moved from the road into the bush. We took a path through the weeping trees and I did not die from surprise when Nicky whispered tremblingly that we should walk lightly and put me in front of him.

At the edge of the clearing, topside the hotel, I halted when he rested his hand on my arm. There was nothing I could see, except the buildings and a small light at the

watchman's box at the construction. I shrugged away his hand impatiently.

"We cannot see the beach from here — we should cut across now," I said.

"Then let us go down on this side, Labe," he whispered. Fear made his voice tremble.

"Believe — I believe I saw someone just now."

He was pointing away from the light to the other side of the building. I spoke a bad word at his fears, but took the way he had pointed since he was my partner. We started across the clearing together, his shoulder hard on mine. He meant we should use the cover offered by the construction as we approached the beach; and I saw this was not a bad plan; although I knew it was not born out of his knowledge of scouting, but out of the presence of his cowardice. But he is a useful man to me. He is the one who will run back to call the lads when we see for sure that Groves has sent out his men with the dynamite.

We inclined nearer and nearer to the cover of the buildings, Nicky Ffolkes' shoulder hard on mine. I was about to speak rude words to him, telling him to cease his fears or he would be wetting — when I heard the scream.

~~It was a scream next to~~

It was a scream to tear a woman's throat. A cry of ~~grief and concern~~ ^{sound} which brought a sudden panic to me. I whipped my head towards the shadow of the building from which the cry ~~scream~~ had come, falling to my knees to put my gaze along the floor of the night so I would have whatever was about, standing out against what light there was. An old desert trick, this is. But all I had was the flash of a running figure before I sprawled to the ground from a blow on the back of my head.

Nicky would have had me, sure as death, had he not had to go to work sooner than he has bargained for; and had I not gone to my knees, throwing him from his aim. The blow did not do more than tilt me off my balance. I arose with his treachery taking the attention of all that had been boiling in me. I arose, and whirled like a fencing cat. Swiftly, I had his slim waist in my grasp. Then, sliding my hands into position, I had his weight disposed as I needed. So, I upped him.

I upped Nicky Ffolkes on the ~~scream~~ shriek with which he greeted the sight of his doom, bubbling in my eardrums. I reared back and threw him against the wall of the building. I cannot remember if I heard when he struck. He might have broken all his bones. I am not ^{at this moment,} a gentle man and ~~tonight~~; there was lunacy in me. I gave it no consideration. I turned from there with a sob bursting from my heart as I stumbled forward a foot or two before I straightened for my run in the direction Cobina had gone.

The mad howlings of another woman behind me, the blowing of whistles, the sudden flashings of several torches, the shouts of men's voices, were as happenings on the outer edges of a world in which all that mattered was Cobina fleeing before me, her voice crying on my name.

"Cobina! Cobina! COBINA!"

The thunder of my voice shook me on the run. I sobbed and whimpered a little far
fretfully at the insufficiency of my muscles to keep pace with my thoughts which were
far up ahead.

"Cobina! Cobina-O! COBINA-O!"

As a bell that is booming, is my voice.

A great~~x~~ fist hit in the small of my back and hurled me several paces forward
and for the second time this night, I was flat on my face. A pair of ~~ext~~ ^{staggered} explosions ~~hit~~
up the night and sent huge waves of hot air over me. I pushed to my feet again, my path
illuminated by the flames bursting from Squire Groves' new hotel. I saw now that Cobina had
fallen at the ~~x~~ edge of the bush, but had risen and torn on through, the wet leaves doing
a fiery dance in the reflection of the flames, as they closed behind her.

It was a race to be spoken of, if any had been there to applaud. But I ran it alone,
weeping as I ran. My woman was ahead; I could hear her stumbling progress in between the
times I stilled my callings of her name. Then, after awhile, I heard her no longer.

CHAPTER 31

I hunted through the trees, addressing the sodden roots of ackee and guinea, clawing at the slippery trunk of a mango, hammering their woods with my fists, in vexation that they could not speak whether she had passed this way, or whether she laid insensible and in what part of the forest. I burst out into the small clearing at the mouth of the cave on our line-fence — and I heard her calling my name.

Something of a cannon ball must have been in my progress into the mouth of the cave. The reflections from the burning buildings put a reddish light inside the cave, by which I saw Cobina on the ground. I fell to my knees, unashamed of my tears.

"Cobina — Cobina my darling — potoos my sweetness O!"

"Potoos — my Labe —!" she ~~existed faintly~~ whispered. Her voice, in our island word for sweetheart, outed whatever wrath might have been left in me. I sobbed as I found her lips and her hand touched the back of my head.

"I died, Cobina — I died when I could not find you."

"It is well again, Labe — well again. Together - we are - again."

Her words were weak and broken. A sharp fear tingled through me.

"Hurt you are, Cobina? Are you hurt?" I asked quickly.

"No - no - a little weak - from so much running."

I reached out my hands to lift her. "Come - I will take you home."

up to
"No - no - not!" Her words climbed ~~outside~~ a whispered shriek. "I - cannot go now!"

It opened on me like a midsummer's day — a blinding light of understanding.

"God — Lord God — no, Cobina!"

"It is - alright - Labe —" she burst out quickly, her hand touching my head.

"You are here, Labe — will be alright, I say!"

But there was no comfort she could give me. "No - no - God kill me — no!"

I was staring at her face and saw the poorly smile she made for my comfort.

"It is no' right, Labe, ~~xx~~ man, that there should be oathings at a birth." Her coive came steadier as the wave of pain passed and I believed there was laughter stirring among her words.

"But — Cobina —!"

I felt the tenseness of her body as another wave gave notice to her. I saw the tightening about her lips as she fought back a groan.

"It - it is the running back there — and the fall — puts my son in a hurry——"

She was talking to me so I would not be a scared little boy in the dark.

"It cannot be here, Cobina," I whispered blindly. "It can be death here!"

She smiled in the glow of the flames, licking her dried lips before she set them back against her teeth. The pain passed and she smiled again.

"I will not have you talking of death when I am a-thinking about the grandchildren I shall have in a day to come," she said.

"But — the pains!" I blurted.

"I will manage those. Even queens have pains, foolish Iabe —" I saw her move her head. "'Tis only this earth falling on my face which makes me remember that I am no' in a hospital room."

I wiped her face, trying to soften the roughness of my hand. Then, as I bent over her, I felt the blob of wet earth fall on the back of my neck — and terror washed over me. I twisted my head and looked up. The rock, which formed the back and roof of this cave, grinned at me from the edges where glistened the seeping water. A lifetime had passed since this great stone was left to guard ~~the~~ the roof of the cave, and now the acceptable year for it to fall had come. Just it would begin to ~~be~~ ^{be} now; but in falling to be dust, my woman and her unborn child would become onewith it. The ~~saxth~~ ^{rock} had rotted at the edges and would no longer support itself in the ~~fx~~ frame it had been given. Under stress of the weather, it would fall about now. I cried without thought.

I gave the cry because of the terror which washed over me. My dry womb should have nothing to be afraid of. Strength was enough in my limbs to leap out of this place before the falling rock made a tomb of it. But here, at my feet, my woman was in travail and could not budge/^{quickly} if the judgment horn had sounded. If I stooped and picked her up and walked to the ~~ex~~ mouth of the cave, perhaps I would be out before it fell; but perhaps not.

Another splash of earth and water fell on my upturned face. In swift moments, the frame of wet earth would ease with a soft sigh and the rock would fall. Tomorrow, the lads a-searching for us would see the ruin at the mouth of the cave and would dig into it for us. Aie — they would find us.

"There is a matter wrong Iabe?" Cobina cried at me.

I turned my face to her so that in the firelight she could see the easy grin at my mouth.

"There is something wrong that this place is no' a hospital room and you ~~taka~~ ^{taking} so long over the matter of a small birth," I said.

My feet were shoving quietly apart, ~~sing~~ sinking into a purchase with my legs a-straddle. I humped myself up slowly in the shall ow cave until I felt the rock hard at my shoulder blades. I kept my shoulder hard up to it, my hands ~~axkimboz~~ ^{akimbo}.

"It was a sinful thought which first put me up to Deborah," Cobina was saying, a tiny smile on her lips. "Strange that it took a sinful thought to bring us together again, Iabe," she said now, with wonder.

It was as if a pair of great hands were levelled, palms flat, on my shoulders, telling me with rough gentleness to be out of the way. The muscles in me were now steadied to ^{rude} meet this ~~znagx~~ behaviour as the stone settled on my shoulder.

"Dont talk but if you must, Cobina," I said. "The strength, you will be needing."

Her smile was not free of pain. "I will have all I need, Iabe. But I must tell

you of Deborah. Think you she was hurt back there?"

"This is a riddle you offer me, Cobina," I said, proud that my voice was steady. "How does Deborah come into this?"

"Labe, O," she said, a sad note in her voice, "here I talk and talk and it is not clear to you. Is it that youd have not found out that Deborah was there?"

"There? Where?"

"Eh, my man is a child. I should tell him things then."

Talk to me, Cobina. This way, perhaps I shall not feel what comes down on my shoulder.

"Then make it plain, my mother. Tell it plain as to a child."

She smiled at my puny joke. "I watched you walking the house line earlier tonight while Nicky whispered to Deborah."

"You knew about them?" I enquired with surprise.

"Laban, man, such things are not ~~hidden~~ hidden from other women. I saw the boast in Nicky's eye, and the laugh at his struttings in Deborah's. It made me to wonder, so it seemed right and sensible that I should play cunning while my man sulked."

"Then how you played cunning, Lady Devil?" I asked.

"Eh, I watched where nobody thought to watch, Laban. I sought to see why a blood mare should run with such a mean bred animal as Nicky." She paused a little. I thought it was due to a failing in her strength, but then she laughed.

"The joke, Cobina?" I asked.

"Poor Laban. Deborah played such devil tricks with you. Yet, 'tis these which made me suspect her more." She laughed a little again.

"Answer your own riddles, Cobina," I rallied her, glad that she laughed even a little.

"Ah, me. You never knew, Labe, that Deborah was spreading a rumour among the women that your anger at her was because she would not smile ~~on~~ on you?"

A bad word stood up in my mind.

"Or that she even said you suspected her of playing loose with Squire Groves?"

Wonder held my tongue for a space. "And they believed - that?" I asked, amazed.

"People believe anything bad of anyone who tries too hard to lead, Laban," Cobina said softly. "A leader should step out in front — alone. Let those who will follow, follow. But never he should ~~drag~~ drag them behind ~~them~~ him; for then, they will sit back on their haunches and wildly believe anything — if it will help them to bolster their resistance and justify their convictions that the fellow trying so hard up in front, is not really the leader he claims to be."

"Only foolish women would believe such a gossip!" I protested.

"Their husbands, whom they told, did too," my Cobina said soberly. "'Twas thus that Deborah sought to divide the camp."

So now, I knew why the division in the camp ^{had} come so swiftly. Some of the lads must ^{had} had thought my anger at Groves was due to Deborah Black, and not to any evidence I ^{had} had. It would have been better had I told them earlier, how I had seen the constable

VICTOR STAFFORD REID

at Page 4

P.O. BOX 129 - KINGSTON 10.
OR
ROCK HALL P.A., JAMAICA W.I.

I am

"A Lby"

~~My name is~~ Laban Daniels, Colour-sergeant, a Jamaican man, 32, son of a slave, ^{drafted} ~~was~~ soldier. I am a Sergeant of Foot who grew up in the Regiment. I fought in for the English King in ~~the~~ against Spaniards and Frenchmen and lastly took the WHIPPING the Americans gave us at New Orleans. ^{before} ~~the~~ Day 'lowed us out to take ship back to the Caribbean. Now ~~we are~~ ^{we are} glad and tired of wars, & England is giving up many of her armies. ~~and~~ We are the first to go, His Majesty's Loyal Black Regiment.

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