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The Heart's Highway

By MARY E. WILKINS

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CHAPTER I.

LIN 1682, when I was thirty years of age and Mistress Mary Cavendish just turned eighteen, she and I together one Sabbath morning in the month of April were riding to meeting in Jamestown. We were all alone except for the troop of black slaves straggling in the rear, blurring the road curiously with their black faces. It seemed happen that we rode in such wise, for Mistress Catherine Cavendish, the elder sister of Mistress Mary, and Madam Cavendish, her grandmother, usually rode with us—Madam Judith Cavendish, though more than seventy, sitting a horse as well as her granddaughters and looking, when viewed from the back, as young as they and being in that respect as well as others a wonder to the countryside.

But it happened today that Madam Cavendish had a touch of the rheumatism, that being an ailment to which the swampy estate of the country rendered those of advanced years somewhat liable, and had remained at home on her plantation of Drake Hill. Catherine, who was a most devoted granddaughter, had remained with her, although I suspected with some hesitation at allowing her young sister to go alone, except for me, the slaves having accounted no more company than our shadows.

Mistress Catherine Cavendish had looked at me after a fashion which I was at no loss to understand when I had stood aside to allow Mistress Mary to precede me in passing the door, but she had no cause for the look nor for the apprehension which gave rise to it. By reason of bearing always my burden upon my own back I was even more mindful of it than others were who had only the sight of it, whereas I had the sore weight and the evil aspect in my innocent soul. But it was to be borne easily enough by virtue of that natural resolution of a man which can make but a featherweight of the sorest ill if it be put in the balance against them. I was tutor to Mistress Mary Cavendish, and I had sailed from England to Virginia under circumstances of disgrace—being, indeed, a convict.

I answered not, yet kept at my distance, but at the next airy place she held in Merry Roger until I was forced to come up, and then she spoke again, and as she spoke a mocking bird was singing somewhere over on the bank of the river.

"Did you ever hear a sweeter bird's song than that, Master Wingfield?" said she, and I answered that it was very sweet, as indeed it was.

"What do you think the bird is mocking, Master Wingfield?" she said, and then I answered like a fool for the man who meets sweetness with his own bitterness and keeps it not locked in his own soul is a fool.

"I hope not," said I, "but he may be mocking the hope of the spring and he may be mocking the hope in the heart of man. The song seems too sweet for a mock of any bird which has no thought beyond this year's nest."

Mistress Mary's blue eyes, as helpless of comprehension as a flower, looked in mine.

"But there will be another spring, Master Wingfield," she said somewhat timidly, and then she added, and I knew that she was blushing under her mask at her own tenderness, and such beauty as hers, which should have all the silks and jewels of earth, and no questioning, for its adorning, was not given to selfish appropriation for her own needs, but rather considered of those of others first.

I rode a pace behind Mary Cavendish and never glanced her way, not needing to do so in order to see her, for I seemed to see her with a superior sort of vision, compounded partly of memory and partly of imagination. Of the latter I had, not to boast, though it may perchance be naught to boast, of being simply a kind of higher folly, a somewhat large allowance from my childhood. But that was not to be wondered at, whether it were to my credit or otherwise, since it was inherited from ancestors of much nobler fame and worthier parts than I, one of whom, though not in the direct line, the great Edward Maria Wingfield, the president of the first council of the Dominion of Virginia having written a book which was held to be notable.

This imagination for the setting forth and adorning of all common things and

Mary Cavendish and
Merry Roger



happenings and my woman's name of Maria, my whole name being Harry Maria Wingfield, through my ancestor had been a favorite of a great queen and so called for her honor, were all my inheritance at that date, all the estates belonging to the family having become the property of my younger brother John.

But when I speak of my possessing an imagination which could gild all the common things of life I meant not to include Mistress Mary Cavendish therein, for she needed not such gilding, being one of the most uncommon things in the earth, as uncommon as a great diamond which is rumored to have been seen by travelers in far India. My imagination when directed toward her was exercised only with the comprising and combining of various and especial beauties of different times and circumstances, when she was attired this way or that way, or as grave or gay, or sweetly helpless and clinging or full of daring. When, riding near her, I did not look at her, she seemed all of these in one, and I was conscious of such a great dazzle forcing my averted eyes that I seemed to be riding behind a star.

That morning Mistress Mary glowed and glittered and flamed in gorgeous apparel until she seemed to fairly overreach all the innocent young drowsy beauties of the spring with their hairy backs of hands, their mouths red with wine. But the captain, one

Calvin Tabor, stood before them with more assurance, as if he had some warrant for allowing such license among his men. He himself seemed not to have been drinking. Mistress Mary regarded them, holding in Merry Roger with her firm little hand, with the calm grace of a queen, although she was so young, and all the wild fire was gone from her blue eyes.

The sailors had ceased their song and stood with heavy eyes sheepishly averting

Captain Calvin Tabor



ed in their honest red English faces, but Captain Calvin Tabor spoke, bowing low, yet, as I said before, with as-sured eyes.

"I have the honor to salute you, misses." He spoke with a grace somewhat beyond his calling. He was a young man, as fair as a Dutchman and a giant in stature. He bore himself also curiously for one of his calling, bowing as steadily as a cavalier, with no trembling of the knees when he received and carrying his right arm as if it would grasp sword rather than cutlass if the need arose.

"Be good pleased! I see that you have brought the Golden Horn safely to port," said Mistress Mary, with a stately sweetness that covered to me, who knew her voice and its every note so well, an exultant ring.

"Yes, praised be God, Mistress Cavendish," answered Captain Tabor, "and with fine winds to swell the sails and no pirates."

"And is it my new scarlet cloak safe?" cried Mistress Mary, "and my tabby petticoats, and my blue broadcloth bodice, and my stockings, and my satin shoes and laces?"

I wondered somewhat at the length of the list, as not only Mistress Mary's wardrobe, but those of her grandmother and sister and many of the household supplies had to be purchased with the proceeds of the tobacco, and that brought but scanty returns owing to the navigation act, and scrupled not to say so, being secure in the new world, where disloyalty against kings could flourish without so much danger of the daring tongue being silenced at Tyburn.

It had been a hard task for many planters to purchase the necessities of life with the profits of their tobacco crop, since the trade with the Netherlands was prohibited by his most gracious majesty, King Charles II, for the supply, being limited to the English market, had so exceeded the demand that it brought but a beggarly price per pound.

Therefore I wondered, knowing that many of those articles of women's attire mentioned by Mistress Mary were of great value and brought great sums in London, and knowing, too, that the maid, though innocently fond of such things, to which she had, moreover, the natural right of youth and beauty such as hers, which should have all the silks and jewels of earth, and no questioning, for its adorning, was not given to selfish appropriation for her own needs, but rather considered of those of others first.

"They be the heaviest furbuckles that ever maiden wore," I thought as I watched them strain at the cases, both hauling and pulling, with many men to the ends to get them through the hatch, then ease them to the deck, with regard to the nipping of fingers. I noted, too, an order given somewhat privately by Captain Tabor to put out the pipes, and noted that not one man but had stowed his away.

There was a bridle path leading through the woods to Laurel Creek, and by that way, to my consternation, Mistress Mary ordered the sailors to carry the cases. Twas two miles inland, and I marveled much to hear her, for even should nearly all the crew go, the load would be a grievous one, it seemed to me. But to my mind Captain Calvin Tabor behaved as if the order was one which he expected.

Neither did the sailors grumble, but straightway loaded themselves with the cases raised upon a species of burdles which must have been provided for the purpose and proceeded down the bridle path, singing to keep up their hearts another song even more at odds with the day than the first.

The captain marched at the head of the sailors, and Mistress Mary and I followed slowly through the narrow aisle of green. I rode ahead, and often pulled my horse to one side, pressing his body hard against the trees that I might hold back branch which would have caught her headgear. All the way we never spoke. When we reached Laurel Creek, Mistress Mary drew the key from her pocket, which showed to me that the visit had been planned should the ship have arrived. She unlocked the door, and the sailors, no longer singing, for they were well nigh spent by the journey under the eyes of the governor in his pew and the governor's lady and all the burgesses and the churchwarden half starting up as if to exercise his authority and the parson swelling with a vast expanse of sable robes over the book, with no abashedness and yet no boldness nor unsmiling forwardness.

There was an innocent gayety on her face like a child's and an entire confidence in good will and loving charity for her tardiness which disarmed all.

She looked out from that gauze love of hers as she came up the aisle,

and she said I proceeded churchward on the highway.

When we were once alone together I spurred my horse up to hers and caught her bridle and rode alongside and spoke to her as if all the past were naught, and I with the right to which I had been born. It had come to that pass with me in those days that all the pride I had left was that of humility, but even that I was ready to give up for church, Master Wingfield," she said in a sweet, sharp voice.

"Go when you go, madam," said I.

"You have no need to wait for me," said she. "I prefer that you should not wait for me."

I made no reply, but reined in my horse, which was somewhat restive, with his head in a cloud of early flies.

"Do you not hear me, Master Wingfield?" said she. "Why do you not proceed to church and leave me to follow when I am ready?"

She had never spoken to me in such manner before, and she dared not look at me as she spoke.

"Go when you go, madam," said I again.

Then suddenly, with an impulse half of mischief and half of anger, she lashed out with her riding whip at my restive horse, and he sprang, and I had much ado to keep him from bolting. He danced to all the trees and bushes, and she had to pull Merry Roger sharply to one side, but finally I got the mastery of him and rode close to her again.

"Madam," said I, "I forbid you to do that again," and as I spoke I saw her little fingers twitch on her whip, but she dared not raise it. She laughed as a child who knows she is at fault and is scared to conceal it by a bravado of merriment. Then she said in the sweetest, wheedling tone that I had ever heard from her, and I had known her from childhood:

"But, Master Wingfield, 'tis broad daylight and there are no Indians here-

in their honest red English faces,

but Captain Calvin Tabor spoke, bowing low, yet, as I said before, with as-sured eyes.

"I have the honor to salute you, misses."

"Be good pleased! I see that you have brought the Golden Horn safely to port," said Mistress Mary, with a stately sweetness that covered to me, who knew her voice and its every note so well, an exultant ring.

"Yes, praised be God, Mistress Cavendish," answered Captain Tabor, "and with fine winds to swell the sails and no pirates."

"And is it my new scarlet cloak safe?" cried Mistress Mary, "and my tabby petticoats, and my blue broadcloth bodice, and my stockings, and my satin shoes and laces?"

I wondered somewhat at the length of the list, as not only Mistress Mary's wardrobe, but those of her grandmother and sister and many of the household supplies had to be purchased with the proceeds of the tobacco, and that brought but scanty returns owing to the navigation act, and scrupled not to say so, being secure in the new world, where disloyalty against kings could flourish without so much danger of the daring tongue being silenced at Tyburn.

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