

# OVER THE BORDER.

By WALTER BESANT.

"Since I have been of such great service," he said, "to Mathew Humble, he seems to think that he must not come so often as he did. A worthy man, however, and, perhaps, he's moved by the shame of taking assistance."

"Very likely, sir," I said, wondering what thing, short of the pillory, with the fugleman and his pike beside it, would move Mathew to shame. "It is strange that men should thus court the appearance of ingratitude. Did you ever, sir, borrow money, sums of money, of Mathew Humble?"

"Lend, you mean, Drusilla," he replied, turning red with sudden anger.

"No, sir, I said borrow. Pray pardon me, sir, I had no intention to offend."

"But you have offended, child." He puffed his cheeks, and became scarlet with sudden passion. "You have offended, I say. Not offended? Do you know what you have said? Have words meaning for you? Should I, Solomon Hetherington, Knight, known and venerated for my wealth from Tower Hill to Temple Bar, and from London Bridge to Westminster, stoop to borrow—to borrow, I say, paltry sums—for he could lend none but paltry sums—of a petty farmer? Not mean to offend! Zounds! the girl is mad."

"Pray, sir, forgive me. I am so ignorant that I knew not."

"To be sure, my dear, to be sure." He became as quickly appeased as he had been easily offended. "She does not know the difference between lending and borrowing. How should she?"

"And have you lent Mathew much, sir?"

"As for lending, I have. It is true, placed in his hands, from time to time, sums of money for which I have no security and have demanded no interest. But let that pass. I am so rich that I can afford to lose. Let it pass. And whether he pays them back or not, I do not greatly care."

"You gave this money to him," I said, "by drafts upon your bankers, I suppose."

"Why, certainly. You do not suppose that we London merchants, however rich we are, carry our money about with us. That would indeed be a return to barbarous times."

"Then there was the paper that you signed in the presence of an attested attorney and of Barbara, what was that, father?"

He laughed and made as if he were annoyed, though he appeared pleased.

"That, sir," he said, "a trifle—a mere trifle; let an old man have his little whims sometimes, Drusilla."

"But what was it, sir?" I persisted.

"Mathew would have me call it a mortgage," my father went on. "A mortgage, indeed! Because he wished his sister not to know. It was—ho, ho!—a deed of gift, child. That is all it was when I assigned certain lands to him. A deed of gift. We called it a mortgage, but I could not prevent showing Barbara by laughing—ha, ha!—that it was something very different. In addition to the money, I have bestowed upon him a field or so for the improvement of his farm. The gain to him is great; the loss is small to me. A mortgage, we agreed to call it. Ha! ha! Duty signed and witnessed. Your father, Drusilla, is not one to do things irregularly. Duty signed and witnessed."

This conversation made it quite clear to me that Mathew had contrived an abominable plot for our ruin. For the supposed deed of gift which my father wished to sign, he substituted a real deed of mortgage, in which my father was to acknowledge that he had received £200 for which he assigned his house for security, and without, as afterward appeared, any clause as to time allowed after notice should be given of foreclosing. How far the lawyer was concerned in this conspiracy I know not. Perhaps he was innocent. Indeed, I am now inclined to believe that he was innocent of any complicity. How far Barbara—perhaps she, too, was ignorant of this wickedness.

All that night I lay awake turning the thing over in my mind. I planned a thousand mad schemes. I would break into Mathew's room and steal the papers. I would go round the town and proclaim his wickedness. I would inveigle him into surrendering the papers by a false promise of marriage; I would seek the protection of Mr. Carnaby. All these things I considered, but none of them approved themselves on consideration, because a forger and a cheat will always be ready, if he escapes punishment for the first offense, to repeat his wickedness. Lastly, I resolved upon seeking Mathew at the mill, where I could talk to him at greater freedom.

I went there in the afternoon about 2 of the clock. When I lifted the latch I saw Barbara sitting on the settle near the window working. Before her, as usual, lay an open Bible. Strange! that one who was so hard and severe could draw no comfortable things from a book which should be full of comfort.

She shook her long lean forefinger at me. "I have known," she said, "for a long time the ruin that hangs over your house. I saw your father sign the mortgage. He laughed and called it a deed of gift, I remember. Ah! good money after bad. But my brother, who was foolish enough to lend the money, was not so foolish as to let it go without security. A deed of gift! He is cunning, your father, and would deceive me if he could, I doubt not." She turned over the leaves and found something that seemed to suit the occasion

and my demerits. "He hath made thy vine bare." My brother is full of compassion. "He hath made it clean bare." "Thy punishment hath begun."

"I wish to see your brother alone."

"Do you come in peace or in enmity? If in peace, you must first make submission, and confess your debts as regards the boy, who is surely dead. Nothing else will satisfy him. You can begin with me. Where is the boy?"

"What I have to say is with your brother, not with you."

"Go, then; but remember, when you are married, look not to be mistress here. I shall continue to be the mistress as I have always been. If you come in enmity, then you have me to battle with and not my brother alone. Two hundred pounds is not a sum to be given away for naught. Men are soft where a woman is concerned. Mathew may be a fool for your sake; you may look to wisele him out of his papers. Ah, but you shall not. He may be a fool, but I am behind. I am not soft; your eyes will not make a fool of me, Mistress Drusilla."

She then bade me go within, where I should find her brother. It was a cloudy afternoon, and, so early in the season, already growing dusk; Mathew was seated beside the fire, and on the table a stout jar containing Hollands which he had already begun to drink.

"Pretty Drusilla!" he cried, astonished.

"Have you brought the money?"

"No," I said. "I come to learn if you are in earnest or in jest."

"In jest?" Then he swore a loud oath. "See you, my lass; if that money is not paid next week, your house will be sold. Make your account of that. But if you comply with my conditions, the papers shall be torn up."

"Then I am come to tell you, Mathew, that although I shall not comply with your conditions, the cottage will not be sold."

"Why not?"

"Because, first of all, that mortgage is false. I know now what you did. You caused my father to sign one paper, believing it to be another. That is a fraud, and a hanging matter, Master Mathew."

He laughed, but uneasily, and he turned pale. Also, which is hardly worth the noting, he swore a great oath.

"It's a lie!" he cried. "Prove it!"

"I can prove it, when the time comes. Meantime, reflect on what I have said. It is a wicked and detestable plot. Reflect upon this and tremble."

He laughed again, but uneasily.

"There is another reason," I said. "Why will you not sell the cottage. It is this. You are afraid that Ralph may come home and demand an account."

Well, I can tell you this; that he will not come home just yet. But, if you do this thing as sure as I am alive, Mathew, I will write to him and tell him all. I shall tell him how you have persecuted me to marry you, not because you want me for your wife, and though you have had your answer a dozen times over, but because you want to plague and spite your cousin. I will tell him, next, how you have spread false reports about another will, and how you have whispered that he is turned highwayman. And lastly, I will tell him how you have practiced upon the kind heart of a poor demented man, and made him sign his name in testimony of your own foul plot and falsehood. I will not spare you. I will tell him all. I will beg him to return post haste, and to bring with him officers of justice. Then, indeed, you may look for no mercy, nor for anything short of the assizes and Newcastle jail."

I spoke so resolutely, though perhaps through ignorance I spoke foolishly, that I moved him and he trembled.

Yet he blustered. He said that all women are liars, as is very well known; that the boy was long since dead and buried; else why did he not return to claim the property? That, as for my story, he did not value it one farthing, while, as regards my accusation, he would laugh. In fact, he did laugh, but not mirthfully.

"Come, Drusilla," he said; "your father is welcome to the money, for aught I care. I do not desire to sell the cottage. Sit down and be friendly. Tell me all about the boy; and look, my lass"—his eyes were cunning indeed—"look you. Write to the boy; tell him, if you will, about the money. Tell him that I am willing not to press it if he will give reasonable assurance or security of his own in exchange. Let him, for instance, give me a mortgage on the mill, and let him, since he is so prosperous, pay the interest himself."

This was a trap into which I nearly fell. But I saw in time that he designed to find out in this way what he had to fear.

"I have told you," I said, "what I shall do."

"Ah! your story, I doubt, is but made up by woman's wit. Drusilla, you are a cunning baggage. Come, now, give over; stay here and be my wife; thou shalt be mistress in everything. As for Barbara, I am tired of her sour looks. She scolds all day. She may pack; she makes the meals uncomfortable. She may vanish; she stints the beer. We will keep house without her. She finds fault from morning to night. She is a"—

"You called me, Mathew?" Barbara suddenly opened the door and stood before us. Her eyes followed me as I went away with malignity difficult to describe, and Mathew, sinking back into his chair, feebly reached out his hand for the jar of Hollands.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE WISDOM OF THE STRONG MAN.

When I went home I told my mother that for the present, at least, we need not fear anything from Mathew. Of this I

was quite certain. My assurance that I would appeal to my cousin, the doubt where "the boy" might be—there was no reason, for instance, why he should not be at Newcastle, or at Rothbury, or at Hexham, or at Carlisle—to say nothing of my charge of fraud, went home to his guilty conscience. These things were sure, I thought, to deter a man not naturally courageous, although his conscience might be hardened, from tempting the vengeance of his injured cousin.

So far was I right, that for the whole of the spring and summer we had no further molestation from him, but continued in our quiet course, spending as little money as we could, yet looking forward to the time, now growing very near, when there would be no more left to spend. As for myself, I may truly declare that my faith was strong—I mean not the faith of a Christian, such as I ought to have held—but faith in my lover so far away. He would send me an answer. The answer, whatever it might be, would surely set all right.

Mathew not only ceased to persecute us, but he ceased to desire the conversation and company of my father. He came no more even to church, as if conscious of his wickedness, and ashamed to face honest people. He was rarely seen even in town, and he left me quite alone; so that I began to think that repentance had perhaps seized upon his soul. Alas! Repentance knocks in vain at the heart of such as Mathew.

Though, however, we saw him not, I heard, through my faithful fugleman, certain intelligence about him. Thus, he drank harder; he neglected his business; he quarreled daily with his sister, who reproached him for his drunken ways, and the neglect of his worldly affairs; also, she continually urged him to recover the £200 owed him, as she thought, by my father. She hungered and thirsted after this money, which, it seemed, she did not know that her brother possessed. Why had he concealed from her, she asked him with anger, that he had so much as £200, when he would not give her even money to buy things wanted for the house? Let him get the money back. Was he mad to let interest and all go? She let him have no peace; she longed to have this money; perhaps she longed for our ruin as well. Then she constantly threw in her brother's teeth the fact that if the boy was not dead and should return, if, in fact, my story was true, he would find the books and accounts in such confusion as might lead to their ruin. She wanted to know what truth there was in the reports, once so industriously spread, about a second will. In fact, she led the wretched man a dog's life, having a tongue sharper than a sword and more dreadful than a fiery serpent. But, as concerning the things she said of Ralph, I could have desired nothing better, because it kept alive in Mathew's breast the wholesome fear of his cousin's return. So long as that lasted we were safe. We should have continued in safety, because that fear did not die away, but rather increased day by day, save for the instigation, as I cannot but believe, of the evil one, and the concoction of a design even more wicked than that of the mortgage. I suppose the plot was conceived in the spring or summer, but it was not until the late autumn that it was attempted. The way of it was as follows (I do no harm, I trust, by speak-

ing openly of a traffic which, as everybody knows, is conducted almost openly all over the northern counties of England and the southern counties of Scotland).

I have mentioned one Daniel, or Dan Gedge, always called the Strong Man, because he was like Hercules, the fabled Greek, for bodily strength, who lodged with Sailor Nan. He professed to make a living out of his strong arms and legs. He went to fairs, and was seen on market days in all the towns of Northumberland, Durham and Carlisle, performing great feats for wagers, or for money laid down. He was a man standing over six feet, with legs and arms of surprising stoutness, a square red face and a kindly eye. Despite his strength he was peaceful and the softest hearted of mankind. Now, though he pretended to live by the exhibition of his strength, which I believe was the reason why the vicar called him Milo, it was very well known everywhere that he had another and a more important source of profit. This was in the running of "stuff" across the Border, a business which demands, as everybody knows, much caution, with knowledge of the country and powers of endurance. The "stuff" consists generally of brandy, lace, silk and Geneva. Salt is also smuggled across, but a better profit is made out of the former articles, which are less in bulk and more easily concealed. There are many reasons why Warkworth should be a convenient spot for the illicit trade. First, it lies two miles up the river, and has many safe hiding places, so that a cargo once landed at the mouth of the Coquet may be safely and speedily carried up the river and be stowed where it is judged safe; for all along the steep banks there are spots cleverly designed by Nature for the convenient storage of valuable packages. Not a spear of the thick hanging woods beside the banks, where enough Geneva and Hollands may be stored to supply London or a year, there is the Hermitage, whose lumber chamber I have myself seen packed full of silken bales waiting for an opportunity, while in the castle itself there are vaults, dungeons, passages and secret chambers, known only to the fugleman. Here, little suspected by my Lord of Northumberland, enough brandy might be stored to supply the county (which is a thirsty one) for a dozen years. The Border is not, to be sure, so near as it is higher up the coast; but, on the other

and, the lookout and watch kept by the gaugers cannot be by any means so vigilant and close as where the county runs to the north; while more than half the run takes place over the wild moors and pathless slopes of the Cheviots, a place in which the excise people find it difficult indeed to discover or to stop a run made by men who know the country. They have a service of ponies for the work, little, hardy, sure footed creatures, who carry the ankers, kegs and hales slung across their backs, and can be trusted to make the whole thirty-five miles from Warkworth to the Border in a single night, that is, in seven or eight hours, the drivers walking or riding beside them.

Most of the farmers and craftsmen of Warkworth take a share in these risks and profits; one or two of them—of whom Mathew was one—often accompany and lead the expedition. Everybody knows beforehand when a run is arranged; many in the town know the very night when it will take place, the road chosen and the value of the stuff. There is so much sympathy with this work, on both sides of the Border, and so many partners in the venture, that information is never given to the excise, and hiding places are found everywhere, with the help and connivance of the most innocent looking plowboy and the most demure country lass.

Now one morning—it was in November, when the days have already become short, and the nights are long and dark, Dan Gedge got up from his sleeping bench, or cupboard in the wall, about 8 or a little after, calling lustily for small beer, of which he drank a quart or so as a stay to his stomach before breakfast. Then he dressed and came forth to the door with the mug in his hand.

Sailor Nan was already seated on her stone, pipe in mouth, and three cornered hat on her head. She had taken her breakfast, and now sat, regardless of the raw, cold air—for all the winds that blow were the same to her—looking up and down the street, in which nothing as yet was moving, though the blacksmith's apprentice across the road had lit the fire, and the cheerful breath of the bellows made one feel warm.

"Fugleman and me," said Dan, yawning, "fugleman and me, we was rowing up and down from Ambie most all night."

"What is the run?" asked Nan, who



"What is the run?"

needed no other explanation; "and who's in it?"

"Mathew Humble is in it for one," said Dan. "Going with it himself, he is, this journey. Ho, ho! Folks will talk of this run when they come to hear of it. The fugleman thinks he knows. But he don't; no, he don't know. He's not to be trusted. I'm the only one who knows. Ay, a rare run it will be, too—out of the common this run will be. Folks will lift up their heads when they hear of this night's work."

"What is it, Dan? Lace belike?"

He shook his stupid head and laughed.

"How could Mathew have been such a fool as to trust him?"

"Belike there's lace in it, and silk in it, and brandy in it. There's always them things. But there's more, Nan—there's more."

"What more, Dan?"

"Fugleman, he'll laugh when he hears the news. He's helping in the job, and he don't know nothing about it; only Mathew and me knows what that job is. Mathew and me—and one other."

"Who is the other, Dan? And what is the job?"

He shook his head and buried it for safety in the pewter pot.

"Mathew Humble," he said, "is a masterful man."

"What is the job?" asked Nan, feeling curiosity slowly awaken.

"It is a job," replied Dan, "which can't be told unto women."

"Why, ye lubber," she sprang to her feet and shook her fist in the Strong Man's face, so that he started back; "lubber and land lubber, you dare to call me a woman—captain of the foretop. Now, let me hear what this job is that I am not to be told. Out with it or"—I omit the garish of her discourse, which consisted of sea oaths.

"Mathew Humble did say"—the Strong Man began. But strong men are always like babies in the hands of a woman.

"Vast there, Dan," said Nan; "d'ye think I value your job nor want to know what it is—a rope's end? But that you should refuse to tell it to me, you ship-met—that's what galls. And after yester forenoon's salsmagundi?"

This accusation of ingratitude cut poor Dan to the quick. In the matter of sea pie, lobscouse and salsmagundi (which is a mess of salt beef, onions, potatoes, pepper, oil and vinegar, the whole fried to make a toothsome compound) Sailor Nan

was more than a mother to him. "Twenty years aloft," continued Nan, in deep disgust; "from boy to captain of the foretop, and from Cape Horn to the Narrow Seas and Copenhagen, and to be sold by a land swab, who never so much as smelt blue water, that I'm a woman!"

"O' course," said Dan feebly, "I didn't really mean it."

"Didn't mean it? Why—there! What is it, then? Is it piracy or murder?"

He shook his head.

"Look ye, Nan. It won't signify, not a button, telling you. I said to myself, at the beginning, 'Nan won't spoil sport,' and it's only a girl."

Only a girl! Nan pricked up her ears. "As if I cared about girls," she said carelessly.

"Only a girly. It's Miss Drusy—that's all. You see she's been longing to run away with Mathew and marry him, for months. Longing she has, having took a fancy for Mathew, which is a strange thing, come to think of it, and she so young. But women are—Ay, ay, Nan, I know. You see I always thought she was saying up for Ralph Embleton. But Mathew, he says that's nonsense. Well—she all this time longing to marry him, and her mother won't hear it—no chance till now. So it's fixed for to-night. What a run! Lace, and brandy, and Geneva, and a girl."

"Oh—well; I don't care. Go on, Dan, if you like."

He then proceeded to explain that Mathew had arranged for a pony to be saddled in readiness; that the signal agreed upon between the girl and Mathew was a message from the castle carried by a certain boy named Cuddy, pretending to come from the fugleman, who was to be kept out of the way, employed at the Hermitage, where the stuff was bestowed; the boy was to say that the fugleman was ill. On receiving this message the girl would make an excuse to run up to the castle where she would mount the pony, and so ride off with Mathew and be married over the Border. To keep up appearances, she went on—this soft headed giant—it had been arranged that the young woman was to scream and struggle at first, and that Dan should lift her into the saddle, and, if necessary, hold her on. Once across the Border they would be married without so much as a jump over the broomstick.

Nan slowly rose.

"I'll get you some more beer, Dan," she said.

She went indoors and poured about three-fourths of a pint of gin into a tankard which she filled up with strong ale, and brought out to her lodger with tender care.

"Drink that, Dan," she said; "it's good old stingo—none of your small beer. Drink it up; then you can put on your coat and go about your work."

He drank it off at a gulp, with every outward sign of satisfaction. Then he suddenly recoiled and caught at the door post.

"Go and put on your coat, Dan," she said, looking at him with a little anxiety. He disappeared. Nan heard one—two heavy falls, and nodded her head. Then she followed into the room and found the strong man lying upon the floor, on his back, with his mouth open and his eyes shut. She dragged a blanket over him, and went out again to sit on her stone with as much patience as a spider in October. She sat there all the morning quiet as if she was on watch. About 2:30 in the afternoon there came slowly down the street no other than Mathew Humble himself.

"Where is Daniel?" he asked.

Nan pointed to the door.

"He's within, fast asleep. He came home late last night. I dare say he'll sleep on now, if you let him alone, till evening."

"Have you—has he—talked with you this morning?" Mathew's eyes were restless, and his cheek twitched, a sign of prolonged anxiety or much drink.

"Nay, what should he say to me, seeing that he came home in the middle of the night as drunk as a pig? Let him bide, Master Mathew. What do you want him for? Is there a run?"

He nodded.

"She held out her hand. 'I'll drink luck to the venture,' she said, taking the shilling which he gave her for luck. 'Thank you; this is sure to bring you luck. You'll say so to-morrow morning. Remember that you crossed old Nan's palm with a shilling. A lucky run! Such a run as you never had before. A run that will surprise the people.'

"Ha! ha!" said Mathew, pleased with the prophecy. "It shall surprise them."

"And how do you get on with Miss Drusy? So she said nay. She will and she won't—ay, ay—I know their tricks. Yes, a fine girl, and spilling, as one may say, for a husband. Take care, Master Mathew. Better men than you have lost by shillyshally."

"Why, what would you have me do, Nan?"

"Do? A man o' mettle shouldn't ask. Capture the prize; pipe all hands and alongside; then off with her; show a clean pair of heels; clap all sail."

"I believe, Nan," Mathew said, "that you are a witch."

"I believe," she replied, "that after your run you'll be sure I am. Go in and wake Dan."

The fellow, roused rudely, sat up and rubbed his heavy eyes.

"You can't be drunk still, man," said Mathew, "seeing it's half-past 2 in the afternoon."

TO BE CONTINUED.

Durham's steamery and tobacco factory and the tobacco factories of Cameron & Co and Cameron & Sizer were destroyed by fire at Richmond, Va.