

To Have and To Hold

by

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I. In Which I Throw Ambs-Ace

THE work of the day being over, I sat down upon my doorstep, pipe in hand, to rest awhile in the cool of the evening. Death is not more still than is this Virginian land in the hour when the sun has sunk away, and it is black beneath the trees, and the stars brighten slowly and softly, one by one. The birds that sing all day have hushed, and the horned owls, the monster frogs, and that strange and ominous fowl (if fowl it be, and not, as some assert, a spirit damned) which we English call the whippoorwill, are yet silent. Later the wolf will howl and the panther scream, but now there is no sound. The winds are laid, and the restless leaves droop and are quiet. The low lap of the water among the reeds is like the breathing of one who sleeps in his watch beside the dead.

I marked the light die from the broad bosom of the river, leaving it a dead man's hue. Awhile ago, and for many evenings, it had been crimson, - a river of blood. A week before, a great meteor had shot through the night, blood-red and bearded, drawing a slow-fading fiery trail across the heavens; and the moon had risen that same night blood-red, and upon its disk there was drawn in shadow a thing most marvelously like a scalping knife. Wherefore, the following day being Sunday, good Mr. Stockham, our minister at Weyanoke, exhorted us to be on our guard, and in his prayer besought that no sedition or rebellion might raise its head amongst the Indian subjects of the Lord's anointed. Afterward, in the churchyard, between the services, the more timorous began to tell of divers portents which they had observed, and to recount old tales of how the savages distressed us in the Starving Time. The bolder spirits laughed them to scorn, but the women began to weep and cower, and I, though I laughed too, thought of Smith, and how he ever held the savages, and more especially that Opechancanough who was now their emperor, in a most deep distrust; telling us that the red men watched while we slept, that they might teach wiliness to a Jesuit, and how to bide its time to a cat crouched before a mousehole. I thought of the terms we now kept with these heathen; of how they came and went familiarly amongst us, spying out our weakness, and losing the salutary awe which that noblest captain had struck into their souls; of how many were employed as hunters to bring down deer for lazy masters; of how, breaking the law, and that not secretly, we gave them knives and arms, a soldier's bread, in exchange for pelts and pearls; of how their emperor was forever sending us smooth messages; of how their lips smiled and their eyes frowned. That afternoon, as I rode home through the lengthening shadows, a hunter, red-brown and naked, rose from behind a fallen tree that sprawled across my path, and made offer to bring me my meat from the moon of corn to the moon of stags in exchange for a gun. There was scant love between the savages and myself, - it was answer enough when I told him my name. I left the dark figure standing, still as a carved stone, in the heavy shadow of the trees, and, spurring my horse (sent me from home, the year before, by my cousin Percy), was soon at my house, - a poor and rude one, but pleasantly set upon a slope of green turf, and

girt with maize and the broad leaves of the tobacco. When I had had my supper, I called from their hut the two Paspahugh lads bought by me from their tribe the Michaelmas before, and soundly flogged them both, having in my mind a saying of my ancient captain's, namely, "He who strikes first oft-times strikes last."

Upon the afternoon of which I now speak, in the midsummer of the year of grace 1621, as I sat upon my doorstep, my long pipe between my teeth and my eyes upon the pallid stream below, my thoughts were busy with these matters, - so busy that I did not see a horse and rider emerge from the dimness of the forest into the cleared space before my palisade, nor knew, until his voice came up the bank, that my good friend, Master John Rolfe, was without and would speak to me.

I went down to the gate, and, unbarring it, gave him my hand and led the horse within the inclosure.

"Thou careful man!" he said, with a laugh, as he dismounted. "Who else, think you, in this or any other hundred, now bars his gate when the sun goes down?"

"It is my sunset gun," I answered briefly, fastening his horse as I spoke.

He put his arm about my shoulder, for we were old friends, and together we went up the green bank to the house, and, when I had brought him a pipe, sat down side by side upon the doorstep.

"Of what were you dreaming?" he asked presently, when we had made for ourselves a great cloud of smoke. "I called you twice."

"I was wishing for Dale's times and Dale's laws."

He laughed, and touched my knee with his hand, white and smooth as a woman's, and with a green jewel upon the forefinger.

"Thou Mars incarnate!" he cried. "Thou first, last, and in the meantime soldier! Why, what wilt thou do when thou gettest to heaven? Make it too hot to hold thee? Or take out letters of marque against the Enemy?"

"I am not there yet," I said dryly. "In the meantime I would like a commission against - your relatives."

He laughed, then sighed, and, sinking his chin into his hand and softly tapping his foot against the ground, fell into a reverie.

"I would your princess were alive," I said presently.

"So do I," he answered softly. "So do I." Locking his hands behind his head, he raised his quiet face to the evening star. "Brave and wise and gentle," he mused. "If I did not think to meet her again, beyond that star, I could not smile and speak calmly, Ralph, as I do now."

"'T is a strange thing," I said, as I refilled my pipe. "Love for your brother-in-arms, love for your commander if he be a commander worth having, love for your horse and dog, I understand. But wedded love! to tie a burden around one's neck because 't is pink and white, or clear bronze, and shaped with elegance! Faugh!" "Yet I came with half a mind to persuade thee to that very burden!" he cried, with another laugh.

"Thanks for thy pains," I said, blowing blue rings into the air.

"I have ridden to-day from Jamestown," he went on. "I was the only man, i' faith, that cared to leave its gates; and I met the world - the bachelor world - flocking to them. Not a mile of the way but I encountered Tom, Dick, and Harry, dressed in

their Sunday bravery and making full tilt for the city. And the boats upon the river! I have seen the Thames less crowded."

"There was more passing than usual," I said; "but I was busy in the fields, and did not attend. What's the lodestar?"

"The star that draws us all, - some to ruin, some to bliss ineffable, - woman."

"Humph! The maids have come, then?"

He nodded. "There's a goodly ship down there, with a goodly lading."

"Videlicet, some fourscore waiting damsels and milkmaids, warranted honest by my Lord Warwick," I muttered.

"This business hath been of Edwyn Sandys' management, as you very well know," he rejoined, with some heat. "His word is good: therefore I hold them chaste. That they are fair I can testify, having seen them leave the ship."

"Fair and chaste," I said, "but meanly born."

"I grant you that," he answered. "But after all, what of it? Beggars must not be choosers. The land is new and must be peopled, nor will those who come after us look too curiously into the lineage of those to whom a nation owes its birth. What we in these plantations need is a loosening of the bonds which tie us to home, to England, and a tightening of those which bind us to this land in which we have cast our lot. We put our hand to the plough, but we turn our heads and look to our Egypt and its fleshpots. 'T is children and wife - be that wife princess or peasant - that make home of a desert, that bind a man with chains of gold to the country where they abide. Wherefore, when at midday I met good Master Wickham rowing down from Henricus to Jamestown, to offer his aid to Master Bucke in his press of business to-morrow, I gave the good man Godspeed, and thought his a fruitful errand and one pleasing to the Lord."

"Amen," I yawned. "I love the land, and call it home. My withers are unwrung."

He rose to his feet, and began to pace the greensward before the door. My eyes followed his trim figure, richly though sombrely clad, then fell with a sudden dissatisfaction upon my own stained and frayed apparel.

"Ralph," he said presently, coming to a stand before me, "have you ever an hundred and twenty pounds of tobacco in hand? If not, I" -

"I have the weed," I replied. "What then?"

"Then at dawn drop down with the tide to the city, and secure for thyself one of these same errant damsels."

I stared at him, and then broke into laughter, in which, after a space and unwillingly, he himself joined. When at length I wiped the water from my eyes it was quite dark, the whippoorwills had begun to call, and Rolfe must needs hasten on. I went with him down to the gate.

"Take my advice, - it is that of your friend," he said, as he swung himself into the saddle. He gathered up the reins and struck spurs into his horse, then turned to call back to me: "Sleep upon my words, Ralph, and the next time I come I look to see a farthingale behind thee!"

"Thou art as like to see one upon me," I answered.

Nevertheless, when he had gone, and I climbed the bank and reentered the house, it was with a strange pang at the cheerlessness of my hearth, and an angry and unreasoning impatience at the lack of welcoming face or voice. In

God's name, who was there to welcome me? None but my hounds, and the flying squirrel I had caught and tamed. Groping my way to the corner, I took from my store two torches, lit them, and stuck them into the holes pierced in the mantel shelf; then stood beneath the clear flame, and looked with a sudden sick distaste upon the disorder which the light betrayed. The fire was dead, and ashes and embers were scattered upon the hearth; fragments of my last meal littered the table, and upon the unwashed floor lay the bones I had thrown my dogs. Dirt and confusion reigned; only upon my armor, my sword and gun, my hunting knife and dagger, there was no spot or stain. I turned to gaze upon them where they hung against the wall, and in my soul I hated the piping times of peace, and longed for the camp fire and the call to arms.

With an impatient sigh, I swept the litter from the table, and, taking from the shelf that held my meagre library a bundle of Master Shakespeare's plays (gathered for me by Rolfe when he was last in London), I began to read; but my thoughts wandered, and the tale seemed dull and oft told. I tossed it aside, and, taking dice from my pocket, began to throw. As I cast the bits of bone, idly, and scarce caring to observe what numbers came uppermost, I had a vision of the forester's hut at home, where, when I was a boy, in the days before I ran away to the wars in the Low Countries, I had spent many a happy hour. Again I saw the bright light of the fire reflected in each well-scrubbed crock and pannikin; again I heard the cheerful hum of the wheel; again the face of the forester's daughter smiled upon me. The old gray manor house, where my mother, a stately dame, sat ever at her tapestry, and an imperious elder brother strode to and fro among his hounds, seemed less of home to me than did that tiny, friendly hut. To-morrow would be my thirty-sixth birthday. All the numbers that I cast were high. "If I throw amb-ace," I said, with a smile for my own caprice, "curse me if I do not take Rolfe's advice!"

I shook the box and clapped it down upon the table, then lifted it, and stared with a lengthening face at what it had hidden; which done, I diced no more, but put out my lights and went soberly to bed.

II. In Which I Meet Master Jeremy Sparrow

MINE are not dicers' oaths. The stars were yet shining when I left the house, and, after a word with my man Diccon, at the servants' huts, strode down the bank and through the gate of the palisade to the wharf, where I loosed my boat, put up her sail, and turned her head down the broad stream. The wind was fresh and favorable, and we went swiftly down the river through the silver mist toward the sunrise. The sky grew pale pink to the zenith; then the sun rose and drank up the mist. The river sparkled and shone; from the fresh green banks came the smell of the woods and the song of birds; above rose the sky, bright blue, with a few fleecy clouds drifting across it. I thought of the day, thirteen years before, when for the first time white men sailed up this same river, and of how noble its width, how enchanting its shores, how gay and sweet their blooms and odors, how vast their trees, how strange the painted savages, had seemed to us, storm-tossed adventurers, who thought we had found a very paradise, the Fortunate Isles at least. How quickly were we undeceived! As I lay back in the stern with half-shut eyes and tiller idle in my hand, our many tribulations and our few joys passed in review before me. Indian attacks; dissension and strife amongst our rulers; true men persecuted, false knaves elevated; the weary search for gold and the South Sea; the horror of the pestilence and the blacker horror of the Starving Time; the arrival of the *Patience* and *Deliverance*, whereat we wept like children; that most joyful Sunday morning when we followed my Lord de la Warre to church; the coming of Dale with that stern but wholesome martial code which was no stranger to me who had fought under Maurice of Nassau; the good times that followed, when bowl-playing gallants were put down, cities founded, forts built, and the gospel preached; the marriage of Rolfe and his dusky princess; Argall's expedition, in which I played a part, and Argall's iniquitous rule; the return of Yeardley as Sir George, and the priceless gift he brought us, - all this and much else, old friends, old enemies, old toils and strifes and pleasures, ran, bitter-sweet, through my memory, as the wind and flood bore me on. Of what was before me I did not choose to think, sufficient unto the hour being the evil thereof. The river seemed deserted: no horsemen spurred Along the bridle path on the shore; the boats were few and far between, and held only servants or Indians or very old men. It was as Rolfe had said, and the free and able-bodied of the plantations had put out, posthaste, for matrimony. Chaplain's Choice appeared unpeopled; Piersey's Hundred slept in the sunshine, its wharf deserted, and but few, slow-moving figures in the tobacco fields; even the Indian villages looked scant of all but squaws and children, for the braves were gone to see the palefaces buy their wives. Below Paspahugh a cockleshell of a boat carrying a great white sail overtook me, and I was hailed by young Hamor.

"The maids are come!" he cried. "Hurrah!" and stood up to wave his hat.

"Humph!" I said. "I guess thy destination by thy hose. Are they not 'those that were thy peach-colored ones'?"

"Oons! yes!" he answered, looking down with complacency upon his tarnished finery. "Wedding garments, Captain Percy, wedding garments!"

I laughed. "Thou art a tardy bridegroom. I thought that the bachelors of this quarter of the globe slept last night in Jamestown."

His face fell. "I know it," he said ruefully; "but my doublet had more rents than slashes in it, and Martin Tailor kept it until cockcrow. That fellow rolls in tobacco; he hath grown rich off our impoverished wardrobes since the ship down yonder passed the capes. After all," he brightened, "the bargaining takes not place until toward midday, after solemn service and thanksgiving. There's time enough!" He waved me a farewell, as his great sail and narrow craft carried him past me.

I looked at the sun, which truly was not very high, with a secret disquietude; for I had had a scurvy hope that after all I should be too late, and so the noose which I felt tightening about my neck might unknot itself. Wind and tide were against me, and an hour later saw me nearing the peninsula and marveling at the shipping which crowded its waters. It was as if every sloop, barge, canoe, and dugout between Point Comfort and Henricus were anchored off its shores, while above them towered the masts of the Marmaduke and Furtherance, then in port, and of the tall ship which had brought in those doves for sale. The river with its dancing freight, the blue heavens and bright sunshine, the green trees waving in the wind, the stir and bustle in the street and market place thronged with gayly dressed gallants, made a fair and pleasant scene. As I drove my boat in between the sloop of the commander of Shirley Hundred and the canoe of the Nansemond werowance, the two bells then newly hung in the church began to peal and the drum to beat. Stepping ashore, I had a rear view only of the folk who had clustered along the banks and in the street, their faces and footsteps being with one accord directed toward the market place. I went with the throng, jostled alike by velvet and dowlas, by youths with their estates upon their backs and naked fantastically painted savages, and trampling the tobacco with which the greedy citizens had planted the very street. In the square I brought up before the Governor's house, and found myself cheek by jowl with Master Pory, our Secretary, and Speaker of the Assembly.

"Ha, Ralph Percy!" he cried, wagging his gray head, "we two be the only sane younkens in the plantations! All the others are horn-mad!"

"I have caught the infection," I said, "and am one of the bedlamites."

He stared, then broke into a roar of laughter. "Art in earnest?" he asked, holding his fat sides. "Is Saul among the prophets?"

"Yes," I answered. "I dined last night, - yea or no; and the 'yea' - plague on 't - had it."

He broke into another roar. "And thou callest that bridal attire, man! Why, our cow-keeper goes in flaming silk to-day!"

I looked down upon my suit of buff, which had in truth seen some service, and at my great boots, which I had not thought to clean since I mired in a swamp, coming from Henricus the week before; then shrugged my shoulders.

"You will go begging," he continued, wiping his eyes. "Not a one of them will so much as look at you."

"Then will they miss seeing a man, and not a popinjay," I retorted. "I shall not break my heart."

A cheer arose from the crowd, followed by a crashing peal of the bells and a louder roll of the drum. The doors of the houses around and to right and left of the square swung open, and the company which had been quartered overnight upon the citizens began to emerge. By twos and threes, some with hurried steps and downcast eyes, others more slowly and with free glances at the staring men, they gathered to the centre of the square, where, in surplice and band, there awaited them godly Master Bucke and Master Wickham of Henricus. I stared with the rest, though I did not add my voice to theirs.

Before the arrival of yesterday's ship there had been in this natural Eden (leaving the savages out of the reckoning) several thousand Adams, and but some threescore Eves. And for the most part, the Eves were either portly and bustling or withered and shrewish housewives, of age and experience to defy the serpent. These were different. Ninety slender figures decked in all the bravery they could assume; ninety comely faces, pink and white, or clear brown with the rich blood showing through; ninety pair of eyes, laughing and alluring, or downcast with long fringes sweeping rounded cheeks; ninety pair of ripe red lips, - the crowd shouted itself hoarse and would not be restrained, brushing aside like straws the staves of the marshal and his men, and surging in upon the line of adventurous damsels. I saw young men, panting, seize hand or arm and strive to pull toward them some reluctant fair; others snatched kisses, or fell on their knees and began speeches out of Euphues; others commenced an inventory of their possessions, - acres, tobacco, servants, household plenishing. All was hubbub, protestation, frightened cries, and hysterical laughter. The officers ran to and fro, threatening and commanding; Master Pory alternately cried "Shame!" and laughed his loudest; and I plucked away a jackanapes of sixteen who had his hand upon a girl's ruff, and shook him until the breath was well-nigh out of him. The clamor did but increase.

"Way for the Governor!" cried the marshal. "Shame on you, my masters! Way for his Honor and the worshipful Council!"

The three wooden steps leading down from the door of the Governor's house suddenly blossomed into crimson and gold, as his Honor with the attendant Councilors emerged from the hall and stood staring at the mob below.

The Governor's honest moon face was quite pale with passion. "What a devil is this?" he cried wrathfully. "Did you never see a woman before? Where's the marshal? I'll imprison the last one of you for rioters!"

Upon the platform of the pillory, which stood in the centre of the market place, suddenly appeared a man of a gigantic frame, with a strong face deeply lined and a great shock of grizzled hair, - a strange thing, for he was not old. I knew him to be one Master Jeremy Sparrow, a minister brought by the Southampton a month before, and as yet without a charge, but at that time I had not spoken with him. Without word of warning he thundered into a psalm of thanksgiving, singing it at the top of a powerful and yet sweet and tender voice, and with a fervor and exaltation that caught the heart of the riotous crowd. The two ministers in the throng beneath took up the strain; Master Pory added a husky tenor, eloquent of much sack; presently we were all singing. The audacious suitors, charmed into rationality, fell back, and the broken line re-formed. The Governor and the

Council descended, and with pomp and solemnity took their places between the maids and the two ministers who were to head the column. The psalm ended, the drum beat a thundering roll, and the procession moved forward in the direction of the church.

Master Pory having left me, to take his place among his brethren of the Council, and the mob of those who had come to purchase and of the curious idle having streamed away at the heels of the marshal and his officers, I found myself alone in the square, save for the singer, who now descended from the pillory and came up to me.

"Captain Ralph Percy, if I mistake not?" he said, in a voice as deep and rich as the bass of an organ.

"The same," I answered. "And you are Master Jeremy Sparrow?"

"Yea, a silly preacher, - the poorest, meekest, and lowliest of the Lord's servitors."

His deep voice, magnificent frame, and bold and free address so gave the lie to the humility of his words that I had much ado to keep from laughing. He saw, and his face, which was of a cast most martial, flashed into a smile, like sunshine on a scarred cliff.

"You laugh in your sleeve," he said good-humoredly, "and yet I am but what I profess to be. In spirit I am a very Job, though nature hath fit to dress me as a Samson. I assure you, I am worse misfitted than is Master Yardstick yonder in those Falstaffian hose. But, good sir, will you not go to church?"

"If the church were Paul's, I might," I answered. "As it is, we could not get within fifty feet of the door."

"Of the great door, ay, but the ministers may pass through the side door. If you please, I will take you in with me. The pretty fools yonder march slowly; if we turn down this lane, we will outstrip them quite."

"Agreed," I said, and we turned into a lane thick planted with tobacco, made a detour of the Governor's house, and outflanked the procession, arriving at the small door before it had entered the churchyard. Here we found the sexton mounting guard.

"I am Master Sparrow, the minister that came in the Southampton," my new acquaintance explained. "I am to sit in the choir. Let us pass, good fellow."

The sexton squared himself before the narrow opening, and swelled with importance.

"You, reverend sir, I will admit, such being my duty. But this gentleman is no preacher; I may not allow him to pass."

"You mistake, friend," said my companion gravely. "This gentleman, my worthy colleague, has but just come from the island of St. Brandon, where he preaches on the witches' Sabbath: hence the disorder of his apparel. His admittance be on my head: wherefore let us by."

"None to enter at the west door save Councilors, commander, and ministers. Any attempting to force an entrance to be arrested and laid by the heels if they be of the generality, or, if they be of quality, to be duly fined and debarred from the purchase of any maid whatsoever," chanted the sexton.

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