

slapped it, nodded, and rose. "Well sir, I'll be going, — there be Miss Anthea in the garden yonder, and if she was to see me now there's no sayin' but I should be took a laughin' to think o' this 'ere hundred pound."

"Miss Anthea! — where?"

"Comin' through the rose-gardin. She be off to see old Mother Dibbin. They call Mother Dibbin a witch, an' now as she's down wi' the rheumatics there ain't nobody to look arter 'er, — 'cept Miss Anthea, — she'd ha' starved afore now if it 'adn't been for Miss Anthea, but Lord love your eyes, an' limbs, Mr. Belloo sir! Miss Anthea don't care if she's a witch, or fifty witches, not she! So good-night, Mr. Belloo sir, an' mum's the word!"

Saying which, Adam slapped his pocket again, nodded, winked, and went upon his way.

CHAPTER XI

Of the "Man with the Tiger Mark"

It is a moot question as to whether a curl can be more alluring when it glows beneath the fiery kisses of the sun, or shines demurely in the tender radiance of the moon. As Bellew looked at it now, — that same small curl that nodded and beckoned to him above Anthea's left ear, — he strongly inclined to the latter opinion.

"Adam tells me that you are going out, Miss Anthea."

"Only as far as Mrs. Dibbin's cottage, — just across the meadow."

"Adam also informs me that Mrs. Dibbin is a witch."

"People call her so."

"Never in all my days have I seen a genuine, old witch, — so I'll come with you, if I may?"

"Oh, this is a very gentle old witch, and she is neither humpbacked, nor does she ride a broom-stick, — so I'm afraid you'll be disappointed, Mr. Bellew."

"Then, at least, I can carry your basket, — allow me!" And so, in his quiet, masterful

fashion he took the basket from her arm, and walked on beside her, through the orchard.

“What a glorious night it is!” exclaimed Anthea suddenly, drawing a deep breath of the fragrant air, — “Oh! it is good to be alive! In spite of all the cares, and worries, life is very sweet!”

After this, they walked on some distance in silence, she gazing wistfully upon the beauties of the familiar world about her while he watched the curl above her ear until she, becoming aware of it all at once, promptly sent it back into retirement, with a quick, deft little pat of her fingers.

“I hope,” said Bellew at last, “I do sincerely hope that you ‘tucked up’ my nephew safe in bed, — you see —”

“Your nephew, indeed!”

“Our nephew, then; I ask because he tells me that he can’t possibly sleep unless you go to ‘tuck him up,’ — and I can quite believe it.”

“Do you know, Mr. Bellew, I’m growing quite jealous of you, he can’t move a step without you, and he is for ever talking, and lauding your numberless virtues!”

“But then — I’m only an uncle, after all, and if he talks of me to you, he talks of you to me, all day long.”

“Oh, does he!”

“And, among other things, he told me that I ought to see you when your hair is down, and all about you.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Anthea.

“Indeed, our nephew is much luckier than I, because I never had an aunt of my own to come and ‘tuck me up’ at night with her hair hanging all about her — like a beautiful cloak. So, you see, I have no boyish recollections to go upon, but I think I can imagine —”

“And what do you think of the Sergeant?” Anthea enquired, changing the subject abruptly.

“I like him so much that I am going to take him at his word, and call upon him at the first opportunity.”

“Did Aunt Priscilla tell you that he comes marching along regularly every day, at exactly the same hour?”

“Yes, — to see how the peaches are getting on!” nodded Bellew.

“For such a very brave soldier he is a dreadful coward,” said Anthea, smiling, “it has taken him five years to screw up courage enough to tell her that she’s uncommonly young for her age. And yet, I think it is just that diffidence that makes him so lovable. And he is so sim-

ple, and so gentle—in spite of all his war medals. When I am moody, and cross, the very sight of him is enough to put me in humour again.”

“Has he never—spoken to Miss Priscilla,—?”

“Never,—though, of course, she knows, and has done from the very first. I asked him once, why he had never told her what it was brought him so regularly,—to look at the peaches,—and he said, in his quick, sharp way: ‘Miss Anthea,—can’t be done, mam,—a poor, battered, old soldier,—only one arm,—no mam.’”

“I wonder if one could find just such another Sergeant outside Arcadia,” said Bellew, “I wonder!”

Now they were approaching a stile towards which Bellew had directed his eyes, from time to time, as, for that matter, curiously enough, had Anthea; but to him it seemed that it never would be reached, while to her, it seemed that it would be reached much too soon. Therefore she began to rack her mind trying to remember some gate, or any gap in the hedge that should obviate the necessity of climbing it. But, before she could recall any such gate, or gap, they were at the stile, and Bellew, leaping over,

had set down the basket, and stretched out his hand to aid her over. But Anthea, tall, and lithe, active and vigorous with her outdoor life, and used to such things from her infancy, stood a moment hesitating. To be sure, the stile was rather high, yet she could have vaulted it nearly, if not quite, as easily as Bellew himself, had she been alone. But then, she was not alone, moreover, be it remembered, this was in Arcadia of a mid-summer night. Thus, she hesitated, only a moment, it is true, for, seeing the quizzical look in his eyes that always made her vaguely rebellious,—with a quick, light movement, she mounted the stile, and there paused to shake her head in laughing disdain of his out-stretched hand; then—there was the sound of rending cambric, she tripped, and, next moment, he had caught her in his arms. It was for but a very brief instant that she lay, soft and yielding, in his embrace, yet she was conscious of how strong were the arms that held her so easily, ere they set her down.

“I beg your pardon!—how awkward I am!” she exclaimed, in hot mortification.

“No,” said Bellew, shaking his head, “it was a nail, you know, a bent, and rusty nail,—here, under the top bar. Is your dress much torn?”

"Oh, that is nothing, thank you!"

So they went on again, but now they were silent once more, and very naturally, for Anthea was mightily angry,—with herself, the stile, Bellew, and everything concerned; while he was thinking of the sudden, warm clasp of her arms, of the alluring fragrance of her hair, and of the shy droop of her lashes as she lay in his embrace. Therefore, as he walked on beside her, saying nothing, within his secret soul he poured benedictions upon the head of that bent, and rusty nail.

And presently, having turned down a grassy lane and crossed a small but very noisy brook that chattered impertinences among the stones and chuckled at them slyly from the shadows, they eventually came upon a small, and very lonely little cottage bowered in roses and honeysuckle,—as are all the cottages hereabouts. But now Anthea paused, looking at Bellew with a dubious brow.

"I ought to warn you that Mrs. Dibbin is very old, and sometimes a little queer, and sometimes says very—surprising things."

"Excellent!" nodded Bellew, holding the little gate open for her, "very right and proper conduct in a witch, and I love surprises above all things."

But Anthea still hesitated, while Bellew stood with his hand upon the gate, waiting for her to enter. Now he had left his hat behind him, and, as the moon shone down on his bare head, she could not but notice how bright, and yellow was his hair, despite the thick, black brows below.

"I think I—would rather you waited outside,—if you don't mind, Mr. Bellew."

"You mean that I am to be denied the joy of conversing with a real, live, old witch, and having my fortune told?" he sighed. "Well, if such is your will—so be it," said he obediently, and handed her the basket.

"I won't keep you waiting very long,—and—thank you!" she smiled, and, hurrying up the narrow path, she tapped at the cottage door.

"Come in! come in!" cried an old, quavering voice, albeit, very sharp, and piercing. "That be my own soft dove of a maid,—my proud, beautiful, white lady! Come in! come in!—and bring him wi' you,—him as is so big, and strong,—him as I've expected so long,—the tall, golden man from over seas. Bid him come in, Miss Anthea, that Goody Dibbin's old eyes may look at him at last."

Hereupon, at a sign from Anthea, Bellew

turned in at the gate, and striding up the path, entered the cottage.

Despite the season, a fire burned upon the hearth, and crouched over this, in a great elbow-chair, sat a very bent, and aged woman. Her face was furrowed, and seamed with numberless lines and wrinkles, but her eyes were still bright, and she wore no spectacles; likewise her white hair was wonderfully thick, and abundant, as could plainly be seen beneath the frill of her cap, for, like the very small room of this very small cottage, she was extremely neat, and tidy. She had a great, curving nose, and a great, curving chin, and what with this and her bright, black eyes, and stooping figure, she was very much like what a witch should be, — albeit a very superior kind of old witch.

She sat, for a while, staring up at Bellew who stood tall, and bare-headed, smiling down at her; and then, all at once, she nodded her head three several, and distinct times.

“Right!” she quavered, “right! right, — it be all right! — the golden man as I’ve watched this many an’ many a day, wi’ the curly hair, and the sleepy eye, and the Tiger-mark upon his arm, — right! right!”

“What do you mean by ‘Tiger-mark?’” enquired Bellew.

“I mean, young master wi’ your golden curls, — I mean as, sitting here day in, and day out, staring down into my fire, I has my dreams, — leastways, I calls ’em my dreams, though there’s them as calls it the ‘second sight.’ But pray sit down, tall sir, on the stool there; and you, my tender maid, my dark lady, come you here — upon my right, and, if you wish, I’ll look into the ink, or read your pretty hand, or tell you what I see down there in the fire. But no, — first, show what you have brought for Old Nannie in the blessed basket, — the fine, strong basket as holds so much. Yes, set it down here — where I can open it myself, tall sir. Eh, — what’s this? — Tea! God bless you for the tea, my dear! And eggs, and butter, — and a cold chicken! — the Lord bless your kind heart, Miss Anthea! Ah, my proud lady, happy the man who shall win ye! Happy the man who shall wed ye, my dark, beautiful maid. And strong must he be, aye, and masterful he who shall wake the love-light in those dark, great, passionate eyes of yours. And there is no man in all this world can do it but he must be a golden man — wi’ the Tiger-mark upon him.”

“Why — oh Nannie —!”

“Aye, — blush if ye will, my dark lady, but

Mother Dibbin knows she's seen it in the fire, dreamed it in her dreams, and read it in the ink. The path lies very dark afore ye, my lady, — aye very dark it be, and full o' cares, and troubles, but there's the sun shining beyond, — bright, and golden. You be proud, and high, and scornful, my lady, — 'tis in your blood, — you'll need a strong hand to guide ye, — and the strong hand shall come. By force you shall be wooed, and by force you shall be wed, — and there be no man strong enough to woo, and wed ye, but him as I've told ye of — him as bears the Tiger-mark."

"But Nannie," said Anthea again, gently interrupting her, and patting the old woman's shrivelled hand, "you're forgetting the basket, — you haven't found all we've brought you, yet."

"Aye, aye!" nodded old Nannie, "the fine, strong basket, — let's see what more be in the good, kind basket. Here's bread, and sugar, — and —"

"A pound of your favourite tobacco!" said Anthea, with a smiling nod.

"Oh the good weed! The blessed weed!" cried the old woman, clutching the package with trembling fingers. "Ah! who can tell the comfort it has been to me in the long, long days,

and the long, long nights, — the blessed weed! when I've sat here a looking and a looking into the fire. God bless you, my sweet maid, for your kindly thought!" and, with a sudden gesture, she caught Anthea's hand to her lips, and then, just as suddenly turned upon Bellew.

"And now, tall sir, can I do ought for ye? Shall I look into the fire for ye, or the ink, or read your hand?"

"Why yes," answered Bellew, stretching out his hand to her, "you shall tell me two things, if you will; first, shall one ever find his way into the 'Castle of Heart's Desire,' and secondly; — When?"

"Oh, but I don't need to look into your hand to tell you that, tall sir, nor yet in the ink, or in the fire, for I've dreamed it all in my dreams. And now, see you, 'tis a strong place, this Castle, — wi' thick doors, and great locks, and bars. But I have seen those doors broke' down, — those great locks, and bars burst asunder, — but — there is none can do this but him as bears the Tiger-Mark. So much for the first. And, for the second, — Happiness shall come a riding to you on the full moon, — but you must reach up — and take it for yourself, — if you be tall enough."

"And — even you are not tall enough to do

that, Mr. Bellew!" laughed Anthea, as she rose to bid Old Nannie "Good-night," while Bellew, unnoticed, slipped certain coins upon a corner of the chimney-piece. So, old Nannie blessed them, and theirs, — past, present, and future, thoroughly and completely, with a fine comprehensiveness that only a genuinely accomplished old witch might hope to attain to, and, following them to the door, paused there with one shrivelled, claw-like hand up-lifted towards the sky:

"At the full o' the moon, tall sir!" she repeated, "at the full o' the moon! As for you, my dark-eyed lady, I say, by force you shall be wooed, and by force ye shall be wed, aye! aye! — but there is no man strong enough except he have the Tiger-Mark upon him. Old Nannie knows, — she's seen it in the ink, dreamed it in the fire, and read it all in your pretty hand. And now — thank ye for the tea, my pretty, and God bless ye for the good weed, and just so sure as you've been good, and kind to old Nannie, so shall Fortune be good and kind to you, Miss Anthea."

"Poor old Nannie!" said Anthea, as they went on down the grassy lane, "she is so very grateful for so little. And she is such a gentle old creature really, though the country folk do

call her a witch and are afraid of her because they say she has the 'evil eye,' — which is ridiculous, of course! But nobody ever goes near her, and she is dreadfully lonely, poor old thing!"

"And so that is why you come to sit with her, and let her talk to you?" enquired Bellew, staring up at the moon.

"Yes."

"And do you believe in her dreams, and visions?"

"No, — of course not!" answered Anthea, rather hurriedly, and with a deeper colour in her cheeks, though Bellew was still intent upon the moon. "You don't either, — do you?" she enquired, seeing he was silent.

"Well, I don't quite know," he answered slowly, "but she is rather a wonderful old lady, I think."

"Yes, she has wonderful thick hair still," nodded Anthea, "and she's not a bit deaf, and her eyes are as clear, and sharp as ever they were."

"Yes, but I wasn't meaning her eyes, or her hair, or her hearing."

"Oh, — then pray what were you pleased to mean?"

"Did you happen to notice what she said

about a — er — Man with a — Tiger-Mark? ” enquired Bellew, still gazing up at the moon.

Anthea laughed:

“ The Man with the Tiger-Mark, — of course! he has been much in her dreams, lately, and she has talked of him a great deal, — ”

“ Has she? ” said Bellew, “ ha! ”

“ Yes, — her mind is full of strange twists, and fancies, — you see she is so very old, — and she loves to tell me her dreams, and read the future for me. ”

“ Though, of course, you don’t believe it, ” said Bellew.

“ Believe it! ” Anthea repeated, and walked some dozen paces, or so, before she answered, — “ no, of course not. ”

“ Then — none of your fortune, — nothing she told you has ever come true? ”

Once more Anthea hesitated, this time so long that Bellew turned from his moon-gazing to look at her.

“ I mean, ” he went on, “ has none of it ever come true, — about this Man with the Tiger-Mark, for instance? ”

“ No, — oh no! ” answered Anthea, rather hastily, and laughed again. “ Old Nannie has seen him in her dreams — everywhere, — in

India, and Africa, and China; in hot countries, and cold countries — oh! Nannie has seen him everywhere, but I have seen him — nowhere, and, of course, I never shall. ”

“ Ah! ” said Bellew, “ and she reads him always in your fortune, does she? ”

“ And I listen very patiently, ” Anthea nodded, “ because it pleases her so much, and it is all so very harmless, after all, isn’t it? ”

“ Yes, ” answered Bellew, “ and very wonderful! ”

“ Wonderful? — poor old Nannie’s fancies! — What do you mean by wonderful? ”

“ Upon my word, I hardly know, ” said Bellew, shaking his head, “ but ‘ there are more things in heaven, and earth, ’ etc., you know, and this is one of them. ”

“ Really! — now you grow mysterious, Mr. Bellew. ”

“ Like the night! ” he answered, turning to aid her across the impertinent brook that chuckled at them, and laughed after them, as only such a very impertinent brook possibly could.

So, betimes, they reached the stile, and crossed it, this time without mishap, despite the lurking nail and, all too soon for Bellew, had traversed the orchard, and were come to

the garden where the roses all hung so still upon their stems that they might have been asleep, and filling the air with the perfume of their dreams.

And here they paused, perhaps because of the witchery of the moon, perhaps to listen to the voice of the nightingale who sang on more gloriously than ever. Yet, though they stood so close together, their glances seldom met, and they were very silent. But at last, as though making up her mind, Anthea spoke:

“What did you mean when you said Old Nannie’s dreams were so wonderful?” she asked.

“I’ll show you!” he answered, and, while he spoke, slipped off his coat, and drawing up his shirt-sleeve, held out a muscular, white arm towards her. He held it out in the full radiance of the moon, and thus, looking down at it, her eyes grew suddenly wide, and her breath caught strangely as surprise gave place to something else; for there, plain to be seen upon the white flesh, were three long scars that wound up from elbow to shoulder. And so, for a while, they stood thus, she looking at his arm, and he at her.

“Why —” said she at last, finding voice in a little gasp, — “why then —”

“I am the Man with the Tiger Mark!” he said, smiling his slow, placid smile. Now, as his eyes looked down into hers, she flushed suddenly, and hot, and her glance wavered, and fell beneath his.

“Oh!” she cried, and, with the word, turned about, and fled from him into the house.