

# FREEDOM AT LAST

History of a Man Who Lived in  
Misery and Torture

## CHAPTER III.—(Cont'd)

When at last Lady Alice withdrew and the cups were filled afresh with cool wine from the cellar, Geoffroi signed to Fulke to come up to him. The young man was a bebauched creature of twenty-six, clean-shaven. His hair was not long like his father's, but clipped close. The back of his head was also shaven, and gave him a fantastic, elfin appearance. It was a custom to shave the back of the head, which was very generally adopted, especially in hot weather, among the young dandies of the time.

"Letters from the king," said Geoffroi, shortly, in a deep, hoarse voice.

"About Gertrude?"  
"Yes, that is it. Now there is but one answer to make to that. You must marry her in a day or so, and then nothing more can be said."

"That is the only thing," said Fulke, grinning and wrinkling up his forehead till his stubble of hair seemed squirting out of it. "But I will not give up my pleasures for that."

The evening was growing very hot and oppressive as it wore on. It was quite dark outside and there was thunder in the air. Every now and again the sky muttered in wrath, and at such sounds a sudden stillness fell upon the four knaves at the high table, and, putting down their wine vessels, they crossed themselves.

Little Gertrude was long since a-bed, her prayers said, and her little dark head tucked under the coverlet.

Geoffroi began to be less taciturn as the wine warmed him. Some bone dice were produced, and they fell to playing for silver pennies. One of the squires joined them, but the other left the hall early.

In the middle of the game, a stir came about at the hall door. One or two of the soldiers went to see what was toward. A traveller, wet with rain, was asking speech with Geoffroi, and he was brought up to the high table by Huber and John.

"My lord," said he, "you will remember me. I am Oswald, your liege man. I come from Norwich bearing news of war. I have been there a-buying rams, and bring you grave news. Roger Bigot is arming all his men in hot speed, and comes to Hilgay to overthrow us. In a week or two he will be here. He is very strong in arms."

These tidings affected the five men very differently.

Lewin glanced quickly at Anselm and then turned to Oswald, waiting more. The young squire tossed his head, and rang his hand upon the table joyously. Fulke's lips tightened, and an ugly light came into his eyes. The Baron alone showed no outward sign of agitation. He drummed his fingers on the side of the wine-goblet for a minute, in silence.

Then he suddenly looked up. "Well," he said, "that is news, Oswald, but I had thought to hear it a month since! Let the man come up against me if he will, he shall rot for't. I am lord of this country-side, with a rare lot of devils, lusty for blood, to guard this keep. A week, you say. Very well, in a week he shall find us ready. But get you to the table, Oswald, along of my merry men, and see that you drink in God's name. Get you drunken, Oswald, my man; I thank you for this. Get you drunk. Huber! John! Tell Master Pantler from me to put rope to windlass and draw up a cask of wine for the men-at-arms. Hei! Hei!! Hei!!!" he shouted in a vast and wonderful voice, rising in his seat and holding his beaker above his head, "Men of mine! men of mine! my Lord Roger Bigot lusteth for our blood and castle. The foining scamp a-comes riding with a great force to take us. Drink ye all to me, men of mine, and we will go against this traitor to the king—Hei! Hei! Hei!!"

There was a fierce roar of exultation which pierced the very roof. The war spirit ran like fire round the great hall, and as Geoffroi's tall figure stood high above them, his voice rolled louder than the mightiest shout there.

They broached the cask of wine, and brought torches into the hall

until the whole place flamed with light. The enthusiasm was indescribable. They had all been long spoiling for a fight, and here was news indeed! Oswald was plied with drink and pestered with questions.

When, in some half-hour's time, the excitement had in some degree subsided, it began to be told among the men that a jongleur was in the castle, and had been there since the afternoon. Lewin told Geoffroi of this, and the man was sent for, so that he might amuse them with songs of battle.

## CHAPTER IV.

In the early Middle Ages, no less than now, men and women believed in ominous happenings to those about to die. There were no materialists in England in those times, and the unseen world was very near and present to men's minds.

On this night of thunder and alarms, there was to happen another of those supernatural occurrences which are so difficult to explain away.

About the time the jongleur was brought into the hall—a little elderly man, very pleasant and merry, but yet with something greedy, brutal, and dangerous in his face—the enclosure of the serfs began to be agitated by new and terrible emotions. Tragedy, indeed, had often entered there, but it was at the bidding of some one in the outside world. To-night she was to be invoked by the down-trodden and oppressed themselves.

When men are gathered together, set upon some fearful act of retribution or revenge, the very air seems instinct with the thoughts that are in their hearts, and fluid with the electricity of the great deed to be done.

In the centre of the stoke the common fire burned without flame, for the rain had tamed it. Round the fire sat the conspirators, and in the stillness, for the rain was over and there was no wind, the murmuring of their voices seemed like the note of an organ hidden in the wood.

Round the stoke the giant trees made a tremendous sable wall, grim and silent, and even the dark sky above was brighter and more hopeful than the silent company of trees. The sky was full of flickering lightnings—white, green, and amethyst—and ever and again the thunder murmured from somewhere over against Ely. Sometimes a spear of light came right into the stoke, cracking like a whip.

The little group of inky figures round the embers seemed in no way disturbed by the elements, but only drew closer and fell into more earnest talk.

Hyla, Cerdic, Harl, Gurth, and Richard, sat planning the murder of Geoffroi. On the morrow the Baron was to ride after a great boar which the foresters knew of in the wood. This was settled, and it was thought there would be a great hunt, for the boar was cunning, fierce and old.

Now Geoffroi was skilled in all the elaborate science of woodcraft. He knew every word of the pedantic Norman jargon of the hunt in all its extravagance. He could wind upon his horn every mot known to the chase, and no man could use the dissecting dagger upon a dead stag more scientifically than he. More than all this, he rode better and with more ardor than either his son or squires. Often it would happen that he would gallop far into the forest after game, outstripping all his train. They were used to that, and would often start another quarry for themselves. Geoffroi was a moody man, happy alone, privy to himself, and it had become somewhat of a custom to let him ride alone.

Now the serfs plotted that they should lie hidden in the underwood and turn the boar towards a distant glade called Monkshood. In that open space—for the trees were sparse there and studded the turf at wide intervals—it was probable that Geoffroi would wind the death note of the quarry. It was to be his last mellow call in this world, for Hyla planned to take him as he stood over the dead boar and kill him in the ride.

Then when he had done the work, he was to return through the brushwood towards the village. Provid-

ed only that the other hunters were far away while he was killing the Baron, his presence in the wood would excite little comment, even if he was seen returning. Moreover, he purposed to carry an armful of dry sticks, so that he might appear as if he were gathering kindling wood.

He would reach the stoke, he thought, just about the time that the huntsmen would discover the Baron lying stark. He was to go through the village, down the hill to the river, and embark in a small punt. He would fly for his life then, poling swiftly through all the waterways of the fen till he reached Lombe in the heart of the waters, where he should find sanctuary and lie hid till happier times.

Hyla sat among them curiously confident. He never for a moment doubted the result of the enterprise. None of them did. The resolution which they had taken was too overwhelming to allow a suspicion of failure.

There was something terrible in their grim certainty.

In an hour or two, Gruach and Frija, with the two little prattling boys, were to be taken down to the river and to set out for the Priory before rehand, so that Hyla should find them waiting him. Harl was to punt throughout the night, hoping to reach safety by dawn. It was a hard journey, for the Priory was fifteen miles away.

"It is near time to set out," said Harl. "My heart is gride at this night's work."

"Sore things always happen in time of wrack," said Cerdic. "See that you protect Gruach and Frija."

"The boat shall speed as boat never did before, and they shall be safe at dawning."

The arrangements were all made for the flight of Gruach and Frija; the plot was planned in every detail, and a silence fell upon them. Few of them had the art of conversation or knew how to talk. Hyla sat silent, with nothing in his brain to say. Although he was in a state of fierce excitement, of exultation at a revelation of self, which appeared miraculous in its freshness—as if he had been suddenly given a new personality—he had never a word to say. Cerdic was his firm and faithful friend, but he could express none of the thoughts surging over him even to Cerdic. The poor tolling, tired souls had never learnt the gift of speech; they were cut off from each other, except in the rarest instances.

For example, a combination, such as the one we are discussing, was unheard of. Of course, only a few of the serfs had been told of the plot, for it would not have been safe in the hands of many of them. Yet that eight or nine men, with all the stumbling-blocks of inherited slavery, a miserable life, and an

## IS THINNESS EMBARRASSING?

Undoubtedly It is to Many a Maiden and Youth—While Even Those Well Along in Years Prefer Well Rounded Figures.

### Prescription Increases Weight.

A scrawny, gangling youth or maiden is almost invariably slighted, overlooked or ridiculed in any social gathering. There is something about a plump or well proportioned figure which attracts not only friendship, but love and adulation as well.

People with a proper amount of flesh are favored in all walks of life, while the thin are unloved, unwelcome and frequently miserable for life. The difference lies in the power of the digestive functions and the ability of the blood and nerves to absorb and distribute over the body the nutrition extracted from the food eaten.

The thin person is abnormal and lacks the power to absorb and retain the flesh and fat elements which the gastric juices in the stomach and intestines should extract or separate from all kinds of food and drink.

A recent accidental discovery has proven that tincture cadomene when blended with certain other drugs, will add from one to three pounds of flesh per week during treatment, while the general health and strength also improves wonderfully.

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# WHEAT

incredible lack of opportunity, should have learnt and put in practice the lesson of combination, is a most startling fact.

"Combination," indeed, was born that night, and stood ready to be clothed with a vigorous life, and to supply the means for a slow but glorious resolution. The direct effects of the proceedings at Hilgay have affected our whole history to this day.

After a half hour of silence, broken only by an occasional word-of-course, the women, who had been sleeping to gain strength, were summoned for departure.

The great enterprise seemed to knit the men at the fire together in a wonderful way. They felt they must keep with each other, and all rose to accompany the fugitives to the river. The little boys, sleepily protesting, were carried in the arms of two of the men, and the melancholy procession stole out into the warm darkness. The other serfs were all asleep, and deep breathings resounded as they passed the huts. At the entrance to the stoke a mongrel dog barked at them, but a blow with a stick sent him away whining.

In a few minutes, treading very quietly, they passing along the green by the castle. There were still points of light in the towering black walls, and distant sounds of revelry coming to them sent them along with faster steps.

Now that the enterprise was actually embarked upon, most of them felt very uneasy. The mere sight of that enormous pile brought before their minds the tremendous power they were going up against. It was so visible and tangible a thing, such a symbol of their own poor estate.

They went without mishap through the village. All the houses were silent and showed no sign of life. The way was very dark, though the white chalk of the road helped them a little to find it. Also, now and then, the lightning lit up the scene strangely, showing the members of the group to each other, hurrying, very furtive and white of face.

The fens opened before them as a wall of white vapor. No stranger would have imagined the vast flat expanses beyond. The mist might have concealed any other kind of scenery. Standing on the hill they could see the mysterious blue lights

dancing over the fen. They crossed themselves at that. It was thought that restless souls danced over the waters at night, and that many evil things were abroad after dark.

They were quite close to the landing-stage and, encircled by the mist, walking very wearily, when Harl, who was a pioneer, was heard to give a quick shout of alarm.

Another voice was heard roughly challenging. They passed through the vapor and came suddenly upon Pierce, the man-at-arms. At his feet lay a heap of fish, phosphorescent in the dark. He looked at them with deep amazement. "What are you?" he said.

As he spoke, and his voice gave clue to his identity, Hyla gathered himself together and leapt upon him. The two men fell with a great clatter on to the very edge of the landing-stage, slipping and struggling among the great heap of wet fish. Had not the others come to their assistance both would have been in the water.

Hyla rose bleeding from scratches on the face. Gurth had a great bony hand over the soldier's mouth, and the others held him pinned to the ground, so that he was quite powerless.

"Get the women away," said Cerdic, "get the women away."

Harl stepped from punt to punt until he came to a long light boat of oak, low in the water, and built for speed. He cast off the rope which tied it to one of the other punts, and brought it alongside the steps. He put a bundle of clothing and food in the centre, and waited for Gruach and her daughter.

Hyla lifted the little boys, wrapped in cat-skins, into the boat, and turned to Gurth. She lay sobbing in his arms, pressing her wet face to his.

"Pray Lord Christ that I am with you on the morrow, wife," he said, "and fare you well!" He embraced Frija, and helped both women into the boat. Harl took up the pole.

"Farewell!" came in a deep, low chorus from the group of serfs, and, with no further words, the boat shot away into the dark. They could hear the splash of the pole and the wailing of the women, and then the darkness closed up and hid them utterly.

(To be continued.)

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Cautionary Note:—Be sure you get this stove—see that the name-plate reads "New Perfection."

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