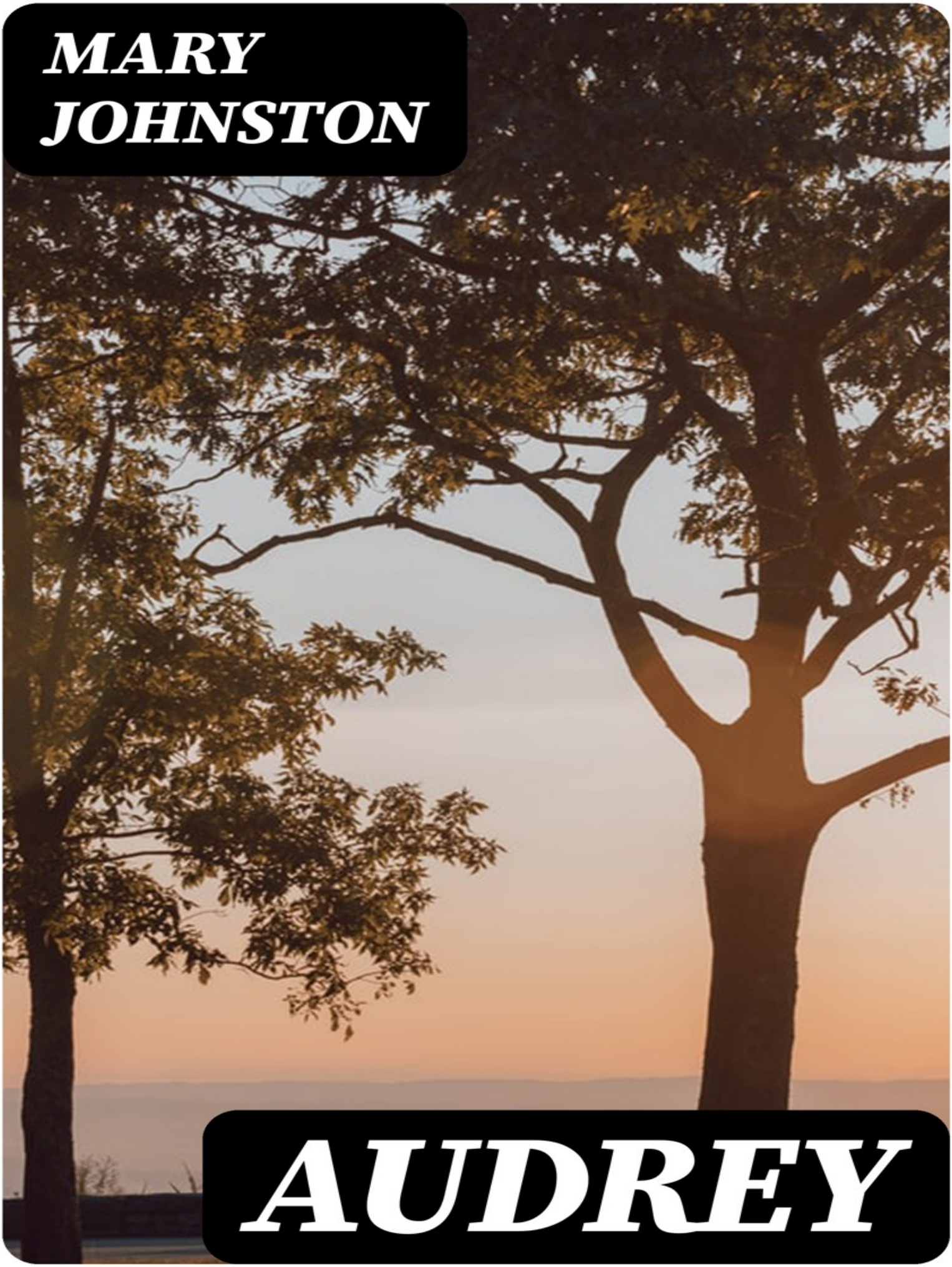
MARY
JOHNSTON
AUDREY

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Audrey

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CHAPTER I

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THE CABIN IN THE VALLEY

The valley lay like a ribbon thrown into the midst of the encompassing hills. The grass which grew there was soft and fine and abundant; the trees which sprang from its dark, rich mould were tall and great of girth. A bright stream flashed through it, and the sunshine fell warm upon the grass and changed the tassels of the maize into golden plumes. Above the valley, east and north and south, rose the hills, clad in living green, mantled with the purpling grape, wreathed morn and eve with trailing mist. To the westward were the mountains, and they dwelt apart in a blue haze. Only in the morning, if the mist were not there, the sunrise struck upon their long summits, and in the evening they stood out, high and black and fearful, against the splendid sky. The child who played beside the cabin door often watched them as the valley filled with shadows, and thought of them as a great wall between her and some land of the fairies which must needs lie beyond that barrier, beneath the splendor and the evening star. The Indians called them the Endless Mountains, and the child never doubted that they ran across the world and touched the floor of heaven.

In the hands of the woman who was spinning the thread broke and the song died in the white throat of the girl who stood in the doorway. For a moment the two gazed with widening eyes into the green September world without the

cabin; then the woman sprang to her feet, tore from the wall a horn, and, running to the door, wound it lustily. The echoes from the hills had not died when a man and a boy, the one bearing a musket, the other an axe, burst from the shadow of the forest, and at a run crossed the greensward and the field of maize between them and the women. The child let fall her pine cones and pebbles, and fled to her mother, to cling to her skirts, and look with brown, frightened eyes for the wonder that should follow the winding of the horn. Only twice could she remember that clear summons for her father: once when it was winter and snow was on the ground, and a great wolf, gaunt and bold, had fallen upon their sheep; and once when a drunken trader from Germanna, with a Pamunkey who had tasted of the trader's rum, had not waited for an invitation before entering the cabin. It was not winter now, and there was no sign of the red-faced trader or of the dreadful, capering Indian. There was only a sound in the air, a strange noise coming to them from the pass between the hills over which rose the sun.

The man with the musket sent his voice before him as he approached the group upon the doorstep: "Alce, woman! What's amiss? I see naught wrong!"

His wife stepped forward to meet him. "There's naught to see, William. It's to hear. There was a noise. Molly and I heard it, and then we lost it. There it is again!"

Fronting the cabin, beyond the maize field and the rich green grass and the placid stream, rose two hills, steep and thickly wooded, and between them ran a narrow, winding,

and rocky pass. Down this gorge, to the listening pioneer, now came a confused and trampling sound.

"It is iron striking against the rocks!" he announced. "The hoofs of horses"—

"Iron!" cried his wife. "The horses in Virginia go unshod! And what should a troop of horse do here, beyond the frontier, where even the rangers never come?"

The man shook his head, a frown of perplexity upon his bronzed and bearded face. "It is the sound of the hoofs of horses," he said, "and they are coming through the pass. Hark!"

A trumpet blew, and there came a noise of laughter. The child pressed close to her brother's side. "Oh, Robin, maybe 't is the fairies!"

Out from the gloom of the pass into the sunshine of the valley, splashing through the stream, trampling the long grass, laughing, and calling one rider to the other, burst a company of fifty horsemen. The trumpet blew again, and the entire party, drawing rein, stared at the unexpected maize field, the cabin, and the people about the door.

Between the intruders and the lonely folk, whose nearest neighbors were twenty miles away, was only a strip of sunny grass, dotted over with the stumps of trees that had been felled lest they afford cover for attacking savages. A man, riding at the head of the invading party, beckoned, somewhat imperiously, to the pioneer; and the latter, still with his musket in the hollow of his arm, strode across the greensward, and finding himself in the midst, not of rude traders and rangers, but of easy, smiling, periwigged gentlemen, handsomely dressed and accoutred, dropped

the butt of his gun upon the ground, and took off his squirrel-skin cap.

"You are deep in the wilderness, good fellow," said the man who had beckoned, and who was possessed of a stately figure, a martial countenance, and an air of great authority. "How far is it to the mountains?"

The pioneer stared at the long blue range, cloudlike in the distance. "I don't know," he answered. "I hunt to the eastward. Twenty miles, maybe. You're never going to climb them?"

"We are come out expressly to do so," answered the other heartily, "having a mind to drink the King's health with our heads in the clouds! We need another axeman to clear away the fallen trees and break the nets of grapevine. Wilt go along amongst our rangers yonder, and earn a pistole and undying fame?"

The woodsman looked from the knot of gentlemen to the troop of hardy rangers, who, with a dozen ebony servants and four Meherrin Indians, made up the company. Under charge of the slaves were a number of packhorses. Thrown across one was a noble deer; a second bore a brace of wild turkeys and a two-year-old bear, fat and tender; a third had a legion of pots and pans for the cooking of the woodland cheer; while the burden of several others promised heart's content of good liquor. From the entire troop breathed a most enticing air of gay daring and good-fellowship. The gentlemen were young and of cheerful countenances; the rangers in the rear sat their horses and whistled to the woodpeckers in the sugar-trees; the negroes grinned broadly; even the Indians appeared a shade less saturnine

than usual. The golden sunshine poured upon them all, and the blue mountains that no Englishman had ever passed seemed for the moment as soft and yielding as the cloud that slept along their summits. And no man knew what might be just beyond the mountains: Frenchmen, certainly, and the great lakes and the South Sea: but, besides these, might there not be gold, glittering stones, new birds and beasts and plants, strange secrets of the hills? It was only westward-ho! for a week or two, with good company and good drink—

The woodsman shifted from one foot to the other, but his wife, who had now crossed the grass to his side, had no doubts.

"You'll not go, William!" she cried. "Remember the smoke that you saw yesterday from the hilltop! If the Northern Indians are on the warpath against the Southern, and are passing between us and the mountains, there may be straying bands. I'll not let you go!"

In her eagerness she clasped his arm with her hands. She was a comely, buxom dame, and the circle on horseback, being for the most part young and gallant, and not having seen a woman for some days, looked kindly upon her.

"And so you saw a smoke, goodwife, and are afraid of roving Indians?" said the gentleman who had spoken before. "That being the case, your husband has our permission to stay behind. On my life, 't is a shame to ride away and leave you in danger of such marauders!"

"Will your Excellency permit me to volunteer for guard duty?" demanded a young man who had pressed his horse to the leader's side. "It's odds, though, that when you return

this way you'll find me turned Papist. I'll swear your Excellency never saw in Flanders carved or painted saint so worthy of your prayers as yonder breathing one!"

The girl Molly had followed her parents, and now stood upon a little grassy knoll, surveying with wide brown eyes the gay troop before her. A light wind was blowing, and it wrapped her dress of tender, faded blue around her young limbs, and lifted her loosened hair, gilded by the sunshine into the likeness of an aureole. Her face was serious and wondering, but fair as a woodland flower. She had placed her hand upon the head of the child who was with her, clinging to her dress. The green knoll formed a pedestal; behind was the sky, as blue as that of Italy; the two figures might have been some painted altar-piece.

The sprightly company, which had taken for its motto "Sic juvat transcendere montes," looked and worshiped. There was a moment of silent devotion, broken by one of the gentlemen demanding if 't were not time for dinner; another remarked that they might go much farther and fare much worse, in respect of a cool, sweet spot in which to rest during the heat of the afternoon; and a third boldly proposed that they go no farther at all that day. Their leader settled the question by announcing that, Mr. Mason's suggestion finding favor in his sight, they would forthwith dismount, dine, drink red wine and white, and wear out the heat of the day in this sylvan paradise until four of the clock, when the trumpet should sound for the mount; also, that if the goodwife and her daughter would do them the honor to partake of their rustic fare, their healths should be drunk in nothing less than Burgundy.

As he spoke he swung himself from the saddle, pulled out his ruffles, and raised his hat. "Ladies, permit me,"—a wave of his hand toward his escort, who were now also on foot. "Colonel Robertson, Captain Clonder, Captain Brooke, Mr. Haward, Mr. Beverley, Dr. Robinson, Mr. Fontaine, Mr. Todd, Mr. Mason,—all of the Tramontane Order. For myself, I am Alexander Spotswood, at your service."

The pioneer, standing behind his wife, plucked her by the sleeve. "Ecod, Alce, 't is the Governor himself! Mind your manners!"

Alce, who had been a red-cheeked dairymaid in a great house in England, needed no admonition. Her curtsy was profound; and when the Governor took her by the hand and kissed her still blooming cheek, she curtsied again. Molly, who had no memories of fine gentlemen and the complaisance which was their due, blushed fire-red at the touch of his Excellency's lips, forgot to curtsy, and knew not where to look. When, in her confusion, she turned her head aside, her eyes met those of the young man who had threatened to turn Papist. He bowed, with his hand upon his heart, and she blushed more deeply than before.

By now every man had dismounted, and the valley was ringing with the merriment of the jovial crew. The negroes led the horses down the stream, lightened them of saddle and bridle, and left them tethered to saplings beneath which the grass grew long and green. The rangers gathered fallen wood, and kindled two mighty fires, while the gentlemen of the party threw themselves down beside the stream, upon a little grassy rise shadowed by a huge sugar-tree. A mound of turf, flanked by two spreading roots, was the Governor's

chair of state, and Alce and Molly he must needs seat beside him. Not one of his gay company but seemed an adept in the high-flown compliment of the age; out of very idleness and the mirth born of that summer hour they followed his Excellency's lead, and plied the two simple women with all the wordy ammunition that a tolerable acquaintance with the mythology of the ancients and the polite literature of the present could furnish. The mother and daughter did not understand the fine speeches, but liked them passing well. In their lonely lives, a little thing made conversation for many and many a day. As for these golden hours,—the jingle and clank and mellow laughter, the ruffles and gold buttons and fine cloth, these gentlemen, young and handsome, friendly-eyed, silver-tongued, the taste of wine, the taste of flattery, the sunshine that surely was never yet so bright,—ten years from now they would still be talking of these things, still wishing that such a day could come again.

The negroes were now busy around the fires, and soon the cheerful odor of broiling meat rose and blended with the fragrance of the forest. The pioneer, hospitably minded, beckoned to the four Meherrins, and hastening with them to the patch of waving corn, returned with a goodly lading of plump, green ears. A second foraging party, under guidance of the boy, brought into the larder of the gentry half a dozen noble melons, golden within and without. The woman whispered to the child, and the latter ran to the cabin, filled her upgathered skirts with the loaves of her mother's baking, and came back to the group upon the knoll beneath

the sugar-tree. The Governor himself took the bread from the little maid, then drew her toward him.

"Thanks, my pretty one," he said, with a smile that for the moment quite dispelled the expression of haughtiness which marred an otherwise comely countenance. "Come, give me a kiss, sweeting, and tell me thy name."

The child looked at him gravely. "My name is Audrey," she answered, "and if you eat all of our bread we'll have none for supper."

The Governor laughed, and kissed the small dark face. "I'll give thee a gold moidore, instead, my maid. Odso! thou'rt as dark and wild, almost, as was my little Queen of the Saponies that died last year. Hast never been away from the mountains, child?"

Audrey shook her head, and thought the question but a foolish one. The mountains were everywhere. Had she not been to the top of the hills, and seen for herself that they went from one edge of the world to the other? She was glad to slip from the Governor's encircling arm, and from the gay ring beneath the sugar-tree; to take refuge with herself down by the water side, and watch the fairy tale from afar off.

The rangers, with the pioneer and his son for their guests, dined beside the kitchen fire, which they had kindled at a respectful distance from the group upon the knoll. Active, bronzed and daring men, wild riders, bold fighters, lovers of the freedom of the woods, they sprawled upon the dark earth beneath the walnut-trees, laughed and joked, and told old tales of hunting or of Indian warfare. The four Meherrins ate apart and in stately silence, but the

grinning negroes must needs endure their hunger until their masters should be served. One black detachment spread before the gentlemen of the expedition a damask cloth; another placed upon the snowy field platters of smoking venison and turkey, flanked by rockahominy and sea-biscuit, corn roasted Indian fashion, golden melons, and a quantity of wild grapes gathered from the vines that rioted over the hillside; while a third set down, with due solemnity, a formidable array of bottles. There being no chaplain in the party, the grace was short. The two captains carved, but every man was his own Ganymede. The wines were good and abundant: there was champagne for the King's health; claret in which to pledge themselves, gay stormers of the mountains; Burgundy for the oreads who were so gracious as to sit beside them, smile upon them, taste of their mortal fare.

Sooth to say, the oreads were somewhat dazed by the company they were keeping, and found the wine a more potent brew than the liquid crystal of their mountain streams. Red roses bloomed in Molly's cheeks; her eyes grew starry, and no longer sought the ground; when one of the gentlemen wove a chaplet of oak leaves, and with it crowned her loosened hair, she laughed, and the sound was so silvery and delightful that the company laughed with her. When the viands were gone, the negroes drew the cloth, but left the wine. When the wine was well-nigh spent, they brought to their masters long pipes and japanned boxes filled with sweet-scented. The fragrant smoke, arising, wrapped the knoll in a bluish haze. A wind had arisen, tempering the blazing sunshine, and making low music up

and down the hillsides. The maples blossomed into silver, the restless poplar leaves danced more and more madly, the hemlocks and great white pines waved their broad, dark banners. Above the hilltops the sky was very blue, and the distant heights seemed dream mountains and easy of climbing. A soft and pleasing indolence, born of the afternoon, the sunlight, and the red wine, came to dwell in the valley. One of the company beneath the spreading sugar-tree laid his pipe upon the grass, clasped his hands behind his head, and, with his eyes on the azure heaven showing between branch and leaf, sang the song of Amiens of such another tree in such another forest. The voice was manly, strong, and sweet; the rangers quit their talk of war and hunting to listen, and the negroes, down by the fire which they had built for themselves, laughed for very pleasure.

When the wine was all drunken and the smoke of the tobacco quite blown away, a gentleman who seemed of a somewhat saturnine disposition, and less susceptible than his brother adventurers to the charms of the wood nymphs, rose, and declared that he would go a-fishing in the dark crystal of the stream below. His servant brought him hook and line, while the grasshoppers in the tall grass served for bait. A rock jutting over the flood formed a convenient seat, and a tulip-tree lent a grateful shade. The fish were abundant and obliging; the fisherman was happy. Three shining trophies had been landed, and he was in the act of baiting the hook that should capture the fourth, when his eyes chanced to meet the eyes of the child Audrey, who had left her covert of purple-berried alder, and now stood beside

him. Tithonus, green and hale, skipped from between his fingers, and he let fall his line to put out a good-natured hand and draw the child down to a seat upon the rock. "Wouldst like to try thy skill, moppet?" he demanded.

The child shook her head. "Are you a prince?" she asked, "and is the grand gentleman with, the long hair and the purple coat the King?"

The fisherman laughed. "No, little one, I'm only a poor ensign. The gentleman yonder, being the representative in Virginia of my Lord of Orkney and his Majesty King George the First, may somewhat smack of royalty. Indeed, there are good Virginians who think that were the King himself amongst us he could not more thoroughly play my Lord Absolute. But he's only the Governor of Virginia, after all, bright eyes."

"Does he live in a palace, like the King? My father once saw the King's house in a place they call London."

The gentleman laughed again. "Ay, he lives in a palace, a red brick palace, sixty feet long and forty feet deep, with a bauble on top that's all afire on birth-nights. There are green gardens, too, with winding paths, and sometimes pretty ladies walk in them. Wouldst like to see all these fine things?"

The child nodded. "Ay, that I would! Who is the gentleman that sang, and that now sits by Molly? See! with his hand touching her hair. Is he a Governor, too?"

The other glanced in the direction of the sugar-tree, raised his eyebrows, shrugged his shoulders, and returned to his fishing. "That is Mr. Marmaduke Haward," he said, "who, having just come into a great estate, goes abroad

next month to be taught the newest, most genteel mode of squandering it. Dost not like his looks, child? Half the ladies of Williamsburgh are enamored of his *beaux yeux*."

Audrey made no answer, for just then the trumpet blew for the mount, and the fisherman must needs draw in and pocket his hook and line. Clear, high, and sweet, the triumphant notes pierced the air, and were answered from the hills by a thousand fairy horns. The martial-minded Governor would play the soldier in the wilderness; his little troop of gentlemen and rangers and ebony servants had come out well drilled for their tilt against the mountains. The echoes were still ringing, when, with laughter, some expenditure of wit, and much cheerful swearing, the camp was struck. The packhorses were again laden, the rangers swung themselves into their saddles, and the gentlemen beneath the sugar-tree rose from the grass, and tendered their farewells to the oreads.

Alce roundly hoped that their Honors would pass that way again upon their return from the high mountains, and the deepening rose of Molly's cheeks and her wistful eyes added weight to her mother's importunity. The Governor swore that in no great time they would dine again in the valley, and his companions confirmed the oath. His Excellency, turning to mount his horse, found the pioneer at the animal's head.

"So, honest fellow," he exclaimed good-naturedly, "you will not with us to grave your name upon the mountain tops? Let me tell you that you are giving Fame the go-by. To march against the mountains and overcome them as though they were so many Frenchmen, and then to gaze into the

promised land beyond—Odso, man, we are as great as were Cortez and Pizarro and their crew! We are heroes and paladins! We are the Knights of"—

His horse, impatient to be gone, struck with a ringing sound an iron-shod hoof against a bit of rock. "The Knights of the Horseshoe," said the gentleman nearest the Governor.

Spotswood uttered a delighted exclamation: "'Gad, Mr. Haward, you've hit it! Well-nigh the first horseshoes used in Virginia—the number we were forced to bring along—the sound of the iron against the rocks—the Knights of the Horseshoe! 'Gad, I'll send to London and have little horseshoes—little gold horseshoes—made, and every man of us shall wear one. The Knights of the Golden Horseshoe! It hath an odd, charming sound, eh, gentlemen?"

None of the gentlemen were prepared to deny that it was a quaint and pleasing title. Instead, out of very lightness of heart and fantastic humor, they must needs have the Burgundy again unpacked, that they might pledge at once all valorous discoverers, his Excellency the Governor of Virginia, and their new-named order. And when the wine was drunk, the rangers were drawn up, the muskets were loaded, and a volley was fired that brought the echoes crashing about their heads. The Governor mounted, the trumpet sounded once more, and the joyous company swept down the narrow valley toward the long, blue, distant ranges.

The pioneer, his wife and children, watched them go. One of the gentlemen turned in his saddle and waved his hand. Alce curtsied, but Molly, at whom he had looked, saw him

not, because her eyes were full of tears. The company reached and entered a cleft between the hills; a moment, and men and horses were lost to sight; a little longer, and not even a sound could be heard.

It was as though they had taken the sunshine with them; for a cloud had come up from the west, and the sun was hidden. All at once the valley seemed a sombre and lonely place, and the hills with their whispering trees looked menacingly down upon the clearing, the cabin, and the five simple English folk. The glory of the day was gone. After a little more of idle staring, the frontiersman and his son returned to their work in the forest, while Alce and Molly went indoors to their spinning, and Audrey sat down upon the doorstep to listen to the hurry of voices in the trees, and to watch the ever-deepening shadow of the cloud above the valley.

CHAPTER II

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THE COURT OF THE ORPHAN

An hour before dusk found the company that had dined in the valley making their way up the dry bed of a stream, through a gorge which cleft a line of precipitous hills. On either hand the bank rose steeply, giving no footing for man or beast. The road was a difficult one; for here a tall, fern-crowned rock left but a narrow passage between itself and the shaggy hillside, and there smooth and slippery ledges, mounting one above the other, spanned the way. In places, too, the drought had left pools of dark, still water, difficult to avoid, and not infrequently the entire party must come to a halt while the axemen cleared from the path a fallen birch or hemlock. Every man was afoot, none caring to risk a fall upon the rocks or into the black, cold water of the pools. The hoofs of the horses and the spurs of the men clanked against the stones; now and then one of the heavily laden packhorses stumbled and was sworn at, and once a warning rattle, issuing from a rank growth of fern on the hillside, caused a momentary commotion. There was no more laughter, or whistling, or calling from the van to the rear guard. The way was arduous, and every man must watch his footsteps; moreover, the last rays of the sun were gilding the hilltops above them, and the level that should form their camping-place must be reached before the falling of the night.

The sunlight had all but faded from the heights, when one of the company, stumbling over a round and mossy rock, measured his length upon the ground, amid his own oaths at his mishap, and the exclamations of the man immediately in his rear, whose progress he had thus unceremoniously blocked. The horse of the fallen man, startled by the dragging at the reins, reared and plunged, and in a moment the entire column was in disorder. When the frightened animals were at last quieted, and the line re-formed, the Governor called out to know who it was that had fallen, and whether any damage had been suffered.

"It was Mr. Haward, sir!" cried two or three; and presently the injured gentleman himself, limping painfully, and with one side of his fine green coat all stained by reason of contact with a bit of muddy ground, appeared before his Excellency.

"I have had a cursed mishap,—saving your presence, sir," he explained. "The right ankle is, I fear, badly sprained. The pain, is exquisite, and I know not how I am to climb mountains."

The Governor uttered an exclamation of concern: "Unfortunate! Dr. Robinson must look to the hurt at once."

"Your Excellency forgets my dispute with Dr. Robinson as to the dose of Jesuit bark for my servant," said the sufferer blandly. "Were I *in extremis* I should not apply to him for relief."

"I'll lay my life that you are not *in extremis* now," retorted the doctor. "If ever I saw a man with a sprained ankle keep his color so marvelously, or heard him speak in so

composed a tone! The pain must be of a very unusual degree indeed!"

"It is," answered Mr. Haward calmly. "I cannot possibly go on in this condition, your Excellency, nor can I dream of allowing my unlucky accident to delay this worshipful company in their ascent of the mountains. I will therefore take my servant and ride slowly back to the cabin which we left this afternoon. Doubtless the worthy pioneer will give me shelter until my foot is healed, and I will rejoin your Excellency upon your return through the valley."

As he spoke, for the greater ease of the injured member, he leaned against a towering lock. He was a handsome youth, with a trick of keeping an unmoved countenance under even such a fire of laughter and exclamation as greeted his announcement.

"And for this you would lose the passing of the Appalachian Mountains!" cried Spotswood. "Why, man! from those heights we may almost see Lake Erie; may find out how near we are to the French, how easily the mountains may be traversed, what promise of success should his Majesty determine to plant settlements beyond them or to hold the mountain passes! There is service to be done and honor to be gained, and you would lag behind because of a wrenched ankle! Zoons, sir! at Blenheim I charged a whole regiment of Frenchmen, with a wound in my breast into which you might have thrust your hand!"

The younger man shrugged his shoulders. "Beggars may not be choosers," he said coolly. "The sunlight is fast fading, and if we would be out of this gorge before nightfall we

must make no further tarrying. I have your Excellency's permission to depart?"

One of the gentlemen made a low-voiced but audible remark to his neighbor, and another hummed a line from a love song. The horses moved impatiently amongst the loose stones, and the rangers began to mutter that night would be upon them before they reached a safer footing.

"Mr. Haward! Mr. Haward!" said the Governor sternly. "It is in my mind that you meditate inflicting a greater harm than you have received. Let me tell you, sir, if you think to so repay a simple-minded hospitality"—

Mr. Haward's eyes narrowed. "I own Colonel Spotswood for Governor of Virginia," he said, speaking slowly, as was his wont when he was angry. "His office does not, I think, extend farther than that. As for these pleasant-minded gentlemen who are not protected by their rank I beg to inform them that in my fall my sword arm suffered no whit."

Turning, he beckoned to a negro who had worked his way from the servants in the rear, along the line of rangers, to the outskirts of the group of gentlemen gathered around the Governor and the injured man. "Juba," he ordered, "draw your horse and mine to one side. Your Excellency, may I again remind you that it draws toward nightfall, and that this road will be no pleasant one to travel in the dark?"

What he said was true; moreover, upon the setting out of the expedition it had been laughingly agreed that any gentleman who might find his spirits dashed by the dangers and difficulties of the way should be at liberty at any time to turn his back upon the mountains, and his face toward

safety and the settlements. The Governor frowned, bit his lips, but finally burst into unwilling laughter.

"You are a very young gentleman, Mr. Marmaduke Haward!" he cried. "Were you a little younger, I know what ointment I should prescribe for your hurt. Go your ways with your broken ankle; but if, when I come again to the cabin in the valley, I find that your own injury has not contented you, look to it that I do not make you build a bridge across the bay itself! Gentlemen, Mr. Haward is bent upon intrusting his cure to other and softer hands than Dr. Robinson's, and the expedition must go forward without him. We sorrow to lose him from our number, but we know better than to reason with—ahem!—a twisted ankle. *En avant*, gentlemen! Mr. Haward, pray have a care of yourself. I would advise that the ankle be well bandaged, and that you stir not from the chimney corner"—

"I thank your Excellency for your advice," said Mr. Haward imperturbably, "and will consider of taking it. I wish your Excellency and these merry gentlemen a most complete victory over the mountains, from which conquest I will no longer detain you."

He bowed as he spoke, and began to move, slowly and haltingly, across the width of the rocky way to where his negro stood with the two horses.

"Mr. Haward!" called the Governor.

The recreant turned his head. "Your Excellency?"

"It was the right foot, was it not?" queried his sometime leader. "Ah, I thought so! Then it were best not to limp with the left."

Homeric laughter shook the air; but while Mr. Haward laughed not, neither did he frown or blush. "I will remember, sir," he said simply, and at once began to limp with the proper foot. When he reached the bank he turned, and, standing with his arm around his horse's neck, watched the company which he had so summarily deserted, as it put itself into motion and went slowly past him up its dusky road. The laughter and bantering farewells moved him not; he could at will draw a line around himself across which few things could step. Not far away the bed of the stream turned, and a hillside, dark with hemlock, closed the view. He watched the train pass him, reach this bend, and disappear. The axemen and the four Meherrins, the Governor and the gentlemen of the Horseshoe, the rangers, the negroes,—all were gone at last. With that passing, and with the ceasing of the laughter and the trampling, came the twilight. A whippoorwill began to call, and the wind sighed in the trees. Juba, the negro, moved closer to his master; then upon an impulse stooped, and lifting above his head a great rock, threw it with might into one of the shallow pools. The crashing sound broke the spell of the loneliness and quiet that had fallen upon the place. The white man drew his breath, shrugged his shoulders, and turned his horse's head down the way up which he had so lately come.

The cabin in the valley was not three miles away. Down this ravine to a level place of pines, through the pines to a strip of sassafras and a poisoned field, past these into a dark, rich wood of mighty trees linked together with the ripening grape, then three low hills, then the valley and the

cabin and a pair of starry eyes. It was full moon. Once out from under the stifling walls of the ravine, and the silver would tremble through the leaves, and show the path beneath. The trees, too, that they had blazed,—with white wood pointing to white wood, the backward way should be easy.

The earth, rising sheer in darkness on either hand, shut in the bed of the stream. In the warm, scented dusk the locusts shrilled in the trees, and far up the gorge the whippoorwill called and called. The air was filled with the gold of fireflies, a maze of spangles, now darkening, now brightening, restless and bewildering. The small, round pools caught the light from the yet faintly colored sky, and gleamed among the rocks; a star shone out, and a hot wind, heavy with the smell of the forest, moved the hemlock boughs and rustled in the laurels.

The white man and the negro, each leading his horse, picked their way with caution among the pitfalls of the rocky and uneven road. With the passing of the Governor and his train a sudden cure had been wrought, for now Haward's step was as firm and light as it had been before his fall. The negro looked at him once or twice with a puzzled face, but made no comment and received no enlightenment. Indeed, so difficult was their way that they were left but scant leisure for speech. Moment by moment the darkness deepened, and once Haward's horse came to its knees, crashing down among the rocks and awakening every echo.

The way, if hard, was short. The hills fell farther apart, the banks became low and broad, and fair in front, between two slender pines, shone out the great round moon. Leaving

the bed of the stream, the two men entered a pine wood, dim and fragrant and easy to thread. The moon rose higher, and the light fell in wide shafts between trees that stood well apart, with no vines to grapple one to another or undergrowth to press about their knees.

There needed no watchfulness: the ground was smooth, the light was fair; no motion save the pale flicker of the fireflies, no sound save the sigh of the night wind in the boughs that were so high overhead. Master and man, riding slowly and steadily onward through a wood that seemed interminably the same, came at last to think of other things than the road which they were traveling. Their hands lost grasp upon the reins, and their eyes, ceasing to glance now here, now there, gazed steadfastly down the gray and dreamlike vista before them, and saw no longer hole and branch, moonlight and the white scars that the axe had made for guidance. The vision of the slave was of supper at the quarters, of the scraping of the fiddle in the red firelight, of the dancing and the singing. The white man saw, at first, only a girl's face, shy and innocent,—the face of the woodland maid who had fired his fancy, who was drawing him through the wilderness back to the cabin in the valley. But after a while, in the gray stillness, he lost the face, and suddenly thought, instead, of the stone that was to cover his father's grave. The ship that was to bring the great, dark, carven slab should be in by now; the day after his return to Williamsburgh the stone must be put in place, covering in the green sod and that which lay below. *Here, lieth in the hope of a joyful resurrection—*

His mind left the grave in the churchyard at Williamsburgh, and visited the great plantation of which he was now sole master. There was the house, foursquare, high-roofed, many-windowed, built of dark red brick that glowed behind the veil of the walnuts and the oaks. There, too, were the quarters,—the home quarter, that at the creek, that on the ridge. Fifty white servants, three hundred slaves,—and he was the master. The honeysuckles in the garden that had been his father's pride, the shining expanse of the river, the ship—his ship, the Golden Rose—that was to take him home to England,—he forgot the night and the forest, and saw these things quite plainly. Then he fell to thinking of London and the sweets that he meant to taste, the heady wine of youth and life that he meant to drain to the lees. He was young; he could spare the years. One day he would come back to Virginia, to the dim old garden and quiet house. His factor would give account, and he would settle down in the red brick house, with the tobacco to the north and east, the corn to the west, and to the south the mighty river,—the river silvered by the moon, the river that lay just beyond him, gleaming through the trees—

Startled by the sudden tightening of the reins, or by the tearing of some frightened thing through the canes that beset the low, miry bank, the horse sprang aside; then stood trembling with pricked ears. The white man stared at the stream; turned in his saddle and stared at the tree trunks, the patches of moonlight, and the impenetrable shadow that closed each vista. "The blazed trees!" he exclaimed at last. "How long since we saw one?"

The slave shook his head. "Juba forgot to look. He was away by a river that he knew."

"We have passed from out the pines," said Haward. "These are oaks. But what is that water, and how far we are out of our reckoning the Lord only knows!"

As he spoke he pushed his horse through the tall reeds to the bank of the stream. Here in the open, away from the shadow of the trees, the full moon had changed the night-time into a wonderful, silver day. Narrow above and belows the stream widened before him into a fairy basin, rimmed with reeds, unruffled, crystal-clear, stiller than a dream. The trees that grew upon the farther side were faint gray clouds in the moonlight, and the gold of the fireflies was very pale. From over the water, out of the heart of the moonlit wood, came the song of a mockingbird, a tumultuous ecstasy, possessing the air and making elfin the night.

Haward backed his horse from the reeds to the oak beneath which waited the negro. "'Tis plain that we have lost our way, Juba," he said, with a laugh. "If you were an Indian, we should turn and straightway retrace our steps to the blazed trees. Being what you are, you are more valuable in the tobacco fields than in the forest. Perhaps this is the stream which flows by the cabin in the valley. We'll follow it down, and so arrive, at least, at a conclusion."

They dismounted, and, leading their horses, followed the stream for some distance, to arrive at the conclusion that it was not the one beside which they had dined that day. When they were certain of this, they turned and made their way back to the line of reeds which they had broken to mark their starting-point. By now the moon was high, and the

mockingbird in the wood across the water was singing madly. Turning from the still, moonlit sheet, the silent reeds, the clear mimicker in the slumbrous wood, the two wayfarers plunged into the darkness beneath the spreading branches of the oak-trees. They could not have ridden far from the pines; in a very little while they might reach and recognize the path which they should tread.

An hour later, the great trees, oak and chestnut, beech and poplar, suddenly gave way to saplings, many, close-set, and overrun with grapevines. So dense was the growth, so unyielding the curtain of vines, that men and horses were brought to a halt as before a fortress wall. Again they turned, and, skirting that stubborn network, came upon a swamp, where leafless trees, white as leprosy, stood up like ghosts from the water that gleamed between the lily-pads. Leaving the swamp they climbed a hill, and at the summit found only the moon and the stars and a long plateau of sighing grass. Behind them were the great mountains; before them, lesser heights, wooded hills, narrow valleys, each like its fellow, each indistinct and shadowy, with no sign of human tenant.

Haward gazed at the climbing moon and at the wide and universal dimness of the world beneath; then turned to the negro, and pointed to a few low trees growing at the eastern end of the plateau.

"Fasten the horses there, Juba," he said. "We will wait upon this hilltop until morning. When the light comes, we may be able to see the clearing or the smoke from the cabin."