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THE DAYS OF CHARLES THE FIRST

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THE DAYS OF CHARLES THE FIRST

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "WHITEFRIARS."

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WHITEHALL.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WALLER's caroché was indeed in waiting, but Ingulph, ascertaining that a body of the city watch was coming up Ludgate, to suppress the disturbance, took a private way out by some back lanes which emerged in Holborn. Aware how strange the circumstances would appear to Stonehenge, his great object was now to convey Ramona home without becoming engaged in any public exposure. Unluckily, she was so much exhausted by fear that she could scarcely walk, and it was much later than he had imagined. In fact, the hour was past at which the usual adits of the palace were closed, and he consulted Ramona, with great perplexity, how she was to reach the old palace, when she reminded him of the secret corridor, and said she had taken the precaution to order the mulatto to be in waiting for her in the picture gallery.

Ingulph disliked this expedient, but there was no resource, and as they continued their long journey he more particularly explained the perilous position of affairs. He desired Ramona to inform Marie of all, immediately, and to desire her to be ready to start at daybreak for Oxford, taking with her whom she would—for he could not prevail upon himself to say De la Pole—and that he would be in readiness to escort her out of the city, and to answer all questions.

Ramona breathlessly promised compliance, and though nearly spent with the toil of walking so unusually far, hastened her steps until they reached Holbein's Gate. To elude observation, he wrapped her in his own cloak, but although it was dark night, one of Ingulph's soldiers, on duty at the gate, seemed at least to recognise that it was a female, by the long emphatic whistle of surprise which he gave.

The terrible consequences of discovery hastened their movements, but Ingulph did not abandon his unlucky companion until he had escorted her safely into the gallery, and

found the mulatto in attendance. He then hastened back to his own chambers, and resolved, and yet devoured by anxiety, awaited the return of De la Pole, watching in the gateway chamber.

But hour after hour passed and the cavalier returned not; the pale light of dawn began to be visible, and Ingulph, in his anxiety, was about to sally forth in quest of him, when the whole building rang with tremendous blows at the gates below.

Darting to the window to ascertain the cause, Ingulph perceived, with something of the terror of guilt, in the faint morning light, the figure of Stonehenge, striking at the gates with all his force. Lilly and the mulatto were with him, and as the sentinel at the gate kept it barred and refused to open without the pass-word, Ingulph had time to throw open a lattice in the window, and demand what was the matter.

"Where is Mistress Stonehenge? no man hath seen her since she left Ludgate with you!" shouted Lilly.

"Monster, where is my wife, my lamb, my innocent Ramona?" yelled Stonehenge, turning up a visage so deformed by passion, that it resembled some hideous mask, and flourishing an axe, with which it seemed he was striking at the gates.

At this instant, Lord de la Pole, with several lackeys, came up to the gates, singing and slightly staggering, as if under the influence of wine. Ingulph heard him inquire what the matter was, and then exclaim, "What! Saint Ingulph found out after all?" and he called the pass-word to the sentinel to admit him. But by this time Ingulph comprehended, if not all the treachery to which he had fallen a victim, enough to convince him of the perilous circumstances in which he stood. In the desperation of his thoughts only one chance of escape presented itself. He ordered the soldier not to open the gates, but rather to suffer the assailants to batter it down; snatched up his cloak and sword, and rushed to the secret corridor. Unluckily, in his agitation he tore the tapestry down, instead of lifting it up; but unheeding that he had thus left traces to guide a pursuer, he continued his way.

His intention, if the wild hope which guided him could be called so, was to hasten to the old palace, warn Lady Marie of the necessity of flight, and then to return, and, at whatever risk, undeceive his uncle from his error. Darkness and silence reigned throughout the immense palace, but he ran through the suites as if in the broad daylight; yet he had scarcely ex-

pected otherwise, when, on arriving at the exit to the hermitage garden, he found the doors fastened beyond all the efforts of his strength to open.

In this desperate pause he suddenly remembered the ruined galleries which apparently conducted to the tower where the unfortunate magus carried on his operations. Guided only by this conjecture and faint beams of light, he pursued his way recklessly, like one in a fearful dream, over all obstacles—leaping, scrambling, and tottering on giddy planks, till he found himself, how he knew not, on the remains of a gallery which conducted to the winding staircase of the tower. Without an instant's pause he ran down its apparently endless steps, and arrived at length at the base, whence he easily found his way into an inhabited part of the old palace.

Early as it was, the domestics were all up, or rather had not been to bed, and from them he learned the confirmation of some of his worst fears. Mistress Stonehenge had not been seen by anyone in the palace since she left it the night before to go to Ludgate; and the mulatto, taking the alarm, went there with intent to bring her home, and was the first to give the alarm.

Ingulph distractedly demanded to speak with Lady Marie, and then he learned that she was at Northumberland House, whither she had accompanied Lady Carlisle, after the water-party. Almost overwhelmed with grief and indignation at the conspiracy in which he felt he was with such wonderful dexterity ensnared, Ingulph determined at least to save his honour as a soldier, and baffle the political part of De la Pole's extensive plot. That Ramona was spirited away in some manner by his contrivance, he could not doubt; to save her honour was now scarcely possible, but at all events, the only hope was to secure De la Pole. He must hasten, therefore, and procure his seizure by the committee of safety, and thus strike a panic into the whole party which might prevent them from openly compromising themselves.

But fear of what might be the consequences of his revelation to Marie, and the certainty that in his absorption Stonehenge could scarcely anticipate him, induced Dethewarre to make a last effort for her preservation. There was a boat always kept at the palace stairs; he embarked himself in it, rowed to Westminster, and avoiding the great thoroughfares, arrived at Northumberland House.

He knocked for some time in vain at the portals, for it was still very early morning, but they were at last opened, and the