

because of the final severance of the cord, caught his hand as with a drowning grip: "You must take me—you must!"

"I cannot."

"Oh, I will not go on to rot in that vile prison. I am so young, and my mother has nobody but me! Don't you know how I have always loved you, Richard? You never asked me to do anything that I was not ready to try it. I'd never leave you here if I were going to freedom—never."

To take him lessened his chances more than half, and heaven knew how slender they were already; but the struggle in Richard's mind lasted only a moment. Then he leaned over the boy's body and began carefully and quietly to untie the cord that bound him to the next sleeper, stopping now and then when the man made any movement. The lad, guessing his consent by his action, spoke no word, but lifted his head and kissed him on the cheek; and Richard felt the tears that coursed down the smooth face.

"You confounded young idiot!" he whispered, but his voice was very tender, and presently, when the knot was loosed, he drew the lad close to him and told his plan.

"God grant we may both of us get safely away; but if only one of us succeeds, and that should be I, then will I carry your love to your mother."

"And if I escape, I shall do the like for you."

"Ay, laddie, and more, for you shall say to Joscelyn Cheshire that even behind prison bars I am her lover; and if death comes, her face, or the blessed memory of it, will outshine those of the angels of Paradise."

"You love her so, then?"

"As a man loves sunshine and warmth and beauty and life."

"And she loves you?"

"No, lad, she loves me not."

And the boy left the silence that followed unbroken, knowing the other wished it so.

A while later they heard the call of the watch farther down the beat, and presently

the sound of steps outside and the welcome "All's well!" of the relieved sentry. Turning upon their backs with the ravelled ends of the cords hidden close between them, they seemed asleep like their comrades when the watchman cast the light of his lantern through the flapping canvas door.

"Too d—n tired to give any trouble," the outgoing sentinel said as he glanced along the line. Then he went away, and the two watchers in the tent waited for what seemed an eternity. Finally Richard lifted the edge of the tent and looked out. The sentinel leaned against a small tree, his gun held slack in his fingers. He was very tired.

"Now," Richard whispered, and crawled stealthily from under the tent, followed by Billy. Keeping in the shadow of the tents, they moved on hands and knees across the ground toward a clump of bushes that promised a hiding-place for reconnoitring. Only twenty yards the stretch was, but to those two crawling figures it seemed a mile. Every weed that swayed against its fellow had in it the sound of a rushing wind, and every twig that broke under hands or knees seemed like the crack of a rifle. To their overwrought senses each breath the other drew was as the sough of a tempest, and they scarcely understood how the sentry could not hear. So slowly they had to move that it took fully twenty minutes to cover those few yards. Then, while Billy lay still in the shadow, Richard raised himself stealthily and looked about. They could have happened upon no worse place for their attempt. It was near the end of a short beat up and down which two sentinels trod, passing each other near this end so that only a few moments intervened when one or the other did not command the whole beat with his eye and gun. Behind and on either side stretched the tents of the sleeping army, set thick with picket posts and guards. Across the narrow road was a rock large enough to conceal a man, and beyond this was a field of high grass, to gain which meant freedom. Not a detail of the starlit scene