

CHAPTER XXV

JOHAN WODEN came to himself to find his tunic loosened at the neck, his forehead running with cold water, and himself lying on a mat on a floor with a pillow under his head. The room was lighted by an oil-lamp; through the open window still came the scent of roses. The noise of conflict had died away and all seemed steeped in the eternal peace of a summer night.

The girl was bending over him, and he noticed that her hair shone like burnished gold in the lamplight, that her eyes were green pools and that her skin was very fair. In her little hands were a bowl of clear water and a sponge.

"Thank you very much," said John Woden, rather faintly.

"I'm sorry I had to put you on the mat. You're such a big man, and much too heavy for me to lift. I had to pull you in here by the collar."

"I am giving you a tremendous amount of trouble."

John tried to sit up, but she pushed him back.

"Just you lie on that pillow until I bandage you. Are you wounded anywhere else but the head?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Well, we'll see. Say, where are you from?" said the lady with the burnished golden hair.

"The last place of which I have any clear recollection was, I believe, called Gettysburg."

"You're miles north of Gettysburg. Why didn't you go back with your lot if you're a rebel? That uniform isn't any too safe up here, believe me."

"No," said John, feeling his head, tenderly, "I think you are probably right. You spoke of my lot going back? Am I to understand that the Confederate Army is in retreat?"

"You are. I got the news from a man an hour back."

"Very unfortunate," mused John, "And I have walked miles away from them. I wonder how soon it will be practicable for me to rejoin?"

"You are not overlooking the fact that you are my prisoner, are you?" asked the lady, suavely, her little fingers gently busy with a bandage.

John gazed at her blankly. This point of view had not occurred to him.

"I'm Union, you know. Of course, if you would rather I handed you over to the nearest Federal post—I could send for them!"

"Thank you; I should prefer to be your prisoner," said John, smiling, and thinking how very pretty she was.

"I must ask for your parole then, Mr. Confederate. When you get a little stronger, you'll be much too strong for me."

"I do not war with women, and I give my parole—Miss Yankee." The smile on his lips disclaimed offence.

"I reckon it's a deal. Where are you from, anyway—your home place? I can't get your State from the way you talk."

"I am British," said John. "I come from England—you may have heard of it?"

"Now, don't tease me, Mr. Britisher. If you are British, what are you doing in that uniform?"

"Just in search of adventure."

"And have you had it?"

"I have," answered John, again feeling his head, thoughtfully.

"Now, don't get disarranging that bandage. Tell me all about yourself and who you are?"

John gave her a detailed account of his recent and a scantier account of his remoter history. The only fact which did not occur to him to mention was that he had a wife.

"So your name is John Woden, and you enlist in the Confederate army one month and get taken prisoner the next? Not an extensive military career, Mr. Woden."

"No," agreed John, "It has been short but packed with incident. All the better. I did not intend to make a long stay; I have interests in England."

"If you hadn't happened on me, you might have found a little difficulty in getting back to them."

"I am very lucky," said John, "I am in a delightful cottage with the scent of roses coming in from the garden, and a lovely and tender-hearted lady to tend my hurts."

"Lovely?" She smiled, "Tenderhearted—I wonder? Men and women have called me wanton—one of the scarlet women of Babylon."

"You?"

"Yes, Mr. Woden, that is what they say about me. Why do I live all alone in a cottage on a hill?"

"All alone?"

"Quite—quite alone! Except for my roses and the wild things which live in the woods."

"I do not understand," said John.

"Listen, John—I'm not going to keep on calling you, Mr. Woden. I am only twenty-two: I'm quite nice to look at as I daresay you've noticed. I let one man notice it rather too much when I was twenty. I lived in Bethel, Vermont, and they don't teach girls much about their bodies in Bethel, Vermont. It is not considered respectable. He was a nice boy, and it was spring, and oh, well, I guess he fell at "Bull Run." She was blinking now to keep back the tears. "You'll allow he was a nice boy for all he was Union, I reckon? So they stuck a little cross over where they put him, and he didn't come back to marry me." They

keep us pretty innocent down in Vermont," she added bitterly.

"There was a baby?" asked John, gently. He was strangely troubled; old memories of the little shop in the far off Strand were flitting about him like little ghosts.

"There was a baby, John, and lucky for it—it died. And there was the nice boy gone too. I—well, I was Rahab, and the Scarlet Woman: less than the dust beneath their chariot wheels. That's how one of the eloquent deacons put it. They got right away on the telegraph to heaven to tell them all about me, John, so that I should never get in. I came away then: I had a little money my folks left me. I wanted quiet, so I found this lonely little cottage."

"You poor women," said John, softly.

"Aren't we so, when we have babies that never ought to be? I see all these little rabbits and the birds, John, and no-one tells them that they mustn't have all the babies they want without wearing gold rings. I love nature: I've learned a lot, and I'm going wild too. I'm through with convention. If I find I'm liking a nice man, I'll give myself body and what soul they've left me. Harry wouldn't mind. I often think of him quiet there down by Bull Run, and I know he'd understand."

"You poor little thing."

"I like you, John," She stroked his hair, rather fondly.

"What is your name, lady of the golden hair?"

"My name is Lucy—and that's all you need to know."

"I like you Lucy."

"John, you're my prisoner-of-war. You'll stay here?"

"What will the Federal authorities say to that, Lucy?"

"Nothing—for they won't know. I can get you other clothes, safer than that uniform, and when you're tired of Pennsylvania and me, I'll show the way to New York and home."

"So be it, Lucy."

"I'm feeling as though I'd known you for years, John, instead of so short a time. Somehow you're rather like Harry, except you're bigger than he was, and so English. John, you must be tired. You'd better have something to eat and go to bed."

"Lucy, I think you are right. But have you a bed to spare?"

"I've a big bed, John, which will take you fine."

"And you——?"

"I sleep on the couch—to-night."

"I protest."

"Wounded prisoners-of-war have to obey orders, John. I insist."

"Very well, Lucy."

"I'll help you undress."

"No."

"No conventions in my cottage—and you're wounded. Don't be silly John. Have you never undressed a girl?"

"Once—long ago," said John, quietly, thinking of a little lady he had rescued in Vienna, now sundered from him by deep and vast seas.

Angeline. . . . *"I trust you. You are my husband."*
He sighed as he remembered her voice.