Blade Against the Heart

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Abstract

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An account of the adventures of Luke Muston, a protégé of Italian sword master Vincentio Saviolo, as he tries to find a place for himself in London in 1592. While it follows the pacing and rhythms of historical romance, Blade Against the Heart is a coming of age tale where the adventure is primarily in Luke navigating the nuances of personal relationships, especially with other men.

Contents

Preface

The reader is entirely excused for not knowing until this moment the name of Luke Muston, esquire. It is not a household name. His surviving contribution to science, Of the Honey Bee (1614), remains little known, and he would be just another small note in history if not for the strange circumstances that led to this present work. We have every reason to believe that Luke moved in the most influential circles of late Elizabethan and Jacobean England, crossing paths with such worthies as William Cecil, Robert Devereux, and Francis Bacon. These connections he made while an intimate friend and student of Italian sword master Vincentio Saviolo, whose two books on dueling were popular texts of the time.

Luke apparently kept a journal at that period of his life and made preparations to publish it as an older gentleman. We do not know why this plan never came to fruition. As can be

surmised by the existence of his dedicatory letter, he anticipated publication. Whatever the reason, the manuscript was lost for over two hundred years. It resurfaced when Admiral J. Edward Lomax discovered it in the papers of his late father-in-law in 1834. The admiral seems to have made something of a retirement project out of what he found. He updated the language of Luke's prepared journals to make them "more suitable to a broader readership." But the story of Luke Muston's journal does not end there. Shortly before publishing his version, Admiral Lomax died in a fire that also consumed the vast majority of his notes and papers. What remains is a packet of materials that Lomax sent to his friend W.B. Phillipson for review. Phillipson kept the papers just as they were sent to him, and they were left in that state for another century and a half, when I stumbled across Phillipson's collected papers in the special collections of the University of Washington. The name of Saviolo was known to me from earlier work, and I found that I was, as Lomax before me, captivated by Luke's story.

I have collected the work as Lomax edited it, along with some other snippets that accompanied the manuscript, without much further amendment of my own. I standardized the spelling into my own American English (a crime for which I can but ask forgiveness from my friends across the water).

One might well ask why I have chosen to present these

stories in our modern time. Surely, after all, there have been ample books collecting writing from the time of Shakespeare. To which query I might riposte, why tell any story at all? Luke's world is filled with the same human elements that make any narrative compelling: love, heartache, camaraderie, adventure, and strife. I find that many of the struggles that are pressing matters to Luke in 1592 and 1593 mirror common struggles in my own time. Do we not all search for a place for ourselves in the world? Do we not all look around us for community and find that the people with whom we end up relating have agendas and personalities that are foreign and alarming to us? There is something about Luke's story that takes hold of me and bridges the gap of four centuries between us. I can only hope that it will be as enticing to you as it is to me.

James Loomis, May 2014

A Note on Period Text

A note about period texts is required for your ease of reading. Where I have copied from documents original to the Elizabethan era, I have chosen to leave the idiosyncrasies of spelling intact. For clarity within that constraint, I have replaced all printer's ligatures with their expanded forms, and changed any dual purpose letters (V/u for U/v, and i for j) to their proper modern forms. So while you may find words that require a little thought to construct in your mind from the way that they have been spelled, you do not need to worry about characters that you are not accustomed to see on a printed page or screen.

When it comes to punctuation, I have given up all hope of rational correction and left you in the weedy fields of commas and colons native to early modern English. There is a certain

style to how the writers (and printers, to we know not what degree) of that age sprinkled punctuation on their lengthy sentences. My hope is that you will get a sense of it rather than trying to force it to make sense, if you take my meaning.

-JL

Epigraph

"According to a verse of Petrarch, Everie one must learne to his cost: which saying pertaineth especially to young men, who for the most parte can never learne to govern themselves aright, until such time as they have had experience of some mishappe or other, concerning either their goods, life, or credite."

-Vincentio Saviolo, Of Honor and Honorable Quarrels, 1594

Luke Muston's original epistle dedicatory

To the right honorable, my singular good Lord, Francis, Baron Verulam, and Knight Batcheler, oft times councellar to his Majesty.

Honor is a thing that every worthie gentleman must take heed of for it is that same honour, which is the chief advantage that maketh a people establish lawes and custome the which bringe peace and every goode grace of God. If there be but one unknowen waie for a man to bring dishonor unto himself, or to his prince or countrie, experience hath shewn us that he will find it and do himselfe or his Prince such disservice thereby as attends upon ruination and dispayre. It is therefore a blessing to the generall publique when a man of wisdome taketh it upon his person to inbodie the rules of honor and to teach the same unto such gentlemen as shall make themselves ready to heed him.

Such a man was Vincentio Saviolo who, coming to our lande from stranger parts, made honor his marchendise, and sought to make all men of breeding and of meanes worthy of the name of gentleman. In undertaking to recollect such fit remembrances of that worthie man and my loving friend, I have thought good to dedicate the same unto your worship, as unto him whose wyse judgement inforceth all philosophers and statesmen to acknowledge you the English Solomon.

This work, I must needs confess, is far unworthie your Lordship's view. Had not you favored me many times with your good will and intreated me to make you better acquainted with the life of that singular good gentleman, I would think my account to be too flawed in execution to trouble you withal. As it is, I hope that what I have here expressed meets with your honor's favour, and that you will accept it, howsoever it be, as a gift proceeding from a minde most dutifully affected towards you, that wisheth and prayeth that your Honour may injoy many good and prosperous yeres.

Your Honours in all dutifulnes,

Luke Muston.

Of Beginnings

In the spring of 1592, the thirty-fourth year of Elizabeth's reign, and the eighteenth of my own life, I traveled to London with the intention of finding a fortune for myself. I undertook the journey neither to satisfy some passing fancy, nor to enact a desire for glory, but out of the direst need. I had nothing to my name save for that I carried with me and the title of esquire. I bore also the grief of a son who had, but a scant month before, committed a doting father into the loving bosom of his Creator.

The reasoning that led me to London was in keeping with every truth I knew at that age. My dear father could deny neither my mother nor myself our faintest desire, and so, unknown to us, he impoverished himself to fulfill our every whim. It is well known that a title oft entices a man to spend

all he has to prove himself worthy of it. So it was with Father. My grandfather gained honor in battle to earn his knighthood from king Henry. That honor was bolstered by a tidy fortune during long years in the mercer's trade, after which he retired with our little family to a home in the country where he could draw upon his earnings to keep us in the fashion befitting provincial gentry. So sure was he in his illusion of comfort that it was with utter surprise that I learned upon his death that Mother and I were left with a small income, a smaller coffer of cash, and a collection of debts totaling just over a thousand pounds. If you are a person of any station, as I might flatter myself would take interest in my tale, you might think that sum to be a small one, but for a young man with no prospects it was as insurmountable as Frobisher's northwest passage to the Indies. Being thus left less than penniless, I had little choice but to seek a means of wealth on my own. I have never felt that pull toward the ocean and the horizon that proved so lucrative for many men of my parents' age. Nor had I any inclination to go to war, having always been of a more phlegmatic humor. The only choice left to me was to go to London and hope to find what service I could in the workings of state or in the entourage of some great gentleman whose acquaintance I could make as the sole benefit of my grandfather's distinction.

So far I have drawn for you a dismal picture of my reasons

for setting out, but you must not think that a boy of seventeen years would do any else than take such troubles in his stride. And so it was with me. I set out with every expectation of success, imagining that, as I had been until that hour sheltered from misfortune in the tender care of my parents, I was immune to the cruelties of fate and happenstance.

It was, therefore, with a heart at once made heavy by my recent loss and lightened by the excitement of a new undertaking into the unknown that I rode away from the only home I had ever known on the family's best horse. To finance my journey, I had been forced to sell some valuables from the house. At my mother's insistence I rode away from Tinford accompanied by Tom Lind, the sole footman left in our household. Tom was but two or three years my senior and, though we had always been on friendly terms, I was impatient to be on my own and thought that being under the eye of a family servant would somehow delay the start of my adventures.

We rode two days at the easy pace of unaccustomed riders, for though my heart yearned for adventure, my more immediately tender parts cried out for restraint. The road south was in ill repair, but by taking our leisure we were able to circumvent the worst places by riding along fields and through villages by the way. This was much to my liking, as I always enjoyed watching the plowing of fields and the sowing of crops. There is, I

think, a glimpse at the divine order of the world to be seen in the well-organized labors of farmers in their busy time of year. In the lanes I found many spring flowers also, and my father had instilled in me a great love of gardening and the tending of flowering plants. The changing scenery proved an enticement as well: after some hours on the first day of riding, all the lands through which we traveled were new and mysterious to me. Far from the fields, streams, and trees of my home, even the smallest variation in leaf or bud called out to me as a new discovery. Lost in so much of the new, my anxiety to begin my enterprise (whatever it may prove to be) was eclipsed.

I stopped often to exchange some few words with the local men. I inquired about the roads and about good places to stop for food and a bed along the way. In each encounter I felt still close to home—these smudged faces were interchangeable with those of men in Tinford, and their manners were alike even when a word or oath here or there was different in their speech.

On the second evening out I was confident that another day would bring me to London, and I decided that I would send Tom home in the morning and ride into the city free and unencumbered. We arrived at a large inn on the post road as the sun was setting. Impatient to get into the warmth of the hall, I rode into the yard, dismounted, and began handing the ostler my bags to be brought to my room. Tom followed at a more restrained

pace and, when he saw the ostler and porter handling my things, leapt off his own horse and forcefully took each bag back from them. Whereupon he aimed a look at me with his eyes narrowed and stalked off into the house. Assuming only that he chafed to see another man perform his office, I thought little of the gesture and followed him across the muddy yard into the main door of the inn.

The hall reverberated with the voices of many men. It was dim, as such houses often are, but the orange light of a merrily burning fire played across the oaken beams and whitewashed walls. The same fire, along with the many bodies already assembled, lent the room a warmth that was most welcome after the damp of the road, though neither fire nor bodies added anything pleasant to the smell of the place. The landlord met me at the door and we quickly settled arrangements for the night. Tom returned to the yard, fetched what remained of our things, and demanded that I give him the key to our chamber before he settled the rest of the luggage therein. I was left to squeeze in at the long common table and refresh myself.

The inn, being farther along the post road to London than any other I had ever visited (and even those visits were few in my young life), attracted diverse men of many trades and stations. I took them in with interest.

At a table near a broad window that faced out into the

yard reclined a handful of young gentlemen. In my mind they were students on their way to or from Oxford. They played at dice, in oblivious defiance of the law, at such a slow pace and with such flat, spiritless countenances that their indifference and aura of superiority could not have been more clearly heralded by a town crier.

The bulk of the others in the place as that day wore on toward night seemed to be of three sorts. First, there were cottagers and husbandmen who came in from their labors in the fields after the sun had set. These men listened for the news while having a drink. They joked among themselves and most seemed on good terms with the landlord and his family. Second were those travelers in off the road, much like myself. These showed the most variation between them, with some in the fine raiment of wealthy merchants, while others wore what might be their only set of clothes, worn from travel and carefully patched. Even the most well appointed of these men bore the marks of journey, however, with the dust of the road showing on shoes and the weariness of travel carried in the face. The third kind of customer in the hall was like the second, but fresher in appearance. These I took to be travelers of the same sort, but on their way away from the city rather than destined for it. Many women numbered among the crowd as well—more than I might see at the village tavern back home. They took their ease in

much the like manner as the men.

As the light from outside faded, the entertainments multiplied in number and in kind. Food and drink filled the tables, and the wenches that provided it fairly danced through the throng with pitchers and trays in unending succession. Some of the local husbandmen produced pipes and drums. They worked on their instruments from the central hearth so that a thick crescent of revelers soon began lending their voices to the music. For those that were inclined to make merry but who were disinclined to sing, several games appeared at cards and dice—and not just the games of the bored gentlemen at the window. The sound of coins moving between piles on tables was a bright, clinking music of its own. Many there were who, like me, sought no sport but to sit, to eat, to drink, and to enjoy what was on display—for amid such merriment, even the timidest could find contentment in the observation of the revelry of some one or other there assembled.

As you might guess by my description, I found the whole of the scene fascinating. I have always taken great pleasure in observing my fellow man at work and in sport alike, and this sort of gathering in such a large public house could have distracted me for days had I given in to my fancies. It is hard for me to say, therefore, how long I had been watching it all transpire before I was pulled back to my own concerns by the

reappearance of Tom. He wedged his way through the hall to stand behind me, from which position he spoke into my ear to raise above the din and tell me that all our things had been stowed safely away and that the horses were properly tended to. I negotiated with my neighbors on the bench to make room and signaled for Tom to sit next to me and have some refreshment.

He was not reluctant to get off his feet and take some food and drink, though he seemed discomposed by the crowd. At each loud outburst of voice whether in song or in boast, he twitched his gaze toward the utterer. He hunched over the trencher full of food that I caused to be placed in front of him with a protective hand pulling it toward his chest. I gave him some time with his meat and a tankard of ale before I set to work on him.

"Very good, Tom," I said, "It gladdens my heart to see you comfortably settled for the evening. Now I wished to speak with you about the morning."

"The morning mister Luke?" said he in tones of confusion. He continued casting a squinted eye around the hall during my speech, and seemed to me taken aback by my opening remarks.

"Yes, the morning, Tom. You have done very well to ride with me all this way, and I am sure that you are already missed at home. I would like for you to leave for Tinford in the morning. I can go the rest of the way to London in one day, and

I shall not need your further assistance."

"What's that? Go home afore I see you to London? The mistress won't think much o' that, no matter how much she misses my service." Tom had forsaken his vigil and now turned his shaggy head toward me and none other. His eyes were widened, and his voice held urgent force so that bits of spittle and bread flew from his lips. "She says to me, Tom, you see my boy safe to London town. He's your master now, you must see to his safety."

I held up a hand to stop him. "Your care in your duties is very well, my friend, but how can harm come to me on an easy day's ride on the post road where so many walk and ride? I will be the more distracted if I worry that my mother needs you."

"Well, mister Luke, if you would heed me in this, I think you've been too free about yourself tonight," he said, leaning close to me and continuing in a gravelly whisper directly in my ear. "I hear tales of these great inns. Never know what kind of man you'll meet in a place like this. Those boys what were so quick to unpack the horses when we came into the yard were taking the measure of your purse, or I'm a Puritan. You'd best have old Tom with you as you go, and I'll carry a stout stick to learn any as waylays you. Learn 'em about the head, I will."

The clarity of his round eyes reflected his earnestness in all that he had so solemnly spoken, and he punctuated his last pronouncement with a violent gesture of his hand. Had his

sincerity seemed any less, I would have laughed to hear this young man all but of an age with me speaking as might a seasoned old drover or carter about the dangers of the road.

"Now, Tom, we must not let our fears rule us. How shall I fare in London by myself if I cannot even ride a day through Middlesex without a stout footman at my side?"

"Be that as it may, mister Luke..."

"Come, surely you cannot say that you would rather ride another day with me than be back among your own people all the sooner."

"That's neither here nor there. I have a duty," said Tom. His eyes on me had changed from fearful to hurt.

"I do not mean to say that you are in any way unfit to protect me. There is none I would rather have with me if it came to, as you say, learning anyone. I merely state that I anticipate no such need. So, please, go home and be of service to my mother, and there is an end to it."

"As you say. But I don't like it," said he. Again he leaned in close to speak at my ear, "And see that you attend to those that are a watching you, mister Luke. Even now I see a man what looks very keen to know your business, down the table on the other side with the tall hat."

I started a little at this pronouncement, now anxious that someone was watching me. Tom wiped up the last of his gravy and

ate the last crust of bread then, with a quick nod to me, got up from the table and left the hall. I leaned back to watch him leave, and then slowly swept the room with my eyes in as subtle a way as I could manage. Most of the faces I took in were occupied with revelry or conversation, but when my glance made it to the place where Tom had indicated, I caught the eye of a man who was occupied, so it seemed, with nothing but watching me. He was shorter than the men to either side of him—probably about my own height (which is to say, unimpressive)—but he made up for that lack of stature in breadth, seeming about half again as wide as another man, yet he was not fat. He smiled as our eyes grappled for an instant, showing white teeth between a black mustache and a beard streaked with gray that covered only the chin and came to a sharp point. He raised his tankard in my direction, drained its contents, and stood up to leave.

I hardly knew how to think of this strange man. He seemed so unabashed to be found watching me from across the table. When he stood, he revealed a rapier suspended from a hanger draped over his plain, but well-tailored, doublet. This was not unusual—after all, I wore one as well—though it marked him as a gentleman, for none of lower birth were allowed under the law to carry a sword. He pulled at the bottom of the doublet to smooth the fabric and walked to the foot of the stairs, showing that he was a guest for the night as well. I watched him ascend the

stairs and kept watching after he was blocked from view, wondering who he was and why he had been watching me.

It may normally have been my way to brood about such an occurrence, especially given the warnings of Tom, but at the start of an unknown journey I was easily swayed by the assembly to change my disposition for that evening and to adopt a more sanguine humor. I had not been staring after the stout, dark man for long when one of the serving girls jostled me in her haste, causing a flagon of ale to spill between me and the young man sitting next to me at the table. The accident was not taken hard by either of us, and we began a conversation as a result. He was a journeyman carpenter also on his way to London, where he hoped to earn the freedom of the city and eventually open a shop of his own. This young artificer, named Edmond, voiced a host of fears and doubts in among his excitement that mirrored my own. As I listened I began to think how much more desperate was my own mission, having no foundation for my hopes of fortune. So, though merry, the both of us felt swift currents of worry within reach of us. We did what many men do in such times, and drank, sang, and danced long into the night to keep the fears at bay. It was an unsteady climb up the stairs that brought me to my bed, and then only after the landlord begged us to retire.

I rose early next morning, despite my indisposition, mostly to show no weakness to Tom, who was up and about early every

day. I threw open the window in our little room in hopes of the morning sun and some fresh air, only to find a dense fog had settled in. We broke our fast together in the hall with the landlord and his wife. To those good people I turned the warmest cheer that I could muster while saying not a word to Tom. The landlord, one mister Oakes, seemed to take his humor from the weather and shook his head slowly as he wondered aloud at my setting out in such gloom after so late a night. Mistress Oakes had, by contrast, that continual disinterested effervescence so common among those whose business is providing for the comfort of their fellow man. She asked about my destination and business without betraying the smallest genuine interest, but made grunts and sighs all through my answers to her mechanical queries that seemed to fill her end of the discourse without signifying anything that I could articulate to you.

Tom left the table early to tend to the horses, and before long we were both ready to ride. Tom made no repetition of his warnings. I decided to be as cheerful as the circumstances allowed, and wished him a pleasant journey home, imploring him to attend to my mother and to assure her of my safe outset, at which he snorted quietly. He made no other objection and saw fit to wish me safe journey without lapsing into the tones of a prophet to a doomed man.

The fog presented an unpleasant addition to the day. In it

I could see only a few yards ahead. I tried to convince myself that it would burn off before too long and took to the saddle as confidently as I could. I was aware that Tom was probably watching me set out and I wanted more than anything to seem unconcerned. Before long the inn and the surrounding buildings and populated places faded into the mists behind me and my world became the shrouded section of road on which I traveled.

I heard that someone was following before I saw anything. You know, I am sure, how all sounds seem much louder when they travel through a dense fog. The steady, rhythmic clop-clopping of a horse bearing a rider came at me out of the wall of mist behind me. My heart pounded at the sound at first, for the atmosphere had combined with Tom's manner to form in me a strong agitation. I was at odds with myself to determine the best course of action. If I continued apace, I reasoned, I might never know who it was that rode behind me, though I might by that same reasoning avoid any interaction with the mysterious follower altogether. If I chose the opposite course of action and slowed my pace to get a glimpse of the unknown rider I would spare myself the agonizing wonder of his identity, but I might also make an encounter unavoidable. I decided that the removal of the worrying unknown would be the action most likely to ease my present suffering, and so I slowed my pace to give the rider time to gain distance on me.

The minutes passed tortuously as I kept my horse at a lumbering walk and watched behind me for a form to emerge from the gloom. Finally, a horse's head appeared and then astride him the fog parted around the form of the stout man who had taken such an interest in me in the hall the last evening. Now I choked back a flash of real fear. Did this man mean me harm, as Tom had foretold? I urged my steed onward and sped down the road away from the many torments that my brain devised as the intention of the dark stranger. When I finally slowed my pace again to listen, I heard no sounds of pursuit. Relieved, I began to breathe more easily and, having calmed myself sufficiently, found that both my mount and my own person were hard-ridden and in need of rest. The sound of running water met my ears and before long the road crossed a large creek by way of an old stone bridge. I thought that I would let the beast have a drink from the stream while I washed the sweat and grime from my face. As I approached I dismounted and led my horse by the bridle.

I had no sooner turned off the road to walk down to the stream beside the bridge, than two men stepped out from cover behind trees flanking the way. Both of them were large, in height as well as sinew, and each carried a broad-bladed sword. They had obscured their faces by tying some rough cloth around their heads, like a kerchief pushed down over the face.

The one closer to me called out, “Tread lightly, my fine gentleman. Give us your purse and we will do you no harm.”

The other sped across the ground between us to stand behind me, his sword pointed directly at my back.

“You have made a mistake, I fear,” said I. “On two counts.”

“How’s that?” asked the same brigand.

“First, I have scant little coin, hardly worth your effort.”

The second thief chuckled, “We’ve heard that before, my lad. Let’s have a look at the purse, and I’ll be judge of its worth.”

“You said two counts. What other reason have you?” asked the first.

“Second,” I said, “you seem to think that I will give you what I have without a fight.”

Then I leapt forward and to the right so that the horse was between me and my assailants. I drew my sword an pivoted to face the direction of the robbers. Meanwhile, my poor horse, wholly unaccustomed to blades and angry men, reared up and kicked with her front legs, tearing through nothing but air, but also further dividing me from the two attackers. I shrank back from her strike, thinking of nothing but avoiding a sharp kick that would probably more effectively wound me than an errant sword blow.

Thinking back on it now, I like to presume that I was thinking clearly enough to remember all I had been told about such men and that I therefore knew that they were robbers, not killers, and would prefer not to have to deal with my body if they could instead leave me penniless and without any notion of their identities. The truth of the matter is more likely that I was overcome with aggravation that Tom had been right in his fears, and that frustration manifested itself in a fit of uncharacteristic boldness. Whatever the motivation, I had committed myself to the combat, and had no choice but to see it through to its conclusion.

The horse sped away from the combat at a run after the initial strike, leaving me uncovered against two armed men. Though untested with the sword, I had such confidence in my abilities as any ignorant young fool might. My dancing master had taught me the fundamentals when I was a boy and had been ever full of compliments as to my form and facility with a blade. That this betokened more in regards to dancing than fighting had not occurred to me. I squared myself against the first robber, who was now closer, and began to bring all of those lessons in defense to my mind.

My opponent spoke, “Come, boy, there’s no need for you to get hurt. You’ve been exceeding brave. No one would fault you now if you just put down that sword and give us your purse.

We'll even let you keep the horse."

Head full of wards and footwork, I launched forward at him, extending my sword arm. He stepped to the side, avoiding the blow.

"Hoy!" he cried. "You'd best watch where you point that thing. If your purse is as empty as you say, why not give it over?"

All my frustration and worry boiled to the surface and escaped my lips as a shouted "No!" I settled back into my guard and waited for him to make an attack. Unfortunately, I had lost track of his companion, and I was saved from being hewn by his sword by the merest chance of catching a glimpse of him out of the corner of my eye. Thinking to avoid the overhead cut from behind by once again dodging forward and to the right, I leapt. This time the first thief was ready for me and thrust out his leg, which caught me in the shin as I went and caused me to sprawl to the ground. Still, for all my inexperience, I was nimble. I was back on my feet in a trice, sword at the ready once again, and now I could see both of my foes.

Both brigands began to look more determined, as though my insistence on defending myself had been the original offense in our dealings together. With a nod to his confederate, the first man swung at me with a wide strike from the outside. At the same time, the second man charged at me with sword out-thrust, coming

at me lower and from the opposite side. I yielded ground and ran to one of the trees by the side of the road, hoping that it might afford some useful cover against two men. They follow hard upon me. I had scarcely made it past the tree before a sword bit into it, swung by the second man.

The tree's trunk stood thick as a large man. It would serve. Whenever one of my attackers made to move around the trunk, I would thrust out at his fellow, pushing myself away from the advance, and forcing them to stay close together and on the opposite side from me. This tactic worked for the first few passes, but the robbers quickly grew tired of my dance. The second man broke off and followed the path that my horse had made when she fled. I realized, as had he, that my valuables could be taken without ever dealing with me simply by plucking them from the horse's back where they were secured. I decided to quit the relative safety of the tree to stop him from taking my money and belongings, such as they were.

I ran after him, hoping that pure speed would take me out of the influence of the close guard of the first man. His stroke missed me by inches, but I did not even look back, such was my haste. My horse had not gone far. I found the second man approaching her down by the bank of the stream a dozen yards or so from the road. He was crouched, with his arms wide, trying to make soothing sounds, but not doing a very convincing job of it.

When he heard me coming he turned to face me and spat.

"You don't know when you're beat, boy," he said.

His comrade was right behind me, so that by the time I stopped to make a good distance from him, I was again surrounded. My feet sank into the spongy soil near the bank and I wondered how to proceed. There was nothing for it but to make an attack on one of them that would put him out of the action, for it was plain that I could not fight them both at once. I charged at the second man, toward the stream and my horse. This time, instead of leaping aside, my opponent brought his sword around in a sweeping blow to swat aside my blade. The weight of his weapon worked to his advantage and snapped my rapier clean in two. The force of the blow stung my wrist and, after staring dumb at it for an instant, I threw away the useless hilt.

My desperation was now at its height. Unarmed and out-manned, I gave up rational control of myself and resorted to some bestial instinct. I ducked low under the next swing from the second man while charging forward at him. I jumped straight at his chest, fists raised in front of me. We collided and fell together into the mud of the bank.

There followed a great deal of thrashing and flailing in the mud as we struggled for control of one another, but this was cut short by the arrival of the first man. He put the tip of his sword at my throat and I stopped struggling. They had beaten me

and I was at their mercy.

Their first task, having bested me, was to confine me. They fetched some rope from among the hidden tools of their trade and tied me to a tree that lay some little distance from the road. While they bound me, they gagged me with a cloth so that I could not call for help. Then they began slowly emptying my bags and taunting me with the things that they had won. I was beyond struggling, beyond hope that I could avoid being left tied to the tree with my money and few possessions gone forever. The first man paraded around with my finest shirt draped over his crude jerkin when a hail rang out from the direction of the road.

It was a clear, lilting voice, and it asked, “Is anything the matter?”

Both of my captors were taken as unaware as I. They turned to see the newcomer. At the same time they had moved enough that I could see him too. It was the man who had been riding behind me—the same man who had been watching me the night before. I wriggled furiously and made as much noise as I could while still bound and gagged.

The first brigand spoke, “Good morrow friend,” he said to the new arrival, flashing a horrible smile with fewer teeth in it than he had fingers on one hand. “Our business is not with

you. If you will ride on down the way, there need be no trouble."

"I beg your pardon for contradicting you," said the dark man, "but there seems to be a deal of trouble already. I imagine that young gentleman would think very ill of me indeed if I were to ride on leaving him in such a state."

He spoke cheerfully and always with a musical quality. He had an accent, but it was not pronounced. It was more in the cadence of his speech that one could tell he was not born into the English tongue. He was on foot and had taken a few steps toward us.

"Stay back, old man, and heed my warning."

"And if I do not?" he said casually. "Will you visit upon me the same indignities as you have him?"

"I'll cut your throat for being an interfering old fool," said the second brigand.

"Ah, that does not sound enticing in the least. May I present a counter-proposal?"

The second thief stepped forward, as if intent to make real his threat. His sword leapt from its scabbard and he swung it at the older man. The latter stepped outside the line of the blow so smoothly that it hardly seemed that he had moved at all. Then, as part of the same easy motion, he pulled his own sword out of its scabbard so that the pommel thrust forward and caught

the thief in the stomach, doubling him over breathless.

The first robber drew his sword, but before he could even swing it, the stranger had whipped the blade of his rapier around and caught the other on the back of his hand. The robber shouted and dropped the sword. He looked as if he would strike out at the stranger with his bare hands, and they stood there, eyes locked, motionless for a long moment. Then the brigand ran. The second one was still recovering from the blow he had taken, but when he saw his partner flee he picked himself up and limped off after him.

The formidable dark man strode toward me. He still wore the same grim expression that had so affected my abusers and I was more than a little frightened of him myself. As he approached, however, his expression changed to one of concern and care. He unbound me and helped me up.

“Well, you seem intact, if not entirely unscathed,” he said, smiling.

I stammered something incomprehensible by way of thanks.

“Where are my manners,” he said with a wink. “I am Vincentio Saviolo, late of Padua, and a good many other places as well.”

“I’m Luke,” I replied. “I mean, Luke Muston. I know not how to thank you.”

“You may thank me by assuring me that you are put back to

rights. Did they make off with anything?”

“I think it is all here. They were so busy tormenting me with it that they did not secure anything of mine before you arrived.”

“Then let us get your baggage and animal back in order and perhaps you will see fit to accompany me for a while. I find the road so tiring when I travel it alone.”

“I can hardly refuse after you have been so instrumental in my salvation.”

“Very good. It may also prove wise for me to have a young gentleman with me in case I need protection,” he said, turning a twinkling, ink-black eye toward me.

I laughed.

It quickly came out that we were both headed to London, where Saviolo lived and taught young gentlemen to use the sword in the Italian style. We rode together for the rest of the day. Along the way it seemed that everything that we saw reminded the old swordsman of a story from his youth. He told me of battles and duels, ancient feuds and newfound enmity that both lead to the same ends. I confided in him my many hopes for finding my fortune and I confessed my wonder and anxiety at moving to the city.

In the middle of the afternoon we stopped at another inn to rest and find refreshment. As we sat by the window, I asked

Saviolo why he had been staring at me the previous night.

"Oh, please forgive me, I meant no harm," he said. "It is just that you look very like my son Antonio."

"Does he live in London with you?"

"No, he is with God. He left us when he was of an age with you, I think."

I could think of nothing to say after that and we ate in silence.

Back on the road he resumed his talk as readily as before, and the time passed quickly. Before I knew it, the city loomed ahead of us in the gathering dark. We rode up the Strand toward the wall. Once inside, I struggled to take in the sights of London. Saviolo deposited me at the Bell and Hoop, near to Paul's churchyard, where I saw myself ensconced in the city and ready for the next adventure.

Before he left me, Saviolo put a hand on my shoulder. "It is no mean thing to learn to govern your weapon," he said. "I think you would find my school to be a fit place for you. Visit, and we will talk more."

"My thanks to you," I said, "for everything."

"God grant you good fortune," he said.

"Fortune indeed," I said.

Letter from Agnes Muston to Sir William Cecil, 1st Baron Burghley, etc.

Right worshipful, My humble duty remembered, trusting in the justice of almighty God to keep you in health, I beseech your Honour to accept this letter by way of commendation to receive my humble son, and to show such favor upon him as is right and proper and befitting such a worthy Christian Gentleman as I know your Lordship to be. Your Lordship is I thinke rightly accounted, as a wyse and generous counsellar who in your loving care of her Majesties right Honourable state and person hath prooved to be like unto that aunciente king of Rome, Numa Pompilius, who held not onely the credite of both the Roman and the Sabine peoples ere his crowening, but stayed him until the augury of Jupiter himself affirmed him worthy of the office. Certes, I have myself heard excellent report of your wisdom and

goode counsyl from my husband, may his soul reside in heaven.

For that your Worshipe might the better to know of Luke, my foresaid son, I would have you understand that his father when he lived bestowed upon him the fullest measure of love and purchased for him such education as few men in these times may procure. You may thinke it ill that Luke hath not taken his learning at either University as many do, but think you of the tutilage that may be had when well chosen for a boys particular merits. I assure your Lordship that Luke hath excellent French and Latin, and reads well the Greek, and in these tongues doth he discover the works of all such auncient phylosophers as other young gentleman do, and mayhap more beside, as he hath with relish spent many happy howers in such bookes as his father had found out for him, the like I think me he would scarce finde so ready and convenient at any school. You will therefore find him to be as well apt to any employmentes as are befitting to a Gentleman of honourable breeding and upright studiousnes as any man howsoever he be schooled.

I am well contented that I have lain out for you Honour all reason that you should require to make some small measure of your facility manifest to assist Luke as he arrives in London, but well do I know that there are many who make like petition unto your Worship and with cause seeming alike with that I have given. To this I add that your Lordship was ever renownede in

the memory of my husband, that same Walter Muston who in your minde may be recalled, who also credited you as a worthy Gentleman his friend on more than one occasion and with whom your Lordship did business and shewed some favour bytymes. I reminde your lordship of the love that my husbande held you in not to claim some unjust or untowarde right to your favour, but merely to give the opportunity to deal with Luke as almighty God would have all men deal with his creations, with love and remembrance of common bond.

I fear that I have trespassed already overmuch on your Honours good grace and will therefore beseech you one last time to receive my son into your wise and righteous guidance as he findeth his way in London and seeketh such employment as may do honour and credit unto him and to the memory of his father, God rest his soul.

The Almighty preserve your lordship in health and prosperity, and see you well to do more of such good as you are justly knowen. Tinford this Monday the xv of May 1592.

Your honours most dutiful bound obedient servant

Agnes Muston

Of Quarrels

There were few men in London in 1592 with more influence than Sir William Cecil, baron of Burleigh, who had in varying capacities advised the queen for more than two score years. My father had often told me of his dealings with Cecil, from earlier days when he worked in London. On the strength of those remembrances, my mother wrote a letter to the great man, desiring him to provide some assistance for the sake of his old friend. The very day that I arrived in London I delivered the letter to Cecil house, leaving my room at Savage's by way of address.

I can little recall the diversions that entertained me in those first few days. Being new to the city, every mundane thing felt fresh and strange to me. It quickly became apparent to me that the connection with Burleigh, slight though it was, formed the pith of my stratagem for enrichment. To take the chance of

striking out on my own with no further scaffolding to support the endeavor had seemed a fine thing to me when I had been at home thinking of London as magical place, like Spencer's Faery land. It was all different once I had arrived to find the city to be a place of terrestrial wonders, more likely to vomit forth human filth upon its crowded, muddy streets than to produce a kindly sprite ready to reward a pure heart. The sport that I found to occupy me those first days was, therefore, best designed to distract me from the reality of the situation into which I had so eagerly leapt. Every day, if not every hour, that passed without word from Burleigh came to me as proof of my folly. Lest I give the impression that I lost myself in base pursuits, drinking and whoring my way across town, let me assure you that my tastes were much more innocent, if no less idle. I was bewitched by the comings and goings of the varied and, to me, exotic people who swarmed every day through the capital. I know that something enticed me to walk every street within the walls in those first days, but I was particularly drawn to the places where men and women came to buy and sell goods. Paul's churchyard was closest to my lodgings, and many were the hours that I spent leaned against a wall out of the way, watching the changing of wares and coins. In later years, I found much satisfaction and delight in observing the comings and goings of bees and such like insects in among gardens of flowering plants.

I think that it was the same impulse in my younger self that found such joy in taking in the business of man.

The details of that time are of little import to the present narrative, except to note that I was immediately awake to the precariousness of my situation, and I found no active pursuit to amend the same. Some ten days had passed when I finally received a reply to my letter, and I promptly arranged to meet with lord Burleigh the following afternoon.

Cecil house rose up along the Strand between the western wall of the city and Westminster, where the Queen's palace of Whitehall drew in all the power of England. Taken with the other great men of the land, Burghley was not accounted fashionable or ostentatious. His London house glowed with the evident wealth that accompanied his success, but it lacked the excess in detail of the houses of men younger in years or in prosperity. When I arrived I was swept through a commodious hall to a small chamber with large glazed windows that looked out into a garden. It was no doubt the personal study of the great man, and from within it, one might with but a little amendment of the senses imagine the place to be far from the hurly-burly of the city. Though drawn to the light and green that flowed through the window, I could not help but notice the fineness of the intricately carved panels of dark wood that lined the place. In keeping with his lordship's sober taste, these panels were exceptionally well

rendered while remaining plain enough, unpainted and lacking gilding or other ornamentation, to seem less remarkable than they were. Burghley must have seen me admiring them, because he spoke before I had even registered that he was in the room with me.

"You like the carvings?"

"Oh, yes. I have never seen their like before."

"It is gratifying to see a young gentleman with an eye for subtlety."

"Thank you, my lord," I said, then I remembered who it was that I was talking to and added hastily, "Forgive me, my lord, I forgot myself."

"That is quite alright," he said, smiling.

"You are very kind to speak with me, my lord," I said.

"The bonds of friendship demand no less, Luke. Your father was an excellent man, and a good friend. It grieves me to learn of his passing. What plans do you have for your enrichment? How may I assist you?"

"I must confess, my lord, that I am at somewhat of a loss. Forgive me that I am ill-prepared to engage your generosity."

"You are young, and thrown into such trials as befit an older man. Perhaps the first service I can perform in assisting you is to help you chart your course, so to speak."

"I would happily benefit from your experience."

"Let us begin with your assets. To what tasks are you apt? What education have you?"

"My lord, I hardly know how to answer. Until a short time ago, I was wholly engaged in the pursuits that occupy any young gentleman living in the country. I have little taste for the hunt, but I ride well enough. I know something of the management of lands and the organizing of men to work them. Of the governance and husbandry of an estate I am capable and comfortable. Though I have not been to university, my father was careful of my education and provided me with the finest tutors. I can read and write in Latin and Greek (though my facility with the latter wants frequent amendment), and I have tolerable French. I am confident that my familiarity with the ancient philosophers is as strong as any."

"Do you seek a profession? Have you entertained a future in secular law or medicine?"

"In truth, my lord, I have spent little time in contemplation of either one. I am not insensible to the connection between the law and service to the crown. Not having been at Oxford or Cambridge, my understanding of law as a profession is limited, at best. Yet, I would know more, that I might bend myself toward the law. I would, for surety, undertake any honest labor that would lead to some security, and service to the civil authority may best suit my humor."

"There are many young gentlemen that look to the mechanism of state since the diminishing of the Church with the passing of Catholicism from the land. You are right to think of law as a means to such like positions. I will send you to Gray's Inn with my recommendation." He dipped a pen in his ink pot and began to scratch out a note on a sheet of paper. "You may find it difficult there, as you are already advanced more in years than most new scholars, who have the advantage of university preparation over you as well. Still, if you are determined, you may yet distinguish yourself."

The letter written, signed, and sealed, he held it out for me and looked at me with a partial smile and the sort of steadiness of eye that betokens the termination of an interview. I did not expect more of our conversation, but I yearned for it. Given my position, I was lucky to have received this much attention from the old lord. I took the letter.

"You are too kind, my lord," I said. "I shall remember the friendship you have shown me."

I left Cecil house discouraged. I got more than perhaps I had any right to expect, but I had somehow hoped for more. In my young brain, the connection to such a powerful lord drew a direct line to my own success in some vague, undefined career. That I had been accepted into his presence on such slight

familiarity and given so great a boon as his recommendation at an inn of court was miraculous. Had I been a different man, I could have found a way to apply myself to the task of winning the confidence of the barristers of Gray's and might in the relatively short span of a few years been called to the bar myself. Perhaps all young men are prone to some mad-brained conceit that leads them on paths that no thoughtful man would tread. All that I can say is that upon that instant, I saw little value in the gift so easily bestowed upon me. All I could think of Gray's Inn was how long it would take for me to be called to the bar, and how much effort I would have to muster to even set myself rightly in the way of such an appointment. I thought also of the great expense of such an education, and how the intervening years would only increase the exhausting burden of debt that my mother and myself already bore.

I think that I did presume that I would do well in the service of the crown in some modest office. Even the most humble and timid man has moments of pride and assumption of his own worth beyond his due. I had some notion that Burghley would exchange some few words with me and make me a personal assistant or clerk on the very spot. In my head, informed by and chiefly filled with the romantic tales enacted by players, every good thing was ready for the man who asked for it. Walking away from Cecil in a confusion of emotions, I told myself that I had not

demanded enough—that if I had but told the great man that I should work for him, he would have given me fruitful employ without further proofs of my talents.

I was in, therefore, that sort of unthinking stupor that comes over one filled with thoughts of a conversation just ended. My feet already knew their own way about town well enough, but a clot of carters and carriages diverted me down the wrong street once back inside the walls and, instead of arriving back home at my chamber in Savage's Inn, I found myself along a row of unfamiliar houses when I came back into my senses. I stood in the street for a long moment, almost going so far as to scratch my head, when a shingle hanging off the front of one of the houses jarred my memory. It was the head of a lion, done in red paint, with a stripe of worn gilt along the edge.

I had not forgotten Saviolo so much as I had put the notion of him and his school aside in my busily aimless mind. I was not convinced that I needed to learn the sword, and I was very much convinced that I had no money with which to pay for instruction. The double doors beneath the sign hung open and from within thundered the sound of a great brawl. Between the recollection of my recent savior, recognition of the sign by which he told me I could find him, and the grim allure of the sounds of violent activity, I edged into the doorway without even knowing I had been so moved. The threshold opened onto a long, voluminous

hall. In the midst of the space two young men squared off against one another with swords in their hands. Nearly a dozen others crowded around those two, leaving a pace or two of empty floor between the combatants and themselves, so that they formed a crescent of onlookers. The spectators called out to the fighters, offering encouragement and boisterous censure by turns. Even to my senses, so unaccustomed to the ways of scholars of the art military, the widened eyes of the participants clearly showed excitement rather than fear. On the opposite side of the fighting men, facing the crescent of students, Saviolo stood still as a great oak, taking in all that transpired. Alone in the hall, the old master's features remained still, his eyes flitting between the two blades that tore through the air.

The bout ended quickly. Of the two men fighting, one fairly bounced across the floor with a dexterity that was somehow both ferocious and languid. He seemed to me to be the better swordsman, batting aside the other's blade with his off hand and weaving or ducking out of the way of harm to bring his own point to bear. The other presented a less imposing and less graceful person, being shorter and stockier, though still a little taller than I. His movements flowed more rigidly than the first man's, but in avoiding the repeated strikes aimed at him he showed a celerity that I would not have initially suspected. They made

four or five passes at one another while I watched, working their way circle-wise around the hall as they went. The taller man yielded ground on the last assault, stepping backward and to one side. His opponent pressed forward with a thrust directed at his leg. Taking the advantage, the first man reversed his movement, bringing his leg inside the line of the thrust and extending his own sword at the other's chest. The counter-action had won the day, and the foiled rapier of the graceful man bent with a solid hit.

The onlookers raised their voices to an even greater frenzy. The greater part of them cheered for the winner, but others cried out in lower voices and brought their hands down upon their thighs, or hissed between their teeth as they turned away. A few coins changed hands in the immediate aftermath, but none there seemed to carry their disappointment or elation for very long, and the whole assembly in short time turned toward Saviolo to hear what he had to say about the contest.

Saviolo leaned on a slender stick of about a rapier's length, and looked on his students with a little smile.

"Well fought, the both of you," he said. "Before I tell you what I saw, we have a guest." He turned and nodded at me. "Luke Muston, a gentleman out of Warwickshire, you are very welcome among us, Luke."

A cheer of greeting came from the assembled gentlemen, who

had all turned their attention to me. I felt their gazes keenly in the heat of my cheeks, having come to be among them of no plan of my own, and not knowing at all what to say.

Saviolo continued, “Introductions will come in time, my boy. For now, acquaint yourself with Henry Starkyn.” Here he gestured at the lithe and lanky combatant, who slowly pushed a stray, golden forelock back into the mass of his hair and gave me a little nod. “And,” he continued, “Hugh Gregory.” Hugh smiled broadly and whipped his blade up and then back down in a smart salute.

“Tell us, Luke,” said Saviolo, now taking the steady, penetrating tones of a teacher, “what did you see in the contest?”

“I am not expert in the ways of the sword.”

“That may be, but your eyes may see as well as any man’s. Perhaps the opinion of one untrained will be of use.”

“Very well,” I said, hesitant to reveal my ignorance in front of these young men, while also feeling some satisfaction that the sword master had remembered my name and was so eager to include me in the proceedings, “The taller man—er—Henry, seemed to me to govern his weapon with less surety than the other. By contrast, Hugh made every strike and counter with precision. If judged on handling of weapon alone, I would have said that Hugh had the advantage, yet Henry prevailed, and made the effort seem

trifling."

"Good, yes," said Saviolo, "And what may we surmise thereby, presuming that you have observed aright?"

"Well, again, my familiarity with the art of combat is small, but this example suggests to me that the particulars of the weapon, while no doubt important, make up only a part of a successful defense."

The room quieted to hear my response, and for a few moments after I had spoken it remained so, with the noise coming in from the street seeming extraordinarily loud. I looked at Saviolo in the hope that he would take up the lesson and sweep the eyes of all the company away from me. He looked back at me, his eyes crinkled at the corners, and his smile twitching slightly. An outburst from Hugh broke over the silence.

"God's blood!" he snarled.

The contemplative moment having ended, the others in the room exhaled a fit of titters and chuckles at their friend's vexation.

"I am sorry," I said, "Did I say something wrong?"

"No, curse it," said Hugh, "you have only repeated more or less exactly what the Maestro has been saying to me for some time."

Still confused, I asked, "Is that bad?"

Hugh tried to beam at me despite his agitation, resulting

in a grimace so deformed as to be comical. “No, it is not bad,” he said, “but it does make it that much the harder for me to ignore. I should say, ‘well spotted.’”

Saviolo raised a hand. “You would all do well to take that lesson away with you. Luke is no master of the sword, though I have seen that he has some courage, and yet he has seen what some of you do not. You fight not with your sword, but with your whole body. Henry’s technique is loose, unstudied, despite his years at this art, but he is the best among you in that he treats a fight like he would a dance. He fights with his feet, making deft steps in good time. And he fights with the center of him, knowing when to bend and be swayed by the rhythm of the combat.”

“Now let us all put Henry’s example into practice. Pair off and go through my basic exercises in the high ward. Pay attention especially to the relation of your body to your opponent, and think—no, feel—how you might exploit your relative positions within the confines of the blows I have taught you.” He looked to me and said, “Take up a sword, Luke, there are plenty on the rack. You can work with Hugh, since you have seen his weakness already. And Hugh, I trust that your mastery of technique will benefit our new friend.”

Every man did as ordered, and in no time at all we were arranged in pairs down the length of the hall, exchanging blows

according to a sequence devised by Saviolo and known to all but me. I found a simple foiled rapier in a rack on the wall and returned to Hugh, who still smiled broadly.

"I am sorry to have taken your assessment so ill. You have a keen eye, I think. Do you know the master well?"

"No, we only met less than a fortnight ago, though he did me a great service on the road."

"I may complain, but he is the best teacher there is. It is the office of a scholar to be peevish when a wise professor tells him a truth he does not wish to acknowledge."

"For my part, I find I know so little that any truth is welcome."

Saviolo's gaze fell upon us, so we halted our pleasantries and Hugh explained the sequence. I did not feel immediately comfortable with the techniques, as they were different from what my dancing master had taught me as a boy, but I tried to make my body acquainted with them. I had little opportunity to enter into the "dance" what with struggling to do all that was required of me in good enough time to keep myself from sprawling headlong on the floor. The old master strode up and down the hall calling out encouragement and suggestions. Whenever he came to me and Hugh, he praised the latter for being so adept a teacher, and told me that I was getting along fine. After a quarter of an hour, he stopped everyone and addressed the class

as a whole.

"You are all doing quite well. Now let us turn our efforts to the low ward. I think you will find..."

He got no farther in his speech because at that instant another young man ran in through the still open doorway, all but yelling, "Master Saviolo," over and over again as he came. It had fallen out that Hugh and I were closest to the door, so the newcomer's trajectory stopped in our midst. All attention was on him, and Saviolo crossed the hall in two or three strides that each seemed larger than his rather short legs should be capable of. The young messenger must have come some distance, for, having halted his progress, it was all he could do to hunch over, panting, with his hands on his thighs and his chest heaving away the effort of the run.

In the alarm caused by so abrupt an entrance, no one thought to tell me who he was, but Hugh was in an instant upon him patting him on the back and saying, "What news, Tom? What has happened?"

Saviolo was there almost immediately after Hugh and said, "Stay back, my boys, give Thomas some room."

One of the other students was at the master's elbow with a cup filled with some refreshment, which Saviolo took and gave to Thomas. The young man drank it down and shook himself. Then he

addressed the professor, despite his haste and agitation, in the tones of a schoolboy reciting a passage from Tacitus.

"Maestro, it is Sam. He has gone out on Tyburn road by Tottenham Court to fight a man."

Whatever Saviolo had expected, it was clearly not this. He took Thomas by the shoulders and placed a firm gaze upon him. "Slow down, Thomas, and tell me what happened?"

I was perplexed by the commotion, and I was at the serious disadvantage of not knowing any of the young gentlemen involved. I felt that, despite the awkwardness of my forced evaluation, Hugh had been very kind and open toward me, so I looked to him in hopes of some explanation or commentary, but he was rigid, his neck tensed so that the muscles of it stood out and his eyes did not waver from young Thomas, or Tom as he had called him.

The said Thomas had taken another deep breath or two to moderate his haste and follow the command of his teacher.

"We were walking back from Whitehall along the Strand, Sam and I and a couple of others. Sam was in a foul mood, having been on the wrong end of Essex's wit. Just before Temple Bar we passed by three young gentlemen, though I hesitate to use that word to describe them. Their chief reclined against a low wall, and from a long way off he stared, I might even say he leered, at Sam. My friend was in no mood to brook insolence, so he strode up to the man straightway and did not stop until their

faces were within kissing distance.

'Do you some office with me, sir, that you look upon me so?' Sam demanded.

'I have no business with you,' said the other, not taking his eyes off Sam, and so continuing his offense.

'Then why do you look at me?'

The other sneered such as I have rarely seen and said, 'I look because I have eyes.' His face was so twisted by mockery and chuckling to himself that he looked a very gargoyle.

At that point I tried to pull Sam away, thinking that there would be no reasoning with this mad conceited fellow, but Sam could not let it stand. 'That is the crows' fault, sir, in that they have not yet plucked them from your skull.'

Then the other man, who had until that moment been but sporting with his bluster, ceased all levity, and his gay sneer turned hard and sharp. 'If you are a man, you will come with me and we will see whose eyes the crows will feast upon.'

'I am for you,' cried Sam. In truth, Maestro, his hand was on the hilts of his sword, and I think he would have drawn right there in the middle of the Strand and cut the fellow down had not I and his other friends held fast his arm and convinced him to follow some gentlemanly procedure that whatever might fall out he would not be censured by his general peers. They made arrangements to meet in a quarter of an hour in the little

clearing north of the Tyburn road where I told you he was bound to fight."

Saviolo, for the first time since Thomas arrived, looked alarmed. "A quarter of an hour! That is little concession to the proper duello. When was this?"

"I came directly from Temple Bar to fetch you."

"Then we have no time. I will go at once."

The little clot of scholars that had been working itself into knots trying to get close to the news wordlessly decided that all in attendance would accompany the master on this outing. When Saviolo went to the edge of the hall to get his cloak, all of us moved with him. All, that is, except for Hugh, who was nowhere to be seen. Saviolo turned to us and said, "You cannot all come with me. Sampson's adversary will think we are a gang come to thrash him if he sees us all coming up the road, armed and determined. I will take Thomas and," he looked at me, "Luke, you might find the outing instructive."

I was taken aback. I had spent the better part of an hour feeling entirely out of place, and now to be included in what seemed to me to be an intimate errand—and an urgent one as well—made me wonder what the old master was planning. Still, to be actively employed in any endeavor felt an improvement over the idleness I had fallen into, so I nodded my assent and followed him out the doors.

The spot in question was, as Thomas had described, a small, flat clearing in a thicket of trees and undergrowth just to the north of the Tyburn road on the way to Oxford. Though the way there was short, I was still somewhat in awe of how suddenly one could walk beyond the city walls to find oneself in open country. Even in the years since that time the growth of London without has been marked, but for many ages the City of London tried to keep itself within the artificial boundary of the walls erected first by the Romans.

Saviolo was mostly silent along the way, but before we even passed by Paul's churchyard he made introductions.

"Luke Muston, this is Thomas Hollyband. He is, as I am certain you have surmised, another one of the gentlemen who look to me for guidance in the art of arms. Thomas, Luke is a new scholar."

He had nothing else to say and lead us with a steady pace and his eyes fixed forward. Keeping up with the old master took some effort, as he walked with a fleetness far greater than his stature suggested, and even though he was shorter than most, I was no taller. Still, I desired some explanation or at least some matter to occupy myself while we went. I fell into step with Thomas and determined to make conversation.

"Is this a regular happening?" I asked.

"What? Oh, no, the Maestro does not like us to get into fights. He is very particular about what makes a justifiable combat."

"Forgive me, I took it from your description that this fellow, Sam, was quarrelsome."

"Sam? He has choleric fits, but this is the first real fight I have known him to get himself into. He is one of Essex's favorites, so his passions often follow those of his lordship."

"You know the earl?"

"Essex? Yes. He likes to have a group of followers with him much of the time. Though he can retreat into melancholy betimes. He studies with Saviolo, too, though in private of course. He graces the school on occasion. I am sure you will meet him before long."

"I cannot say that I will. Saviolo said I was a new student, but I have not the means to be a regular one, even if I were to desire it."

"You would do well not to contradict the Maestro," said Thomas with a laugh. "If he says you are a scholar, then you are one, whether you know it or not."

"We will see," I said. "What more can you tell me about Sam? I do not feel at all as though I understand what is happening."

"He is like most of us: the son of a man who made good his

fortune through some trade—shipping in old Gregory's case, rest his soul. Sam is newly made head of the family, as his father went to God not long ago. I think that the responsibility weighs on him."

"Gregory? Are Sam and Hugh kinsmen?"

"Yes, brothers. And closer than most. Hugh has a cool head, but he admires Sam for his impetuosity."

"That explains it then," I said, mostly to myself.

"What?"

"When you were relating your tale to us, Hugh was tense as a bowstring. Then, when I looked for him to answer some of my questions, he was gone."

Saviolo, who had not said a word through all of this, and who I assumed was lost in thoughts of his own, spoke sharply, "Hugh was missing? He must have gone ahead to see to his brother. We must make haste!"

Thomas and I exchanged perplexed glances, for clearly we both thought that we were making as much haste as might be expected. But we followed our leader into a trot and fairly ran past Saint Giles' to the crossroads with Tyburn street and even faster down the last stretch to the appointed field of combat.

The way through the thicket from the road proved somewhat difficult. Bushes and shrubs had overgrown the area, and finding a path required care so as not to snag our clothes on shoots,

canes, and thorns. I think that if I had been trying to find the fight on my own, I would have despaired at the barrier and presumed that I had taken the wrong way, but it was clear from his movement that Saviolo knew this place. He had kept the rod with which he adjusted scholars' movements in the school, using it as a walking stick on our journey. Now he used it to part the vegetation and scout out the thoroughfare that would bring us to Sampson and his unknown foe. I followed last, letting Thomas go before me, and I was unsure of my footing in many places, my shoes sliding on a combination of mud churned up from the recent passage of many feet and the leaves and stems of plants broken off during that progress.

We made our way through some five or six yards of thicket in this way, and when we came to the end of it, a small clearing, scarcely bigger than the foundation of a house in town, opened before us. In that clearing stood eight men: three on our left side, and five on our right. Ours was the larger group. Four of them were strangers to me, but among them it was clear who was Sampson. He had his rapier out of its scabbard and whipped it through the air as best he could with Hugh (the fifth in the group) tugging at his sleeve and imploring him to come away from the madman with whom he was so determined to cross swords. Sampson's face was drawn tight, looking almost cracked with rage and frustration. He alternated between hurling curses

across the too-small field and shrugging his brother away. The other three of that party made a neat picture of young gentlemen. They huddled together in their corner of the glade, looking on with bored half-interest. They looked quite comical in their fine clothes so gathered in a rough field, grass and wildflowers scratching their hose, but their wills combined to disbelieve in their present surroundings, and the unconcern that they shone outward from themselves did little to relive anyone.

The other group consisted of three young men dressed as gentlemen, but without much by way of manner that would otherwise distinguish them from the common rabble. Their leader, for there was no mistaking him as any other, thrust forth his great, broad chest, straining inside a fashionable doublet, toward Sam. He gestured violently at his opponent and returned every curse with a stronger one, and added an additional oath to each. He too held a naked rapier, and with each spitting breath of his taunts he thrust the point at Sam.

“Sampson.” The voice was Saviolo’s, and though he spoke clearly and with enough volume that all could easily mark him, he used his professor’s voice and nothing harsher.

In his heat, Sampson had apparently not noted the arrival of the master and we other two newcomers. At being so addressed, he started and turned to face us.

“Maestro,” he said, “you needn’t have come. We will have an

end soon enough."

"So I see. And what offense has this man given you that you are so determined?"

At this, the opponent in question spoke, using the sneering tones that many a schoolboy employs to frighten his smaller peers. "Who's this old man? Have you called your grandfather to help you, coward?"

Sampson reddened. "Coward, am I?" he said, "I'll show you coward!" He broke free of Hugh's grasp and bolted forward. His foe rushed forward too, but the men he had with him took hold of him and kept him back. One of them said, "No, Bill, that's not the way of things. You must face each other like gentlemen."

"Come, come," said Saviolo, "no harm has yet been done. Why do you not cool your tempers? I'll wager a tankard of ale would do much to mend both your humors."

"Yes, go with your doter, fool," said the man called Bill, advancing on Saviolo now.

The old swordsman did not flinch or move himself in the slightest, but merely fixed Bill with a steady gaze, smiled faintly, and said, "Do be careful—William is it? Did not your father teach you to bait your hook only for fish you can bring ashore?"

Bill broke off his advance and renewed his attention on Sampson. "You are delaying," he said, "if you are man enough to

fight, then fight."

Saviolo ignored Bill and said to Sam, "None will think you any less a gentleman for refusing to fight one so obviously beneath you. Quite the contrary, I think."

"No. I have to fight him, it is a question of honor."

"Feh!" said Saviolo. "This has nothing to do with honor, but if you are so determined to fight, you must see it through."

I had watched this whole exchange in wonder, having never encountered such a strange quarrel in my life. Well, perhaps that is not true. I had seen boys in the yard at home have similar fights, but they never had weapons and usually ended up merely shoving each other until they both fell to the ground, then rolled in the dirt, bruised and exhausted. I had let myself believe that young gentlemen, especially those who had newly inherited the care of a family, would never come to such a pass. As Saviolo moved back out of the circle of trampled weeds that marked the field of battle, I stepped forward into it.

"Wait," I said, "I know neither of you, and hardly understand how you have come to this fray, but even I can see how ridiculous it is. Listen to Saviolo. Put up your swords and walk away from here, if not friends, then strangers that need never discourse again."

Bill cut over my last words, "First a grandfather, now a boy! What won't you try to save your neck?"

Whether the statement had pushed him past the point of reason, or the lengthy preamble had worked him into a frenzy that broke at that moment, Sampson's restraint failed. He pushed Hugh away from him with such force that the smaller man fell onto the ground, then he charged at Bill. The two crossed paths directly in front of where I stood, their swords coming so near to my face that I felt the wind of their passing. Rather than engage and exchange deliberate blows, they ran past one another, so that Bill ran headlong into the fashionable trio of gentlemen that were Sam's friends, and Sam ended up beside Bill's supporters.

During this advance, a firm hand took hold of me by the back of my doublet and pulled me back to the periphery of the field. Saviolo's voice sounded very close to my ear when he said, "Never try to part those who are determined to fight. If they cannot be dissuaded by reason, then they must reap their own consequences. It would not do to get yourself killed by fighting men on your first day with us." He stopped pulling me at that point and aimed a smile at me. "Besides, as you just said, you know neither of these fools."

Then, in a much louder voice that must have carried all the way back to the road, he said, "Hugh, stay back. You can be of no help to your brother in the midst of things. He has made his choice."

Hugh had indeed been surveying the arena and looked as if he was going to take some action. On hearing the command, he shot Saviolo a mutinous look, but shrank back quickly under the older man's gaze and came around the edge of the trees to stand next to us.

The fight wore on as we stood, powerless to stop it. After a couple more charging passes like the first, they met in the middle of the small area and brought their weapons more formally to bear. Neither man showed much precision with the blade. I assumed that Bill had little to begin with and that Sampson had lost his with the rest of his self-control. Still, they both fought well enough to make it a prolonged combat. At first, Bill took the defensive, beating away Sam's thrusts with hand or blade and yielding ground. This surprised me, as I had taken him to be that blustering sort of man that, when it comes to blows stands like a statue and reigns strikes down on his foe. For his part, Sam used speed to keep his opponent at bay and unable to react with counter-strikes. The rapidity with which he thrust the point of his rapier was terrifying. He moved the blade from one target of Bill's body to another in lightening succession. But such an assault can never endure long, even when delivered by one as able as Sam apparently was. When his endurance waned, he changed his stance and avoided a sequence of blows from Bill while marshaling his strength to renew his attack. On the third

such assault, one of Sam's thrusts, aimed at Bill's thigh, came in wide and low. Bill pulled his leg up and brought it down deftly on Sam's blade, breaking the top third of it off. Undeterred, Sam came at him with three slashing cuts in succession aimed at face, flank, and arm. With the last of these, Sam spun backward and to the left, so hoping thereby to put enough distance between them that he could defend against the far longer blade. During that action, his foot dragged a little on the wet weeds. He still stood firmly in his ward, but he was too close to Bill, who had launched an upward slash. Sam whipped his head back to avoid the blow while taking a passing step back as well. All looked well as he prepared for another strike, but within an instant his forehead reddened with blood.

I accounted it good fortune that, at seeing the wound, Bill ceased his attack. He laughed and spat. "Now we know the better man," he said, and turned back to his friends, breathing heavy and ragged from the exertion of the fight. As soon as Bill lowered his sword and took a step away, Sam's friends (among whom I counted myself) crowded around him. Saviolo took out a kerchief and staunched the blood. It was soon clear that, while he had a gash running along his right temple that was bleeding fiercely, Sam was in no serious danger. The old swordsman began giving orders to the others to bring a cart and get a doctor to meet them at the school. I was given no task and, having seen

that Sam was not mortally wounded, looked to see what had become of Bill and his friends. They had ambled leisurely toward the road and were almost out of the clearing, but as I looked, Hugh rushed past me, yelling curses at Bill and brandishing his sword.

Bill turned, a look of surprise in his wide eyes. He drew his rapier and managed to swat away the first thrust of Hugh's with his other hand. The second blow came hard upon the first, and Bill tried to move himself out of its line while thrusting wildly on his own part. It seems a tired manner of speaking to describe a moment of perilous action as hanging still for longer than it could ever really last, but I can think of no other way to describe it. I saw the two of them, both with sword arms extended and blades bent against the force of their points in the flesh of the other. Each man had struck his foe in the chest. I could see Bill's face, but not Hugh's. Bill's surprise was evident. His brows had drawn together, eyes round and white. His mouth hung slightly open, the abruptness of the action robbing him even of the ability to sneer. I expected both of them to fall, yet they stood there as if in bronze. At length, Hugh's head rolled almost imperceptibly to the side away from the sword, and then he slid off Bill's blade and crumpled to the ground. He landed on the wet weeds with an ungainly, squelching thud that had in it a finality that none of us watching could

gainsay. As he fell, his rapier sprang back from Bill's chest with force and shot several feet back toward the rest of us. When it landed I discovered why: he had been holding the foiled rapier that he carried with him from the school, the button on its tip could not have penetrated a layer of Bill's doublet, to say nothing of his flesh.

Bill continued to stand still where the blow had been struck. He came to the same realization about the sword and looked back at the motionless form of Hugh.

"Get up!" he said. "Get up, I say!"

His sword dropped from his shaking hand, and he turned to seek the counsel of his friends, but they were gone. His hands darted to his head, knocking off his hat. He pushed his fingers through his hair and clenched fists over handfuls of the wavy brown locks.

"No," he said. "No. Fool! Why would you?" He took a step toward the body, and spitting once again the word, "fool," he drew back a foot as if to kick Hugh's corpse, but checked himself so that the forward swing of it fizzled into a fumbling step. He looked up at me and at the others who had not already left on their errands. "He...he came at me. How was I to know? I didn't... I never." His eyes leapt to each of us in sequence and back to Hugh's limp body. Then he turned and ran as fast as he could through the thicket, his passing marked by the snaps of

breaking branches and the loud rustle of foliage.

After a moment's hesitation, I plunged forward to follow, but was halted in my progress by a clear call of "Luke, stop," from Saviolo. His sharp eyes shone with the hardness of polished stone.

"But, he is getting away," I said.

"Let him go."

"But..."

"What good will you do if you find him? He may be frighted enough to add you to his list of victims. The civil authorities will find him, or drive him beyond finding. Now we must think of Sampson," he said, then added in a softer voice that broke as he spoke, "and Hugh."

I had forgotten that Sampson was among us. He sat in the broken weeds clutching a blood-soaked cloth to the cut on his scalp. His mouth had frozen agape under liquid eyes that stared in vibrating horror at the form of his brother, slain mere feet from where he sat. From deep within him there began to emanate a piteous wail. It started low, gurgling and groaning in his throat, but it rose in pitch and volume until it shook the leaves above us. He did not stand, or even move very much at all, but simply sat slumped in the mud and filth, yelling his sorrow to the world. Rivulets of tears cut their way through the thickening blood on his face.

I expected Saviolo to offer some comfort, or at least to distract Sampson so as to quell the howling. To the contrary, he ignored him entirely, instead taking up a post next to the body of Hugh. He bent over and straightened the twisted body to lay on its back. The resulting pose looked so much like a body set to rest in a sepulcher that Hugh seemed even more dead in my mind than he had before. I could offer Sampson no comfort, being a stranger to him, and I could not decide for myself whether I wanted to comfort him or chide him for his foolishness. Still he howled, but he now broke the noise at intervals with heavy sobs. Soon even the sobbing ceased and he slid all the way to the ground in a faint.

"See to his wound," said Saviolo,"he has bled too much, I think. It would be shameful to let him die and add another wasted life to the day."

I fumbled with a fresh kerchief of my own and had barely time to secure it to his face using his own belt when the others returned and said they had brought a cart as directed.

There was a certain renewal of shock and grief as those who had left at once discovered Hugh's fate. Saviolo stepped back into the lead of the group and got them to carry the two bodies out to the road where the cart waited. He told the rest to walk back to town on their own while he rode with the brothers. I was surprised when he requested that I ride with him. I say

requested, but it was, though prettily and kindly conveyed, more akin to an order. I was beginning to see the respect and obedience that the old Italian demanded and earned of his scholars. I had no objection, but neither had I much inclination to make conversation. We sat on the back of the cart with our legs dangling over the edge of the platform as young men of the country often do. At first we were both content with the jingle of chain and the rumble of wheels, but soon Saviolo spoke.

"You chose an eventful day to finally find us, Luke."

"Your students do seem to keep themselves busy," I said with an unsuccessful attempt at a smile.

"Hm," he said, "You know that none of what you have seen out here is in accordance with my teachings?"

"I gathered as much."

"The trial by combat—the duello—is an ancient tradition by which honorable and noble gentlemen can prove truths that civil laws can never establish. I teach these boys how to defend themselves from attack, and to lawfully invoke such trials at direst need."

"Her majesty has forbidden such fights, you know," I said.

"Yes, Luke, she has. I speak, however, of a higher law. The same law that puts her majesty on the throne and, heaven be praised, keeps her safely there. The ancient, oft unspoken law that makes civil law possible. The knights of old knew that

almighty God would guide their hands against slanders and lies, but they knew also that to test the forbearance of God with trifles is a dangerous thing."

We were silent a few moments more. The cart had come to Charing Cross and now the noises of the conveyance became lost, or at least mingled with, that of the many people abroad in the street.

"All that I mean to say," Saviolo continued, "is that I hope you do nut judge my humble school by what you have seen in the field today."

"It is of little import. I do not think that training with the sword is for me at present."

He narrowed his eyes and looked hard at me, taking in the whole of me. "You do not fool me, Luke. You are as much lost as when I found you on the road a fortnight ago." He paused for me to sputter uselessly a moment and went on, "It may be that you are concerned about money. I should not wonder, since you are spending a not inconsiderable sum on your room at Savage's. I should think that your budget is all but empty. Do not look so offended, my boy! If we are to come to some accord, we must be frank with one another."

"I do not see how any accord is required," I said with rising heat, "I cannot say how it is that you know the state of my purse, but even if you are nearer the mark than I am

comfortable with, I can in no way see how it is any concern of yours. And I am not a boy! I have nearly eighteen years and I am man enough to take responsibility for my mother and myself."

"I think that, like me, you are one who pays attention to things. I have seen the scrutiny with which you examine all that you find in your presence. I know what I do about you because I see and I listen. I also have a great many friends throughout the city who tell me things." He smiled, a gesture that I did not return, giving him instead a scowl of disapproval. "Forgive me. I forget how delicate are the feelings of the young. I suggest only that you would find some benefit in coming to study at my school, and that I would benefit from your presence there—as would a number of the young gentlemen my friends who attend regularly. In understanding of your present circumstances, I would like you to come as often as you like, and at present I expect no fee. If you decide to leave after a few lessons, I will say nothing more of the matter. If you find yourself captured by the study, as I think you will, we will find a way to keep you there."

"Well," I said, "I could use some activity and occupation."

"As you say," he smiled broadly, "Now that we have settled that, there is a grim business before us."

We had come through the gates into the city proper. On Saviolo's direction we made our way through streets at times

packed solid with men and women, horses, carts, and the occasional caroche to a neat house down a relatively quiet alley. The tiny yard accommodated us and the cart, but only just. As the two of us slid down off the cart, the door opened and a servant emerged. By his shrieks upon seeing the prostrate forms of the Gregory brothers, I took him to be a chief retainer of their house. He took it in turns to shoot mutinous glances at Saviolo and to call into the house that the masters had been slain. The first action seemed not to concern the old swordsman, but he became animated upon the second, and bid the man to hold his tongue. It was too late, for there now emerged from the door two young ladies, the sisters Gregory it seemed, and their reaction was much louder and more shrill than the servant's had been. It took some time for us to calm the lamentable scene. We were aided in that effort by the stirring of Sampson, who admonished his sisters for making such a din in the company of a wounded man. He tried to push himself up on his arms, but when he did so he nearly fainted away again and the effort brought Hugh's body into view so that I thought we would have three siblings to calm.

The duties were done, I know not how—or rather, they were done thanks to Saviolo's commands, which all obeyed. Servants bore the body inside and made to help Sampson to his bed. Before entering the house, he turned to Saviolo.

“My thanks to you, Maestro.”

“I have earned no thanks today, having done only what any man must.”

“Still, as your scholar...”

“You are no scholar of my teaching.”

“But, I...”

“You must bear the dishonor of this yourself, and do not think to stain my school with it.”

Sampson made to say something, but Saviolo’s black eyes seemed rimmed with fire, like the dark coals in a forge that with one pump of the bellows glow with heat, and he could not speak while they fixed on him.

“I ask little of my students,” said Saviolo, “and am ever quick to help them adjust when they misstep, but this is beyond forgiving. You have killed a worthy brother for that a foolish man stared you in the face. Think on that, and teach yourself.”

And so we left him.

From Saviolo's second book, Of Honor and Honorable Quarrels.

How Gentlemen ought to accept of any Quarrel, in such manner that they may combat lawfully.

They that maintaine any quarrell, use most commonly to undertake the combate with such intent, that howbeit the cause of their quarrell be just, yet they combate not justly, that is, not in respect onely of justice and equitie, but either of hatred, or for desire of revenge, or for some other particular affection: whence it commeth to passe, that many howbeit they have the right on their sides, yet come to be overthrowen: For that God whose eyes are fixed even on the most secret and inner thoughts of our harts, and ever punisheth the evil intent of men, both in just and unjust causes, reserveth his just

chasticements against all offenders, until such times as his incomprehensible judgement findeth to be most fit and serving to his purpose.

Wherefore, no man ought to presume to punish another, by the confidence and trust which hee reposeth in his owne valour, but in judgement and triall of armes, every one ought to present himselfe before the sight of God, as an instrument which his eternall majestie hath to woorke with, in the execution of justice, and demonstration of his judgement.

If therefore any man violate the chastitie of my wife, sister, neece, or kinse-woman, I ought not or may not call him to the trial of the sworde, to the end that I maybe revenged of him. Nor if any one should prove disloyal to his Prince or Countrie, ought I challenge him to the combate in respect of the hatred I beare him, or to obtaine favour at the Princes handes, or to purchase honour in my Countrie, or if any of my kinsemen or freends were slain, may I challenge the murderer to the fielde, in respect of the kindred or freendship I had with him, but my intent ought to be such, that howbeit I had not been especially offended, and in no particular affection or respect should induce me thereunto, yet for the love of virtue, and regarde of the universall good and publique profite, I was to undertake such a combate. For I ought in all particular injuries present unto mine eyes, not the persons either offending or

offended, but rather fall into consideration how much that offence displeaseth almightie God, and how much harme may ensue unto humaine kinde thereby. And for adulterie ought a man to combate, not as to revenge the wrong done to one particular person, but in regarde of all, considering how holye and religious a bond matrimonie is, being a lawfull conjunction instituted and ordained by God, to the end that man and woman therein should not as two, but one person, live together in such manner, that nothing except death only might seperate and disjoyn them. Wherefore perpending the dignitie and worthines hereof, and how that by adulterie this devine ordinance and institution is violated, matrimonyall conjunction infringed, and lawfull procreation corrupted, every Gentleman ought to undertake the combate, not so much to revenge himself, or his freends, or to chastice or punishe the offenders, as to preserve and keepe from violence a bond so sacred and inviolable, with sure hope, that God, who (as S. Paul saith) will judge the Adulterer, will by means thereof give most severe judgement.

In like manner, if some man have mis-behaved himselfe in any matter concerning his prince or cuntrie, each Gentleman ought to thinke, how that God hath ordained and authorised Princes to be above us, to the ende that under him they may as his ministers and officers governe us his humble flocke, how that nothing beeing more gratefull and acceptable unto God, then

good government among men (who assembled together, and living under the same lawes, beare themselves orderly, governing their lives and manners aright) we are not so much bound in dutie towardes any, as towards them that are as it were lieutenantes unto almightie God in earth, for so I call our princes and governors: and towards that assemblie & congregation of mankind, under whose lawes we are borne and bred, I meane our Countrie, and how that no greater wickednes can be committed than for a man to rebel against him whom God hath ordained Lord and governor over him, or to wrong him unto whome he hath given his faith, or betray that citie unto which hee is both for his living, bringing up, & many benefits besides infinitly beholing. In respect whereof, I saie each Gentleman having considered and weighed all this, ought as a publique plague, and not as a particular enemie, to persecute him that committeth any of these odious excesses: calling him to the triall of the swoorde, confidentlye hoping and trusting with assured faith, that God will chastice and punish him that hath so greevouslye offended both him and his people, violating his sacred ordinances and constitutions. And for the same reason, if some man have committed murder, hee that will combate with him, must not doe it to this ende, onely to wreake the death of him that is murdered, in respect that he was his freend or kinseman, but he ought to call to minde what a noble and excellent creature man

is, who being taken away and brought no naught by murder or slaughter, the fairest and notablest woorke which almightie God hath framed, is marred, and spoiled. Insomuch that whosoever committeth murder, dooth dissolve and break the most perfect peece of woorke that the creator of heaven and earth hath made, and defaceth the image and likenes of God. And for that God in his sacred law ordained, that man-slayers should be carryed from his alter and put to death, the partie that will combate, knowing how greatly his divine majestie is offended with this sinne, ought not to undertake the combate, because he would kill him, but because hee might be as it were, the minister to execute Gods devine pleasure, and most holy commandment.

By these examples maye a Gentleman perceive what ought to be doone in all other cases, so that it shall be needles for men to seeke examples for each offence, troubling both my selfe and the Reader. In the meane time, take this by the way, that whatsoever I have heere saide of the Challenger, is also in the same manner to be understoode of the Defendant: insomuch that both the one and the other ought to regarde the preservation of their honour and innocencie by just meanes: the one never challenging but with just cause and upright meaning, and the other never accepting any challenge, unlesse hee know himselfe to be guiltles: and in such sorte, that he may take it with a good conscience, as to doe or performe any action that

concerneth his honor, to live and dye in defence thereof. For, as it is shamefull to doe any dishonorable act, so is it more shamefull and opprobrious to maintain the same, and stand in defence of it.

And againe, a man finding himselfe innocent and wrongfully dishonored, ought not to feare any danger, but to venter his life at all times, for the righting either of private or publique wrongs: in all things, considerations, and circumstances, having a speciall regarde unto justice. For God giveth right unto him that is just , and overthroweth the unjust: whosoever therefore shall take armes for justice to repell unjust injuries, may be assured to prevaile, and with an undismaied courage goe about what he undertaketh.

Of Cloaks and Daggers

Though I would hesitate to call him a close or intimate friend, especially in those early days, I owe my situation in London largely to Henry Starkyn. He was one of the older students at Saviolo's school, being at least five and twenty when I met him, though to judge by his actions and his perpetual slanted grin you would have thought him only on the threshold of manhood. His influence over my fortune begins, I suppose, with his preoccupation with his garments and other vestiary matters.

When I arrived in London, the cape was the height of fashion for young men of quality. Every day the heirs of the wealthy strutted through town with short ones, bejeweled and finely trimmed, draped loosely over the shoulder. These were, of course, little able to ward off a chill, but to be seen without one in better circles had a chilling effect of a different sort.

Henry owned more capes and cloaks than I could venture to guess. For my part, I began to think of warming my shoulders when the late summer days started to change to the first cold nights of autumn. My old cloak was too short for me, having been made when I was but a boy, and the velvet had lost much of its pile with so much use.

My thoughts as I walked to the royal exchange one afternoon were of economy and practicality. I had little coin in my budget, and could only see the circumstances of further depletion with almost no hope of increase. I anticipated some plain, warm traveling cloak purchased from a draper ready-made. Lost in the dismal preoccupation of the mundanity that poverty excites, I was oblivious at first to my name being called from across the way. I turned to see Henry waving at me and trotting through the press of carts, horses, and men to approach me.

"Luke," he said, "Wait, stay a moment and we will walk together."

I was in no humor to be with him. Henry was in many ways the chief student at the school, having known Saviolo since before the latter had come to London. His position, which was mostly a rank among the students, because Saviolo often despaired of Henry's behavior and showed him little actual favor, caused him to be the leader of those young men who attended the school as part of a broader group of intimates.

Those boys were always looking for some new jest, and had taken, with no small encouragement from their chief, to taunting me and calling me names on account of my size and apparent age. I chafed somewhat, still aggrieved by this teasing. “Mister Starkyn,” I said. I did not stop and inclined my head in as small a bow as I could manage.

It was immediately apparent from his furrowed brow and drooping mouth that my attitude was both unexpected and alarming to the young gentleman. “Why so cold, my friend?” he asked. “Surely we fellow scholars should be united in our affections.”

I stopped walking, the teeming crowd taking a moment to adjust and to begin flowing around us like a stream around a rock. I aimed the sternest look I could at him. “I understood, from our last meeting, that you felt my company to be beneath you. You seemed at that time to hold great store in seniority.”

“Oh, is that what’s bothering you?” he said, letting out a merry laugh and resuming his customary smile. “You mustn’t think anything of that. In school we have our little rivalries and competitions, and there’s some joking at the expense of new scholars. But that’s all in fun. We’re all brothers in the art, after all.”

My stern look had begun to falter before he even finished his speech. There was no way to endure for long against that face, eyes earnestly wide.

"Oh, very well then, Henry. But as my brother in arms, perhaps you can joke a little less?"

Henry beamed at me. "There's a good lad," he said. Then he swept my cap clean off of my head and rumpled my hair. "A very good lad indeed!"

I snatched my cap back with some irritation, smoothed my hair, and placed it back on my head. Again the bright openness of his face softened my anger at the impetuous man. He raised his hands to shoulder level, palms out and looked at me sidelong.

"Pardon, Luke," he said, "I can see you're in no mood for merriment. What brings you out into the air this fine afternoon?"

"I need a new cloak."

His eyes widened for an instant and his smile, already broader and more rakishly curled at the edges than was seemly, stretched even wider. "What a remarkable coincidence! I'm on my way to my tailor's even now to check up on a cape. You should come with me. He's quite the man to fit you out."

He kept his distance from me, no doubt fearing that my mood would cause me to strike out at him, but somehow his presence had the same effect as if he had taken me by the arm. He stepped once more into the stream of people and I followed unbidden but captive in his wake. For a time he prattled on about the cuts

and trimmings of the most fashionable capes and cloaks. I kept pace with him in stride, but not in conversation, and he seemed happy to talk largely to himself with only the occasional grunt from me to assure him that he had an audience. And that was the magic of Henry Starkyn: he could compel and annoy in a single breath. As angry as I got with him, and sometimes he incited my rage, I could never wholly quit him. I have observed that many men when training a puppy are aggrieved by its unruliness, but when they would strike it in their frustration they look upon it and are carried away by tis charms. In that way, Henry was like a puppy, I suppose.

The next thing I knew we were in a quiet street standing before a shop. Henry pulled me toward the front wall of the place and craned his neck around to look into the window then turned back to me, his face gone pinkish around the edges.

“Tell me in truth, Luke,” he said, “is she not the loveliest creature you have ever seen?”

Taken aback, I could do little more than goggle at him, an unformed response groaning incoherently in my throat.

“I know,” he said, “Don’t be ashamed to be stricken so with her beauty. She had a similar effect on me the first time I saw her.”

There were no young ladies in the street, so it became eventually apparent to me that he must be speaking about someone

inside the house. I took a turn peeking in at the window and saw a girl in the shop arranging some small wares in a case. Her coppery hair was bound up in complicated braids and tucked under a small hat. Before I could absorb any more of the girl, Henry pulled me back out of the line of sight of the window and stared at me with a look of such expectation and anticipation that I hardly knew where to begin.

"She is, ah, that is she appears to be quite lovely," I said.

"Quite lovely? Is that all you can say for yourself Luke? I took you for a man with more poetry in his soul than that!"

"Well, I," I stammered, "which is to say, I dare not form any opinion of the young gentlewoman on such a brief and clandestine familiarity."

"Yes," he said, his brows gathering as if in thought, "Yes! Of course. I must let you meet her. Then you will tell me how right I am in esteeming her above all other maids."

Henry began to pace under the eaves while speaking. When his course ran at its closest point to me he took hold of my shoulders and fixed me with another wide-eyed gaze, this time not accompanied by his smile. His voice was low and level when he spoke again.

"Luke, I must speak with her alone. Do you think you could engage her father in a discussion of your new cloak for long

enough that I might slip out with Charity into the yard for a few moments conference? You would do that for me, wouldn't you my friend?"

"I would be happy to, Henry, but I fear my cloak is a simple matter that needs no discussion. I should have done well to get one from a draper at the exchange, as I tried to tell you earlier."

He recoiled, looking as if he had been surprised by some noisome thing.

"Speak no more of drapers and ready-made clothes to me Luke, I pray you. I won't have a friend of mine walking about London in a plain cloak. I'll buy it for you."

"That is exceeding generous. I cannot accept such a gift."

"Pish! What are a few shillings between friends?"

"A few shillings are a great deal to me, though they be of no consequence to you," I snapped back with rising indignation.

"Don't take it that way, Luke. Come, let me finance your new cloak, not as a gift, but as a token of my esteem and as thanks for your help wooing Charity."

"Well," I said, half spellbound by the rapid shifting of his strong emotions.

"It's settled then!" he said with a wink. He took me by the arm and half led, half dragged me into the shop.

Master Smart, the tailor, was an eager man when it came to talk of clothes. I had anticipated some difficulty in making something as simple as arranging for a warm cloak into a topic of prolonged conversation. He needed no urging, and brought forth samples of cloth, trims of various colors and materials, embroidery patterns, and jewels. It was clear to me that Henry must indeed be a regular and enthusiastic patron, and that some of the exuberance attending to that young gentleman was transferred to me by association.

My interaction with Charity had been slight. Henry introduced me as an intimate friend and then busied himself in examining his cape in progress while sending me off to deal with the master of the house. She spoke softly and with an air of coyness about her. She cast her eyes downward to the floor with little or no provocation. I found that shy gesture to highlight her long lashes and smooth, pale brow in a very flattering way. I had no doubt that she was aware of the advantage, and used it as she pleased. Far from being stricken with adoration, I thought her vain beyond the compass of her merits.

When finally I had come to agreement on all the particulars of my cloak with master Smart, he called for his apprentice to tidy up the aftermath and we returned to the main area of the shop. There we found Henry glowing warmly as always and Charity with a reddened face and with her pristine hair a little

disarranged. The two of them had the partially completed cape between them on the table.

"Well, Smart, I hope you are treating my friend well," said Henry.

"Oh, yes, mister Starkyn. He has chosen a subtle piece, but I will make it sumptuous in its simplicity. It will be elegance itself. And you? I hope you like what Charity has been doing with your new cape?"

"I am all satisfaction on that front," said Henry with a glance at the girl so radiant that she could not contain a giggle.

Behind us, the apprentice lost control of his tower of samples and all came crashing down around him. Smart turned to chastise the boy, and Henry and I took our leave. Henry renewed his inquiries about Charity as soon as we cleared the threshold and gained the relative seclusion of the street. Seeing no reason to dissuade him, I made a few vague remarks about her merits, thanked him for his extreme generosity, and left him for my next errand.

I thought at first that the episode was ended there, but over the next few weeks Henry sought me out and brought me along with him to tailor Smart's in a series of contrived missions. Each time, he came with some pressing concern about his cape, the embellishment of which grew more and more extravagant by the

day. It was, of course, Charity that did all of the beadwork and embroidery for the shop, so each visit involved close consultation with the young lady. My job was always to keep the master occupied so that Henry and Charity could have secret counsel on their own. My actual business with the tailor had been stretched beyond its scope after a single visit, so I began to engage him in conversation only marginally related. In that time I learned more than my share about the making of clothes. I was able to bring what little of the mercer's trade my father had imparted to me into the conversation and, to any watching eye, master Smart and I were becoming the best of friends.

Henry practically danced into the street as we left after out sixth visit. His whole body seemed to sway and move as he confided in me, "This may have been our last visit. Today Charity consented to marry me, and we will go together to the church in two weeks."

"Oh," I said, trying to summon enthusiasm for my friend, "has her father agreed to the match?"

"A trifle," said he with a wave of the hand. "What reservation can old Smart have against a union that will see his daughter wealthy beyond her dreams and attached to a family of import?"

"It is true, you offer a connection he could not have hoped for."

"That's right. We've always got on well, Smart and I. He's a fine artist, to be sure—none better with needle and thread, but he's also got a head for business."

"Well then, let me be the first to congratulate you."

"You've been such a help to me, Luke, giving me time to talk to her without interruption, and showing Smart how generous a friend I am."

"Think nothing of it. You have, as you say, been very generous."

"And you've borne it all like an ox," he said, stopping me with a gentle hand on my arm and looking at me with a moist and earnest eye. "I'll tell you what, you should be in the party when I wed. I'll show you a feast worth remembering. I'm cursed if you've seen much sport in town, it'll do you good."

"That is very kind," I said, "It will be my honor to celebrate with you."

"My thanks Luke. I ride at once for my father's land to make arrangements. I'll send the details of the ceremony to you. Farewell."

With that he jogged down the way.

The next day I took my lesson with Saviolo in the morning and I also took advantage of the time alone with the old master to inquire about our mutual friend.

"Do you have any advice about wedding ceremonies?" I asked.

"You seek my counsel as a bridegroom?"

"No, the bridegroom is Henry Starkyn. He has asked me to be part of the ceremony."

"Ah, I see. Tell me, whom is Henry to marry this time?"

"The young woman is named Charity Smart, she is the daughter of—wait, what do you mean, 'this time'?"

"Perhaps it is time you got to know your new friend a little better. I have known him for several years now, in which time I confess I have lost count of his many betrothals."

"But, the way he speaks of her, he is consumed by his passion."

"The thing about fiery emotions is that they quickly burn through all of their fuel—if they are left to blaze. I think, however, that Henry's passions are usually doused by his family."

"What do you mean?"

"Henry's father, Sir Edmund, is determined that his family only rise up the apparatus of society. Unless this Charity is the daughter of a baron or better, I will wager that the whole business ends up a fond memory. My advice, therefore, about wedding ceremonies is to avoid buying new clothes for them until you are sure of them taking place."

It was as Saviolo surmised, though I did not become acquainted with the details until a week and a half later. A messenger came by my rooms in the morning with a note from old Smart. My cloak was ready, and I went to fetch it. From the moment I entered the shop, I saw that the tailor was preoccupied. He was cordial to me, but when he looked at me, he often looked away briefly and then back again as though he was about to speak and was checking himself. As he was draping the cloak over my shoulder to verify the fit, he found his voice.

"Forgive me, mister Muston, but I understand that you are an intimate friend of mister Starkyn?"

"I am on pleasant terms with mister Starkyn," said I, "but intimate is not the word I would choose. I have known him, I think, for a shorter span of time than his relationship with you."

"I don't think, though, that you would be surprised to learn that he has been wooing my daughter for some time?" he asked.

"Indeed, no, it was to that purpose that he brought me here initially, I think."

"You have the advantage of me in that, then, I only learned of their engagement this morning."

"How can that be? My understanding was that he meant to

marry her in just a few days. Surely he must have made arrangements with you a week ago?”

“It seems he has decided not to carry through the engagement. He visited an hour ago and broke with her. When he left, I got the whole of it from Charity, who is transformed by her disappointment,” he said. He looked at me with expectation, but when my astonishment admitted no remark, he continued. “I should have been happy to welcome him as a son. He has been very good to me with his patronage, and he sends his friends to me as well. I am at a loss to understand why he never spoke of his intentions or what can have happened that so altered his aim.”

“I have no news from Henry,” I said, “though a mutual friend told me he might break the engagement. I think his father has expectations for his marriage that, forgive me, Charity cannot hope to fulfill.”

“I see. It is strange though, that she should be so completely without hope. If he has told her about such a difficulty, they might labor to persuade his father.” He took a step back and walked around behind me in a semicircle. “This looks very well, if you will permit me to say so. The green brings out the color in your eyes. Would you like to wear it, or shall I wrap it for you?”

I took the hem of the cloak in my hand and held it across my chest so I could get a feel for the drape of it. “Yes, it is

fine. You know your work, my friend. I will wear it home."

"Very good," he said, suddenly in modulated tones of business. He led me back to the front room and when we passed through the door, I could hear the creaking of treads on the stairs as though someone had fled at our coming.

"Well," he continued, apparently unaware of our being overheard, "I cannot say I understand it. I had thought that young Howe, my apprentice, might make a fine husband for Charity, but now that she has had the attention of a fine gentleman she will no doubt have set her stakes much higher than that." At his words, I fancied I heard a gasp from the stairs, followed by light footfalls rushing up to the floor above. "In any case, I do hope you will come back when you need more work." Here he glanced at my doublet and breeches, many years behind the current fashions and beginning to wear thin along the seams.

I felt such sympathy for the man, but could find nothing comforting to say. I had settled on making some excuse for my friend, when the front door opened and in came Henry himself. His brow was uncharacteristically troubled and he seemed ready to say something as soon as he entered the shop, but was caught short by seeing me there.

"Luke," Henry said, "I am glad to see you, and with your new cloak as well—it looks very fine." He looked back to the tailor and addressed him. "Master Smart, I left in haste

earlier. I didn't bring my cape with me."

There followed a few exceedingly awkward moments as all three of us searched around the shop for the garment in vain. Henry's patience faded first. "It's all one to me whether you find it or no," he said with a sigh, "I don't want it anymore. Keep your fee for the work. I only wish to be done with the whole business. Sell it to someone else when you find it."

Smart sputtered but formed no recognizable words. Henry shuffled his feet for a moment and then let out an agitated breath, turned on his heel, and left the shop. In his wake, I took a step toward the tailor. I put a hand on his arm, hoping to steady him and show my support. "Dear master Smart. I will tell everyone I know where this excellent cloak came from, and I am certain whatever has happened will not keep Henry's custom from you for long," I said, "I will follow him and see what I can learn."

I tried to summon up a warm smile, despite the confusion and turmoil I was feeling. He nodded back at me, and I left the shop.

It was not difficult to catch up to Henry, who was striding leisurely down the street in the narrow strip of sunlight that squeezed in between the shadows of the tall and overhanging houses. When he saw that I was trying to overtake him, he stopped and looked back at me with an odd smile that was

compressed in the middle.

"That cloak really does look well on you, Luke," he said.

"You have an excellent taste in tailors."

"I can't deny it," he grinned.

"What was the meaning of that?" I inclined my head in the direction of the shop.

"Oh, I don't want to talk about that," he said. "It's over with Charity. I was a fool to ever think of her as worthy of being my wife."

"You have confused and upset the old man today."

"More is the pity. He'll be fine. So will she for that matter."

"I believe she will be. You were so certain less than a fortnight ago, though."

"Look," he said, "I am a man of passions, Luke. That doesn't mean that I can't change my mind about things. But let's talk of something else. Come on, I'll buy you a drink. I quite like a tavern that's not far from here."

He led me along the street and then ducked into a small alley. As soon as we entered the secluded dimness, I felt something push past me from behind. Thinking that some cutpurse had assailed me, I spun myself around so that my back was against the wall of one of the houses and drew my sword. Then I saw that the man who had hit me had run headlong into Henry with

enough force that he must have been trying to bowl him over, but Henry was well trained and had kept his feet under him. The attacker had barely kept his own footing and had run beyond Henry before righting himself and turning to face us. Though his face was red with rage and his hair was disarranged, I recognized the apprentice from Smart's shop. Henry apparently did not recognize him, because he yelled, "God's blood! Who the devil are you?"

"It is the apprentice of your friend Smart," I said, "Howe, is it not?"

"Ha!" Howe spat, "You are no friend of my master. You have to pay for what you've done!"

"Do you want to challenge me?" asked Henry. "Go home. I don't duel with boys."

Howe snarled and ran at Henry again, leaning over like a ram. Henry nimbly stepped out of danger and, as the young man passed he shoved him on the shoulder so that Howe stumbled and fell to the ground. I looked to Henry to ascertain whether he wanted any help from me, but the look he returned was bland, almost bored. He strode to where Howe lay and extended his hand. "Let me help you up, and then hie you home before any harm is done."

Howe swatted away the proffered hand. "She is too sweet a girl for the likes of you," he cried.

"That's probably true," said Henry, "so it's good that I won't bother her anymore." He turned his back on his crumpled foe to walk back to where I stood.

"Too late," said Howe, "You have wounded her. I need to make you feel pain like she feels."

Howe got to his feet with surprising alacrity. I saw a glint of metal in his hand and called out to Henry. Henry turned in time to guide Howe's thrusting hand away from his body with his forearm. Howe's strike went very wide. Too wide. He had no sense for fighting and was thrashing wildly. In his overextended hand he held a simple dagger. Henry caught sight of the weapon a fraction of a second after I did and, before I knew what was happening, he had taken his sword, scabbard and all, out of its hanger and brought it down on Howe's wrist. The impact made a crunching thud like a butcher's cleaver sinking into the block. Howe yelled in pain and dropped his blade, cradling his wounded hand close to his chest while crouching close to the ground.

I thought I would secure the dagger and get Howe up and on his way home, but when I made to move, Henry was there in the space between us. He had unsheathed his sword, but held the weapon in his left hand while gripping the scabbard with his right. He laid about him with the scabbard, landing blows around Howe's head and shoulders. All the while, Howe hurled curses at the both of us and wound himself tighter and tighter into a

ball. Henry's reply tore from his throat, "How dare you? I am a gentleman's son, and what are you? What are you?"

At that time I had very little experience with the sword. I was unaccustomed to how one senses time in a fight. I saw Henry beating the apprentice with vicious blow after blow. From the first, I thought to stop him—to keep the young man safe—but I could not will my body to move quickly enough to stay his hand before many strikes had already landed. Then, as if the intervening moments had never happened, I had my hands around Henry's arm and he was pulling me with him as he reached out with the scabbard to do more harm. Coming to my senses in this position, I heard a woman's scream. Charity was there, I knew not how she had come. She ran toward the three of us struggling in the alley. No sooner had Henry shaken me off and turned to resume his attack than Charity was between him and his foe. She stood with her side toward Henry, one hand thrust out to ward of his attacks. Her other hand lay on Howe's shoulder. For a grim moment I thought that Henry's rage extended far enough to strike her. He stood with the scabbard held at shoulder height and stared at her.

"Oh, Brian, you fool," she said to the wounded young man.

I took the momentary pause to grasp Henry's wrist as gently as I could and pull it down so that his impromptu weapon hung at his side. He stood, stunned and wide-eyed. We both looked on as

Charity cradled Howe's battered and bloody face, already swollen and disfigured, against her bosom. When she had satisfied herself that he might stand, she helped him rise and led him back toward her house.

Tears streaked Henry's face when he turned to face me. He said nothing. He thrust his sword back into its sheath with such force that the clack of it resounded off the walls. Then he walked away in the other direction. I had no desire to follow. Instead, I stayed in the alley for a few minutes and then found the fastest way back to my room.

The next time I saw Henry was two days later at Saviolo's school. I and a handful of other scholars were preparing for a lesson, and Henry arrived just before we started. Saviolo welcomed him as always and had us line up to form a row down the length of the hall for an exercise in "moving the body." When we were all ready, we began going through a series of exercises in pairs, as we had done many times before. I pretended to need to secure my shoe when Henry was looking for a partner, thinking that I was not prepared to work with him so soon after the fight in the alley. I saw the image of Howe's face, swollen and bleeding and I could not blink it away.

Saviolo walked up and down the line of students making

corrections. When he got to Henry, he lingered. Instead of smoothly stepping in to the pair and guiding limbs or extremities with his hand or with the stick he carried for that purpose, he stood in careful observation. Henry could not help but be aware of the prolonged scrutiny. As he took the active role in the exercise he faltered almost imperceptibly and Saviolo swept in with his stick and applied it with circular force to the tendons behind Henry's knee. Henry collapsed to the floor with a shout.

"Get up!" said Saviolo, the little pointed beard on his chin poking straight in front of him, quivering. Henry tried to pick himself up off the floor, but as he did, Saviolo used his foil on some weak point and sent him back down.

"How does it feel, Henry? To be overtaken by a more skilled man?"

"I...what?" stammered Henry.

"Listen, my fine gentlemen," said Saviolo, "young mister Wilde has taken it upon himself to prove his martial might by savaging a tailor's apprentice in the street. Are you not proud of him?"

Everyone tried to avoid meeting the eyes of both the master and Henry. Henry managed to catch my gaze for a moment, and his look asked clearly whether I had told the swordsman what had happened. I shrugged and shook my head, trying to do so subtly

enough that the others would not see our silent communication.

"Well?" asked Saviolo. "What do you have to say for yourself?"

"I was attacked," said Henry.

"Oh, yes. A fearsome lad who has never held a blade to attack anything except his beef in all his eighteen years."

Henry had no response. He no longer even tried to get up off the floor. There he sat, lip aquiver, his eyes on Saviolo bright with anger but filling with tears.

"Get up," Saviolo commanded, "The rest of you—did I tell you to stop your exercise?" He rounded on us, turning his back to Henry and walking further down the line of combatants.

Henry rose and called after Saviolo, "I am sorry, Maestro. Truly I am."

Saviolo turned and, after a long pause wherein he took in the young man, said, "You have small cause to be sorry to me—though your actions, especially in a fight, reflect on the credit and honor of this school. It is the boy and the young lady that you have wronged."

"You are right. I will go to them and try to make amends," Henry said in a low voice. He stepped out of the line, collected his things, and left directly.

When the lesson was done and we scholars were busy

collecting ourselves to leave the school, Saviolo drew me aside. “I know that you were with Henry when he was attacked, Luke.”

“I did not take part in the action, save to try to part them, and to keep either one of them from doing more harm,” I said, my eyes cast down at my feet to avoid the keen gaze of the old master.

“That I know also,” he said. “You did the right thing. When a man is in such a rage, it does good to no one to interpose yourself. I am a little surprised that Henry did not strike the young woman.” He paused long enough for me to meet his glance. “Why did you not tell me of what transpired?”

“It did not seem to be my place. In my estimation, Henry was unlikely to take further action, or I would have warned Smart.”

Saviolo nodded his agreement. “You chose wisely. Revealing Henry’s actions to me would have been seen as a betrayal.”

“I am glad you think so,” I said. “I could not help but wonder if there had been something else that I could have done to stop him—if I could have helped bring about a better resolution for all of them.”

“Do not trouble yourself with things outside of your responsibility. It is an honorable sentiment. A gentleman should be always aware of alternate responses to situations, in case a similar event occurs later, but it does not good to dwell too

long on what is done."

"Will you cast him out of the school?"

"Henry? I think not. He regretted his action immediately, and will do his utmost to make satisfaction."

"I suppose some would say that he need not. That as a common man, Howe made his life forfeit when he attacked his better."

"There are some that would. What do you think?"

"I think that the attack came upon the heels of Henry's handling of Charity. He was wronged, being assailed, but he was also in the wrong for proving false in his word."

"And therefore?"

"Therefore the attack on him followed as a consequence of his own action, and one would do well to be lenient with Howe."

He nodded and scratched his chin, then we went our separate ways.

Not long afterward, Saviolo made me the proposition of a unique arrangement. Knowing well my financial difficulties and my aspirations in London, he offered to have me live in his own house free of rent. Knowing that I would not accept such a great gift of charity he assured me that I could repay him by helping him at home and at the school. Though we were both aware that such a situation would put us in awkward positions from time to

time, my being a gentleman, my budget was nearly empty and I leapt at the chance to have more exposure to the swordmaster, who had more than martial wisdom to convey. For his part, I think Saviolo was lonely, which made two of us. In short, it was a beneficial understanding for both of us. I am certain that my handling of the trouble with Henry played no small part in Saviolo making the offer, so in a strange and roundabout way I am thankful for the otherwise trying experience.

Of Henry himself I saw very little for a while. I heard through the gossip at the school that he had gone to Smart's shop immediately after Saviolo's confrontation and had paid for the doctor who waited on young Brian Howe. Some might take a dim view of his trying to assuage his own guilt by the expenditure of money, a thing which he had in abundance, but in some cases there is little else one can do. Charity and Howe were married more than a year afterward, and even after that time, Henry insisted on buying as a present a fine new dress for her to wear to church.

A fortnight or so after the brawl, I met Henry by chance outside Paul's churchyard. He was resplendent in a burgundy velvet doublet garnished with small pearls. He greeted me with a broad, sparkling smile, with no hint of the troubles we had seen together in it.

"Luke!" he called, "It's good to see you. Where are you

headed?”

“I am for the school,” I replied.

“Excellent. I’ll walk with you.”

We ambled along in silence for a time. I saw that he had something clasped in his hand and, for lack of some other comfortable topic of conversation I asked him what it was.

“Oh, this,” he said, stopping. He opened his hand to reveal a small oval frame of beaten gold, chased with patterns of vines and flowers. The frame held a painted miniature portrait, of the kind that was so popular in those days. It was very well done and portrayed a dark-haired young woman with shining eyes.

“Tell me, Luke, is she not the most heavenly creature you’ve ever seen?” he looked at me expectantly with wide, wet eyes.

I stifled a burst of laughter that raged in my chest and said, nodding, “She is a very angel, Henry.”

Of The Drummer

One cannot live long in London without hearing whispers about Bethlem hospital, or Bedlam, as it is more commonly known. On more than one occasion in those early days of mine in the city, I happened upon some parishioner of St. Botolph, where the hospital lays, just north of Bishopgate. Over a tankard, such a man would speak of wailing or of the rattling of chains at night, overheard from the grounds of Bedlam. These momentary confidences were always solemnly uttered and were every time interrupted rather theatrically with an oath or a prayer. I thought little of them.

Early one morning in my first Autumn in the city, I was going out into the street on some errand or other for Saviolo when I encountered, on the very threshold of the house, a group of nearly a dozen young men. They were a disorderly band, but

were gentlemen of quality to a man. The bulk of them loitered along the front of the house, pressed close in a vain attempt against the heavy mist that so often moistens the streets of London. In their efforts to take the shelter of the eaves, these young men jostled one another and talked animatedly in voices lowered, but still quite loud. Upon opening the door, I was greeted by an eruption of laughter followed immediately by a storm of shoving and slapping on arms that gusted through them until it reached their chief and leader, who with a slow turning of his head to glance at them stopped it cold.

This man was taller than any other there by a considerable margin. I looked up into his face and knew him at once. Most everyone in town knew Robert Devereux the second Earl of Essex by sight. I had never met him, but had seen him in procession and riding through the streets. It was unusual for him to come into the main part of the city on foot, even more so because he and his entourage were dressed for a hunt. His friends being silenced, he turned his head to look at me. His eyes were large and soft, but when I looked into them I became instantly aware of my patched cloak and worn shoes, and I looked away again at once.

“Ah, boy, please tell your master that the Earl of Essex desires a word with him,” he said.

I have said before that I was never quite comfortable with

the arrangement that Saviolo and I had devised, or rather, had fallen into unspoken agreement about. The chief ground of my discomfort was in being taken for a servant, for I did the office of a servant in many ways while also being treated as a lodger, nay an honored guest by the old master. It would, therefore, have been my natural inclination to put right such a bold assumption of my station. In that moment, however, I had not a thought of correcting the earl, and instead found myself giving a quick bow, saying, "Yes, my lord," and popping back through the door to find Saviolo. When I closed the door behind myself I heard another crack of laughter from the assembly outside, followed by an equally sharp shushing that quelled the commotion. On a mission, I walked straight past Brink, who had come into the front passage to see what was the matter, and up the stairs to Saviolo's chamber without a word.

The swordsman answered my knock with bleary brow raised. He wore only his long white shirt, most likely the one he had slept in. When I delivered my message, he pushed the door shut only to reemerge a few moments later with a pair of slops, hastily donned, the same shirt tucked into them.

"Well, come, Luke, it will not do to keep an earl waiting."

With that, he plunged down the stairs. I followed behind him, still not entirely free of Essex's glamour. Brink had apparently made up for my lack of decorum, for Essex was draped

against the window frame in the front chamber when we arrived. The peer held his buff gloves in his hand and his eyes were on them. At the noise of our coming, Essex looked up and, seeing me trailing Saviolo, lifted the corner of his mouth into a smile. Saviolo bowed to him, and the earl inclined his head in acknowledgement.

"My apologies, Saviolo, for coming so early unannounced."

"Think nothing of it, my lord."

"And you, Luke," Essex went on, "I must apologize to you for my little joke."

I did not at first understand his meaning. But his apology, coupled with the smile and an accompanying lightening around his eyes, brought some comprehension. "You know me, my lord?" I asked.

"Certes. You must know that master Saviolo and I are often in conference. He has told me much of you."

I looked to Saviolo, but found no wisdom in the bland smile he wore. My glance returned to Essex and I found nothing in his face but a crooked smile and an inquisitive sparkle in his eyes. "I am honored that your lordship includes me in your mirth," I said.

"Good. Excellent. Now, if you will leave me to confer with my good friend," he said, trailing off.

Thus dismissed, I left the chamber and sat down on the

stairs, my morning's errand forgotten.

Within the span of two hours, Saviolo and I were on the road heading into the county of Essex at the urging of the earl. Saviolo had let me know we were bound for a journey as soon as Essex left, but he refused to go into details until we were well on our way. I spent the intervening time wondering at the sudden commotion the nobleman had so casually caused, being painfully curious about the substance of it, and running letters from Saviolo to the school and to the houses where he had other appointments in the next few days that now needed to be cancelled or postponed.

There was great activity in the fields as we passed beyond the northern influence of the city. Laborers cut and bundled the stalks of wheat in gangs. The work was thrown into contrast with the scenery by a clear sunlight of a kind that only happens on fine autumn days. Though curiosity still burned inside me, I knew that Saviolo was not a man to be rushed. The clopping hooves of the hired horses we rode lulled me into a pleasant kind of stupor despite my interest. It was an abrupt snap, therefore, when Saviolo spoke at last.

"What do you think of young Essex, Luke?"

I turned my head to look at him. He rode easily enough,

walking the horse at a pace that was determined but not rushed. Nor was there any hint of expectation, no sparkle of rising jest in the question.

"He bears himself like a worthy nobleman," I said. There was a long stretch of silence between us, accompanied by the continuo of footfalls and the distant banter of farmhands. "He seems to have taken you into his command," I ventured.

"The earl of Essex is a powerful and desperate man, Luke. I think you might relate to his situation. His father left him with much a greater debt than the one you inherited, and with it he also came into one of the highest seats in the peerage."

I felt the heat of the earl's joke from the morning boiling up my cheeks. "That doesn't give him leave to..."

"Leave?" interrupted Saviolo, followed by a quick bark of laughter. "An earl needs little leave to do anything he desires. He means well. He has a fondness for youth and all of its sports. I am much mistaken if he had much merriment when he was of your age."

"Yes, but what power does he have over you?"

"The same power he has over any man. At a word from him I could find myself accused of whatever crime he could imagine, and he has the power to make that case his. But more than that, he is my friend. He has shown me courtesy and respect, in his own fashion. Whatever you think, know this: once a man may call

him friend, he will use all his not inconsiderable powers to defend the friendship. He has his faults, as do we all, but he has a good heart, I think, if only he can let it shine through his circumstances."

"And it's his friendship that now blows you far from home on the whim of a moment?"

"I suppose I cannot blame you for not knowing what I have kept from you. So now I will make amends. Have you heard the name Martin Fitch?"

"It sounds familiar, though I cannot say why."

"No doubt it is the whispered stories of the young gentleman at the school—most of whom never met him and were the merest boys when he was most himself. Let me tell you his story, then, so that you will not fill your mind with the gossip of silly boys" he said.

"I never knew Martin as a boy, you understand. He spent his childhood in the county of Essex. I am told that he was an odd child. Not clever, to be sure, but something more. I know nobody who was well acquainted with him at that time, so we can only guess. In '85, as you know, her Majesty made her first decisive military action against the papists in Flanders. It was also the first campaign of his lordship the earl of Essex. When Essex gathered together his men for the action, his captains told him there was a queer boy wanting to join the trained bands. They

were, no doubt, enchanted by the lad, as so many were. Essex took a liking to him on first meeting, and at once agreed that Martin should travel to Flanders and carry the drum for him."

"So much happened all before I met him. I was in Flanders too, at that time, though with the French forces. I met Martin and Essex on the same day. In Martin I saw a boy eager to please and to be useful, though he seemed troubled and slow. I would not say that I took him under my wing, or that we had a particular bond, but he seemed to desire my company and he was thrilled to learn what he could about the sword and, indeed, about all the military arts. Being not greatly engaged in the formulation of actions and strategies of that campaign, I had leisure enough to humor the boy."

"He had, as I have said, no great wit, but he was a very pleasant lad, given to bouts of such good nature and joy that he was a darling in the camp. Martin, well pleased to have the attention of so many, beat his drum proudly on the march and danced, sang, and capered when at rest. Essex and I were, I think, of like mind about it. I thought it well for Martin to be active and relied upon, and thought little harm could come of it."

"One day it happened that Martin proved at once his bravery and his frailty. I would be less grieved, mayhap, if it had been some great action against the enemy, but as it was, he gave so

much for an accident. Martin was in a column moving from town to a new camp when one of the horses pulling a supply cart spooked, overturning the load. It was a cargo of harquebus, shot, and powder. Martin anticipated the turning of the cart, and rushed to pull the men away from it lest they be crushed. He grabbed two men and pulled them bodily from the descent of the cargo. A third man was pinned and crushed beneath the cart, and casks of powder broke over and around him. By the rarest of chances, the crushed soldier was an harquebusier himself, and the match in his belt set fire to the powder. As you know, powder burns fast, and one of the casks was mostly intact. When the flame reached the whole cask it exploded, sending Martin and the men he saved into the ditch with its force. This would have been enough, I warrant, but the misfortunes of the day were greater still. A contingent of the enemy, irregulars no doubt, were in the hills overlooking the road, noting the movements of our forces. When they heard the blast, they must have thought that their comrades were attacking the convoy and rushed to add their own fire in what they doubtless thought to be a major action. The enemy, being on the near side to the ditch where Martin lay, took aim at him and at his comrades. Both of the men he had rescued were shot while he still had his hands on them, and it is only by the grace of God that Martin himself was able to scramble out of the ditch and find cover among his comrades. As it was, he was

grazed in both his arm and chest."

"The men in the company were so overtaken by the rapid turn of events that for some half of an hour or more Martin lay on the ground in their midst with guns firing and bullets landing all around him and men screaming up the hill to find the assailants. I saw him that night, and he was changed. His eyes were afraid, and he started at slight noises. We all assumed he would be back to himself after a few days of inaction, as many men are. But he never went back to his former self. Essex sent him home from the action early."

I listened to Saviolo's tale with rising astonishment, and felt the abruptness of his conclusion hard upon my nerves. "He just sent him home?" I asked.

"As I said, a friend of Essex will find himself well cared for," Saviolo smiled at me. "The earl made a home for Martin on his own land."

"But that has been seven years ago now. How has he lived?"

"He has been attended to by men in Essex's employ. I have several times visited him in his home since I came to England."

In my curiosity, I had slowed my horse to the point of stopping. "I don't understand," I said, "If Martin is so well looked after, why are we going to see him now?"

"Maybe for no special reason. Essex is worried that Martin's condition is deteriorating and that the care of him may

be beyond the power of his Lordship's men," said Saviolo. "Now, enough talk, let us ride with more alacrity."

With that, he urged his horse to a trot and shot forward along the highway. Following his lead, I likewise increased my pace. The day stayed fine, and the ride, though not comfortable to one so unaccustomed to riding long distances at a trot as myself, was pleasant in environs if not in practice. By the time we rode into Chelmsford the daylight was fading, and I was more than ready to find a hot supper and some drink to wash it down.

We decided to stay the night in Chelmsford, partly as a favor to my stiff and sore body, and party because Saviolo said, without explanation, that the tide would be better in the morning. Through all of our lingering time in the hall before bed, Saviolo talked of everything except our errand. As was his wont after a few pints, he began to talk of all the noble "professors of the art," which is to say defense with a sword, that he had known. This kind of dissertation, held in conference with whatever scholars could be made from local men mixed with alcohol, involved an increasing number of arguments made in Latin, Italian, and occasionally Greek. It was always a wonder to me how he held the attention of gentlemen, farmers, and tradesmen alike with his talk of washing blows and positions of the body. I had begun to droop, and had avoided only very nearly my face dropping onto the hard table when I looked up to see him

still prattling on about the Spanish masters and their sacred circles. With a hand to prop up my head I watched for a moment as he urged a young butcher's apprentice to speak his mind. Then, though Saviolo had been a little slurred in his speech for hours, he turned and caught my eye, giving me the soberest wink I have ever encountered.

In the morning we broke our fast and headed east toward the sea. My suspicions of Saviolo were bolstered by his seeming clarity and good cheer as we set out. He sang a little song in Italian and beamed his pleasure at all the world. Even the light rain, which had returned after the reprieve of the previous day, made no dent in his good humor.

"It is good to be abroad in the countryside, isn't it Luke?," he said with a wide smile.

I grunted.

"Will you consent to tell me where we are headed now, and what is our objective?" I asked.

"Always so much in haste to know particulars," said Saviolo shaking his head. "Very well, Luke, you shall know. We ride to the sea, where we will meet with some of Essex's men. With them, we will take a barge to the island where the house is that has been these seven years a home to Martin Fitch. As to our aim, I am by no means certain myself. Essex asked me to come and provide a friendly face for Martin, and suggested that we might

be engaged in a trip with him to London, for his Lordship is almost certain that Martin should be moved to Bethlem hospital, there to be attended to more readily."

"Why you? The earl must have other confederates to perform such an errand," I said.

"Time shall show us, I think. But I did get the impression that Essex wanted a trusted friend more than a servant for the job. Though our acquaintance may seem slight, spending some weeks in the field together creates a bond that might take months to form in peaceful company. I would do any modest office that would bring comfort to Martin." As he spoke those last words, Saviolo's eyes fell from the horizon to contemplation of the road just ahead of him. Though I was not fully satisfied, I knew by his tone and demeanor that the time for questions was ended. We rode on in silence for a while.

We followed a clear way that ran along the southern bank of a river, and before too long the sea spread out in the distance. The river emptied into a large estuary. We rode out onto the headland created by the brackish breadth of the river meeting the sea. It was not yet noon when we left the road and followed a much smaller track, overgrown with grass and weeds, northward to a cottage overlooking the water.

The cottage contained two men, Roger and Charles by name. Roger was the authority, and after greeting us and offering us

some refreshment, told us that we would go out to the island within the hour. We talked with the men over bread, cheese, and cider. Roger spoke to us about the time he had spent on the island with Martin. I saw how the creases beside his eyes stretched and contracted as he talked about him. Charles was newer to the job and did not have the same warmth toward their charge.

The barge that connected the island with the shore had been built for the purpose. It was a flat, rectangular platform with a rail on two opposite sides. One of the rails had tall posts with large iron rings attached, through which a long chain attached to both piers was threaded. It was by means of the chain that the vessel was moved back and forth across the channel. When we boarded, I was impressed by the size of the platform, which could have held four or five times our number. Roger explained that sometimes horses were transported on it, even though we had left our hired mounts in the small stable by the cottage.

I looked out over the sea as several servants hauled the chain to bring us across. There, beyond my vision, was Flanders, where Martin had gone to war. I wondered if he ever thought about that foreign land in his long incarceration on this island that was adrift in the same water that lapped on the shores of the low countries. The air stung my nose with cold and salt, and

the wind wrought cold tears.

It was a small island. At high tide it stood in the main only a few feet above the surging estuary waters. At the seaward end, and taking up a fifth or so of the total area, was a stone house with an attached stable large enough to hold three or four animals. Each of the two stories of the house was low, and the windows on the second floor were recently glazed against the breezes that were a constant movement. The rest of the island was a garden of more or less even ground that was overgrown with grass intermingled with a low-growing yellow flower.

As we walked up from the dock on the south side of the island, I saw the household staff, two powerfully built men and a stout woman, assembled on the green. The men made brief introductions before scuttling off to their labors, but the woman stayed on to chat with us. She was called Mrs. Wotton, and was so starved for news of the wider world that she quizzed both Saviolo and myself about every aspect of London from the rat catchers to the lord mayor. After some minutes of her company, Roger coughed an interruption and begged our forgiveness and our leave to bring us to Martin.

Roger explained that Martin was at liberty that day, and had been out in the garden. We walked around the house and found him sitting on a smooth stone on the eastern extreme of the land looking out over the sea. At a hail from Roger, he rose from his

perch to his considerable height. He walked to us with the loose, ungainly gait of a very young man. His round face cracked into a broad, toothy smile at the sight of Saviolo who, though dwarfed by Martin, let the man enfold him in a crushing embrace that lifted him off the ground.

"It's good to see you Maestro!" Martin cried.

"And you, my friend," said Saviolo. "I would like to present to you, my particular friend, Luke Muston." He indicated me, and Martin's gaze fell upon me.

I have often described Saviolo's scrutiny as being like a raven's: calculating, appraising, but somehow containing a sparkle of wit. Most of the young men at the school had made it their task to emulate the master, but none ever came close to his strange and piercing power. Martin Fitch, when he looked on me for the first time, fixed on me not a dram of calculation. Instead his eyes shone with simple warmth at the joy of our meeting. He stepped forward and took me by the shoulders with a tenderness that belied his bulk. "I'm happy to meet you, Luke," he said. "Any friend of the Maestro is beyond welcome here."

At once I understood the love that this man elicited from his friends. From the powerful and brash young earl to the simple cook assigned to feed him, Martin held nothing back and, consequently, he stripped all pretense away from those around him.

We retired to the house and wore away the afternoon in conversation. To hear him speak of his life, you would think that Martin had been on the Grand Tour for the better part of a decade and not confined to a patch of weedy grass less than a mile square. He talked with animation about birds and beasts that visited the island, and rushed to fetch a bundle of papers on which he had drawn many creatures in thick, angular lines.

He was leaning over the table, showing me a picture he drew of a fox when there came a sudden crash of crockery from the kitchen. I had been looking right into his eyes at that moment, and I saw a change come over him. Where he had been all gaiety and boyish softness, his gaze became unfocused and troubled. His shoulders tensed and hunched and then, before I knew what was happening, he had taken me under one arm, lifted me out of my chair and thrown us both to the floor. The stools and table overturned in the process and the others let out startled yells. Martin's hands, already tight around my upper arms, constricted to a crushing intensity and he dragged me, helpless, as he pushed himself up and toward the door out of the hall. For my part, I was so startled that I could not move or speak.

As Martin thrust me to the door in front of him, the two household servants, both sturdy young men, came through it. They edged by me and took hold of Martin, one on each arm. He pulled me to him, smothering me against his massive chest with bone-

cracking force, and tried to throw the men off him. I became aware that he was yelling incoherently, and may have been doing so all along. In my position, I could not see how they accomplished it, but the men got control of him and pried his arms from me, releasing me to fall in a heap on the floor, gasping for breath. All I could do, and that at great effort, was look up to see the two serving men, with help from Roger and Charles, leading the struggling Martin out of the hall toward the garden.

Saviolo had crossed the room and was at my side asking if I was hurt. I assured him that beyond being bruised and winded I was fine. I was about to ask after Martin when Roger came back in to the room to join Saviolo in fussing over me. I shook him off. With a hand up from Saviolo I regained my feet and was about to go out to see what had become of my new friend when I saw Mrs. Wotton standing just beyond the door to the kitchen, paralyzed among a field of earthenware shards.

“I’m so sorry,” she said haltingly, “I was trying to carry too many. They were slippery.”

“Come, Mrs. Wotton,” said Roger, “If it had not been that, some other thing would have set him off.” He turned to Saviolo. “You see how it is with him. One might think him fully himself, but in a moment...”

“Yes, I see,” said Saviolo.

"You have come a few days early," Roger said, "we expect the carter soon. I hope—my lord Essex hopes, that you can keep him distracted on the journey."

The two men were looking directly at each other. They held their gazes for a long moment. Finally, Saviolo nodded.

"He's a good lad," he said. "I've always known it. It is a pity we can do no better for him."

The barn had been made into a kind of cell for Martin, with a sturdy bed and no other furnishings. They had learned from experience and had affixed cushions of leather with strong batting to all the corners and protruding surfaces in the room in the hope of keeping their charge safe from his own fits. That night I could hear from time to time muttering and wailing from the barn, which lay below the window of the chamber Roger had given for my use.

Martin had not improved by the morning. The silence with which we broke our fast and waited for the next change was as smothering as the fog that rolled around and over the island. Around midday, when the fog had lifted and a little sun peeked through the clouds, I went to the barn to look in on him. He was quiet, and through a small window by the door, a hole in the wall really, I saw that he was huddled on the bed, backed into the corner of the wall with his arms encircling his drawn up

legs. I made no attempt to draw his attention and, after a few minutes observing him rocking back and forth I turned away to find that Saviolo was there observing me.

"How is he, do you think?" I asked.

"None but God knows," he replied. "Listen, Luke, I hope that you do not begrudge him. I am certain that he meant you no harm."

"Oh, I know that. You told me how he got this way—the action in the Low Countries. I think," I hesitated, wondering if he would think me mad, "I think he thought I was in danger. When he took hold of me, he threw us both to the ground, but thinking back on it, he was not hurting me, except that he held on to me too tightly. I think he was trying to shield me with his body from a danger only he could see."

Saviolo's eyes narrowed as he looked at me for a long moment.

"In any case," I went on, "I know that he was not in his right mind. I have some bruises that will take some time to fully mend, but I am fine. It is Martin's state that worries me."

He made a thoughtful sort of grunt. "Well, his state as you call it is very uncertain. It would be well if you did not become too fond of a friend in such distress." With that he turned and walked back into the house.

It was the longest day of my young life. Neither Saviolo nor the people of the island seemed to want to talk about anything with me. They did not avoid me, as such, but they did seem to find things with which to busy themselves whenever I was around. I spent most of it looking out over the water, listening to the call of gulls that I could not see through the high mist that still hung in patches around the estuary.

Toward evening a chill wind rose and I walked back toward the house. As I passed close to the barn, Martin called out, "Hoy, Luke! Luke, get my jailor, I'm well."

I approached the door warily and saw a quarter of his face pressed against the little window. It was the face of the man I had met before the episode of the night before—his eye had a hint of that clarity and joy that I had noted at our meeting. As I came closer, he withdrew and the face was replaced by his hand and meaty arm, which could barely squeeze through. He reached for me, and I did not flinch away. He put his grasping hand on my head and ruffled my hair.

"I'm so glad to see you well," he said. "I thought...that is, I was worried that I—I don't remember everything that happens."

"All is well with me, Martin, worry not."

"That's good. Real good."

He retracted his arm and his other eye appeared. "It would

be better if you could get me out of here.” Part of a slanted smile showed through the window.

The next three days we all spent on the island with Martin. He was more tentative than when we first arrived, but he was excellent company just the same. No one spoke of the episode to Martin, or to me for that matter, but this lack of discourse made it possible to mostly forget that anything had happened. The purpling bruises on my arms reminded me, as did a soreness across my chest, but I was so enjoying the time that I easily put them out of my mind.

It happened that Martin had found many things with which to amuse himself in his seclusion. He had mastered several popular card games, and was particularly fond of picket. He had grown bored with the standard games in general and had devised more than a few of his own. Dice were also a great amusement, though he played neither chess nor tables on account of them being, in his words, “dryer than an old maid.” The island, though small as I have mentioned, allowed for outdoor amusements as well. None there thought it wise to introduce sports, and there were not enough men present even with we visitors, to play at hurling or football. Instead, someone—Essex no doubt—had provided a chest full of oddities. Martin’s favorites were toys that flew through

the air. There were two square paper toys with wooden frames, painted with gruesome images from far Cathay that, when managed by a length of twine could be sailed high above the island. He also delighted in a toy that I have heard called a wooden dragonfly that you spin between your opened hands which causes it to fly straight into the air.

Perhaps more than his games and toys, what Martin liked most were stories. Most especially the stories that Saviolo told of strange men of war in far-off lands, and of his travels east beyond the Empire to cities ruled by Turks and Arabs.

On the third night, Roger had permitted the men of the household to build a large fire on a clear patch of ground a stone's throw from the house. Saviolo had finished describing how he had befriended a Turk and learned how to wield the heavy scimitars of that people, and everyone except Martin and myself had gone into the house.

"Luke, where are we going?" he asked.

"You no doubt know better than I. To London."

He nodded. "My lord of Essex is good to me. He's kept me here a long time, though I am nothing to him."

"I would not say that," I said, "his lordship seems to me to admire you very much."

"What did the Maestro say just now? About fire?"

"That 'true friendship is best forged in fire'?"

"That's it. If I had not been in Flanders, or had come home not hurt, I don't think he would have kept me here at all."

I shrugged.

"I'm happy he's my friend," he said, "and you, too. I'm happy you're my friend."

I saw him in the light of the fire and, though he was smiling, his round face was streaked with fat tears.

"What has gotten into you?" I asked.

He rose abruptly. "I need sleep. We'll go in the morning." He gave me a broad smile and walked back into the house.

As Martin predicted, the carter and a few more men arrived early the following morning, and we all prepared to leave. Roger, with much hesitation and sheepishness, insisted that Martin be constrained for the ferry ride across the water. He said that the tide was on the way out and that if anything were to happen, it would be treacherous to anyone that might fall overboard. Martin consented, though as he voiced his agreement, he stared at his feet. I could not tell whether he was more embarrassed that he should be subjected to the treatment in front of us, or understandably perturbed that it was needed at all. Roger bound his hands, not roughly, with leather straps that he then looped through an iron ring on one of the railing posts of the barge. I felt sorry for Martin and, thinking that he would appreciate the distraction, stood by him and tried to

engage him in some jest from the day before.

The party was very silent, making the sound of the chain drawing through the iron bindings feel even louder than it was. As Roger had warned, the current of the tide moving out pulled at the boat and the eddies caused by our progress swirled far out beyond our craft where they were quickly overtaken by the sea.

On the shore ahead, and off to the side, a dog barked and a flush of fowl stirred into flight, just over our heads. There was shouting from onboard the boat that I assumed was someone warning us of the danger of fire from whatever elicit hunter was ahead of us in the fog. When I turned my attention to my comrades, I saw Martin pulling at his bonds and the others, still startled into inaction .

Martin had broken the post that he was tied to free from the railing. He held it in his hands and, with a howl like an angered wolf he swung it around his head. He made straight for Saviolo, who had come to his senses . With the large man bearing down on him in the confined space of the barge, I was afraid the master would be bowled over the side and sucked under the water. I made to distract Martin, interposing my person somewhat between him and Saviolo, but the swordsman pushed me back against the railing. In vain I looked at Martin. His face was twisted with exertion and pain, but as I looked into his eyes I

saw they were clear.

I yelled as loudly as I could for both Martin and Saviolo to stop, but the bulk of Martin's body passed in front of me. Saviolo's sword was out, a strip of metallic silver in the gloom. As Martin bore on, Saviolo extended his arm, his brows furrowed and his mouth pressed hard shut. The blade found its mark.

Then the moment that had stretched so long was over. Martin lurched back and to the side, crashing over the shoreward end of the barge right next to me. I threw out my hand and caught hold of his sleeve. As he slipped under the water, I locked on to that handful of linen and hooked my other arm around the post that was next to me. Martin's hand found my wrist. For a few seconds we were locked together, then he gave a last squeeze and let go of me. My hand ached and had lost most of its strength. The tide bore him away.

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Saviolo said very little about what had happened. We left the rest of the party and returned to London without delay. Some of the other students at the school inquired after Martin, but he cut them short with a glance and they asked no more questions. A few days later a messenger came to the house with a

bulky parcel in his hands. Brink was on the scene and brought it up to Saviolo, who happened to be studying in his private chamber. An observer would no doubt think me guilty of intermeddling, but I felt my curiosity very sharply to know what it was, and consequently lingered a bit overlong outside the chamber door.

"You had better come in," came Saviolo's voice through the door. "I will get nothing done with you breathing in the corridor."

I could not tell whether he sounded annoyed or amused, but I went in regardless, knowing that an invitation was usually as good as an order from the old swordsman. I found him seated behind his little desk, with several books laid out open before him. On top of the center-most book I saw a leaf of paper that had a broken seal on it.

"It is from Essex," he said. "This is a bequest from young Martin."

I experienced a cold sensation in my chest—the kind that often comes when something that is forbidden produces itself. I did not know whether the subject of Martin had opened and, held fast by indecision whether to try it, I waited for him to continue.

"Well, do you not wish to open it," he gestured to the bundle, wrapped in rough cloth and tied closed with twine.

"If you wish," I said, trying to disguise my already betrayed curiosity with feigned unconcern. I undid the knotted twine and folded back the fabric, which fell away to reveal a drum, old and worn, but polished to a shine. I looked at Saviolo to gauge his reaction and saw that his eyes were full of tears ready to break free and run down his face. He made no effort to hide them or wipe them away.

"I wondered," he said, sniffing. "We must find room for it. Put it there, on the cabinet where I can see it while I work."

"But there is no room."

"Take the helmet off of it and stow it in the chest in the corner."

I picked up the indicated helmet. I gleamed in the light that came in through the window, the whole of its surface crawled with figures from the labors of Heracles, carved and gilt.

"This is very fine. Where did you get it?"

"The helmet? It was a gift from the Doge of Venice. That is a story for another day. For now, put it away."

I carefully opened the three-panel chest in the corner and laid the helmet inside it on top of folded clothes. Then I took the drum from the remains of its wrapping and set it on the cabinet where the helmet had been, directly adjacent to the desk where it would be in his view.

Luke’s account of Saviolo’s private study as updated by Admiral Lomax

I can think of no better way to reveal to you the history of Saviolo, so far as I knew it in those early days, than to acquaint you with the appointment of what he jokingly called his privy chamber—for that was where he consulted with his advisors (mostly the various facets of his own intellect) like the queen in her chamber of that name. This was a room on the first floor of his house at the head of the stairs, where in many houses would be the great chamber set aside for the pleasure of the family. Its immediate appearance was like to that of a chamber of curiosities, such as many of the great men of the day kept and filled with all manner of strange things. My lord of Essex had such a chamber, but his was furnished to make men marvel and to make ladies exclaim with delight and disgust, filled as it

was with the skeletons of fanciful creatures and the heads of dwarfish brown savages preserved in jars and other like treasures that his lordship purchased at great expense. Saviolo's chamber contained many fine things but they were none of them purchased by him and their purpose was not to entertain others but to aid the master in his own musings.

The chamber itself was not of great size, being but two or three paces to a side, but the contents were so many that they seemed to overflow from it. In the middle stood a small rectangular table with two stout oaken chairs set by, one on either side. Saviolo sat in the larger chair, which was closest to the small fireplace and faced the two glazed windows that allowed light into the place. The other chair he offered to any soul fortunate enough to be invited. On the desk he kept a constantly growing and shifting pile of books, mostly in Italian and Latin, alongside thick sheaves of paper, and one or two silver inkwells. At the end closest to the visitor he had on display half a dozen plumes of rare and exquisite birds in a quill rack, but when he wrote, it was with the swan quills he kept in an earthenware pot among the papers.

To hold the other artifacts in the room he had no fewer than four open cupboards and two three-panel chests in the room. The latter were covered with colorful rugs woven through with symbols and designs that were foreign to me, but that he told me

were from the Orient, but to be more precise, as he said, he told me to think of them as from a land between that of the Turks and far Cathay—a place where the air was, he assured me, heavy with spice. As if those six heavy movables were not enough to overwhelm the chamber, the finest yet was a massive court cabinet made of a wood with which I was unfamiliar, having supporting posts carved into the likenesses of Indians from the New World, twisting smooth and sinuously around one another. All of these diverse shelves and cabinets were covered by and filled with the curiosities I mentioned. But as I have said, these curiosities were not horrors, but fine things, many of which I daresay seemed out of place in the home of a townsman of London, being more fit for the chambers of a peer of the realm.

One chest was neatly packed with the finest silk shirts along with doublets and hose crafted from exquisite velvet and kid and studded over with small pearls or other precious baubles. About these he said, “they are so fine, I have never been able to wear them in comfort.” These clothes aside, most of the things in the chamber were either arms or books. On the walls in the narrow spaces between furnishings there hung several rapiers, most of which bore gilded hilts intricately carved. Between the court cabinet and the door stood one of the finest suits of armor that I have ever seen, even compared to those worn by wealthy gentlemen to the tiltyard on a festival

day. Its every plate teemed with chased figures from the famed battles of antiquity. Beside these were shelf after shelf piled with daggers, maces, bucklers, two partisans, a halberd, arming swords, tooled leather hangers, gorgets, and many other pieces I had no name for, every one of them decorated or embellished and looking as shining and unmarred as the day it was made. Another distinction between Saviolo's chamber of curiosities and those of noblemen was that there was in his place arrayed not one fine thing that had been bought or sent away for, every one being a gift from some worthy gentleman or lady who had seen fit to bestow a lavish gift or augment whatever wage Saviolo had drawn in their employ with some unique thing just for him. But the fineness or wealth of those items meant nothing at all to the old master, who told me that what he had there collected was a room stuffed to breaking with memories. And indeed, in all the time I spent with him, there was never an occasion when I reached out to some steel or golden thing in that chamber that had caught my eye, that he had not immediately smiled faintly at the recollection of some day long past.

Of Friendship Found

I have often commented in this journal on the strange and precarious nature of my relationship with Saviolo. It would be improper for me to enter into his service, as my title of esquire entitled me to more standing than an alien townsman of unknown rank—in happier times, he might have been in my employ. Yet it would also be improper for him to give me training and accommodation without receiving a fee. We settled on an arrangement whereby I acted as a friend and confidante for the old master and he in turn shared his wisdom and his home with me. I offered to pay him on more than one occasion, but he always refused me with a vehemence that could admit no argument. So I repaid his generosity by doing him favors of a sort that, if too closely scrutinized would look like the errands of a servant. I think we understood one another in the end.

One of the favors that I was often called upon to undertake was to represent Saviolo at social occasions when he could not or would not attend in person. Above I said that he was a man of indeterminate station, but that is a mischaracterization. Whatever his background before he came to England, Saviolo had many friends among the mightiest and most powerful men in the land. He offered private instruction for several peers of the realm, and the gentry who increasingly held the budget of the nation courted the old Italian to train their sons as heartily as many courted the favor of the queen. So while he held no tangible position, he was no stranger to the best circles of society, in London and beyond.

I think in part that he sent me to social gatherings because he took pity on me. My relations with the other students were not bad, for the most part, but neither were they warm. My lack of means was well known because that is the sort of detail for which young men have a nose keen enough to match their lack of discretion. I was not teased or bullied, at least not beyond the level that was standard for that active and youthful group, but most of the young gentlemen saw no use in befriending me, while others resented what they perceived as favors that Saviolo extended to me and no others. As is often the way of these arrangements, Saviolo sent me off to social engagements that I did not enjoy under the misapprehension of doing me a favor, and

for my part I refused to complain about them on the grounds that I did not wish to seem ungrateful for his generosity.

So it was that I found myself at the home of Sir William Sutton on an autumn evening dressed for a feast and carrying a message from Saviolo. Sir William's land was in the countryside just north of London. The event was the sort of party that country gentry stage: lavish enough to impress the wealthy and influential members of the local area, but without any in attendance too wealthy or too influential. The guests were drawn from the list of the regions gentlemen who were precisely the description of the primary source of students for the school.

You may wonder that I was indifferent about my task—after all, a dance at the house of a country gentleman, especially one so close to London seems pieced together from all good things in which a young man takes delight. There was food in both quantity and variety. The daughters of the worthy gentlemen would be there, and music and dancing enough to help the reluctant. If my enthusiasm flagged it was because, despite the vigor with which I had come to London, months of hard reality with few prospects for my enrichment had given rise to a more melancholy disposition than I had known in my pleasant childhood years in the safety of my home. I was more than ever acutely aware of my poverty and the desperate situation in which I and my poor mother remained. It was without much spirit, therefore, that I

entered the house and lost myself in the throng.

The house itself was as much the attraction of the evening as anything else. Sir William had completed the building of it mere months previously and, though he had entertained since its completion, its novelty still had its shine. Though not a house of prodigious size, the gravity of the fine appointments and the structure in general distracted me from my malaise. I walked through the long gallery, where the outliers of the gathering flowed in small clots, attentive not to the humanity but to the sculpture and paintings there on display. Sir William's collection tended toward the classical, with paintings of nymphs and angels set in glades alongside men with Oriental swords and wreaths of greenery in their hair. A handful of marble busts of Roman emperors stared at the paintings with brows almost knit, as if disapproving, though I had heard enough about the Romans of old to know better than judge their gazes along puritan lines. As I paused with my fingers on the face of Caesar, thinking longingly of his talent for self-betterment, I saw the most wonderful aspect of the gallery. Through the long row of expertly glazed windows rising almost from the floor to the ceiling, I saw the garden below in a flash of yellow light from a lone firework. This distracted me well of itself, for I had never seen such amusements before, though I had heard of displays that her majesty had commissioned. Fading embers fell

across the image of squared and knotted hedges and a cluster of onlookers pointing in expectation of the next explosion. Then fires were lit throughout the garden and the whole of its splendor spread out before my eyes. Drawn to the boxwood maze, I descended into the hall to deliver my office, that I might find my way outside the sooner.

I found Sir William in the hall standing behind his many guests pressed against the windows in anticipation of more flowery flames. I approached to find my host's magnanimity directed at me with force. His eyes were fairly alight with pleasure and his smile slanted satisfaction and grandeur. The business was simple, and I was eager to have it done. I explained that I was there to express the regrets that Saviolo could not attend in person, and to assure Sir William that by sending me he was there in spirit. On that occasion, I had a gift to present as well—an ink stand in bronze with the figure of a lone soldier, sword in hand, reclining upon it. Some of the glow left him as he realized that I had not approached to directly compliment his extravagant display, but he accepted the words and the gift with a soft smile nonetheless. As I was about to turn and take my leave, a boy a few years my junior raised stepped toward us, eyes on me, and raised his voice.

"How do we know he is of any quality?"

Sir William was quick to intercept. "Now, Simon," he said,

“Master Saviolo is well thought of, both in general and at court.”

“Well thought of is one thing, father, but that is no assurance of ability.”

I was not certain how to extricate myself from the discussion, and was a little stung that such questions should be raised in public, especially after a fine gift had accompanied the connection. “I assure you,” I said, trying to focus on Sir William, “that Master Saviolo’s methods are the very best. He has taken together the thoughts of many masters of Italy, Germany, and France, and made from them a comprehensive art of defense.”

“Yes, of course you’d say that,” said Simon, “You are his servant after all.”

“I am no servant, but a gentleman and friend of the master.”

“Very well,” Simon continued, “Why don’t you show us how great is his instruction?”

“Ah, Simon,” said Sir William, his eyes taking in his son, the other guests and me in quick succession, “we must think of our other guests.”

“All I mean to say,” said his son, “is that he can show us how well he’s been trained by this Saviolo. Then, if you send me to him to learn, we shall know I am the better off for it.”

"Well," said Sir William, sputtering.

Simon had already begun to redden about the face, but now the muscles around his jaw tensed, and he grew redder. His father took in those changes and quickly turned to me.

"What do you say, young man?" he said quickly, "Perhaps you could give us a short demonstration?"

"I am but a poor scholar, quite new to the techniques. It would hardly be any testimony to the quality of Master Saviolo's work."

"Quite so," said Sir William, "Yet let us have it as an entertainment. We will add it to the other sports of the evening."

"As you wish," I said, longing more than ever to escape to the garden.

After a pause, Sir William asked, "How shall you proceed?"

"Oh," I said, "I suppose I will need an opponent."

I had no time to even look around the crowd of faces that had been gathering as we talked before Simon stepped forward to volunteer. He squinted his eyes at me and smiled in that sideways fashion that holds no mirth.

"Very good," I said, with no conviction, but trying to address the room as Saviolo might, "One need not use a sword to use the art of the sword. Let us arm ourselves with gloves." I took one of my gloves out of my belt and held it so that the

fingers draped forward. Simon did likewise.

"Now, Simon, make what strike you will against me."

He came on as all untrained boys do, swinging his glove at my face first from one side and then from the other. With each attack I yielded ground, removing my frontward foot to slip away from the onslaught. It took all of my concentration to ignore the growing crowd and focus on Simon's flailing. After five of six passes thus avoided, I waited for the next swing. It came high, as the others had, and I easily ducked beneath it and brought my glove gently home to the center of his chest. Simon tensed as I turned away to say, "So you see, that Saviolo's methods favor a yielding defense that exploits the atacker's own movements." I gave a quick bow and turned to leave, but my opponent came on again.

"You tricked me," he said, "but you won't get the better of me this time."

He charged into my side, as I had not even finished turning toward him before his assault. Head down, he caught me with his shoulder and we both toppled straight into a cluster of ladies, taking one of them down with us. As I fell, my flank smarting from the blow, I heard a ripping from above me. The next moment, Simon was rolling on the floor yelling that I had ruined his hose. The hand that appeared to help me to my feet was that of Sir William, who remained silent, but gave me a tiny nod as I

righted myself, and went to attend to his son.

More vexed than ever, and seeing that someone else had rescued the fallen young woman, I forced a part in the wall of people, some laughing, some mumbling, and found may way out to the garden at last, leaving behind food, young women, music, dancing and all. That garden, formed in my eye of fire and shadows, pulled me fiercely to its bosom.

My aim was to throw myself into the hedge maze, which was at the farthest extent from the house and was the least illuminated corner of the garden. I did not expect to find it abandoned, but I thought myself secure that any young couples that would venture into it would have their own concerns to attend to and would leave me to my thoughts.

I crossed the open garden and gained the maze unimpeded. Within the walls of greenery the glow of the fires was dimmed. I had seen from the gallery above that the maze was roughly square and that it contained five open circles, arranged like the pips on the cinque face of a die. I turned left to make for the nearest of these and soon found myself in a little round arbor only half again as wide as a man is tall. In the middle flowed a small fountain in a circular pool, and on the lip of this I sat and listened to the water bubbling. In the seclusion of the maze my mind was carried far away from the other guests, from my host, and from his horrible son and got lost in the pool.

I know not whether I sat there transfixed for the merest moment or for a long time, but my senses woke me to the presence of others. It was not, as I had expected, a young man and woman gone off hunting cuckoos, but the voices of two boys near at hand. In hushed tones they giggled breathily and I was able to find them without difficulty. They were servants, and they had brought into the heart of the hedge several bottles from which they drank deeply. Youth is a time of queer follies and inexplicable urges. For no reason knowable to me, when I uncovered these two I was not outraged. I did not find a senior serving man and call for them to be beaten. Instead I pulled aside the branches and they turned their heads to me. My eyes catching theirs (which were wide with surprise at being found out) I could not bring myself to spoil their fun. Much to the contrary I found myself longing to partake of the youthful merriment they made for themselves. And so I did. The first asked me if I was going to tell the master. I smiled and said that I could keep a secret, whereupon they ushered me into their den, arms flung wide.

Our festivity was of that sort which young men have of trying so hard to be quiet that the very attempt spoils itself. We drank to our ease and broke the garden’s solemnity with barks of laughter followed hard upon by such storms of shushing and admonitions to be quiet that I wonder we were not sooner

discovered. In the end it was an upright gentleman that found us out and hunted us to our place of hiding. He parted the leafy canes that were our walls with the zeal of Moses. When he discovered that two of the heathens he had found were in service, he boxed their ears and pulled them bodily from the place. Not that there was time for me to make an escape, for he had hardly been gone when he was back again. For me he spared the strength of his arm and merely pulled me to my feet and set me to moving, his fingers tight and firm around my shoulder, toward the door back into the hall.

The walk from the maze back through the garden to the house gave me more than ample time to consider the predicament into which I had blundered. The man that had hold of me wore the plain but fine clothes of a Calvinist, and his indignation at having found frivolity and sin made him well past the point where we could negotiate peaceably how I was to be handled. I felt some anger of my own on that journey among the box hedges, for I was not some boy of a dozen years that needed chiding or the correction of a schoolmaster—I was my own man, and though I was instantly ashamed that I had been so easily seduced into wantonness by those inferior to me in both age and station, it was no man's place so to drag me through the throng to the master of the house. Yet, despite my rage at being treated like an errant schoolboy, I had enough wits left above the drink that

I kept my mouth shut. I knew that any angry railing that my captor would perform would do as much or more to discredit him among that merry crowd, who for the largest part were not puritans, and would have small sympathy for his cause. Yet he was a guest and my better in years and no doubt in position, so I could not know how he was held in the affections of Sir William. Add to that my frustration with the recent display with young Simon, and I had no desire to make another scene in the hall.

Here I must confess that for that long traverse the thought never entered my head that my behavior whether laughed off by the main body of the party or taken hard thereby, would necessarily reflect on Saviolo on whose behalf I had come. I was too bespelled by the spittle-filled invective raining down upon me, and altogether too concerned with my own embarrassment and shame to think of my dear friend's reputation. But I hope that I have in this journal made plain enough my admiration and tender concern for the old swordsman that you will not doubt that my mind was brought to that conclusion before long. Within a handful of yards of the door I realized the potential damage of my action and began to struggle against my accuser with renewed vigor. He, in turn, clapped his free hand on the back of my neck in the way that fathers sometimes do their sons' when they wish to drive them straight from place to place with no fear of their

deviation. In the face of the growing crowd, and in anticipation of many more eyes in the hall that would soon be once more upon me I took the only course available to me and composed myself so that I might appear to be walking with my master close behind. He must have been sensible to the stir that his cries would make as well, for within a few paces of the door he stopped even hissing damnations in my ear and though the muscles of the hand on my neck twitched with rage, it was at least silent rage as we passed into the hall. Within, the music and the choir of raised voices overwhelmed all from the outside.

If again I may interrupt my own tale, I think that you may wonder that I had not used some technique learned of Saviolo to discharge myself from the clutches of this man. And you would be wise to wonder, for indeed we had sometimes practiced the use of presses and binds that would have well acquitted me on that occasion. But (I thank the Lord) the stronger lesson in my mind was that of calm forbearance, for it is certain that if I had used such a press to free myself from that fervent gentleman I would have done harm either to his hand that clutched me or to his arm or shoulder and, barring those injuries I would have at the very least injured his pride and fueled his already considerable rage.

As it was I had lost all hope for my deliverance. I did not further profane myself by daring to plead with God to remove me

from a present circumstance that had, after all, followed directly from my own peevishness and melancholy and from my weakness at being so easily convinced to do wrong. No, as we came inside my mind was not filled with dissembling and equivocation, the which would have compounded my rashness. I had come into a sense of responsibility for my actions and sought to comport myself with an even temper that counter-balanced my disgrace. It was therefor as great a surprise to me as to my captor when, at the very moment that we approached the top of the hall, a rocket shot past us and out the door, trailing dark grey smoke behind it. The missile gained but a little elevation before striking the central fountain in the garden with great force and then bursting into secondary projectiles that streaked in a wide radius from the point of collision and showered the whole garden and beyond with sparks the color of scarlet. This was accompanied by diverse pops and bangs which rent the air.

The revelers varied in their reactions to this sudden display. There were first many shouts of alarm and many an audible intake of breath. Many of those gasps quickly changed into cries of delight, but many in the garden shrieked in terror at being so close to the explosion and made to find cover under the pointing arms of statues or in the concavity of a trimmed hedge. I was myself caught in the wonder of the moment. I did not notice when my judge released me from his grasp, and by the

time I came to myself, I was being pulled even harder by the arm and thus led away from him. I turned to see who now had hold of me and met the dark eyes of a smooth-faced youth, a boy a year or two my junior. He was smiling at me, and when our eyes connected he mouthed “come on.” So warm and earnest was that face that I gave myself in to his power and was guided by him in a moment’s time to the great table laden with food and then whisked underneath it.

A tumble of words was assembled to pour from my open jaw, but as we crouched the boy raised a finger to my lips and pointed out into the hall. We were not entirely concealed. The table had been covered with a large woven rug, the fringe of which missed the floor by a foot or more. We had settled on the far side of the central beam running lengthwise along the center of the table and were leaning against the far wall so that we might be dimly seen above the beam and below the fringe if someone were to look carefully. At present I saw that every eye in the hall was still entranced by the spectacular and unexpected fireworks display. Those in the hall, who had seen and heard most of it at a safe distance, had now begun to cheer and applaud, thinking no doubt that the unconventional launch was a daring escapade planned by Sir William. I looked back to my companion and saw that he was imploring me wordlessly to follow him. Again he led me, but this time without taking bodily

hold of me. We crept to the far end of the table and, seeing that the entire assembly had moved toward the garden side of the hall, he took the tall hat from his head and swapped it for my flat cap. Then he pushed me out and came directly behind me. Standing up, we walked together along the front side of the hall and up the stairs into the long gallery. Along this we briskly walked, behind the wall of partygoers pressed against the prodigious windows, and at the other end we opened the first convenient door and thrust ourselves in, pulling it closed behind us.

Both of us sat down with our legs drawn in front of us and our backs against the door. The heaviness of our breathing occupied us both for a moment, but I quickly turned to my companion thinking to get from him some explanation. When I looked into his face however, we both began to laugh. There was no stopping it once it had come. Every time I tried to steady myself and stop, I convulsed with renewed and increased laughter until I was near cackling, and he was in no better state. Eventually we both trailed off, wheezing and catching our breath, by which time we had leaned together so that our heads were touching across the space between us. I rolled my head toward his and brought my hand to my face to wipe away the tears that so much mirth had given rise to. He did likewise, so that we looked again into one another’s eyes and were held there in

silence.

At length I said, “My name is Luke Muston, my good man. And I have to say that I am indebted to you.”

He smiled. “Oliver Thorpe,” he said. “And it may be that I should profess my indebtedness to you. After all, once I had the cursed rocket I had all but lost my will to light it off. If you had not provided me with such a perfect opportunity I think I would still be down in the hall with the thing tucked into my slops.”

“But how did you?”

“Oh, well, the hired men at these places are often far less interested in the task at hand than in sneaking a tankard or two from the hall. It was easy enough to get the man with the fireworks to take his ease for a few minutes. And while I was at it, I took a bit of this,” he pulled from his belt a short loop of hempen match, one end smoldering.

We both laughed again.

I stood up and gave him a bow, “Well, it was a fortunate star that brought you to me so armed, Master Thorpe. Well met, I say. Very well met indeed.”

“Please, as we are such good friends now, you should call me Oliver.”

“Very well, Oliver. Should we investigate the aftermath?”

He nodded and led the way back out the door and down the

gallery to the head of the stairs. The commotion had largely subsided, and there was renewed dancing in the hall below. I spied my malefactor at the long table shaking his head and staring first at one delicacy and then another. When someone brought him a glass filled with some dark red liquor he pushed it away with a hand, turned, and stalked back out into the garden.

"Who is that old canker anyway?" asked Oliver.

"I have no idea," I replied. "He came upon me in the garden while I was..." I trailed off.

"Oh, yes, tell me what bawdy crime you committed!"

"No, I was not..."

"Were you out there hiding in the boxwoods hunting for cuckoos with a lady?" he interrupted in a loud voice. Several other guests turned their heads to look at him, and he grinned back until they looked away.

"It was not like that," I hissed.

Oliver chuckled. "In any case, the danger seems to have passed. Let's go down to the hall and drink and dance," he said.

"I've had more than enough drink tonight," I replied.

"Oh, ho!"

"Leave off. I'd prefer to put the whole business behind me."

"As you say," he said, raising his hands and shrinking back

a little. “Well, if we can’t drink ourselves merry, and if you have sworn off the ladies...”

“I said no such thing! I am as inclined to a dance with a pretty girl as the next man. Yet, I confess, after all that’s happened I am not in a merry mood.”

Oliver was unperturbed. “So we’ll leave the ladies to dance with others tonight. I think I can find the right entertainment for a brace of solemn young gentlemen,” he said. He pressed his lips hard together and protruded his brow. Then, resuming his beaming, he made a flourish with his hands and manifested a deck of cards from somewhere in his voluminous velvet hose. “I, however, do not intend to spend the evening parched.” He dashed down the stairs to the laden table, took a bottle of sack in hand, and charged back up them again. With his other hand he grabbed mine and led me back down the gallery to the little chamber we had hidden in before.

Oliver fumbled in the mostly dark until he coaxed the loop of match he had stolen into a glowing red which he used to light a candle. The candle sat on a little round table of inlaid wood, polished to a high shine. The chamber, as it appeared from the gloom, was a snug little room that was no doubt very pleasant to read in by the light of the large, east-facing windows in the morning. In addition to the table, it contained a large chair of carved oak, and two smaller chairs finely but plainly crafted of

cherry. Oliver took the large chair and sat in it with his knees apart like a portrait of a king. He shuffled the cards and indicated one of the other chairs, in which I obediently sat down.

I wondered at how this boy had such a commanding presence—for twice now he had steered me as well as if he were a coachman and I his nag. Yet, I did not chafe at his taking the lead. He had a face that showed exactly what he was feeling, and his eyes were always darting to the next adventure, real or imagined. We sat there playing cards for hours, and we talked about every trifling subject on which one could discourse. I learned that his father was taking him to London out of Lincolnshire, where he had spent his childhood, and that he was anxious to meet other young gentlemen and to have cohorts for his mischief. He accounted himself to have been the terror of his father's house in the country and was certain that few there would be sad to see the back of him. On my part, I told him about my studies with Saviolo and of the scant contact I had made with noblemen in London in hopes of falling in with an influential man. This much I had told almost anyone who would ask, but to this strange and alien boy I told also my fears about money and the plight of my dear mother and myself. I confided also about my beloved father and how he had died. There was no holding back, and Oliver listened attentively with that face full of feeling. By

the time the candle burned low and the noise of the partygoers faded, I could not have imagined having spent my evening in any other way.

We walked together back down into the hall. There his father met us and, after chastising Oliver at length, but without much heat about having eluded him for so long, we all prepared to leave. I did not know quite what to say, and Oliver and his father were walking away before I found my tongue. “Oliver,” I said, “you simply must come and visit me at Saviolo’s school. You’ll love him, and I’m sure you will want to learn the sword from him. Remember where I told you to find it?”

“In Blackfriars, under the sign of the red lion,” he said smiling, “I’ll find you.” And with a wink he turned and followed his father out.

Containing Several Views of Love

I have written already of the hasty marriage of Henry Starkyn and the trouble that attended that event. As with so many things in his life, Henry moved past the unpleasantness with rare agility and found the next entertainment. I often wondered whether this easy and constant succession of mirth was meant to distract Henry himself, or to keep onlooking eyes from scrutinizing his many embarrassments and inconsistencies. Truth be told, it was probably some of both. In any case, there were some benefits of being connected, though not closely, with him. Not a week after his marriage, he announced that there would be a proper wedding feast. The date being set, Henry and his closest companions disappeared into preparations. I saw much less of all of them at the school, and when they did flit into view they took time only to spread vague rumors about the grand

event, making it as broadly known as they might that this party would be extraordinary.

Those of us outside of Henry's immediate sphere were left to wonder at the details. Of course, as I am sure that you know, one's imagination is a more powerful seducer than any substantial thing, so most of the other students worked themselves into a frenzy of anticipation, thinking that a feast of such magnificence could do no less than change their very lives for the better. One of the chief attributes of the party under discussion was the expected abundance and quality of the young ladies present. Dancing is a delight for young and old alike, and those last years of Elizabeth's reign (she being a dancer of particular grace and enthusiasm, even in her waning years) shall never be rivaled for their stately pavanes, sprightly galliards, sarabands, tourdions, and all the rest. As you might expect, Henry's reputation as an admirer and favorite of young ladies was thought to be uncommonly able to summon a large group of lovely and vigorous dance partners. Not all were so frivolously inclined. I enjoyed a dance, but had never lost myself in contemplation of a maid. I found it difficult to be entirely at ease with the upswing of Henry's humor, and was disposed rather to be annoyed with him for all the trouble he brought on Saviolo and the school. My partner in a somewhat sullen lack of excitement about the nuptial feast was Oliver. He

professed a great love of dancing, but when I asked him whether he, like the others, filled his mind with speculation of imagined partners, he told me that the lady mattered little so long as she had a good leg for the dance.

Still, though we neither of us got caught up in the gust of expectancy, we both looked forward to the event. I could not say that we were particularly starved for entertainment. To the contrary, parties and feasts presented themselves regularly. But a party that had no requirement of us but to be merry and at our ease was rare, and for all that Henry was out of my favor, I had every notion that arranging a banquet was the very best use of his talents.

I was not disappointed.

The house blazed with the light of more lanterns and candles, both in well-crafted holders and set up naked in nooks, than I had ever seen assembled in one place in all my life. If Henry had thought to evoke the sprites of faeryland he had hit his mark. On the walls, already sumptuously decked with wainscoting carved with scenes from antiquity, hung garlands and ribbons of such sundry colors as to make the place like to a pavilion out of the orient. Of food and drink there would be no lack, some five or six tables across the hall and three chambers being stocked to overflowing. But the chief entertainment was, as I have said, the dancing.

The floor of the hall had been cleared to make an uncommonly large space in which to dance, and at one end, Henry had contrived to be built a scaffold that more than doubled the size of the existing musician's gallery. In the latter space sat the usual men with pipe, drum, viol, and so forth, but in their midst crouched others with dark faces and strange clothes who held instruments gleaming with mysterious purpose. But before even one of us could wonder much at all that was supplied, there came a crashing wave of music the like you have never heard. In its crest I heard every voice I had ever encountered in chorus with the cries of wild beasts, with thunder, wind, and rain. This tempest swept into the hall a score or more dancers in Turkish dress, and these performed half a dozen dances before spinning off among us each on his own way like so many dervishes as I have heard described. When that these dancers had quit the floor, and I among others made motion to occupy it for our own delight, there came as many Moors in similar display. By the time that this second troupe had done, I could feel the will to dance as a living thing in the hall. Then all the ladies swept onto the floor, some with masks over their faces, and swirled about in search of partners—of which there was no want.

It seems to me that I should pause at this point to discourse somewhat on my history with love. You may account it strange that in my eighteen years I had not yet come under the

sway of that emotion. I can myself little explain the absence of such feelings from my younger years. I should not, however, make any claim of complete disinterest in or disdain for women up to that point. As I have said, I had ever enjoyed dancing, a pastime that I always undertook with young ladies. In part, I think that I can attribute the lateness of my initial subjugation in love to a relative isolation. As a boy, I was so often confined to my home and therefore kept away from maidens of my own station. There were wenches aplenty in the country thereabout, and many of them had features that I admired, but I knew (and indeed was told without uncertainty) that they were not the like for me. In relating how Henry came to be married in this journal, I described some admiration for Margaret, and such admiration I had for her I had for other young women over time. Yet somehow I had always heard men speak of being transfixed by a woman and laughed at their folly, not knowing yet the described feelings for myself. Alone among my friends and fellow scholars I had found Oliver to be of like mind, and many were the articles of wit that we broke over the fickle agonies of Henry and those who suffered similar maladies.

It is, therefore, with a certain sense of foolishness that I relate the first moments of my own ensnarement. What was the difference between those past admirations and the all-consuming attraction that I felt that night for the first time? Perhaps

none can say. I glanced across the hall toward the young women arrayed for the dance and when my eyes struck her they were the eyes of Tristan, his lips still moist with enchanting liquor. And so, from this moment in my narrative, the eye of my memory may be clouded by the foolishness of love, even with the span of many years between that time and this day when I recall it. I choose to think of memory's deceit as a gift that, like a powerful legend, makes of the mundane past something more rare. While I endeavor to relate things truly, I beg your patience if some varnish of affection overwhelms the facts.

I remember she wore a gown of green cloth a deeper shade than I had ever seen. I never had much of an eye for clothes, but it stood out against the whiteness of her breast most pleasingly. More than any of that, I was taken in by her face. She smiled with no restraint—so clearly was she filled with joy and merriment by the party and all the wonders it provided. She had about her a small clutch of other maids, her friends rather than servants to tell by their dress. In my mind, all eyes were on her, though I think we may safely credit that to the memory of my fears, having been summoned by the jealousy that so often comes with new-forged love.

I was in that instant transformed. Where I had been carefree and easy, I became conscious of every aspect of my person. I sought to hide my hands, which I suddenly found to be

too sweaty and dirty. When I put them behind my back I began to fear that my pose thus arranged made my frame appear too thin. And so it continued until in my mind I was as a leper in that fair assembly. In such a state I could do nothing but back my way into a corner of the hall and contemplate my dismal fate.

Thinking myself bent and malformed, I willed myself to become one with the wainscoting and disappear from the view of the beautiful people. In that state, pressed against the wall in I fathom not what knots of self-torment, Saviolo found me.

"Enjoying the party, Luke?" he said, smiling broadly.

I made an incomprehensible croaking noise in my throat.

"Oh, I see," he said. Then he looked out into the crowded hall and asked, "Which one is she?"

The remark shocked me out of my stupor somewhat. "How?" I asked.

"Come, Luke. I am accounted by many an old man. I know a love sick boy—my apologies, young gentleman—when I see one. I am, however, surprised that you should prove to be so craven in this."

"What? I never...I am no coward."

"Just so. I have often said that one might say what they like of you but that you are no coward."

"But what shall I do?"

"If you ask my advice as an experienced gentleman, I should

think that the first course of action would be to speak to her." He had drawn me out of my corner by degrees as we talked, and he must have been following my eyes to identify her, because at that point he gave me a hearty shove that launched me several feet across the floor where I came to an unsteady halt an arm's length away from the very maid who had so discomposed me. I am loath to think how apish I must have looked to her, unsteadily catching my balance, still tensed with the fright of sudden emotion. I risked a quick glance at Saviolo to see him wink at me and then let loose a peal of laughter of such force as to be indecent.

I opened my mouth to say I know not what to her when the musicians played the preparatory notes for the next dance, so instead, I tried to summon a smile and held out a hand to claim her as a partner. She acquiesced to my wordless proposition and faintly smiled in return.

I could not tell you what we danced. I remember how fervently I wished that it would be lavolta, that the execution thereof would bring our bodies closer together. We had no conversation during it, whatever it was. Every time that the steps brought us facing one another, and therefore gave us the opportunity of speech, I was lost in the racing confusion of my brain. I wished to speak—to say something that would demonstrate my many goodly qualities, but I could not. I feared that, in

opening my mouth, I would vomit forth something vile and perturbed to match the sensation in my chest. Toward the end of the tune she spoke.

"You dance passing well, sir, even if you are no conversationalist." Her smile curled up on one side as her words landed on me. "I would not take offense if you were to seek me out for another before the night is done." With a few more measures, the dance was ended and she spun off into the crowd, leaving me dumb and reeling on the floor. My heart thrashed out a quick tempo in my chest and I was hardly sensible of my surroundings. Couples formed up around me for the next dance, and I had just enough composure to let myself be swept to the side. I stood among the hopefuls and the infirm watching her dance with the next man—nobody that I knew. It slowly occurred to me that she had paid me a compliment and had told me to dance with her again.

While I was lost in a thoughtful stupor of steadily improving humor, Oliver came to stand beside me. I did not notice his coming at first. In fact, I cannot say how long we stood there side by side with me oblivious before he attracted my attention by punching me sharply on the arm just below the shoulder.

"What news, Luke?" said he. "Are you haunted by some spirit that you stand there so pale and distracted?"

"I hardly know." My eyes stayed focused on the dancing girl.

"Are you sick?"

"No, not sick."

"What then? Sad?"

"Sadder than a thing I know not, but happy too, I think."

"You begin to try my good will, Luke. If you are both sad and happy, then embrace the latter and step into the dance. I would see you make merry. I take it as a great affront that you will spoil this much-anticipated event with some wild humor."

"Yes," I said, not rightly marking his words. Then I pointed as discreetly as I could and said, "Do you know that girl?"

"What?"

"That girl. In the dress as green as deep water in the sun."

"Girl? Luke, if you are jesting with me, it is very ill."

"Why would I jest? I want to know who she is, that is all."

"I am no purveyor of maids, to tell you who crafted her. You will have to check her mark yourself."

"Oliver, are you vexed with me? Have I offended you?"

"This party was long planned and you and I were to revel in it together. If I take it ill that you suddenly see fit to be distracted by the first wench to come along, you should not be

surprised."

"She is not a wench, she is a young lady of quality. I think. Can you not see that? She is a very—"

"Stop. Stop right there, Luke. If you begin to spout poetry, by God, I will beat you." His brow formed a straight, solid line parallel to the floor as he stared at me. "I expect this foolery from Henry—we all do—but not from you." He turned abruptly away and disappeared, overswept by the crowd of people forming a wave of partners flowing into the center of the hall for the next dance. I paused, torn between my friend and the new sensations that the young woman had awoken in me. You are, I have no doubt, one with enough experience of the world to know that I chose the latter. Friendship is an easy thing to mend next to a heart in love, after all.

The very instant I turned from where Oliver had disappeared and set my gaze again on the dancers, Saviolo appeared at my elbow, like to a spirit making itself manifest to me.

"It is unlike me to be meddlesome," said he, and though I looked not at him I could hear the self-satisfied smile in his voice, "but I have good intelligence that the maiden who has so captured you is called Joan Archer."

"Joan," I said, spotting her in the crowd. I gave no thanks to Saviolo, nor did I even look to notice when he vanished away. With strengthening resolve I expelled all thoughts of the sword-

master, of Oliver, and all else from my mind save for how I was to make my sudden, all-consuming love known to Joan Archer.

When the music ceased and the crowd dispersed to arrange new couples, I made certain to be but a few quick steps from Joan, and I was before her while other potential partners still lingered on the edges of the field waiting for opportunity to be presented. This time I held her previous words of encouragement in my perturbed mind and sought to use them like an anchor to keep from being swept away by my own thoughts and feelings.

"Fair lady," I said, "Would you walk about with me?"

She nodded her assent and we assumed our place among the forming set.

"I see you are no longer a stranger with your voice, though a stranger still with me," she said.

"I would desire to make myself better known."

"It is a fickle humor that moves you thus, it shall pass."

"It is no such thing. Like Diana, lovely archer, you have struck my hart."

"You have the advantage of me in this. I know you not, and fear that you desire only to strike my hind, and having watched me die, leave me to wither in the field."

"Not true," I said, confused by this exchange of which I had thought my part quite clever, though it seemed to have come off the worse in the end.

"That is an ill reply. If you give me the lie, I must challenge you to fight that I might prove you a deceitful man who dissembles to ensnare a lady. I would call upon the lord of this place to seek approval for our combat, but I know Henry Starkyn to be the worst dissembler of you all, and he would no doubt come down on your side and dishonor me to all assembled."

"Stay, fair one. You think me like Henry? I am dismayed that I have seemed so to you, for I have daily chided him for just the offenses you have leveled against me."

"Then you are, as I thought, one of the gaggle of young knaves that spends their days in sport with him. I warn you, I have no interest in your hound or your slit doublet, nor in the length of your sword."

By the time she said this we had been some while in the dance. The band had chosen a somber courante and our exchange was uttered in lowered voices. Upon her last words, Joan spun around me a little ahead of time from the music and, seeing my stunned and horrified expression, she laughed, high and sharp—in fact, were my feelings for her any less, I would have called it a cackle. She doubled over with mirth then fled, laughing all the way, to an open bench along the fireplace wall of the hall. In the wake of her passing, dancers turned their heads and pursued her with harsh glances under raised brows. It was a young party, for the most part, being constituted primarily of

Henry's friends, and the occasional outburst was not uncommon. Still, a whispering attended Joan's retreat from the dance that grew as it spread its way around the hall. Unconcerned about anything save Joan herself, I followed. She did not admonish me or send me away, but for some time she would not look at me.

"Tell me how," I began.

"Stop, I beg you," she interrupted, erupting into another fit of laughter. "Can you really be insensible of how ridiculous you look with your face so earnest and expectant?" The spasms of her chuckles dislodged a tawny ringlet from the careful braid tucked under a beaded coronet. It shone with a touch of bronze in the lights of the hall, and laid against her pale cheek when she turned her head up and fixed her soft eyes on me. "Do sit down, sir. You will have the whole party saying Lord knows what if you stay standing there like a jeweler watching as I try on a ring." She slid to the end of the bench and indicated the broad, open seat beside her with a pat of her hand. Even thus invited, I had not quite caught my brain up with the conversation and stood dumbly another long moment before spinning into the place.

"If you are going to have discourse with me here," she continued, "you must tell me who you are, properly and like a gentleman—a real gentleman, not one of those you may have read of in books."

I could feel the heat of a blush rising through my cheeks

and, knowing I had little control over them, endeavored to assume the sort of bland and removed expression that I had so often observed in other young men who wished to seem less affected by something than they really were.

"My name is Luke Muston, esquire." Having said all that was immediately required of me, I failed to find any addition with which to illustrate my sincerity, or gentlemanliness, or whatever it was that I so desperately felt the need to convey to her.

"Well, Luke—I will take that liberty since you already seem to know something of me—you are certainly the most amusing of the young men that I have danced with today." She smiled the sort of easy smile that spreads across the whole face and even shows itself in the eye.

"Does it please you to be so amused?"

"It does not displease me. Whether I am, on the whole, pleased with you or no is a matter for further consideration. If you would like it to come out your way, I would suggest that you stop trying so hard to sculpt your countenance into whatever philosophical pose that is supposed to be."

I snapped my head back in surprise, then drooped slightly, letting all of the breath out of my chest for the first time since we had started the dance.

"There," she said, "that is a start. But not so glum, if

you please."

"I don't know what I'm doing."

"That is plain to see. Perhaps I can help. What are you trying to do?"

"I want to make you like me."

"Ah, well, I will tell you a secret, Luke, even though we have just met. You cannot make anyone think well of you. You can sometimes lie to someone, and they will change their estimation of you based upon that lie. Perhaps you have watched our handsome bridegroom lying in this way and have mistaken it for a proper way of behaving toward a gentlewoman."

"I do not think that Henry lies to people. Or rather, I think he lies foremost to himself, if you take my meaning. He has a way of being true that ends up being false, but I often think he is just as surprised to learn it is so as anyone else."

Joan's eyes widened, she pulled her head back in surprise and arched a brow. "That," she said, "is the first intelligent thing you have said to me, I think. And what is more, it is a very clever way of understanding things. There is more to you than you let on in your dumb show and your clowning, Luke Muston."

She stood up, abruptly.

"Now, we must have one more dance, during which I expect you to lose all notions of silly propriety, or pride, or

whatever it is that plagues you, and just dance. Can you do that?”

“Yes, I think so.”

“Good,” she said, holding out her hand to lead me to the dance. “Oh! It is going to be a saltarella, I hope you can keep up.”

In her other hand, she gathered up her skirts enough to easily trot to the far end of the hall and take up her position with the other dancers, rolling fore and aft on the balls of her feet in anticipation once in place. I followed, though far from easy in my mind and heart, more calm than I had been since first seeing her. I have no doubt, fair reader, that you have been in love, or have been taken with emotion in some way. During that third dance I felt that unsteady assurance that comes of having actually encountered an object of distant affection. She had begun her journey in my mind from being the distant angel, Sydney’s Stella or Petrarch’s Laura, toward being the maiden formed of clay that love must come to if it is to be contained in mortal reckoning. Which is not to say that I had no fear—far from it. I anticipated the falling strains of music that would take her from me, and every instant bent my thought toward how I might come into her sphere again. But happily I could hold all of that in my mind while enjoying the dance itself. For her part, Joan embraced the dance with all her heart. She seemed

particularly to enjoy the jumping that is such an integral feature of the saltarella. She shook the hem of her outer skirt in front of her on every leap, and each hop she tried to make higher than the one before. That she freely laughed and almost squealed with delight of it seemed to me more charming than anything that yet I knew of her, despite the fact that such behavior was not strictly fitting for a gentlewoman.

As the end of the tune drew near, I said, "How shall I see you again?"

"It may be that you shall not."

"That is a thing I cannot bear to think of."

"Then make it not so."

We parted at the edge of the hall after the dance, and I forced myself not to watch her walk away.

There was more revelry left in the evening, but I knew that I must not be seen to be so forward as to take any more share of Joan's attention—considering how we both behaved, there would be talk enough as it was. Nor could I stand the thought of lurking (for such it could only be to my mind) on the sides of the hall, watching her dance with other gentlemen. Instead I determined to find Oliver and discover what ill humor had come over him.

He was not hard to find. He stood close by a table still laden with a seemingly unending supply of food. He had gathered some young gentlemen around him and they leaned conspiratorially

together. I edged my way into the group, and was pleased to find that Oliver seemed delighted to have me in their number. Far from any great mischief, they turned out mainly to be making wicked remarks about the clothes of some of the older and less fashionable guests and then stifling mean-spirited laughter within their circle. It was an occupation that brought me neither joy nor distraction, so I quickly left. Following my departure the little group dissolved into the crowd and before long Oliver materialized at my side carrying a bottle of wine. He gestured with the bottle to the front door, and we walked together out of the hall and into the yard which was, despite being alive with horses, servants, and even a few caroches, infinitely quieter than inside.

"I'm sorry about before," he said, handing me the bottle. I did not much feel like drink, but took a swig to be companionable. We found a little fountain where Henry's father had caused a quill of water to be directed (at considerable cost, no doubt) and perched ourselves on the lip of it. The water bubbled gently over a simple marble conduit and filled the wide basin, making a pleasant, calming sound in contrast to the shouts, cheers, and drumbeats that spilled from the house. At length he continued, "It's just that I had a vision of tonight."

"Are you never moved by a clear eye, or the long curve of a neck above a collar?"

"I don't think about such things."

"I find that hard to credit."

"It's true. What cause have I to look? When my father is ready for me to marry, he will tell me to what brute I am to be yoked."

"Surely your heart speaks differently. If you had your own choice to make, would you have no preference?"

"My heart does not want, Luke. I have excellent good companions, thanks to you and to Saviolo. There is merriment and discourse enough for me. Besides, what man do you know who can keep his state once married? I will wager you all the world that from this day Henry Starkyn, notorious goose hunter that we have known him to be, will by and by transform him into a weak-livered husband. We will see him at the school less and less until he becomes that creature that all men exclaim to greet when he rarely trudges into view, but that not a soul marks at any other time."

"I do not think I shall really miss Henry, unless it is because we have no other subject for jesting."

"You miss my point. Even the most entertaining libertine is by the taking of a wife made bland as gruel."

"But I cannot think that it must be so. I will not accept that each of us doomed to such a fate."

"You may draw whatever hoodwink over your head that you

desire, but I will not so easily give over to indenture. The clear eye I admire the most is the one by which I know the world."

I rose from my seat to offer Oliver some rebuke to break his obstinacy, but on standing I found myself looking directly at the form of a young man walking with steady purpose toward us. I did not know him, but he seemed to be acquainted with me. Once in distance of our stolen sanctuary he called out to me.

"I am told that you are one Luke Muston, and a gentleman."

"I am the very same."

"I am Nicholas Galey, likewise a gentleman, and what is more the long-time suitor of Joan Archer." As he spoke the words he shuffled his feet to assume a broad, if not entirely steady, stance and thrust his chest forward.

"She did not mention you," I said. It was a provocation, and I knew it as soon as I said it, but I had no desire to take it back. It was true, after all. Nicholas reddened so much as to be noticeable in the dim light of lanterns that was our only illumination.

"I give you warning that I think you to be a knave, and no gentleman," he said. Upon which, Oliver leapt up and made to charge for him. I was only able to restrain my friend by taking hold of him bodily.

To Oliver I whispered, "Stay, let us hear him." Then, to

Nicholas, “Those are heavy words, sir. Why think you so?”

“You have taken time with my lady and in so doing have goaded her into dishonorable conduct.”

“I have done no such thing.”

“The whole party whispers of your intimacy, and of how she laughed at your poisoned words.”

I had little patience for the accusation, and had half a mind to release the struggling Oliver and follow him myself to prove my point. But though I was certain that a fray would relieve some of the turmoil the night had wrought in me, I checked myself enough to delay the satisfaction.

“Ask Joan of my caddishness before you step into a contract that can only end in your ruin. I will not say you lie at present, but that you have been misled. If you find that what she speaks of me offends then bring your accusation back again, but know that I will prove my innocence with your blood.”

“I am not afraid of you,” he said and then, gesturing to Oliver, who had by that time settled to stand behind my shoulder and contented himself with assailing the gentleman with his eyes, “or your drunken friends.”

“Good. And I am not afraid to defend the right of a gentleman to dance with a lady at a feast.”

“And I am not drunk!” yelled Oliver.

“Whatever I find, you would do well to stay clear of Joan.”

With that he turned and thundered back to the hall.

Oliver snorted, “You see what fools you draw out with your poetic tendencies?”

“I will say this much for him: he was brave enough to find me on his own and away from creditable witnesses.”

“Let’s speak no more of him. We must either return to the dance, or find some sport of our own.”

“I am all out of humor now. I am going home to find my bed.”

“Suit yourself, my stale gruel. Be not surprised if you come over all dry and crusty in the morning and none will deal with you.”

And so I left him.

It would not interest you, I think, for me to relate all of the ways in which I wooed Joan, and woo her I did, despite the inducements to the contrary. Every young lover thinks himself a Faust to love’s Mephisto: the recipient of a secret knowledge known only to him and the spirits, and purchased at great cost. In truth there is no token of love, I am convinced, that has not been used by foolish young men back to antiquity if not before. I would not be surprised to learn that all the craft of wooing has come down to us in unspoken bond from Adam himself.

Over the course of some weeks after Henry’s wedding feast I

discovered where she lived, who her father was, and every other fitting detail that would put me in better stead to continue our acquaintance. I sent her notes and sonnets in letters. I contrived to meet her as if by chance as she walked home from church. In short, I made myself apparent to her and, I hoped, in good form to be accounted a suitor, in every diverse way I could think of. During this time I had the encouragement of Henry, who had sought me out unbidden when he heard the rumors of my attachment in the aftermath of the party, and of Saviolo, in whose home I was a lodger and from whom I would have had a hard time concealing my efforts even had he not been so inquisitorial in his habits. Henry's attention I tolerated, feeling perhaps some indebtedness to him for having, in his way, been instrumental to my introduction to Joan. I did not tell him her opinion of him, partly because I inwardly hoped that he would take the occasion of his marriage and impending fatherhood as a portent of a quieter life. If, I thought, he could in some fashion gain satisfaction by advising me in the pursuit of a lady and thereby keep himself from that chase to which he was so accustomed, it would be for the general good. The other reason I had for not making it clear to him the light in which she, if not the world at large, saw him, was that I was too happy to think too ill of anyone. For his part, Saviolo seemed to take delight in the idea of my finding a woman on which to hang my

affections. Though he did not often speak on it, he evidently harbored strong feelings about the felicity of matrimony. He did not offer me snips of advice as did Henry, but rather he bent his not inconsiderable talents, not to mention his carefully husbanded garden of spies throughout London, to gathering his own intelligence of Joan and passing it on to me, as if casually, a piece or two at a time. It was from Saviolo, in fact, that most of my initial news of her came. I did not take offense at his interference, not least because it was very helpful to me, but also because I knew he meant it kindly. He seemed to like what he learned of her, and like me he had been impressed by her enthusiasm at the dance, "a life with a lively woman is well worth living." He also found both amusement and promise in the way that she had handled me on that first meeting, after adding my account of it to what he observed himself.

I lost myself to my suit as I had failed to lose myself to any active endeavor, save the study of the sword, since coming to London. It was the sort of time that is most worthy of living, but that bears little need of relating. My confidence grew daily, and when my efforts brought me within the presence of Joan, which happened often if never for long, she seemed always well pleased to see me.

You may at this point in my tale wonder what became of

Nicholas Galey and his great offense taken at my familiarity with Joan. I can say little of what occupied him during that time, but whatever conference he had with Joan the night of the party must have calmed his temper somewhat or I would surely have heard from him again and been compelled to give him the lie. Had I been an attentive gentleman, I would have inquired about him at some point when holding discourse with the young lady in question, but I trust you can forgive my young brain for being too concerned with my own suit to ask after another.

So it came about that after a few weeks I at last found myself alone with Joan. Her father brought me into their house and greeted me as befits a suitor, which is to say gruffly. I was possessed of such a fear in talking with him that I cannot relate much about what was said. I remember that he made it plain that he was not looking to make a match for her for the benefit of money or power, the which hopes he assigned his son, Daniel. Rather, he told me he wanted naught but happiness for his daughter and had given her more or less free rein to choose for herself. It was such a queer notion that I scarcely believed it. Though my mind was relieved in finding this worthy gentleman to have so little to cavil at in the suit of a destitute gentleman, I also noted the threat in his attitude: if I displeased her, now or in the future, there would be no gentlemanly agreement or bond of transactional loyalty that

would protect me from his wrath. Having thus rattled and confused me to the limit of his ability, as is the duty of all honorable fathers, he led me down to the garden where Joan and I would walk.

The Archers had a house without the walls of the city. Theirs was not a vast estate, but the house surrounded a pretty little yard in the Italian style and along the back of the place ran a strip of garden that had been tended with walks and arbors of blooming plants. In two or three places along the walks, small niches, or bowers had been sculpted. Later in the spring they would be excellent spots for quiet conversation, having been so exquisitely formed to hold but two persons, there veiled from view. As it was, the green boughs of the boxwood that made the main structure of the bowers found the accompaniment of only bare, wet branches with new buds beginning to plump upon them. Joan wore a heavy cloak, trimmed with dense fur, and though it had been raining, the slate sky ceased its outpouring for a little while so that she was not soaked.

To begin, our time together passed as had during other incidental meetings. We exchanged the sorts of pleasant nothings that young lovers do. I always tried to have some brief story about Saviolo prepared, as she seemed as much interested in the old master as he stood in admiration of her. Such trifles having passed between us, we settled into one of the bowers and I began

some speech or other, made of common phrases touching our being united and my making her mine. Her aspect changed and she replied, sharply.

"Am I to be yours?"

I was much confused, but had in some measure come to expect that state. "I devoutly wish it. What fairer maid is there in all the world?"

"Am I a jewel, that you would buy me?"

"What? No. That is not what I meant."

"Yet it is what you mean, all of you, is it not?"

"No, I would that we might be made as one by holy right, as almighty God has ordained for his children."

"Why?" she asked, looking directly into my eyes with a steady gaze. "You speak of my beauty as one enchanted. But how when those charms, such as they may be, are worn away by time's rough hand? What do you know of me, but that you want me as you see me today?"

"But, you inspire me..."

"Inspire you to what, in truth? Do I inspire you to woo me? Will any inspiration remain when you have won me?"

"In every good thing will you urge me on. You are my muse."

"Muse?"

"I look on you as one might on the sun or the moon, as one who has power over my heart."

"Then you worship me and fear me from afar? Do not so, for I am no goddess, and God has expressly forbidden all prayer to false idols."

"I know not from whence this peevishness springs. Can I tell you how I suffer from the thought of you, or how that suffering is love's benediction? I have no words-or no right words—to covey how much effect you have in merely your passing by my way."

"If you want me as your muse, if, like Petrarch you would gaze upon my footprint in the mud to find some paroxysm of painful delight therein, then follow his better example and suffer whatever torments you have dreamed for yourself away from me—I want none of it."

She rose abruptly and left the bower, leaving me, as seemed to be her custom, stunned. I scrambled after her, dislodging my hat and cloak in the process.

"My lady. Joan. Tell me what to do to convince you. At your word I will swear on whatever holy relic you will."

She turned, and though I saw a flicker of a smile that tugged at the corner of her mouth at seeing me so discomposed, she kept her lips and brow drawn in so that her face seemed larger than her features warranted. "That is the problem, Luke. You men will swear by or to anything, but what will you do? By what action shall I know that you love me as you so often say

you do? Do you even know me?" When she left, which she did before I could make any reply, she did so with more deliberation and composure than she had exited the bower. She held her head aloft and glided into the house.

Left behind, alone, I said to the memory of her, "I want to."

The heart and the brain are separate organs. We so often try to understand the workings of the heart—our own or someone else's—but a mind is only a neighbor to affection and can only guess and wonder at its doings. I spent some little time in Joan's garden, trying with logic and philosophy to solve the mystery of her. When I found only rain and cold I made my way around the house to leave. A hail came from behind me and was followed by a maidservant.

"Sir, you dropped this," she said holding out my hat.

"Oh, my thanks to you," I said.

"My mistress is in a state today, sir. If you will forgive my saying so, you are the second young gentleman to be sent off, and after the first she was heartily vexed." Then she ran back into the house.

I plodded homeward in the rain, at a loss to understand what I had done wrong, or how I could have been better received.

I stopped in at a tavern to warm myself by the fire, and to avoid going home to Saviolo's excited questions. I stayed for hours until evening wore on, though I drank slowly as was my wont. After eating my supper there I decided that I could no longer avoid whatever inquiries I was bound for and walked back to the swordsman's house.

A little way off from home, closer to the school, I came across a solitary figure in the mud of the road. It was Nicholas, and he had evidently been waiting for me for some time, as his boots were consumed by mud and his hat and cloak dragged heavily as he moved.

"There you are, knave," he said.

"Are we to repeat this?" I replied, almost overwhelmed by exhaustion and a desire for the dry sheets of my bed. "I have said I am no knave, and my position on that point has not changed."

"Will you prove it?" he said, fingering the hilts of the rapier at his hip.

"What charge do you level against me? Knave is not particular enough an accusation upon which to fight. Be careful what you say, for I am in such a humor that I may not send you away this time." All the frustration and confusion, all the affection and turmoil that I had been feeling came to life in me. I felt the blood moving through my flesh at the thought of a

fight.

"I say that you have dishonored me by taking liberty with my lady."

"I say I have done no such thing."

"Which is to say that I lie?"

"Take it as you list, I care not."

"Then do you await my cartel, or shall we make an end to this here and now?"

"I do not fear you."

"So you have said. This," he said drawing his sword, "will test the proof thereof."

I drew my blade in turn and fell easily into my middle, or broad, ward. I could tell at a glance that though he knew enough to use the weapon, he had not the mastery of it—not even so little as I had gained in less than a year of study with Saviolo. In my mind I saw all the ways in which I could dispatch him, and my hand felt the thrill that would attend upon so exercising my unruly spleen. But then came to me a better thought. I could see him slain, and myself forever free of him, but I could also see Joan looking at me with that hard, drawn face. And in that moment I think I understood her feelings, as much as anyone can ever know the contents of another's heart. During those thoughts, Nicholas had launched a fierce attack at my head, but it was so artless that I slipped out of its way

without difficulty and he charged by me. I turned to face him, but lowered my sword.

"I am sorry," I said, "I have gone about this all wrong."

"What trick is this? Do you seek to overcome me with a distraction?"

"Mister Galey, Nicholas, can we stop this? Let us speak together before we let this harebrained conceit kill one or both of us."

"How do I know you are in earnest?"

I did not drop my sword, rapiers being expensive tools, but I sheathed it, took the scabbard out of its hanger and leaned it against the wall of one of the houses near us.

"There. I am unarmed. If you find in me any deceit, you have my life in your hands."

"Well? Talk then."

"Nicholas, I have been a fool."

"Go on."

"I have behaved as though Joan's affection was a prize to be won. But do you think she would be pleased at either of our deaths?"

"I had not really..."

"Exactly so. Neither had I."

"But then how do you suggest we settle this?" he said.

"There is nothing to settle. I admit that I dismissed your

interest in Joan when we first met. I am sure that you are an honorable gentleman, when all is told. Please forgive me that I treated you as my enemy."

"But, Joan," he said, and through the mud on his red face I saw rising tears.

"Joan will do as she wishes. If she desires to attach herself to one of us, then whichever that may be must be accounted fortunate."

He did drop his sword in the mud, and then leaned against the same wall where my sheathed one stood. I retreated into the shelter of the eaves so that we were facing each other, both hunched over somewhat.

"But, do not you love her?" he asked.

"I do. But I would not have her as another man would. I need no beautiful statue to gaze upon, but a woman of flesh to be as my friends are to me, and more. I would she would discourse with me on every philosophy, that together we would sport, and play, and read, and fight withal. And any thing so that we might do so as one, but as two as well."

This I said slow and loud, each word coming as if unbidden on the heels of the last. I saw that his tears had broke their dam and now flowed free, though as soon as I noticed it I could feel a like stream on my own face, hot enough to cut through the rain. He raised his head to look at me, but I saw his eyes focus

beyond me, and he was overcome by a sudden, shuddering sob. I turned and saw that Joan was in the way behind me. She did not look very wet, so she must have only just appeared. Though not as advanced in tears as Nicholas or myself, her eyes bore some redness around them. She advanced to Nicholas.

"Dear heart," she said, putting a hand on his cheek and wiping away some of the tears, "I would that you had not been hurt."

"I am unharmed," he said, patting himself about the chest as if to find a hidden wound, but then, "Oh, I see. It is not your fault."

"I know that it is not, yet still may I be saddened."

"I thought we..."

"So did I, once. But children's dreams must often stay in the nursery."

She took hold of his shoulders, stretched up so that she stood on the very tips of her toes, and kissed him gently on the forehead.

"Let me walk you home now. You will feel so much the better when you have dried off and warmed yourself."

He brought his hands to his face and shook the tears away. Then he took up his sword, holding it daintily in his hand as if it were something unwholesome, and they turned to go. Joan looked back at me and smiled sweetly, "And you," she said,

"should come again tomorrow. And hope for better things." She blinked very slowly and turned again to lead her friend away.

I leaned down to take up my sword. When I came upright again, Saviolo was standing in front of me, with a blanket draped over his head and wide-spread arms like a cloak. He grinned broadly with no sign of shame, then ushered me into the school, where he did his best to dry me off and set me by the merrily blazing fire. For a time he busied himself with one task after another, but finally he pulled a second chair close to the hearth and sat down.

"That was the finest show of swordsmanship I have seen this many a year, Luke."

"What? But not a single pass went between us."

"Mmm," he said, scratching his little beard and then carefully reforming it to a point.

"But what I do not understand is how Joan came to be here."

"Well, I take it that some token from young mister Galey came her way that made her think he planned such a confrontation. He knew you were connected to the school, I think—it is no secret after all—and it must have seemed as likely a place to wait for you as anywhere."

"So she followed him."

"Just so."

"But how did she keep herself hidden," I asked, and patting

my damp sleeves added, “and dry?”

“It would not have been very gallant of me to leave her standing in the rain, trying—very lamely I must say—to hide herself among the refuse in an alley.”

“You! But if you knew what was happening, why did you not stop Nicholas long before I arrived?”

“I knew you would acquit yourself well in the end.”

Of Endings

I think there are as many sorts of melancholy in the world as there are sad things, and in the mind each one lives in its own kingdom, separate from all other griefs. A man may relate to you what he deems at that moment to be the most lamentable incident of all his life and you may think it queer that of all else he chose that particular thing. When if you ask him of some other disaster that you know he has suffered by, he may yet tell the tale with equal zeal to the first. The heart can hold many sadnesses and keep each one inviolable. The same is true of loves. So when I say that the story I am presently to write upon is the saddest I can summon, know that what I say is true, but that the truth of it may not be fixed. Know also, that this tale deals with sadness and with love, and tells therefore of a double woe.

I had, at the start of things, been affianced to Joan Archer for something near a fortnight. Between where I ended my relation of how that happy state came to be and this present story I confess there was little passed that would delight you to hear. Joan mended all between Nicholas Galey and myself, and though he was deeply wounded by her choice in preference of my person, he was well resolved to heal. Having made that choice, she was not of a mind to stay the nuptials for long. I felt that too many arrangements had to be made to spend less than three or four weeks at the task, and at the very least I needed to see my mother safely conveyed to London, which took some doing in the planning that would be too stale and flat a subject for me to further expound upon here.

Let us then skip over that fortnight and come to the evening in question. I spent the day, as I had so many at that time, in the presence of Joan, whose companionship I cherished above all. Around four of the clock I received a note from Henry Starkyn, delivered to me at the house of Joan's father by messenger. It contained a plea that I should, if I bore him any love at all, come to meet him at his little house in the Southwark, where sometimes scholars from Saviolo's school met for some sport or other (by which I generally mean cards, dice, drink, and other such revelry as young gentlemen are prone to). It was not a fine house, being that it was a house of

entertainment, not of living. I had not been invited to sport with him there since before his marriage, and that I was called there now I took to betoken some ill hap. I therefore told Joan that I would go to him and be of what assistance I may without doing any harm to my own honor. It had been an unseasonably warm morning for March, and I had left my cloak at home when I came to Archer house. The day's fineness continued, but darker clouds crowded the horizon, so I made my way back to Ludgate hill to fetch it from Saviolo's house, which was not too far out of my way.

Saviolo was not at home, but Brink, his man, told me that Oliver Thorpe, my most intimate friend had come by to see me earlier. I wondered at this because Oliver had been unaccountably vexed with me since I had formed my attachment with Joan. We met at school as we always had, but it felt to me that he had otherwise avoided me. I felt a sudden pang in my breast that I had not been home when he called. Though I thoroughly searched my chamber and the rest of the house, with Brink's assistance, I could not find my cloak. The only other place that I might have left it was the school, but even though the house was close by it, I dared not tarry any longer in the execution of my errand. I hoped for the weather to hold therefore and walked down to the Thames to find a riverman to bear me across. I would normally have walked across the bridge

to Bankside, but I felt a more expedient way was in order. Fair weather meant a river more crowded than usual, and my voyage on the water took me through such throngs of wherries and tilt boats as I had scarce imagined. I grasped more firmly at the gunwales than was necessary, but otherwise kept myself in temper as the merry boater jabbered away at me about the comings and goings of river traffic while jostling the little craft this way and that, squeezing between larger vessels and generally favoring the speed of our voyage over my comfort.

The house sat dark and empty when I arrived. This was no surprise to me, as Henry's note said that I might get there before him, but that I was to find the key behind the barrel out back and let myself in to wait for him. He craved my indulgence if it took him longer than he anticipated, but told me to wait on him until he came. Inside I was able to take my ease. He kept a fine store of many varieties of liquor in the place, its purpose being primarily for recreation. Though no great drinker, I found some comfort in a bottle of sherry sack that I wondered whether my host would balk at my opening.

And there waited I for two hours or so, getting more perturbed and I confess deeper in my cups as time wore on. There were other wines opened, and though I will die in the conviction that I was not out of measure drunk, I was more affected by drink than I was accustomed to be. Finally, when a far off tower

sounded seven bells, I had waited long enough. In my loosened state, I did not go home, nor to see Joan, but rather I went to find Henry, who had so disrupted my day. I stamped my way back on foot across the bridge, wanting no more of boats for the day, and straightway to Starkyn house where I pounded the door with tight fist.

It was Margaret that opened the door, and she looked very surprised to see me, as I was not a frequent guest of that house. I softened enough in my resolve, and I wager I had walked enough wine out of me by then, to kiss her and tell her that I sought her husband.

Henry sat in state in the great chamber, playing at cards with his sister's children. He greeted me with a warm smile. "Luke! What chance brings you to us this day? I would have thought you would be planning the cut of your wedding doublet, or taking up some other honest office that put you in company with your fair bride."

"Do not jest with me, Henry. I only left Joan at your request, and have been waiting for you in your Southwark house for hours."

"But, I never sent for you. Why would you think to meet me there?"

I thrust the letter at him with such force that it crumpled against his chest. "Here is your own hand, delivered to me this

afternoon, entreating me to find you on some urgent business."

He took the letter and read it over twice, first to himself, and then aloud to the room.

"Is it your hand?" asked Margaret.

Henry brought the paper close to his nose and stared at it fiercely. "It is very like my hand, but look here, that is not at all as I would write it." He handed the letter back to me and continued, "Luke, you have been misled. I cannot say by whom or to what purpose, but this is definitely no note from me. It must have been penned by one who knows me though, to be so close to the mark."

We had but a moment to stand there fixed in wonderment, when another knocking at the door rang up from below. Puzzled into stillness, Henry and Margaret let one of the servants answer. In no time a man came bounding up the stairs and into the room. The face of Thomas Hollyband, another scholar that I have had cause to mention once or twice in this journal, was pale and grave. When he saw me among those assembled, he gave a shout, "Luke, praise God, I cannot say how fortune smiles on me to find you."

"What is the matter," I asked.

"You are to come with me straightway to Hoxton, where we will meet the Maestro and, if our luck holds, find Oliver engaged to fight your bride's brother and neither of them killed

or wounded."

"What?" I demanded, with Henry and Margaret adding their own disbelief to mine.

"I know only part of it. Come along, and we shall swap tales on the way."

I looked to Henry, "Can you send a servant to Joan to tell her that something is amiss?"

"We will acquaint her with what little we know, and assure her that you were here and safe until this hour."

It occurred to me, as we walked, that this was the second time that Thomas and I had gone to interfere in a fight with Saviolo. Before I had known none of the parties involved, and this time both men were dear to me by different measures. I pressed him to say what he knew.

"I was with Saviolo at the school. Jeronimo has come back from the country. Oh, Luke, it was a thing to behold the two masters in rapier play, the one against the other!"

"You stray from the point, Thomas."

"Of course, quite right. In short, we stayed at the school later than usual. It was by that happy chance that when Nell came into the place we were there to hear her."

I have not, I think, made any previous reference to Nell in the pages of this journal, at least not by name. Saviolo had, among his other odd habits, a tendency to find his servants by

the way. The proper thing would have been for him to find a manservant to work with him at the school and see to its maintenance. However, some time after the last servant left he found the foresaid Nell selling flowers by the quays abutting the Thames, and had taken her in. She was not a very young girl, as sometimes sell flowers in the street, being almost twenty, and she took to Saviolo and to the school readily. She spoke little of her younger days, but we all knew, or thought we knew, that she had lived on her own until the day that Saviolo gave her a place. In any case, it is as well for you to know that she was a pretty thing, after her fashion, and though not one man in the place would have dared to use her ill for fear of the old master, she was the object of much affectionate joking and playful dalliance—the which she enjoyed as much as any. She was a sort of muse for the school at large, and we loved her with an affection something passing that of brothers, but never too far toward paramours.

"Hear her say what?"

"The strangest things I have heard of in some time. She said she had come from a house in Hoxton where whither she had gone with Oliver to play a joke on a man. When we pressed her for more she said that Oliver wore your cloak—the one we all know you by, and in other ways disguised himself to look like you. When some men were passing by, coming out of a house where

a play was performed, she and Oliver entered the house in a conspicuous, furtive way. She said Oliver wanted a man there to think you were wooing her, and that the jest would be singular in mirth. Once inside, they went to the first floor and lit a candle in a chamber with an open window and made as if to have further sport together, if you take my meaning."

"He wanted to woo her in my likeness? To what end? What jest?"

"That is where her tale turned ill. For no sooner had they appeared at the window, in a seeming close embrace, then a shout came from below. It was Daniel Archer, soon to be your brother. He called out your name and demanded that you show yourself."

"But, I have never met Daniel. In truth, I did not know that he was in town. He has been away on business since before I met Joan."

"Well, someone must have told him it was you, for to hear Nell tell it, he was in a terrible fury."

"What then did Oliver do?"

"He had little choice. The house is not his to dispose of, and Daniel and his friends were like to break down the doors to get to him. He went down and told the gentleman that he was not Luke, and that it was a jest gone wrong."

"And that did nothing to dampen Daniel's rage?"

"You know Oliver. When Daniel replied in disbelief, he

lashed out in rage of his own. Then the one piled his heat on top of the other's until there was no returning. Oliver told him he would fight him as soon as he could get his padrino, and sent Nell to find the Maestro."

"This is an exceeding strange tale."

"So it is. I hope only that it may prove to be less fierce than Nell made it over to be."

At the same instant we both had, I am certain, twin thoughts. Oliver, for all his good qualities, had a mad-brained impetuosity that he could not control. If he had found another that would match his choleric whim, we would be lucky to find that they had stayed themselves for Saviolo, to say nothing of us. We said no more about it, but both sped our pace.

We came to a field in Hoxton by way of Bishopsgate street wherein could plainly be seen a group of men, and two of them with swords drawn and in wards. I ran the last yards to the place, fearing for what may come to pass even as I walked if they were already drawn and at the fight. Saviolo stood, or rather, paced, a little distance off and watched them. In variance with his custom, he exhorted them to put away their swords and come to terms, even though they had already begun to pick their way across the field, circle-wise of one another. I gained Saviolo's side and looked into his face, which was pale

with his mouth stretched to one side in a grimace.

"How is it?" I asked.

"Ill indeed, Luke. It was fortunate that Thomas found you, but I would that you had come sooner and talked sense into one or both of them."

"What has passed between them?"

"Foul words. Hot wind. No more. But it is enough, I'll warrant."

Daniel, for I could tell it was he even without the story by the countenance that so resembled, in rougher form, his sister's, moved about the field with steady confidence. He was no stranger to the blade, and would be at least a match for Oliver, who did not particularly excel at his studies, and who lost some of his agility when in such a temper as he was.

I called out to them, "I do not rightly know how this has come to pass, but I am Luke, and we can find satisfaction away from the field, if you will but try."

"This is past mending," said Daniel. "If you will make amends for your friend, you may do so when I have taught him a lesson."

Oliver tried to take advantage of the momentary distraction of speech and rained blows upon Daniel. The latter was by no means distracted, and it seemed, neither was he at the mercy of his anger. He stepped out of the line of each thrust, and

removed his body from the plane of each cut with none of the wavering that was evident in the strikes themselves.

The reply came hard upon, with a few quick thrusts at chest, head, stomach, and legs in ferocious succession. The last thrust found its mark, and Luke toppled over into the stubble, grasping his leg with both hands. Daniel whipped his blade through the air in front of him and turned from the field.

"Daniel!" It was Joan. I could in no way account for her being there, as the messenger from Henry could only just now have found his way to her house. "What have you done?"

"Sister! You should not be here."

"When I am told that two men that I love are joined to kill each other I will go wherever they are." She looked at me with eyes wide. "But I see you there, Luke, and by that I know I have been misinformed. I was told that you were to fight Daniel."

"I would never," I said, "I could not."

"Then who has he killed?"

"Not killed, lady," said Saviolo from Oliver's side, where he had run as soon as Daniel's assault was ended, "but wounded gravely."

"It's Oliver," I said.

"Your melancholic friend?"

"You do not know him."

"Nor shall she," cut in Daniel. "Come away, Joan. If this

night is anything to judge, you will escape a bad match if you leave now."

"Go home, Daniel," she said in a deep voice. He opened his mouth to protest, but saw her face and turned away.

"Bah!" he barked. "We will see what father says."

"First I will see what I say," she returned, "now go. Your part here is done, and more."

She did not smile when she looked back to me, and I needed no prompting to tell her what I knew. I related all that had I had learned. She listened in silence. When I had done, Saviolo and Thomas had left, carrying the unconscious Oliver between them with some difficulty, his wound bound as best they could in the field.

While I talked, Joan led me across the field to where a low stone wall jutted out of a thicket and we sat on it together. She cast her eyes at the ground, avoiding my gaze, which bore hard into her.

"I knew nothing of any of this," I said.

"I know. But mayhap that is the problem."

"What do you mean?"

"Who are you, Luke?"

"You know me, Joan."

"Do I? I can only know you as much as you know yourself. Who are these men around you? What do they want of you?"

“You are frightening me. The other scholars have no power over me.”

“I think they do.”

“What are you saying? Do you want no more of me?”

“You always want to make everything so simple, Luke,” she said. She raised her eyes to look at me, and the hardness was gone, but they were filled with tears.

“Maybe things can be simple,” I said with a gripping tightness growing in my chest.

“No. That is not what God has planned for us.”

“What do you want me to say.”

She laughed. Not a big laugh, but a tinkling chuckle that came out almost unbidden. “Luke, the night we met you said you wanted to make me like you, do you recall?”

“Yes, and you told me that I could not.”

“Right, but you learned. You found a way to be who you were, and I liked what I saw.”

“But that isn’t enough?”

“You saw yourself through me, and that helped you to find what you needed to tend my affection until it blossomed into love.”

“But now that love has faded?” I asked, choking somewhat on a sob.

“Not so glum, if you please.” She smiled.

"That is what you are saying, though, isn't it? That we can't be together?"

It was her turn to sob and, true to her nature, she mingled her sobbing with laughter. "I love you, fool. But, yes, I think that you have work ahead of you that you must undertake alone."

"I don't know what you mean."

I reached for her hands with mine, and she let me take them, fingers interlaced. We leaned together, both wet with unbidden sorrow. For a long time we sat on that stone wall embracing and mingling our tears. When we broke apart is was as one—we both knew that the time had come. It was quite dark, and we walked together back toward the city. Eventually we came to divergent paths and she turned off toward her home. Before I passed through the gates she turned her face to me one last time.

"Thank you, Luke."

"What for?"

Her laughter rose into the night.

I found my way to home and bed with no thought for anything but rest. Saviolo had gone to his chamber before I came back, and the house was quiet. In the morning, I remembered that Oliver was wounded, and remembered what is more that he had much to answer for. Saviolo told me over a breakfast of cold pork

that they had taken him to the school and that a doctor had tended to him there. When I asked why they did not take him to his father's house, the old swordsman told me he thought Oliver had enough to tend to without his father adding more.

One of the private chambers at the school had been made as comfortable as possible for the patient. Saviolo insisted on coming with me, but once he was sure that Oliver was awake and no worse off than when he had left him the night before, he left the room and shut the door.

"Oliver," I began, not knowing how to proceed, "I don't understand."

"Don't you?"

"I truly don't"

"What am I to you, Luke?"

"I thought you were my friend—the best of friends."

"And that is all?"

"What else is there?"

"I love nothing in this world so much as you."

"The love I bear you is stronger than any."

"Except your love for her."

"That's different."

He looked very small to me, laid out on one of the mattresses that Saviolo kept to use when teaching someone to throw an opponent—or be thrown. They had found blankets and

folded them around him so that he looked like a turtle on its back, and just as vulnerable.

"Oliver..."

"Just leave me alone."

"But..."

"I said leave me."

He pulled the blanket up over his dark eyes and turned over so that his back was to me. I stayed for a time, saying nothing.

Back in the hall, Saviolo was uncharacteristically silent about what had passed. He fixed me with those eyes like little coals about to burst into flame. "Do you want to go over your exercises?" he asked, holding a foil before me, its handle toward my hand. We practiced for a long time. One of us would take the part of the aggressor, and then, when we had worked our way down the length of the hall, we would switch roles and work our way back. Eventually other scholars arrived, and he slipped into a more professorial tone, at which point I left.

To The Reader

In the collection of this present work, I have often been confronted with some issue or other, or have mused about an aspect of the tale. It occurred to me that others might be likewise moved, and so I provide this afterword as a discussion of the piece in the hope that it might enlighten or amuse you. I hope you will forgive me, but in observance of the form of Saviolo's own first book (in which the character of L. Is most certainly Luke Muston), and as an homage to the Elizabethan time, I have structured my thoughts as a hypothetical conversation, for which I have chosen an amalgam made up of early friends of mine in exploring narrative with which to converse and named him Robert Insel (my good friend R.). May it be of use to you.

James Loomis

R. I wonder, for a start, whether you can say how you would classify the memoirs of Luke Muston.

J. Of course I will try, though categorization can be tricky and the use of putting a work into a category is somewhat dubious to my mind. Luke's story is reminiscent of an adventure story, and has many of the rhythms of that form, but its scope or scale is smaller than most historical romances. Luke's stories are about personal things, not momentous figures of state, even though the likes of Essex make their appearances. I find it of particular interest that, for example, Luke begins his tale with the story of coming to the city to become something great. In this we find a parallel with Dumas' The Three Musketeers, though what is most interesting is where the two diverge. Where D'Artagnan heads to Paris to demand his place among the musketeers, thinking to become a legend, Luke seems more hopeful that some vague fortune will come along. He is not a great warrior, nor a swashbuckling hero from a typical historical romance, he is quiet and observant. He looks up to Saviolo and seems desperate for a role model to follow, but the most bold and charming person he meets is Henry Starkyn, whom he continually disavows as his friend.

If anything, therefore, I find Luke's journey throughout the book to be a kind of introspective romance. Luke's head is

obviously full of chivalric ideas and adventures, but he is in his way more practical than a D'Artagnan. He wants to find out who he is. You might think of this work as a memoir, but most memoirs are written by people who are famous for something else. Luke says he is writing about this time in his life because of his association with Saviolo, but it is obviously a time that is in general turmoil for him, a time of change and definition.

We must also acknowledge that we cannot really evaluate the writings of Luke Muston, because we do not have them. We cannot even be certain that we have all of Admiral Lomax's translations of the original work. So whatever intention Luke had in writing down his past, we have only what filtered through Lomax's perspective halfway between the original events and today when we read them. What emerges is a coming of age tale, but it may well have begun much differently.

R. How much impact does that translation have on the story? How much can we trust the accuracy of what we are reading and how it relates to London in the 1590s?

J. While those are good questions, I think we can more broadly cast them. How much can we trust the accuracy of reports of history in general? If we had the original manuscript that Luke wrote, we would perhaps be closer to a true accounting of the period, but would we have an accurate description of events? When you ask two people who were in the same place when

something important happened will they tell you the same thing? Of course not. Even if both remember perfectly what happened, they will most likely have been paying attention to different things or different aspects of the same things. If you and I attend a wedding, for example, you might later ask me about how beautiful the vows were and I might not remember them. I might instead remember the music, or the food.

When Admiral Lomax took the original manuscript and edited it, he could have done so with whatever agenda he secretly harbored so that we cannot say what the initial intentions were. But is his view going to be any more "wrong" than the original version, written with the agenda of the older Luke about his own youth? I do not think so. It will be different. It will not be accurate to the history of Luke's life, but neither will Luke's own account, at least not fully.

R. Do you mean to say that no history has any value?

J. Not at all. Rather I would say that all history is both true and false. When someone writes a thing, any thing, it contains some truth about that person at that time. But it also contains some fiction. Even a complete fantasy must have truth in it, even if it is abstracted truth told entirely through metaphor. A reader can tell when something is not accurate to the human experience, regardless of whether the specific details of the time and place represented are true. Once you make

something into a narrative, it can only function as a narrative. Because language and the structure of story are tools, metaphors for real things that happen, they are necessarily not the same as being present for the events described.

So, every narrative has value if it contains some attention to what is true about being a human alive in the world. Which is not to say that personal stories—first-hand accounts—are not valuable in understanding history. Without such accounts we can know nothing about history. I am only saying that we cannot assume that any historical account tells us all of the truth. Every voice has bias that clouds objectivity, and we only have our limited senses and memories with which to capture things. Luke's history must be received with some scrutiny because of the intercession of Lomax, but even without it we would do well to scrutinize such work.

R. If we are to be skeptical of any narrative, why do writers of historical fiction take so much care in research? What purpose does such research serve?

J. Research is very important. In editing this work I have done a great deal of research myself. Only by understanding the period about which one writes can one describe it adequately for others. Every writer must do research of some kind. A writer of a fantasy novel needs to create a world in which the narrative will exist. Historical writing is the same. In many ways the

worlds of Earth's past are as strange and fantastic as any imagined one. Likewise, even a completely made up world needs some verisimilitude, something of the real world for readers to identify with, if it is going to hold the reader's attention.

R. It seems that Luke's story has many aspects that are at odds with how I think about the Elizabethan period. For example, Joan feels to me a very contemporary character. I think of women in Elizabethan times as being very much oppressed and under the sway of men.

J. One of the problems with a common understanding of history is that we take generalizations and apply them universally in our minds. It is the same process that leads to stereotypes about people from other countries or backgrounds. The human brain is very good at simplifying complex things by averaging things out to generalizations. I think even our imperfect understanding of history (and here I mean "our" as a more complete history as understood by historians) admits for variation outside of the norm. Yes, of course women were oppressed even more than they are now. The typical view of the world in Elizabethan England was that women were actually incapable of the same kinds of reasoning and activity as men. It was a view that must have been disrupted by the presence of such a strong woman on the throne, but that is another matter. Even the most pervasive view must have some variation.

I look at the plays of Shakespeare for some complexity about the view of women. In Much ado About Nothing, none other than the prince, the highest authority present, admires the wit and spirit of Beatrice and asks for her hand in marriage as a result. Beatrice is by no means in line with the prevailing view of how women should properly have behaved in Renaissance Europe. And, importantly I think, she refuses him. A mere woman takes it upon herself to voluntarily refuse a life of privilege because she knows it would be stifling to her.

We can also look at the many journals of foreigners traveling in England during Elizabeth's reign to find how scandalized they were at the liberties granted to women there compared to Continental societies. But I am not here to prove that women were less oppressed than we think they were, which would be a vain and disastrous enterprise, rather I seek only to show that there are more complicated views of gender than we generally think of. Individual women were undoubtedly given more liberty than others, and many were no doubt outspoken on a variety of issues, though they would have had to choose carefully when to hold their tongues.

We would also do well to consider how Luke's perspective played a part in the portrayal. One of the themes that emerges is about gender and class expectations. Luke seems to have had some quite modern views about the expectations of women, and he

may have written about the few women that enter his tale with a sensibility colored by conclusions he came to later in life.

R. Do you think Luke was thinking about themes when he wrote his journal?

J. I cannot say what he was thinking about. Theme exists in all narratives, or at least all narratives worth reading. If a story does not "mean" anything, it is forgettable at best. We have already discussed how Luke expresses his belief that he was writing about Saviolo only to end up writing about himself. That is a great example of how an author often does not know what a piece of writing is about until it is finished. It could be that Luke looked at his finished manuscript and discovered that it was not what he actually set out to write—maybe that is why it was not published in his lifetime. We cannot know. What we do know is what themes arise in the work regardless of intent. We get a lot of meditation on the morality of fighting—a glimpse perhaps of the fading of the old chivalric traditions in favor of the newer social norms of mercantilism and the rule of civil laws. However, much of what Luke's story addresses is the camaraderie of young gentlemen and the isolation that attends on that bond. We are left with the feeling that Luke is ready to leave the circles of young men behind for better things in the end. Along the way, he deals with friendship, both harmonious and troubled, romantic attraction, and more broadly belonging

and companionship. Luke's journey is very personal, and that he relates it with the fast pace of an adventure story is, I think, telling of his attitude toward that time. Becoming is exciting. We are often ready to leave it behind us in favor of better things, but once left, we often look back on times of growth with nostalgia and fondness. The older Luke that is relating the stories of his youth seems to have grown beyond those days but he does not seem hesitant to tell us how exhilarating they were.

R. You have pointed out some of the themes you found in Luke's story, but are there others that a reader might discover?

J. Absolutely there are. Just as I have talked about how a writer does not know what a piece of writing is about until it is written, one reader's experience of a piece of writing varies greatly from another reader's. We all bring our experiences with us when we read, or when we consume any sort of creative expression. Not only do we all have vastly different life stories than Luke did, but we also have the experience of having read different stories, seen films, listened to music, and so on. Narrative works on our brains in a unique way. Language is a symbolic metaphor for things in the real world, so we have to interpret the symbols of words and phrases before we can even begin to make meaning out of them. Just as I said earlier that we each experience an event differently, written narrative is doubly diverse, because we each read the word slightly

differently and then we relate them into meaning differently. We project our knowledge onto them. We try to see ourselves in them. We filter what we read through our own hopes and disappointments. It would be a sad, bleak world is every person who read a piece of narrative got exactly the same things out of it as every other. Part of what makes writing exciting is that it is such a flexible form of expression and so prone to interpretation.

R. Do you think that it is harder for readers to interpret a story set in Elizabethan London than one with a more immediately familiar setting? That is, why do you think this work is important to publish now?

J. Why publish anything, ever? I found these stories to be exciting and moving and I wanted to share them with a broader audience. Anyone who publishes anything has to believe in the work, and find something in it that makes it worth the effort. Now, I have a particular interest in the Elizabethan period, but it is not a time that is very unfamiliar to readers. Mostly due to Shakespeare, I am certain, there has been fairly consistent interest in that age for the last four hundred years. I think our love of the new and our sense of superiority over those that came before us combine to make people think, in the abstract, that stories from or about earlier times are going to be quaint or outmoded. I hope that readers will find that what we have in

common with our forebears than they think. Also, I hope that my enthusiasm for the work, and the excitement of Admiral Lomax, will show through in the presentation. I do not subscribe to the belief that familiarity is required for interest. New genres and modes of writing appear constantly and they succeed or fail based on other characteristics. Again, I will submit that readers will connect to work in which they can identify genuine human issues, regardless of setting. That is not to say that some people are not predisposed toward or against certain types of literature. People have preferences and prejudices, to be sure, but no creative endeavor can hope to be popular with all audiences, no matter what form it takes.

R. So, if a written narrative is able to connect with some genuine human emotion or experience, you think that can make all the difference between success and failure for the work?

J. Exactly.

R. What in Luke’s story do you think makes that connection for you?

J. There are many things. To call one out in particular, there is the episode of Henry Starkyn and his almost casual savagery toward Brian Howe, the tailor’s apprentice.

R. Do you mean that you think that is an experience that people will relate to?

J. No, not the attack itself. I think the morality and

judgment that Luke portrays in his recollections is rich and complicated. You or I, if we witnessed something horrible like that beating, might never associate with Henry again. Or so we might tell ourselves. It is an exaggerated example, but I think we witness our friends doing things we don't approve of all the time. Morality is not a fixed and well-defined thing for most people. Henry tries to make amends, I think he really feels bad about what he did, and Luke is still his friend. I think that clouding of moral principle in the light of circumstance is a real portrayal of how we live. I also think that episode serves to remind us of the violence inherent to that time and place. Henry does not go to jail because he is rich and powerful. He beat a man who is poor and has not even earned the freedom of the city. There would have been those at the time that would say Henry was in his rights to beat the boy—to kill him even. I do not think that we are as far removed from those realities of class as we would like to tell ourselves.

I also associate moral complexity with a rich literary tradition. To go back to The Three Musketeers, the issues in the book about the struggle between the cardinal and the king are complicated, though they have been universally simplified in cinematic interpretations. D'Artagnan starts out as a staunch supporter of the king, not quite an idealist, but certainly a romantic in his views about the great men of state. By the end

of the book he is ready to accept a position with the cardinal—a very pragmatic choice. While the story is not about how he navigates the intrigues of state to come to that conclusion, I have always felt that he is a more intriguing character for that complexity and that the story is richer for it as well. If it is boiled down to the oversimplification of the king being right and good and the cardinal being scheming and bad, we lose the ability to strongly connect with the story, which is really about D'Artagnan's ability to bring his personal will to bear on the political machine so as to impress both mighty men. I have also always been fascinated by the way that D'Artagnan is so seemingly callous and unchivalrous in his dealings with women. That is to my mind his greatest character flaw, though Dumas' original readers may not have noted it as such. But the skill of the writing is that he remains a character that I can admire for other things. In that, he is much more real than other characters in romances. He is complicated enough that I can identify with his human frailty while marveling at his finer qualities—he both elevates humanity with his heroic deeds and then grounds himself in the same kinds of banality that I see all around me, and the work is the better for it.

We can find another example of slight complexity in the novels of Jane Austen, even though they are quite different from Dumas' romances. In each of her books, Austen has her characters

making assumptions based on propriety and privilege that turn out to be incorrect in the end. She discovered that a heroine is more likable when she makes the kind of mistake that a reader might.

Luke's story is marked as much by the things he does not know as the things he does. He is a character who is always observing the world around him, but that is also quite oblivious to the implications of things that he sees. He casts his friends in the roles that he wants them to fill regardless of their actual characteristics and feelings. As I mentioned earlier, he consistently refers to Henry Starkyn as someone who is less than a friend even though he describes him so often and in such a light that we must assume them to be much closer than he admits. The better example is Oliver, whose feelings for Luke are clear to the reader quite early in his part of the story. Luke sees him as the brother that he never had, and forces him into that role in his mind against Oliver's will. I think we can all relate to the attendant narrative about unrequited love, even if the particulars do not match our own experiences.

Nothing that Luke tells us of his life ever seems to go exactly right (or at least as intended) but in each case the details have things within them that make them feel genuine to human experience.

R. You mentioned the violence of the otherwise quite jolly

Henry Starkyn as being somewhat indicative of the time. Can you say more about that? Are there things about Elizabethan England that resonate with modern audiences?

J. I see Elizabethan England as having been a time and place in the midst of transition, and I see our own time in America in a similar light. The Elizabethans were in the process of moving from a fairly fractured, medieval society based on feudalism to the literate society of the Enlightenment. The Elizabethan dilemma was one of reconciling the old ways with the new. The way of the chivalric tradition under which the ruling class had governed England for hundreds of years was based on the rightness of might—a belief in the divine intercession in the martial affairs of good and penitent men. The way of the future for the Elizabethans lay in books and learning—the Baconian way of thought in which Luke later immersed himself. Society was moving on, but the old rulers, the knights and noblemen, needed to find a place in the new order. No character better embodies the restlessness of this dilemma than Essex himself: full of the divine order of the feudal way but under the thumb of the financial dealings of the time.

In our own time, we struggle with the dominance of technology over our lives. We have thrown off much of the old, pre-digital ways but have yet to find the most effective translations of the old in the new technologies. We long for the

new future promised by computerization, but we do not know how to translate who we were only a decade or two ago into the new language of technology.

These two struggles may seem very different in their character, but both are bound up in the passing of old ways into new ones, and in both cases the new ways of life are founded in new technologies or communication: readily available printed books and world-spanning digital networks respectively. In both cases there are whole classes of people who do not know how they will transition to the new way of life. I do not think it is at all hard to see a reflection of ourselves in the Elizabethans.

I also think that, particularly in America, the issues of violence and young men are pertinent. Elizabethan writers complained of the senseless violence caused by the new-fangled rapiers imported from the continent in much the same way as we bemoan the ubiquity of firearms in the United States. In both cases young men are usually implicated in the perpetration of violence against others like themselves.

R. Earlier you talked about themes regarding relationships. Does that material translate to modern audiences as well?

J. Yes it does. I think that relationships between people have changed surprisingly little between Luke’s day and our own. That is partly why the works of Shakespeare remain popular, I think—we have the same insecurities and needs that people did

four hundred years ago, though we may manifest them differently. Some things are different, like the way we view a man's relationships with other men versus with women, but I do not think they have changed as much as we would, for our own comfort, like to think.

Luke's world is one of hetero-normative relationships. Men seek the company of other men for intellectual stimulation and turn to women primarily to sate their libidinous appetites. Most of Luke's story is about how men relate to each other, but when he finds himself attracted to Joan Archer, he has to struggle with the idea of the woman as object. He recognizes that he wants from her the same kind of relationship that he has always had with other men and boys, but with the added layer of sexuality. I think it is very appropriate for modern readers. We still face similar issues of gender and sexuality.

R. For a narrative that is so concerned with relationships, it includes very little about sex and sexuality.

J. I find some of the stories to be sexually charged, like Luke's introduction to Oliver, even if Luke himself does not recognize the tension. But it is not surprising that he would not discuss matters of sex, given the repression of the day. He does mention hunting cuckoos a time or two, which is a reference to female pubic hair, but otherwise his writing is quite chaste—or at least Lomax's version is. I think that is good, all things

considered. It would change the character of the work dramatically if it were filled with more salacious material. It would also be, from my perspective, missing the point. I think we, as modern readers, have an expectation that everything be about sex and sexuality, but it feels like Luke's journey is largely about intimacy that isn't necessarily sex. That is not to say that I think he is asexual or that sex does not affect him, only that his struggles exist in the vulnerable realm of affection a layer removed from sex.

R. So you think it is more about friendship and affection than about sexuality?

J. Absolutely. Luke's needs regarding the people around him in the story are more about belonging and his own identity than about sexuality.

R. You have mentioned belonging more than once. Is a sense of belonging important to the story and to the modern reader's experiences?

J. Very much so. I think we all know or can easily surmise what it is like to feel the need to belong or to fit in. What Luke is going through in his journal is closely related to what any young adult goes through in high school or college. He is finding his own way while finding his people. When he finds that those things do not match up precisely he has to navigate some compromise. I think that is an experience that most people can

relate to.

R. I think I now better understand how you see Luke's story. Thank you for expounding on the issues that are important to you. Is there anything else that you would like to say to conclude?

J. Some things I have said are worth reiterating. The process of putting this book together has exposed me to a variety of new experiences and information. I have found many connections between the work and the modern human experience. I think if you keep yourself open when you read it, you will find that a lot of genuine emotion is present in the characters and what they go through. I hope you find more and different things than I did, and that you enjoy it.