

CHAPTER ONE

One Morning in the Autumn of seventeen forty-one, when I was not yet eleven Yeares of Age, still round in Figure and innocent in Mind, Nathaniel Ravenscroft took me a-walking by the River. I supposed that this small River, the Coller, must have emerged from beneath the chalk Hills somewhere to the South; and as I had once been told that it did not, as other local Rivers, tribute the Isis at Oxford, I imagined that it must somewhere have an equivalent Place at which it sank again beneath them, to flow silent and unseen below the White Horse.

Shirelands Hall, my Father's House, stands a fair Mile north of the Coller, on the main Road between Faringdon and Highworth.

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It is a Country House of Palladian Design, built largely of Sandstone and Marble about the Time of the first Protectorate; and being the largest House for several Miles it was usually first Point of Call for wandering Beggars and Tradesmen as they travelled thro' the County on their Way around Oxford. To travel by Carriage to the nearby Village of Collerton, as I had been obliged every Sundaye in my short Life to do, required that the Coachman follow this main Road eastwards for some short Distance before turning the Horses on to Collerton Lane, which after a Mile and an Half brought the Carriage straight up to the Doorway of Collerton Church. If one then continued along the Lane, eventually one would arrive at the Lamb Inn, where my Parents had celebrated my Christening and that of my Sister, Jane; and finally the River, which tho' it had given Collerton its Name maintained an aloof Distance betwixt it and the Human Settlement.

If, however, upon quitting Shirelands' Drive, one turned one's Horses to the West, and continued toward Highworth, one would come upon a Crossroads marked with a Way-Stone, and a coaching Inn under the Sign of the Bull. Proceed West, and one would find oneself at Highworth; turn North, and the tedious winding Track led thro' Hamlets and Farmsteads in the vague Direction of Lechlade. But turn Left, and South, and the Road travelled on to Shrivenham past a small Number of grand Houses, which had been built beside the Coller to enjoy the fine Views of the antient Chalk-cut Monument upon the Hill provided by the River's gently lowering Slopes.

My Father's Estate, which consisted of a number of large uninclosed Haymeadows and arable Fields, began at the Inn Crossroads and stretched as far as the eastern parish Boundary of Collerton, including also a short Stretch of the Coller itself, whereupon I greatly enjoyed to fish. The Living of Collerton Rectory, which lay

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well within this Compass, fell naturally therefore under my Family's Disposal. Its present Incumbent, whom my Grandfather had installed in both Position and House upon the Death of the previous Rector twenty Yeares before, was a fat and torrid tempered Cleric by the Name of Ravenscroft, about whom I had nothing Good to say or think except that he was Nathaniel's Father; at which Fact I admired wondrous much.

Nathaniel, Nathaniel Ravenscroft, who was two Yeares older than I, was my dearest Friend and closest Companion. In truth, I must admit, attaining this Distinction would not have been difficult for him had he possesst but one Quarter of his Charm; for I was a shy and sullen Child, cursed, I had heard my Father say, when I had been believed well out of Earshot, with a melancholic Disposition that I had surely inherited from my Sephardic Mother. This Reference was a Revelation to me, for in the six Yeares since her Death I had never heard anyone speak of my Mother, and I remembered little more of her than her Voice. His Words stirred a Curiosity in me to know more, but I did not dare to ask.

My Lack of Desire to make Friends with Boys of mine own Age and Station was not, however, intirely due to my Disposition. Verily, I knew, even at that tender Age, and without overhearing anyone, that I had inherited more from my Mother than her Humour. I was a dark Child, brown skinned and black eyed as a Spaniard, with unmistakable upon my Countenance all those distinguishing Features supposed to be indicative of Jewry; and even tho' I had been raised a Christian, with no more Knowledge of Talmud and Torah than I had of the internal Workings of the Sunne, I received no Mercy from those who had been born unmistakably English, and I had long ago learned that it was better for mine Health if I avoided their Society.

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But Nathaniel was a true Sanguine, in every Sense. Long of Limb, even at thirteen, and athletick of Build, he towered laughingly over mine Head, and with merry Jibes and chearfull Jests made me to feel ashamed of my round Belly, and my clumsy Movements. Nathaniel's Hair, unlike my black Mop, was the finest and fairest I had ever seen upon a living Youth, white-gold in Colour and each Strand as soft to the Touch as a downy Feather. His Eyes, which, his Father insisted, were a marshy grey, always appeared to me in the most dazzling and verdant Shade of green.

I loved Nathaniel Ravenscroft marvellous much, and looked up to him as one might an older Brother; and perhaps it was on Account of this Love I bore him, and naught else, neither Fear for mine own Sanity nor Punishment, that I did not ever speak to any Body concerning his strange Habits. Of these Nathaniel had many; but the worst, which he had disclosed to me when I was six, and which caused me much Disgust and Dismay, was his perpetual Delight in snatching blue Tits from the Hedges, and consuming them direct upon the Spot. This inevitably took Place in identical Fashion. Nathaniel and I would be walking, or riding, and engaged in Conversation or idly playing Games, when he would spy a Flutter of Blue in the Briar. At once he would fall stiff and still, and so would I, dreading the Scene I was about to witness, yet unable to look askance; then out would snap his Hand, fast as a striking Snake, and the small Bird would disappear in a Flurry of pathetic Twittering and Blood. Then Nathaniel would turn to me, and smile the happy and innocent Smile of a Babe that hath eaten a Sweetmeat; whilst I would watch the tiny Feathers tumbling from his Mouth, delicate as many coloured Snowflakes. His eye Teeth were surprizing long, and white, and deadly sharp as Poniards.

I would recoil from Nathaniel then in sudden Fear; for always

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it seemed to me that no Human Creature could behave in such a Way; and sometimes I would flee; but ever he, long shanked and agile, would catch me, and, smiling, demand to know what was the Trouble. I could never tell him.

Unlike My Self, who had but the one Sister, Jane, two Yeares my Senior, Nathaniel was the oldest Child of a large and still increasing Brood of Youngsters, all of whom in some Degree resembled the Rector, whether by a somewhat portly Build or in the Cast of their Features. None possesst any Shine akin to his Fairness, and none was as dark as I; all were, Nathaniel told me, intirely mediocre, and unworthy of our Interest, our Contempt or our Approbation.

"They all," he told me confidently, "will meet grisly Ends in the clutching Claws of Raw-Head-and-Bloody-Bones; for they tell petty Lies, and make up malicious Tales; and everyone knows how he lieth in Wait for wicked Children, crouching in the Dark atop his Pile of Bones and jibber-jabbering."

I did not allow My Self to pay much Attention to Nathaniel's Words, for I was, in some childish Part of me, mortally afraid of Raw Head, who, my Nurse had told me when I had been about four, was lurking silent at the Bottom of the River Coller, waiting to leap out and drag me to my Death. Whether Raw Head was real Creature, or Phantasm, I was not intirely sure, but it made little difference; it, or he, was an Horrour: an half known, formless Dread that poisoned the Night and kept blameless Infants from their Dreams. Nathaniel, who shewed no Fear, and claimed to know the Goblin right well, made it Sport to teaze those of us who were not so brave. One autumn Evening, when I was six, he crept up behind me whilst I lay on my Belly watching Minnows thro' my Reflection, and leaning over my Shoulder, created of us both a veritable Monster. Crying out: "Two Heads, two Faces, and two

Persons, as the Almighty hath three!" he convinced me that I had really perceived Raw-Head-and-Bloody-Bones. I did not sleep for many Nights.

On this September Morning, in my twelfth Yeare, we had put Raw Head quite out of our Minds and spent several Houres at our favourite fishing Spot upon the Collier. We had wandered westwards thro' the uncut Corn and well grazed Pastures till we had come upon a Loop in the River, about an half Mile from the Shrivenham Road. There stood here a short Row of half ruined Cottages, which had not been let for several Yeares as they had proved subject to Flooding, and my Father had eventually grown tired of their Repair and had moved all their Tenants to higher Ground. The Earth here was soft and often boggy, and when the swollen River ran fast and lethal, as it always did in Winter, it would become quite treacherous. Todaye, however, it was dry and hard, and the Waters looked as placid as a Millpond.

We set up our Rods, and sate, and waited, and entertained ourselves until the Sunne was long past its Highest; and then Nathaniel's Stomach beginning to call him homewards, we packed up our Equipments, and our few Fish, and returned thro' the yellowing Fields to Shirelands Hall.

I had been of the Expectation that we would ask the Hall Kitchen to fill our Bellies for us, but as we drew near to the House, Nathaniel all on a Sudden turned about, and said: "I have a better Idea, Tris. What sayst we visit my Father's apple Orchard?"

This Suggestion made mine Heart to skip a Beat, for the Rectory Orchard was strict forbidden both to Nathaniel and to My Self. Nathaniel hugely disliked this Restriction, as, indeed, he disliked any authoritative Limitation placed upon his Freedom, and he did his Best to disregard it. I knew that if we were to visit the Orchard, we

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ran an high Risk of being discovered, having our Spoils confiscated, and our Ears sorely harangued; but I found My Self immediately nodding in Assent.

We ran fast to the kitchen Step, deposited our Fish, and then once more we were running away from Shirelands, this Time along the Driveway that would take us thro' the iron Gates on to the Faringdon Road.

Shirelands' Driveway was flanked by an Avenue of ash Trees, and the Ground beneath our Feet was littered with their Leaves, the first that Yeare to have fallen. Nathaniel stoppt at the Foot of the Tallest, for I was somewhat out of Breath from our sudden Exertion, and struggling to keep Pace with him, who sprinted like a Greyhound.

Nathaniel laughed, and put his Hand upon my Shoulder. "Alas! You are poorly named, Tristan Hart; not nearly as fleet footed as your name-Sake."

"I cannot help that," I mumbled, ashamed.

"Fie, Tris, I do but tease you," Nathaniel said, not unkindly. "Sit down here, until your Breath come back to you."

I sate me down upon the mossy Roots, gratefull for the Rest, and watched Nathaniel prowl betwixt the Trees like a great, golden Cat.

If I were like you, I thought, how fine and easy my Life must surely be.

Nathaniel gave an impatient Sigh, which I suppose I should not have noticed, and taking out his pocket Knife, set about carving his Initials into the the great Trunk at my Back.

A strange Thought came to me: Doth not the Tree feel it?

I dismisst this Notion instantly, for 'twas Nonsense. I was well aware that there was no Possibility of a mere Tree feeling anything at all, least of all Pain, as an Human might; but then, snapping at

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the Heels of its Dismissal came another: Might not it be possible? Might not it be real?

I got quickly to my Feet, and asked Nathaniel at once if I might borrow his Knife. He was happy to lend it, and so, having the Blade in mine Hand, I turned about and forcibly inscribed into the surprizing soft Bark of the Tree mine own Initials. *T. H. Tristan Hart.*

If the Tree screamed, I did not hear it.

"Look thro'," Nathaniel said, pointing upward. "Mistletoe, upon an ash Tree."

I squinted both mine Eyes and peered upwards, but I could distinguish no Difference between one leafy Mass and another. "What is special in that?" I said, feeling somewhat resentfull of his sharp Sight.

"It is a Rarity," Nathaniel said. "Mistletoe grows easily upon the Apple, and the Oak; but it is scarce found on the Ash, and is most magickal when it doth so."

"I did not know that," I said.

"You do not know anything. It is possible; it is real. Let's go. My Father's Apples are ripe for the Picking. Canst not hear them calling? Pluck us, they cry! Eat!"

I smiled, and returned Nathaniel his Knife. Then we passt out thro' Shirelands' open Gates and made our Way along the Road toward Collerton.

The Rectory stood on the north Side of the Village, before one reached the Church, and so from Shirelands Hall it was a long Walk. By the Time Nathaniel and I came into the Village, my Stomach was beginning to complain of its Neglect, and I had begun to feel a little dizzy. Nathaniel, however, seemed to have compleat forgot his Hunger, for he gave no Indication of it, and had made no more

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Mention of our eating the Apples we were out to steal. I hoped this did not mean that he had changed his Mind and was leading me, without Explanation, somewhere else intirely; Nathaniel's Character was changeable in the Extream, and his Desires also.

We reached the Rectory and made our Way, without shewing ourselves to the Inhabitants within, to the Rector's treasured cider Trees behind. The orchard Gate being locked, as was quite usual, Nathaniel assisted me to scramble over the dry, crumbling Wall into the glowing Eden that lay inclosed therein. Once I was down, he scurried over the Wall himself with a marten-like Agility and Speed that made me to ponder why the Rector had ever troubled to have locked his Gate, for open or shut, it provided no Defense.

The apple Orchard, in the late afternoon Sunneshine, seemed to mine Eyes a veritable Oasis of sweet Bounties and Delights. The Aire was warm, and slightly humid, and the Perfume of ripening Fruit hung upon it as light as a Breath. Bees buzzed happily about mine Ears; a song Thrush whistled. And on every Tree, in every Cranny and Corner of the Orchard, hung the most delicious Apples of every Hue from the brightest yellow to the deepest crimson. My Mouth watered.

I hastened over to the most heavily laden of the Trees and began to rip the red-gold Apples from the Boughs; more, I was certain, than I would eat; but it did not matter. I sate down upon the Greensward, and fell to with a great Relish. Nathaniel laughed aloud, and told me that I must be a very Pig to have made such a crude Mess of my Meal. This Censure stung me at my Quick, as Nathaniel, surely, had known it must. From mine earliest Infancy I had disliked and feared Pigs.

"If you are sick tonight," Nathaniel said, "don't blame me, tho' you will never hear the last of it from Mrs H.; or from your Father."

I said: "My Father cares naught." But I began to eat more slowly.

I do not now think it was true that my Father cared nothing for my Welfare, or even, for that Matter, my Behaviour. Certainly, whenever I was caught, as I frequently was, about some Misdemeanour, his Reaction was not that of an usual Parent, for it was to refrain from both Punishment and Guidance by ignoring the Instance altogether. This curious Blindness of his was, I know now, a Source of Friction between him and our Neighbours, who took the more Christian Approach and did not spare the Rod, but again, as a Child, I was quite unaware of it. All I knew was that when Nathaniel and I would play a Trick, however cruel, upon some unsuspecting Soule, I would not be punished and Nathaniel would not be caught. Nathaniel Ravenscroft had the Ability, in Addition to his other Peculiarities, of being able to vanish utterly into thin Aire at the first Whisper of Trouble. He had never, to my certain Knowledge, taken any Blame for any Wickedness in which we had been discovered; and altho' this Circumstance appeared hugely unjust, it did have its Advantages. Nathaniel could get clean away with Mischief that no other Boy would dare dream of, and afterwards he would share the Spoils with me, whether they were his Sisters' Secrets or his Father's Cider.

Nathaniel, intirely unconcerned by my ruffled Sentiments, laughed aloud, and scrambled up the Trunk of the tallest apple Tree with the same efficient Ease that had taken him up and over the orchard Wall. He perched himself merrily in the upper Branches, and plucking himself an Apple, said: "I shall act as our Lookout, Tris. If I see someone approaching, I shall caw, thus": he made a chattering Noise identical in Pitch and Intensity to that of a Magpie. "An you hear it, you must straightway hide."

This Strategy of Nathaniel's was not in itself a bad one, for he

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must have had a good View of the Pathway from his Perch; but having no Fear for himself of being caught, he was not the most reliable of Sentries. Perhaps he gave the warning Signal too late, or perhaps he had already given it and I, intent upon filling my Belly, had not noticed; but all in one Second I became aware of the Rat-tat-tattling of a Pie, and the Rattling of a Key in the iron Lock of the orchard Gate; and before I had Wit or Time to hide My Self it opened wide, and there stood the Rector.

To mine own Detriment and Defeat—for if I had but remained silent and still he might, perhaps, not have seen me, and I might have been able to slip unobserved out of the Gate—I gave a guilty Start, and let from my Lips a small Cry of Surprise.

The Rector Ravenscroft, for his Part, was also somewhat astonished; but his Recovery was rapid, and his Retribution swift. With a Bellow of Rage, he bore down on me like a fat, cassocked Epitome of Death. His thick fingered Hand, sweating from the Shock of his Passion or his sudden bodily Exertion, clamped itself upon the Back of my Neck.

"So!" he shouted. "Tristan Hart! Caught in the Act, yet again, by God!"

He hauled me to my Feet. Half eaten Apples tumbled from my Lap. The Rector stiffened at the Sight.

"You have the Devil in you, Tristan Hart!" he roared. "He is in your Blood, your very Blood, and you have your Foot firm and fast upon the Road to Hell! I tell you, Boy, if your Father won't take it upon himself to beat him out of you, I shall! Never let it be said that I let anyone's Soule go to the Devil without battling to save him!"

Without any more ado, he thrust me roughly up against the nearest Tree, and with his walking Cane proceeded to inflict upon my tender young Body as brutal and prolonged a Thrashing as I

have ever witnessed; and if I had not been fully cloathed I have no Doubt but that the resultant Injuries would have been severe. You may be certain that I screamed, and cried, and begged for Mercy, and fought, and struggled hard to make good mine Escape; but all to no Effect. When it was finally over I collapsed exhausted on the velvet Ground, my Ribs and Spine bruised black, in such an Intensity of Pain and Shock that I could neither stand nor weep.

As I have said, my Father, the Squire, had never beaten me, nor suffered me to be beaten at the Hand of any of our Servants; so altho' by this Age of eleven Yeares I had endured from them many a Scolding, I had never once been hit; and as my Body cried out in Pain, so my Mind staggered under the Shock of what had happened, so suddenly, so unexpectedly, to me.

I did not know what had befallen Nathaniel. I supposed that he was yet in the apple Tree, but as I had no Way of finding out without discovering his Presence to his Father I kept quiet, and did not resist as the Rector dragged me once again to my Feet and hauled me from his Orchard. I was terrified now lest of Course he should thrash me again, but to my Surprise he called instead for his Chaise, and forced me inside.

"I will have Words with your Father," he said. "For there is a Wickedness bred in you, Boy, and it must be curbed, by whatever Means he chooseth, else you grow up vicious as the Devil. Too long have you been left unchecked, too long have you been left to his Devices."

The Whip cracked over the Pony's Back. The Animal sprang forward, into a lively Trot, and the Chaise rumbled out of the Rectory Grounds, and along Collerton Lane towards Shirelands Hall, and my looming Disgrace.

CHAPTER TWO

So I became, for the next four Yeares of my Life, a Scholar. The Theft of the Rector's Apples from his Orchard was the last Straw for that choleric Cleric, and in his Determination to preserve my Soule, not to mention the peacefull Enjoyment of his own Property, he inflicted upon my Father so bitter a Sermon regarding mine evil Nature that my Father's Reserve finally cracked, and he muttered somewhat upon the Topic of Dispatching me to School. The Rector Ravenscroft seized on this Notion, and insisted that my Father write the relevant Letters then and there. My Father, however, regaining some of his Dignity, baulked at this Demand, coming as it did from the very Divine of whom he had been Benefactor; and, complaining

that he had neither Time nor Inclination to set about the Business, politely requested that the Rector either take up mine Education himself, or find me a suitable Tutor. The Rector, for his Part, was most vexed by this new and unexpected Development, and refused at once to have me in his school Room; but to my Displeasure, he found me a Tutor; and within Dayes I had been sentenced and confined. A school Room was set up for me on the ground Floor of the House, hard by my Father's Library so that he might, theoretically at least, have an Ear to my Progress, and I was kept busy about my Books between the Houres of seven and five upon every Daye of the Week excepting, naturally, the Sabbath. I complained most bitterly at this, but as mine only Sympathiser was my Father's aged housekeeper, Mrs Henderson—fondly called Mrs H.—a Woman who, since the Departure of the Last of my Nurses, had fulfilled something of the maternal Part towards me, my Disquiet went unremarked.

My school Room, which had been a sitting Room not much used before, was dark, dampe and musty with tall, curtained Windows. The only Comfort was the Fire, which was lit every Daye in Winter, to preserve the Books. Often I stared out across the rain-swept or sunne-filled Shirelands Grounds towards the High Chalk, and wished with mine whole Heart that I had yet Liberty to walk across the flower dotted Turf, to listen to the Buzzards scream, and feel the rough Winds play about mine Ears. Other Times, I thought that if I could have left the Place, alone, I would have crept soft to the River's Edge and slipt.

I sorely missed Nathaniel, and wept much for him at first; but we saw each other still across Church, and were permitted to write. From his, infrequent, Letters I discovered that he, too, was deeply unhappy, and longing to depart his Father's Society. It was the

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Rector's Desire, to which Nathaniel was vehemently opposed, that he should take Orders, and follow him into the Church. Even I could see that this fatherly Determination was misguided: I could no more imagine Nathaniel wearing a Cassock than I could My Self playing the Syrinx. Nathaniel considered himself already a Man in Nature, if not in Law, and he saw no Reason to obey his Father.

By the Summer of forty-four I was still in my Mind very much a Boy, but I had grown and altered much. Gone, almost forgotten, was the small, rounded Puppy I had been. Now I was a gangling, bony Youth; tall and angular with large Hands and long, narrow Fingers. It would have been difficult for the Rector Ravenscroft now to have said that my Soule was bound to the Devil, for I was Word perfect in all my Religious Observances. But what the Rector did not suspect was that my Soule belonged to a rational God.

I could no more give Credence to the terrifying Mystery of Scripture and Pulpit than I could have turned Water into Wine. Mine was a God of knowable Purpose, a God whose Principles might be discovered, tested, and found comprehensible by Human Reason. The World was as an open Bible; the Challenge was in learning how to read it.

I went to the Philosophers; to Descartes, to Harvey, to Baglivi, to Hook. I began to comprehend how the intire World was built according to the Principles of Number, Weight, and Measure, and to see clearly how these applied to the Operation of the Human Body. Whatever the Condition of the Soule within, the Human Body was a Machine, susceptible of Damage, Illness and Decay – but also of Repair.

These Thinkers became my Comfort, in those dark Houres after Church, when my Senses reeled. When my Father dies and Shirelands Hall is mine, I thought, I will construct a great Laboratory

in the eastern Wing, where I shall pass every one of my waking Houres in Experimentation. No mere Surgeon, I will become a Giant of Natural Philosophy, teasing apart the intimate Bonds of the Flesh to discover the Workings of the Machine underneath. I will be the Prophet of a new World, where Logick and Reason will Rule where once Superstition held all Sway. So sweet a Taste, I said to My Self, hath the Electuary of Reason, more effective than any Theriac. Knowledge could heal all Ills. It would be my Mind's Solvent, my Soule's Salvation. I should study all the Processes of Life, from the most insignificant to the most profound. I would measure and circumscribe Pain itself.

I told no one of mine Ambition. None would have understood.

In the early Autumn of forty-five, when I was approaching the Age of fifteen, it was decided that I should have yet another Tutor. By this Age, I had been under the Tutelage of perhaps six of these Masters, and each Episode had ended in the same Way. "His Wits are too sharp," each had said to my Father; "Latin and Euclid are too easy for him; with Respect, Mr Hart, you must pay for a learned Scholar from Oxford or London to undertake your Son's Instruction." And on each Occasion my Father had sighed, and another poor Curate or struggling Student had been engaged.

This Time, however, he took on a Protestant Scotsman by the Name of Robert Simmins, who had been several Yeares an Officer in the Army before taking up the Position of Master at St Paul's School—of which Place he had recently, and hurriedly it seemed, been acquitted. I suspected that some Scandal lay at the Bottom of this, which had almost certainly to do with Drink, but I never found it out. Colonel Simmins' Prejudice against me, which became plain to me very early in our Association, was founded, I now conceive, in nothing more than that intellectual Laziness of a certain

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Breed of ordinary Man, which fancies to discern a Threat in everything and everyone considered clever; and which, rather than striving to comprehend it, habitually contemns. He was not, verily, a bad Man, and his own Faults naught but common, venial Weaknesses for which he should perhaps be envied rather than despised. However, at the impatient Age of fifteen, despise him I did, and I could not perceive how I could learn aught usefull from a Tutor whose primary Aim in mine Education was to cure me of Cleverness.

This Tutor had a Son of his own going by the Name of Isaac, who was several Yeares my junior; and to mine Astonishment and Disgust it was decided that this Son should be allowed to receive Education alongside me, like a Flea riding upon an Hound. He was eleven Yeares of Age, and he turned out to be a light built, girlish little Scrap with shaggy brown Hair, large dark brown Eyes, and Eyebrows of surprizing thickness and excitability. I disliked him immediately on Account of his Father, but it quickly became apparent that Simmins did not return mine Antipathy, but rather liked me very much; and I found that he was perfectly willing to act the Part of Servant and Scapegoat both within the school Room and without it. If the Father set me a tedious and pointless Sum, the Son would solve it; if I was supposed to be working hard upon a Translation of Tacitus, when I would far rather read Ovid, he would cover up mine Inattention by drawing the Tutor's Anger to some Wrongdoing of his own; moreover, he carried my Books for me, shone my Shoes, and was perfectly happy to assist me to dress. This servile Devotion, which did indeed inspire much reluctant Affection within my selfish Breast, began to seem all the more remarkable when I learned something of Simmins' Parentage, for his Mother had been the only Niece of a minor Baronet, and his

Station could have been something akin to mine had his Father been rich. But upon such Infelicities the World doth spin.

On Saturdaye, the fourth Daye of December, seventeen forty-five, Charles the Pretender, who had been Months causing Trouble in the North, captured Derby. These Tidings, which reached first Collerton, and then Shirelands later that Evening, filled our Household with Dread; and tho' Mrs H. instructed the Servants to hide both this Anxiety, and, more significantly, its Cause, from us, she was not successful. Opinion among them held that it could be only a few Houres before Charles presst South to London, and rustick as Shirelands' Location was, if he decided to take Oxford first, he would come dangerously near. The Spectre of War terrified me more horribly than the Fable of Raw-Head-and-Bloody-Bones had ever done; I found it impossible that Night to sleep.

At half-past four in the Morn I gave up the Assay, and left my bed Chamber to creep silent thro' the slumbering House to that of little Isaac Simmins, who would, I conceived, listen to my Worries with an attentive and sympathetic Ear, despite the Earliness of the Houre. I knocked more than once upon Simmins' Door, but he, who plainly was not suffering the Agonies I was, did not answer. I tried the Handle, and when to my Surprize I found the Door unlocked, I slippt quietly within and went to stand at Simmins' Bedside.

Isaac Simmins was indeed quite fast asleep. His Mouth was open, and his white Nightcap, which was too large for his young Head, was pulled down so low that it covered Eyes, Ears, and much of his Face, like a gallows Hood.

"Simmins," I whispered. "Isaac."

He did not move. I reached out, and gently pulled back the Cloth from his Face. It had initially been mine Intent, in doing so, to wake him, but in the Event I had not the Stomach to spoil so pretty and

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tender a Picture as that presented by the Sleeper. I stood back, and regarded Simmins with an almost proprietary Pride, as if we had been in Rome, and I an Emperor gazing fondly on his favourite Slave.

A disturbing Notion quickened then within my Mind, its Seed surely consisting in that horrible Anxiety which had forced me to rise out of my Bed. Suppose, I thought, a Stranger had crept into Simmins' Chamber instead of My Self; one of Charles Stuart's Rebels, a Spy, a Murderer; and suppose that it was he, not I, who stood here, looking silently and grimly down upon the Boy's defenseless Form. Would not he bend forwards, as I imagined My Self doing now, and close one Hand fast over Simmins' Mouth, thus, and his other hand upon his Throat, and press down remorselessly until the Boy's small Candle was snuffed out, and there was no Power on this Earth, scientific or otherwise, that could rekindle it?

The Notion terrified me, both in its Essence and in the Fact that it had been mine Imagination that gave it Birth. I backed violently away from Simmins, upon whose Body, really, I had not laid even the lightest Fingertip, and fled swift from his Chamber to hide behind the locked Door of mine own, where I cowered abed the Remainder of the Night in a trembling Sweat, my Senses all agog for any Whisper that might herald the Enemy's Advance, and the Horrour of my Phantasy becoming real.

By Mondaye Morning, after I had passt that Night, then one Daye and then another Night in this fearfully agitated State, mine Head was aching, and my Vision appeared darkly clouded, as if for me the Sunne had never risen, but hovered the whole Morn just below the Horizon. I struggled to concentrate in my Lessons, and the Time crawled.

JACK WOLF

Colonel Simmins began the Morning with a Focus upon the multiplication Table, in which I, usually, was fully fluent. Todaye, however, I struggled, and this, of Course, brought his Wrath down upon mine Head.

"Have you no Mind?" he demanded angrily. "To study todaye? Mayhap your Wits are not as sharp as you would have us believe. Dunderhead! Begin the Table over!"

I did so, and failed again to compleat the Task.

"Your Pride, Master Hart, verily hath come before a Fall," my Tutor remarked, with considerable Satisfaction.

"Egad!" I protested, stung. "How can I be expected to concentrate with Threat of War upon me?"

Colonel Simmins' Lip curled. "You have been forbidden, with good Reason, from listening to Servants' Gossip," he said. He had a Chill in his Voice that made me all at once to shudder, tho' I had no Idea why it should. My Tutor and I had not seen Eye-to-Eye about anything since the sorry Houre upon which we had met, and it was not unusual for him to address me coldly. "Speak impertinently of such vile Nonsense again, and I shall thrash you, Boy, and soundly."

After that, he set both his Son and My Self about the close Translation of a very long Passage from Suetonius on the Twelve Caesars, which he said must serve to recollect my wandering Wits, and forbade me say aught else, on any Topic, for the Remainder of the Daye.

So we sate in Silence until five o' the Clock, at which Point a curious Expression stole over the Visage of the Tutor, and without Explanation he departed from the school Room. I flung down my Quill and hurried to the narrow Window, where I peered out into the Black.

THE TALE OF RAW HEAD AND BLOODY BONES

"Wh-at are you d-oin, Master Hart?" Simmins inquired of me timidly, after a Moment or more during which I neither moved nor spoke.

"I am looking for the Scots," I said.

"But—" Simmins ventured, in a Tone of mild Remonstrance. "The Pretender's Army is M-iles away, Sir, and if my Father c-atches you away from your S-eat, he will be furious."

"Dost think," I said, turning about to stare at him, "your Father's Anger frightens me? The Scots are close, and you are a Fool if you don't believe they will be here Tonight. When they come, Simmins, their Displeasure will make your Father's a mere Sneeze by Comparison. As shall mine, an you question me again."

Simmins hung his Head. "'Sdeath, Isaac," I said, with a Sigh. "You are still a Puppy. Come here, I shall pat you on your Head."

Simmins left his Chair and came towards me, Head bowed, and knelt at my Feet. I smiled, remembering, for the nonce without any sinister Implication, the pretty Picture he had presented to me two Nights before, and I put mine Hand atop his shaggy Crown, ruffling his Hair. "Sweet as a sugar Plum," I said. "'Tis to be hoped the Rebels spare you."

I had said this joking, tho' cruelly; but as the Words left my Lips they seemed to fill the Aire like a Curse. My Terrour rushed back. Would the Scots spare Simmins? Would they spare me? Would the Intruder stand beside my Bed, and put his smothering Palm over my Mouth? I kept mine Hand on Simmins' Head, and turned mine Attention quickly back to the shrouded Dark beyond the window Pane. The Enemy was close; I could feel his encroaching Circle like a Noose about my Neck, drawing ever tighter. The Tutor had been a military Man, I thought. Surely, he must know the Foe was present? Surely, he did not underestimate the Danger?

A faint Sound echoed across the Distance: a low Drumming.
Drumming, Drumming.

Suddenly, I felt Simmins spring away; the school room Door opened, and Simmins' Father, mine erstwhile Tutor, stumbled into the Room, followed close at Hand by the Stench of Port Wine. At Sight of me, standing seemingly unoccupied beside the undraped Window, my Translation of Suetonius abandoned and mine open ink Pot drying out, he let out an infuriated Roar that put me in Mind of the Rector, and lurched forwards. "Get to your Work, Boy!"

I dodged out of the Way of his flailing Arm, and sate down in my Place as quick as Light, protesting that I had only been about the shortest of Pauses. The Tutor, glowering and sweating profusely underneath his heavy serge frock Coat, strode across the school Room to where I was sitting. Placing his meaty Hands full-square upon my Translation, he leaned forwards across the Desk and pushed his Face so close to mine own that I could see the tiny red Capillaries throbbing in his Eyeballs.

"You, Mr Hart, are a Disgrace," he spat. "A lazy, shiftless Wastrel of a Boy! How long have you been about this Suetonius? Young Isaac here—a mere Child of Eleven—he hath finished it! I doubt you have even read as far as Caligula! There will be no Supper for you tonight! You will stay seated, and you will work!"

The Drumming became suddenly much louder. I started, and upon an Instinct turned once more toward the approaching Danger, as doth a Coney when it heareth Hounds.

"What?" cried my Tutor. "Do you shrug, Sir?"

Seizing my Shoulders, he forced me roughly about, so that I was forced to face him.

"No," I protested. "'Tis—"

The Drumming became deafening; I marvelled that Colonel

THE TALE OF RAW HEAD AND BLOODY BONES

Simmins did not appear to hear it. Then the Notion struck me that perhaps he could; perhaps that was why he was shouting, why little Flecks of Spittle were collecting on his Chin, and why his Adam's Apple was straining against his thick white linen Stock. He was struggling to make himself heard above the Drumming.

"They are here!" I shouted.

"What, Sir?" Could not he hear me?

"The Scots!"

The Tutor appeared, for a Moment, quite confounded. Then a peculiar Expression, in mine Estimation sly, crosst his Face. Narrowing his Eyes, he said: "There are no Rebels here, Mr Hart."

This Assertion, which as far as I could tell was outright Lie, and the contemptuous Manner in which it was spoke, frightened me in my very Bowels. I suddenly perceived a very good Reason why Colonel Robert Simmins, Scotsman that he was, might not appear to care about, nay, even to hear the Drumming, which was now so forceful that the Walls about me vibrated upon every Beat. What Proof had I—indeed, what Proof had any of us that he was, verily, loyal to our King George? My Father, as far as I was aware, had taken him on after only the most cursory Inquiry into his History. He must be, I thought, an Enemy; a Spy in the Employ of Charles Stuart; or something much, much worse, and I dreaded what that could be.

Why had he been gone from the Room? Had he unlocked the Gate?

The Tutor returned to his Desk, and as I watched, terrified and appalled, he took out a birchen Cane. His Lip twitched. He took two Steps toward me. "Stand up, Mr Hart."

I did not move.

"Stand up!"

And then, all on a Sudden, to mine utter and undivided

JACK WOLF

Astonishment, as Colonel Simmins took one farther Step in my Direction, he shrank to a miniature Size, like a Man seen thro' the wrong End of a Telescope. His Voice sounded like the Squealing of a Rat. I remembered Nathaniel Ravenscroft summoning barn Owls at Sunneset, on the Backs of his Hands. The Ice in my Bowels turned to Water.

Before I knew it I was on my Feet, leaping across the Room, and I caught the white Switch in mine open Hand, wresting it easily from his Grip. "No!" I cried.

The Drumming beat about mine Ears, more furious than ever.

I gave the Birch an exploratory Swish thro' the Aire. I smiled. An Owl's Wingbeat. Somehow, by my sudden Leap, I had rid me of all Traces of the Terroure that hitherto had frozen me in my Place. The Cane whistled once more, in a Figure of Eight; Infinity before mine Eyes. The Tutor was a ridiculous Homunculus; a Gnome.

Witchcraft! I thought. 'Tis Scottish Witchcraft! I hissed at the Idea, like a Countryman banishing Evil.

To mine Amazement, at my Making of this Sound, the Gnome began to edge away, backing slowly across the Floor, as if it were afraid. "What, little Spy!" I cried. "So, art frightened of me, now! I will give you a fine Message to take to your Pretender!" I advanced upon it, the Cane high in mine Hand.

All at once, little Simmins leapt up from his Chair and interposed himself between My Self and the small, jabbering Creature, which seemed, in mine Estimation, to be heading for the Doorway.

"Mr H-art, calm d-own," he said, putting his small Hands softly upon my Cheeks and turning mine Head, so that I was induced to look at him. "Please calm d-own, S-ir. They will send me away from you."

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"Pretty Simmins," I said. "I will not let him hurt you."

Mine Attention had been diverted from the Gnome for no longer than a Second, yet when I looked back I saw to my Surprise that it had grown again to man-Size. This pleased me, for there had been a small Part of me that had thought it unfair to have whipt so meagre and defenseless a Sprite, no Matter what Crime it had committed. I had now no Qualm; I steppt past little Simmins, and thrusting the Tutor face-first into the heavy Door, brought down the Switch upon his Back. A Grunt broke from his Lips; his clumsy Fingers struggled with the Latch.

I whipt him hard again, and then a third Time; but then something, perhaps Pity, stayed mine Hand. I steppt back, lowering mine Arm. The Tutor scrabbled at the Door a Minute longer, but it appeared to be stuck. I did not move. Finally, he turned slowly about, and eyed me with an affrighted Craftiness, like a threatened Rat.

"The Birch," he finally demanded. His Eyes danced over my Shoulder, searching for Escape. I stared at him.

"No," I said. And I shrugged.

"You," the Tutor squeaked, "are in Trouble, Boy; give me the Birch."

I leapt forward half a Pace, brandishing mine Hand as if to take him at his Word, really only to see what he might do; at once the Tutor gave a Yelp, and cowered, his Arms covering his Head and his Expression terrified. Pity had stayed mine Hand; Contempt now enraged it. "Faugh!" I spat. "You deserve none of my Compassion, Rat! Gnome! Spy!"

Dropping the Cane, I leapt forward and seized him by the Throat, forcing him rough against the plastered Wall of the school Room. "Brute," I said. "Shalt profit from thine own Teaching."

JACK WOLF

I drew back my Fist and punched him in the Mouth, once, twice, I know not how many Times. Sweet Calm descended on me. I did not stop. I did not want to stop. The Drums, in mine Ears, rolled on and on.

Many Weeks after this, long after Charles Stuart—who never, in Reality, came any farther South than Derby—had retreated, it was explained to me, slowly and carefully, that this violent Episode had been the Result of my being on a Sudden taken ill. With what Disease, I was My Self uncertain; although my Father's Physician, who was possesst of a mediaeval Mind, had diagnosed that I was suffering from a Surfeit of the Choleric and Melancholic Humours. He prescribed a Treatment of compleat Rest, frequent Bleeding, and a very careful Diet, by which means the Balance of the Fluxes was to be restored. I was required moreover to shun anything that would stimulate the production of the yellow Bile and the black, and also to ensure that the Phlegm did not become too pre-eminent.

When Mrs H. and the under-Footman had pulled me off, the Tutor's Eyes had been purple and his Nose bleeding badly. He had subsequently departed, with a golden Reference and considerably more than his full Wage; and my Father having now lost both Patience with and Confidence in the Notion that I could successfully be tutored, he was not replaced. The Freedom that I had thus now regained suited me perfectly and, I am sure, kept the Ratio of mine Humours in appropriate Order. For a little while I missed young Isaac Simmins, who had been more of a Comfort to me than I had admitted to My Self, but this soon passed. The Drumming, which, it seemed, had been some Manner of

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Hallucination within mine own Head, quickly faded. By New Yeare, which fell, then, at the Latter End of March, I was quite well; by May I was back in Church and, by July, to my immense Surprize, a welcome Visitor at the Rectory; so perhaps it was inevitable that by that August of seventeen forty-six I was, once again, roaming the Countryside with Nathaniel Ravenscroft.