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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE DEW OF THEIR YOUTH ***

THE DEW OF THEIR YOUTH

BY
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AUTHOR OF
'THE LILAC SUNBONNET,' 'THE BLACK DOUGLAS,' 'STRONG MAC,'
'ROSE OF THE WILDERNESS,' ETC.

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PART I

CHAPTER I

THE HAUNTED HOUSE OF MARNHOUL

I, Duncan MacAlpine, school-master's son and uncovenanted assistant to my father, stood watching the dust which the Highflyer coach had left between me and Sandy Webb, the little guard thereof, as he whirled onward into the eye of the west. It was the hour before afternoon school, and already I could hear my father's voice within declaiming as to unnecessary datives and the lack of all feeling for style in the Latin prose of the seniors.

A score of the fifth class, next in age and rank, were playing at rounders in an angle of the court, and I was supposed to be watching them. In reality I was more interested in a group of tall girls who were patrolling up and down under the shade of the trees at the head of their playground—where no boy but I dare enter, and even I only officially. For in kindly Scots fashion, the Eden Valley Academy was not only open to all comers of both sexes and ages, but was set in the midst of a wood of tall pines, in which we seniors were permitted to walk at our guise and pleasure during the "intervals."

Here the ground was thick and elastic with dry pine needles, two or three feet of them firmly compacted, and smelling delightfully of resin after a shower. Indeed, at that moment I was interested enough to let the boys run a little wild at their game, because, you see, I had found out within the last six months that girls were not made only to be called names and to put out one's tongue at.

There was, in especial, one—a dark, slim girl, very lissom of body and the best runner in the school. She wore a grey-green dress of rough stuff hardly ankle-long, and once when the bell-rope broke and I had sprained my ankle she mounted instead of me, running along the rigging of the roofs to ring the bell as active as a lamplighter. I liked her for this, also because she was pretty, or at least the short grey-green dress made her look it. Her name was Gertrude Gower, but Gerty Greensleeves was what she was most frequently called, except, of course, when I called the roll before morning and afternoon.

I had had a talk with Sandy Webb, the guard, as he paused to take in the mails. My father was also village postmaster, but, though there was a girl in the office to sell stamps and revenue licences, and my mother behind to say "that she did not know" in reply to any question whatsoever, I was much more postmaster than my father, though I suppose he really had the responsibility.

Sandy Webb always brought a deal of news to Eden Valley. And as I had official and private dealings with him—the public relating to way-bills and bag-receipts, and the private to a noggin of homebrewed out of the barrel in the corner of our cellar—he always gave me the earliest news, before he hurried away—as it were, the firstlings of the flock.

"There's a stir at Cairn Edward," he said casually, as he set down his wooden cup. "John Aitken, the mason, has fallen off a scaffolding and broken——"

"Not his leg?" I interrupted anxiously, for John was a third cousin of my mother's.

"No, more miraculous than that!" the guard averred serenely.

"His back?" I gasped—for John Aitken, as well as a relation, was a fellow-elder of my father's, and the two often met upon sacramental occasions.

"No," said Sandy, enjoying his grave little surprise, "only the trams of his mortar-barrow! And there's that noisy tinkler body, Tim Cleary, the Shire Irishman, in the lock-up for wanting to fight the Provost of Dumfries, and he'll get eight days for certain. But the Provost is paying the lodgings of his wife and family in the meantime. It will be a rest for them, poor things."

It was at this moment that Sandy Webb, square, squat, many-wrinkled man, sounded his horn and swung himself into his place as the driver, Andrew Haugh, gathered up his reins. But I knew his way, and waited expectantly. He always kept the pick of his news to the end, then let it off like a fire-cracker, and departed in a halo of dusty glory.

"Your private ghost is making himself comfortable over yonder at the Haunted House. I saw the reek of his four-hours fire coming up blue out of the chimbley-top as we drove past!"

It was thus that the most notable news of a decade came to Eden Valley. The Haunted House—we did not need to be told—was Marnhoul, a big, gaunt mansion, long deserted, sunk in woods, yet near enough to the Cairn Edward road to be visible in stray round towers and rows of chimneys, long unblackened by fire of kitchen or parlour. It had a great forest behind it, on the verges of which a camp of woodcutters and a rude saw-mill had long been established, eating deeper and deeper in, without, however, seeming to make any more difference than a solitary mouse might to a granary.

We boys knew all about the Haunted House. Since our earliest years it had been the very touchstone of courage to go to the gate on a moonlight night, hold the bars and cry three times, "I'm no feared!" Some had done this, I myself among the number. But—though, of course, being a school-master's son, I did not believe in ghosts—I admit that the return journey was the more pleasant of the two, especially after I got within cry of the dwellings of comfortable burgesses,

and felt the windows all alight on either side of me, so near that I could almost touch them with my hand.

Not that I *saw* anything! I knew from the first it was all nonsense. My father had told me so a score of times. But having been reared in the superstitious Galloway of the ancient days—well, there are certain chills and creeps for which a man is not responsible, inexplicable twitchings of the hairy scalp of his head, maybe even to the breaking of a cold sweat over his body, which do not depend upon belief. I kept saying to myself, “There is nothing! I do not believe a word of it! ‘Tis naught but old wives’ fables!” But, all the same, I took with a great deal of thankfulness the dressing-down I had got from my father for being late for home lessons on a trigonometry night. You see, I was born and reared in Galloway, and I suppose it was just what they have come to call in these latter days “the influence of environment.”

Well, at that moment, who should come up but Jo Kettle, a good fellow and friend of mine, but of no account in the school, being a rich farmer’s son, who was excused from taking Latin because he was going to succeed his father in the farm. Jo had a right to the half of my secrets, because we both liked Gerty Greensleeves pretty well; and I was certain that she cared nothing about Jo, while Jo could swear that she counted me not worth a button.

So I told Jo Kettle about the Haunted House, and he was for starting off there and then. But it was perfectly evident that I could not with these fifth class boys to look after, and afternoon school just beginning. And if I could not, I was very sure that he had better not. More than once or twice I had proved that it was his duty to do as I said. Jo understood this, but grew so excited that he bolted into school in a moment with the noise of a runaway colt. His entrance disarranged the attention of the senior Latiners of the sixth. My father frowned, and said, “What do you mean, boy, by tumbling through the classroom door like a cart of bricks? Come quietly; and sit down, Agnes Anne!”

This was my poor unfortunate sister, aged fourteen, whom a pitiless parent compelled to do classics with the senior division.

Jo Kettle sat down and pawed about for his mensuration book, which he studied for some time upside down. Then he extracted his box of instruments from his bag and set himself to do over again a proposition with which he had been familiar for weeks. This, however, was according to immemorial school-boy habit, and sometimes succeeded with my father, who was dreamy wherever the classics were not concerned, and regarded a mere land-measuring agricultural scholar as outside the bounds of human interest, if not of Christian charity.

In two minutes my father was again immersed in Horace, which (with Tacitus) was his chief joy. Then Jo leaned nearer to Agnes Anne and whispered the dread news about the Haunted House. My sister paled, gasped, and clutched at the desk. Jo, fearful that she would begin, according to the sympathetic school phrase, “to cluck like a hen,” threatened first to run the point of his compasses into her if she did not sit up instantly; and then, this treatment proving quite inadequate to the occasion, he made believe to pour ink upon her clean cotton print, fresh put on that morning. This brought Agnes Anne round, and, with a face still pale, she asked for details. Jo supplied them in a voice which the nearness of my father reduced to a whisper. He sat with his fingers and thumbs making an isosceles triangle and his eyes gently closed, while he listened to the construing of Fred Esquillant, the pale-faced genius of the school. At such times my father almost purred with delight, and Agnes Anne said that it was “just sweet to watch him.” But even this pleasure palled before the tidings from the Haunted House as edited and expanded by Jo Kettle.

“Yes, Duncan had told him, and Sandy Webb had told *him*. There were daylight ghosts abroad about Marnhoul. Everybody on the coach had seen them——”

“What were they like?” queried Agnes Anne in an awestruck whisper; so well poised, however, that it only reached Jo’s ear, and never caused my enraptured father to wink an eyelid. I really believe that, like a good Calvinist with a sound minister tried and proven, my father allowed himself a little nap by way of refreshment while Fred Esquillant was construing.

Nothing loath, Jo launched headlong into the grisly. Through the matted undergrowth of years, over the high-spiked barriers of the deer-park, the Highflyer had seen not only the familiar Grey Lady in robes of rustling silk (through which you could discern the gravel and weeds on the path), but little green demons with chalk-white heads and long ears. These leaped five-barred gates and pursued the coach and its shrieking inmates as far as the little Mains brook that passes the kirk door at the entrance of the village. Then there was a huge, undistinct, crawling horror, half sea-serpent, half slow-worm, that had looked at them over the hedge, and, flinging out a sudden loop, had lassoed Peter Chafts, the running footman, whose duty it was to leap down and clear stones out of the horses’ hoofs. Whether Little Peter had been recovered or not, Jo Kettle very naturally could not tell. How, indeed, could he? But, with an apparition like that, it was not at all probable.

Jo was preparing a further instalment, including clanking chains, gongs that sounded unseen in the air, hands that gripped the passengers and tried to pull them from their seats—all the wild tales of Souter Gowans, the village cobbler, and of ne’er-do-well farm lads, idle and reckless, whose word would never have been taken in any ordinary affair of life. Jo had not time, however, for Agnes Anne had a strong imagination, coupled with a highly nervous organization. She laughed out suddenly, in the middle of a solemn Horatian hush, a wild, hysterical laugh, which brought my father to his feet, broad awake in a second. The class gazed open-mouthed, the pale face of Fred Esquillant alone twitching responsively.

"What have you been saying to Agnes Anne MacAlpine?" demanded my father, who would sooner have resigned than been obliged to own son or daughter as such in school-time.

"Nothing!" said Jo Kettle, speaking according to the honour that obliges schoolboys to untruth as a mode of professional honour. Then Jo, seeing the frown on the master's face, and forestalling the words that were ready to come from his lips, "But, sirrah, I saw you!" amended hastily, "At least, I was only asking Agnes Anne to sit a little farther along!"

"What!" cried my father, with the snap of the eye that meant punishment, "to sit farther along, when you had no interest in this classical lesson, sir—a lesson you are incapable of understanding, and—all the length of an empty bench at your left hand! You shall speak with me at the close of the lesson, and that, sirrah, is now! The class is dismissed! I shall have the pleasure of a little interview with Master Joseph Kettle, student of mensuration."

Jo had his interview, in which figured a certain leathern strap, called "Lochgelly" after its place of manufacture—a branch of native industry much cursed by Scottish school-children. "Lochgelly" was five-fingered, well pickled in brine, well rubbed with oil, well used on the boys, but, except by way of threat, unknown to the girls. Jo emerged tingling but triumphant. Indeed, several new ideas had occurred to him. Eden Valley Academy stood around and drank in the wondrous tale with all its ears and, almost literally, with one mouth. Jo Kettle told the story so well that I well-nigh believed it myself. He even turned to me for corroboration.

"Didn't he tell you that, Duncan? That was the way of it, eh, Duncan?"

I denied, indeed, and would have stated the truth as it was in Guard Webb. But my futile and feeble negations fell unheeded, swept away by the pour of Jo's circumstantial lying.

Finally he ran off into the village and was lost to sight. I have little doubt that he played truant, in full recognition of pains and penalties to come, for the mere pleasure of going from door to door and "raising the town," as he called it. I consoled myself by the thought that he would find few but womenfolk at home at that hour, while the shopkeepers would have too much consideration for their tills and customers to follow a notorious romancer like Jo on such a fool's errand.

I cannot tell how that afternoon's lessons were got over in Eden Valley Academy. The hum of disturbance reached even the juniors, skulking peacefully under little Mr. Stephen, the assistant. Only Miss Huntingdon, in the Infant Department, remained quiet and neat as a dove new-preened among her murmuring throng of unconscious little folk.

But in the senior school, though I never reported a boy to my father (preferring to postpone his case for private dealing in the playground), the lid of the desk was opened and snapped sharply every five minutes to give exit and entrance to "Lochgelly." Seldom have I seen my father so roused. He hated not to understand everything that was going on in the school. He longed to ask me what I knew about it, but, according to his habit, generously forbore, lest he should lead me to tell tales upon my fellows. For, though actually junior assistant to my father, I was still a scholar, which made my position difficult indeed. To me it seemed as if the clock on the wall above the fireplace would never strike the hour of four.

CHAPTER II

"IN THE NAME OF THE LAW!"

At last—at last! The door between the seniors and Mr. Stephen's juniors was thrown open. My father, making his usual formal bow to his assistant, said, "When you are ready, Mr. Stephen!" And Mr. Stephen was always ready. Then with his back to the hinges of the door, and his strong black beard with the greying strands in it set forward at an angle, Mr. John MacAlpine, head-master of Eden Valley Academy, said a few severe words on the afternoon's lack of discipline, and prophesied in highly coloured language the exemplary manner in which any repetition of it would be treated on the morrow. Then he doubled all home lessons, besides setting a special imposition to each class. Having made this clear, he hoped that the slight token of his displeasure might assure us of his intention to do his duty by us faithfully, and then, with the verse of a chanted psalm we were let go.

Class by class defiled with rumble of boots and tramp of wooden-soled clogs, the boys first, the girls waiting till the outside turmoil had abated—but, nevertheless, as anxious as any to be gone. I believe we expected to tumble over slow serpents and nimble spectres coming visiting up the school-loaning, or coiling in festoons among the tall Scotch firs at the back of the playground.

We of the sixth class were in the rear—I last of all, for I had to lock away the copybooks, turn

the maps to the wall, and give my father the key. *But* I had warned the other seniors that they were not to start without me.

And then, what a race! A bare mile it was, through the thick fringes of woods most of the way—as soon, that is, as we were out of the village. Along the wall of the Deer Park we ran, where we kept instinctively to the far side of the road. We of the highest class were far in front—I mean those of us who kept the pace. The Fifth had had a minute or two start of us, so they were ahead at first, but we barged through their pack without mercy, scattering them in all directions.

There at last was the gate before us. We had reached it first. Five of us there were, Sam Gordon, Ivie Craig, Harry Stoddart, Andrew Clark and myself—yes, there was another—that forward Gerty Greensleeves, who had kilted her rough grey-green dress and run with the best, all to prove her boast that, but for the clothes she had to wear, she was as good a runner as the best boy there. Indeed, if the truth must be told, she could outrun all but me.

The tall spikes, the massive brass padlock, green with weathering, in which it was doubtful if any key would turn, the ancient “Notice to Trespassers,” massacred by the stones of home-returning schoolboys—these were all that any of us could see at first. The barrier of the deer-park wall was high and unclimbable. The massy iron of the gates looked as if it had not been stirred for centuries.

But a tense interest held us all spellbound. We could see nothing but some stray glimpses of an ivy-clad wall. A weathercock, that had once been gilded, stood out black against the evening sky. The Grey Lady in the rustling silk, through whom you could see the rain drops splash on the gravel stones, was by no means on view. No green demons leaped these sullen ten-foot barricades, and no forwandered sea-serpent threw oozy wimples on the green-sward or hissed at us between the rusty bars.

It was, at first, decidedly disappointing. We ordered each other to stop breathing so loudly, after our burst of running. We listened, but there was not even the sough of wind through the trees—nothing but the beating of our own hearts.

What had we come out to see? Apparently nothing. The school considered itself decidedly “sold,” and as usual prepared to take vengeance, first upon Jo Kettle and then, as that youth still persisted in a discreet absence of body, on myself.

“You spoke to Sandy Webb, the guard,” said Gertrude-of-the-Sleeves, scowling upon me; “what did he say?”

Before I could answer Boyd Connoway, the village do-nothing, enterprising idler and general boys’ abettor, beckoned us across the road. He was on the top of a little knoll, thick with the yellow of broom and the richer orange of gorse. Here he had stretched himself very greatly at his ease. For Boyd Connoway knew how to wait, and he was waiting now. Hurry was nowhere in Boyd’s dictionary. Not that he had ever looked.

In a moment we were over the dyke, careless of the stones that we sent trickling down to afflict the toes of those who should come after us. We stood on the top of the mound. Connoway disturbed himself just enough to sit up for our sakes, which he would not have done for a dozen grown men. He removed the straw from his mouth, and pointed with it to the end chimney nearest to the great wood of Marnhoul.

We gazed earnestly, following the straw and gradually we could see, rising into the still air an unmistakable “pew” of palest blue smoke—which, as we looked, changed into a dense white pillar that rose steadily upwards, detaching itself admirably against the deep green black of the Scotch firs behind.

“There,” said Connoway gravely, “yonder is your ghost mending his fire!”

We stood at gaze, uncomprehending, too astonished for speech. We had come, even the unbelievers of us, prepared for the supernatural, for something surpassingly eery, and anything so commonplace as the smoke of a fire was a surprise greater than the sight of all Jo Kettle’s imaginations coming at us abreast.

Yet the people who owned the great house of Marnhoul were far away—few had ever seen any of them. Their affairs were in the hands of a notable firm of solicitors in Dumfries. How any mortal could have entered that great abode, or inhabited it after the manner of men, was beyond all things inexplicable. But there before us the blue reek continued to mount, straight as a pillar, till it reached the level of the trees on the bank behind, when a gentle current of air turned it sharply at right angles to the south.

Now we heard the tramp of many feet, and beneath us we saw Jo Kettle with half-a-dozen of his father’s workers, and the village constable to make sure that all was done in due and proper order. To these was joined a crowd of curious townsmen, eager for any new thing. All were armed to the teeth with rusty cutlasses and old horse pistols, which, when loaded, made the expedition one of no inconsiderable peril.

The man with the crowbar applied it to the rusty chain of the padlock. Two others assisted him, but instead of breaking the chain, the iron standard of the gate crumbled into so much flaky iron rust, while padlock and attachments swung free upon the other. It was easy enough to enter after that.

“In the name of the law!” cried the constable, taking a little staff with a silver crown upon it in his hand. And at the word the gate creaked open and the crowd pressed in.

But the constable held up his hand.

“In the name of the law,’ I said. I *might* have put it, ‘In the King’s name,’ but what I meant was that we are to proceed in decency and order—no unseemly rabbling, scuffling, or mischief making—otherwise ye have me to reckon with. Let no word of ghosts and siclike be heard. The case is infinitely more serious—”

“Hear to Jocky wi’ his langnebbit words!” whispered Boyd Connoway in my ear.

“Infinitely more so, I say. It is evident to the meanest capacity—”

“Evidently!” whispered Connoway, grinning.

—that a dangerous band of smugglers or burglars is in possession of the mansion of Marnhoul, and we must take them to a man!”

These words brought about a marked hesitation in the rear ranks, a wavering, and a tendency to slip away through the breach of the broken gate into the road.

“Halt there,” cried Constable Black, holding the staff of office high. “I call upon you, every man, to assist his Majesty’s officers. You are special constables, as soon as I get time to swear you in. Praise be, here’s good Maister Kettle! He’s a Justice of the Peace. He will hold you to it now and be my witness if ye refuse lawful aid. Now, forward! Quick march!”

15

And this formidable armed band took its way along the overgrown gravel avenue up to the front of the great house of Marnhoul. We boys (and Greensleeves close to my elbow) played along the flanks like skirmishers. All our spiritual fears were abated. At the name of the law, and specially after the display of the silver-crowned staff, we entered joyously into the game. If it had only been the arm of flesh we had to encounter, we were noways afraid—though it was a sad downcome from the solemn awe of coming to grips with the prince of darkness and his emissaries.

“You that have pistols that will go off, round with you to guard the back doors!” cried Constable John Black. “It’s there the thieves have taken up their abode. The smoke is coming from the kitchen lum. I see it well. The rest, not so well armed, bide here with me under the protection of the law!”

And with that Constable Black, commonly called Jocky, elevated once more his staff in the air, and marched boldly to the fatal door. He went up the steps by which the Grey Lady was wont to descend to the clear moonlight to take her airing in the wood. A little behind went Connoway, in the same manner holding a “bourtrees” pop-gun which he had just been fashioning for some lucky callant of his acquaintance.

Almost for the first time in his life Boyd Connoway had all the humour to himself. Nobody laughed at his imitation of Officer Jocky’s pompous ways. They would do it afterwards in the safety of their own dwellings and about the winter fire. But not now—by no means now.

16

Even though supported by the majestic power of the law, the crowd kept respectfully edging behind wall and trees. Their eyes were directed warily upwards to the long array of windows from which (legend recounted) the Maitlands of Marnhoul had once during the troubles of the Covenant successfully defended themselves against the forces of the Crown.

Now be it understood once for all, the inhabitants of Eden Valley were peaceful and loyal citizens, except perhaps in what concerned the excise laws and the ancient and wholesome practice of running cargoes of dutiable goods without troubling his Majesty’s excise officers about the matter. But they did not wish to support the law at the peril of their lives.

An irregular crackle of shots, the smashing of window glass in the back of the mansion, with two or three hurrahs, put some courage into them. On the whole it seemed less dangerous to get close in under the great vaulted porch. There, at least, they could not be reached by shot from the windows, while out in the open or under the uncertain shelter of tree boles, who knew what might happen? So there was soon a compact phalanx about the man in authority.

Constable Black, being filled with authority direct from the Lord-Lieutenant of the County, certainly had the instinct of magnifying his office. He raised his arm and knocked three times on the bleached and blistered panels of the great front door.

“Open, I command you! In the name of the law!” he shouted.

After the knocking there befell a pause, as it might be of twenty breaths—though nobody seemed to draw any. Such a silence of listening have I never heard. Yes, we heard it, and the new burst of firing from the rear of the house, the cheers of the excited assailants hardly seemed to break it, so deeply was our attention fixed on that great weather-beaten door of the Haunted House of Marnhoul.

17

Again Jocky, his face lint-white, and his voice coming and going jerkily, cried aloud the great name of the law. Again there was silence, deeper and longer than before.

At last from far within came a pattering as of little feet, quick and light. We heard the bolts withdrawn one by one, and as the wards of the lock rasped and whined, men got ready their weapons. The door swung back and against the intense darkness of the wide hall, with the light of evening on their faces, stood a girl in a black dress and crimson sash, holding by the hand a little boy of five, with blue eyes and tight yellow curls.

Both were smiling, and before them all that tumultuary array fell away as from something supernatural. The words “In the name of—” were choked on the lips of the constable. He even

dropped his silver-headed staff, and turned about as if to flee. As for us we watched with dazzled eyes the marvels that had so suddenly altered the ideas of all men as to the Haunted House of Marnhoul.

But for a space no one moved, no one spoke. Only the tall young girl and the little child stood there, like children of high degree receiving homage on the threshold of their own ancestral mansion, facing the lifted bonnets and the pikes lowered as if in salutation.

CHAPTER III

MISS IRMA GIVES AN AUDIENCE

"My name is Irma Maitland, and this is my brother Louis!" Such were the famous words with which, in response to law and order in the person of Constable Jacky Black, the tall smiling girl in the doorway of the Haunted House of Marnhoul saluted her "rescuers."

"And how came you to be occupying this house?" demanded Mr. Josiah Kettle, father of Joseph the inventive. He was quite unaware of the ghastly terrors with which his son had peopled the Great House, but as the largest farmer on the estate he felt it to be his duty to protect vested rights.

"In the same way that you enter your house," said the girl; "we came in with a key, and have been living here ever since!"

"Are you not feared?" piped a voice from the crowd. It was afterwards found that it was Kettle junior who had spoken.

"Afraid!" answered the girl scornfully, holding her head higher than ever; "do you think that a few foolish people firing at our windows could make us afraid? Can they, Louis?" And as she spoke she looked fondly down at her little brother.

He drew nearer to his sister, looking up at her with a winning confidence, and said in as manly a voice as he could compass, "Certainly not, Irma! But—tell them not to do it any more!"

"You hear what my brother says," said the girl haughtily. "Let there be no more of this!"

"But—in right of law and order, I must know more about this!" cried Constable Jacky, lifting up his staff again. Somehow, however, the magic had gone from his words. Every one now knew that his thunder had a hollow sound.

"Ah, you are the *gendarme*—the official—the officer!" said the tall girl, with a more pronounced foreign accent than before, making him a little bow; "please go and tell your superiors that we are here because the place belongs to us—at least to my brother, and that I am staying to take care of him."

"But how did you come?" persisted the man in authority.

The tall girl looked over his head. Her glance, clear, cool, penetrating, scanned face after face, and then she said, as it were, regretfully, "There are no gentlefolk among you?"

There was the slightest shade of inquiry about words which might have seemed rude as a mere affirmation. Then she appeared to answer for herself, still with the same tinge of sadness faintly colouring her pride. "For this reason I cannot tell you how we came to be here."

Mr. Josiah Kettle felt called upon to assert himself.

"I have reason to believe," he said pompously, "that I am as good as any on the estate in the way of being a gentleman—me and my son Joseph. I am a Justice of the Peace, under warrant of the Crown, and so one day will my son Joseph—Jo, you rascal, come off that paling!"

But just then Jo Kettle had other fish to fry. From the bad eminence of the garden palisade he was devouring the new-comer with his eyes. As for me, I had shaken the hand of the lately adored Greensleeves from my arm.

The girl's glance stayed for an instant and no more upon the round and rosy countenance of Mr. Josiah Kettle, Justice of the Peace. She smiled upon him indulgently, but shook her head.

"I am sorry," she said, with gentle condescension, "that I cannot tell anything more to you. You are one of the people who broke our windows!"

Then Josiah Kettle unfortunately blustered.

"If you will not, young madam," he cried, "I can soon send them to you who will make you answer."

The young lady calmly took out of her pocket a dainty pair of ivory writing tablets, such as only

the minister of the parish used in all Eden Valley, and he only because he had married a great London lady for his wife.

"I shall be glad of the name and address of the persons to whom you refer!" said Miss Irma (for so from that moment I began to call her in my heart).

"The factors and agents for this estate," Josiah Kettle enunciated grandly. The writing tablets were shut up with a snap of disappointment.

"Oh, Messrs. Smart, Poole & Smart," she said. "Why, I have known them ever since I was as high as little Louis."

Then she smiled indulgently upon Mr. Kettle, with something so easily grand and yet so sweet that I think the hearts of all went out to her.

"I suppose," she said, "that really you thought you were doing right in coming here and firing off guns without permission. It must be an astonishing thing for you to see this house of the Maitlands inhabited after so long. I do not blame your curiosity, but I fear I must ask you to send a competent man to repair our windows. For that we hold you responsible, Mr. Officer, and you, Mr. Justice of the Peace—you and your son Jo! Don't we, Louis?"

"I will see to that myself!" a voice, the same that had spoken before, came from the crowd. Miss Irma searched the circle without, however, coming to a conclusion. I do think that her glance lingered longer on my face than on any of the others, perhaps because Gerty Greensleeves was leaning on my shoulder and whispering in my ear. (What a nuisance girls are, sometimes!) So the glance passed on, with something in it at once calm and simple and high.

"If any of the gentlefolk of our station will call upon us," she went on, "we will tell *them* how we came to be here—the clergyman of the parish—or—" here she hesitated for the first time, "or his wife."

Instinctively she seemed to feel the difficulty. "Though we are not of their faith!" she added, smiling once more as with the air of serene condescension she had shown all through.

Then she nodded, and swept a curtsey with an undulating grace which I thought to be adorable, in spite of the suspicion of irony in it.

"Good-bye, good people," she said, letting her eyes again run the circuit of the sea of faces, reinforced by those who had been firing their blunderbusses and horse-pistols (now carefully concealed) so uselessly at the back windows of the house. "We are obliged for your visit. Salute them, Louis!"

Obediently the child carried his hand to the curls on his brow in the same fashion I had seen soldiers do at the militia training on the Dumfries sands, but with the same smilingly tolerant air of receiving and acknowledging the homage of vassals which both of them had shown from the beginning.

Then Miss Irma smiled upon us all once more, nodded to me (I am sure of it), and without another word, shut the door in our faces.

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CHAPTER IV

FIRST FOOT IN THE HAUNTED HOUSE

To understand what a sensation these strange events made in Eden Valley, it is necessary that you should know something of Eden Valley itself and how it was governed.

Governed, you say? Was it not within the King's dominions, and governed like every other part of these his Majesty's kingdoms? Had we of the Wide Valley risen against constituted authority and filled all Balcary Bay between Isle Rathan and the Red Haven with floating tea-chests?

Well, not exactly; but many a score of stealthy cargoes had been carried past our doors on horse-back, pony-back, shelty-back—up by Bluehills and over the hip of Ben Tudor. And often, often from the Isle of Man fleet had twenty score of barrels been dropped overboard just in time to prevent the minions of the law, as represented by H.M. ship *Seamew*, sloop-of-war, from seizing them. So you will observe that the revolt of Eden Valley against authority, though not quite so complete as that of the late New England colonies, yet proceeded from the same motives.

Only, as it typo happened, the tea-chests which were spilt in Boston Harbour were finished so far as the brewing of tea was concerned, while the kegs and firkins dropped overboard were easily recoverable by such as were in the secret. In a day or two, the tide being favourable and the nights dark enough, these same kegs would be found reposing in bulk in the recesses of

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Brandy Knowe, next by Collin Mill—save for a few, left in well defined places—one being left at the Manse for the Doctor himself. That was within the very wall of the kirkyard, and under the shadow of the clump of yews which had dripped upon the tombstones that covered at least three of his predecessors. A second reposed under the prize cabbages belonging to General Johnstone (who, as a young officer of Marines, had simulated the courage of Admiral Byng before Minorca, and like that gallant seaman, narrowly escaped being shot for his pains). General Johnstone's gardener knew well where this keg was hidden. But it contained liquid well-nigh sacred in the eyes of his master, and he had far too much common-sense ever to presume to find it. A third came to anchor under a peat-stack belonging to Mr. Shepstone Oglethorpe, the only Episcopalian within the parish bounds, and the descendent of an English military family which had once held possession of the Maitland estates during the military dragonnades of Charles II and James II, but had been obliged to restore the mansion and most of the property after the Prince of Orange made good his landing with his "Protestant wind" at Torbay. Enough, however, remained to make Mr. Shepstone Oglethorpe the next man in the parish after the minister and the General. He was, besides, a pleasant, gossipy, young-old, fluttery bachelor—a great acquisition at four-hours tea-drinkings, and much more of a praise to them that do well than any sort of a terror to evil-doers.

These three constituted the general staff of our commonwealth, and in spite of occasional forgetfulnesses as to the declaration of the aforesaid kegs, parcels of French silks and Malines lace, to H.M.'s Supervisor of Customs, King George had no more loyal subjects than these highest authorities in Eden Valley, ecclesiastical, military and civil. Then, after due interval, came the farmers of Eden Valley, honest, far-seeing, cautious men, slow of action, slower still of speech—not at all to be judged by the standard of the richest of them, Mr. Josiah Kettle. He was, in fact, a mere incomer, who had been promoted a Justice of the Peace because, on the occasion of the last scare as to a French invasion, he had made and carried out large and remunerative contracts for the supply of the militia and other troops hastily got together to protect the Solway harbours from Dryffe Sands to the Back Shore.

The siege of the Haunted House of Marnhoul happened on a Friday, the last school-keeping day of the week. Saturday was employed by the parish in digesting the news and forming opinions for the consumpt of the morrow. Meantime there was a pretty steady stream of the curious along the Marnhoul road, but the padlock had been replaced, and only the broken bar bore token of the storm which had passed that way.

On Sunday, however, a small oblong scrap of white attracted the attention of the nearer curious. It was attached, at about the level of the eyes, to the unbroken bar of the gate of Marnhoul, and on being approached with due care, was found to bear the following mysterious inscription—

"Sir Louis Maitland of Marnhoul, Bart., and Miss Irma Sobieski Maitland receive every afternoon from 2 to 5."

Marnhoul, Galloway, June 21.

"Keep us a'!" was the universal exclamation of Eden Valley as it read this solemnizing inscription. It was generally believed to be a challenge to the lawyers and the powers in general to come at these hours and turn the young people out.

And many were the opinions as to the legality of such a course. Law was not generally understood in the Galloway of that date, and though the Sheriff Substitute rode through the village once a month to spend a night over the "cartes" with his friend the General, he too only laughed and rode on. He was well known to me at the head of his profession, and to have the ear of the Government. Such studied indifference, therefore, could only be put down to a desire to wink at the proceedings of the children, illegal and unprecedented as these might be.

But I must now say something about my own folk.

Though undoubtedly originally Highland, and, as my father averred, able to claim kindred with the highest of his name, the MacAlpines had long been domiciled in the south. My father was the son of a neighbouring minister, and had only escaped the fate of succeeding his father in the charge by a Highland aversion to taking the sacrament at the age when he was called upon to do so—in order that, by the due order of the Church of Scotland, he might be taken on his trials as a student in Divinity. He had also, about that date, further complicated matters by marrying my mother, Grace Lyon, the penniless daughter of a noted Cameronian elder of the parish of Eden Valley.

In order to support her, and (after a little) *us*, John MacAlpine had accepted a small school far up the glen, from which, after a year or two, on the appointment of Dr. Forbes to the parish, he had followed his old college friend to Eden Valley itself. Under his care the little academy had gradually been organized on the newest and best scholastic lines known to the time. Even for girls classics and mathematics played a prominent part. Samplers and knitting, which had previously formed a notable branch of the curriculum, were banished to an hour when little Miss Huntingdon taught the girls, locked in her own department like Wykliffites in danger of the fires of Tower Hill. And at such times my father almost ran as he passed the door of the infant school and thought of the follies which were being committed within.

"Samplers," he was wont to mutter, "samplers—when they might be at their Ovid!"

My mother—Gracie Lyon that was—had none of the stern blood of her Cameronian forebears, nor yet my father's tempestuous Norland mood. She was gentle, patient, with little to say for herself—like Leah, tender-eyed (in the English, not in the Hebrew sense)—and I remember well that as a child one of my great pleasures was to stroke her cheek as she was putting me to

sleep, saying, "Mother, how soft your skin is. It is like velvet!"

"Aye," she would answer, with a sigh gentle as herself, "so they used to tell me!"

And I somehow knew that "they" excluded my father, but whom it included I did not know then nor for many a day after.

But my grandmother, my mother's mother—ah, there indeed you were in a different world! She dwelt in a large house on the edge of the Marnhoul woods. My grandfather had the lease of the farm of Heathknowes, with little arable land, but a great hill behind it on which fed black-faced sheep, sundry cattle in the "low parks," and by the river a strip of corn land sufficient for the meal-ark and the stable feeding of his four stout horses. Also on my father's behalf my uncles conducted the lonely saw-mill that ate and ate into the Great Wood and yet never got any farther. There might be seen machinery for making spools—with water-driven lathes, which turned these articles, variously known as "bobbins" and "pirns," literally off the reel by the thousand. It was a sweet, birch-smelling place and my favourite haunt on all holidays. William Lyon, my grandfather, had had a tempestuous youth, from which, as he said, he had been saved "by the grace of God and Mary Lyon."

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"Many a sore day she had with me," he would confess to me, for he took pleasure in my society, "but got me buckled down at last!"

As my grandmother also kept me in the most affectionate but complete subjection, the fact that neither one nor the other of us dared disobey "Mary Lyon" was a sort of bond between us. Yet my grandmother was not a very tall nor yet to the outward eye a powerful woman. You had to look her in the eye to know. But there you saw a flash that would have cowed a grenadier. There was something masterful and even martial in her walk, in the way she attacked the enemy of the moment, or the work that fell to her hand. All her ways were dominating without ever being domineering. But in the house of Heathknowes all knew that she had just to be obeyed, and there was an end to it.

When my father and she clashed, it was like the meeting of Miltonic thunderclouds over the Caspian. But on the whole it was safe to wager that even then grandmother got her way. John MacAlpine first discharged his Celtic electricity, and then disengaged his responsibility with the shrug of the right shoulder which was habitual to him. After all, was there not always Horace in his pocket—which he would finger to calm himself even in the heat of a family dispute?

A great school-master was my father, far ben in the secrets of the ancient world—and such a man is always very much of a humanist. My grandmother, alert, clear, decided on all doctrinal points, argumentative, with all her wits fine-edged by the Shorter Catechism, could not abide the least haziness of outline in religious belief.

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She did not agree with my grandfather's easier ways, but then he did not argue with her, being far too wise a man.

"Eh, William," she would say, "ye will carry even to the grave some rag of the Scarlet Woman. And at the end I will not be surprised to find ye sitting on some knowetap among the Seven Hills!"

But at least my grandfather was a Cameronian elder, in the little kirk down by the ford, to which the Lyons had resorted ever since the days of the societies—long before even worthy Mr. MacMillan of Balmaghie came into the Church, ordaining elders, and, along with the pious Mr. Logan of Buittle, even ordaining ministers for carrying on the work of the faithful protesting remnant.

But my father, John MacAlpine, both by office and by temperament, belonged to the Kirk of Scotland as by law established. So indeed did nine-tenths of the folk in the parish of Eden Valley. The band of Cameronians at the Ford, and the forlorn hope of Episcopalians in their hewn-stone chapel with the strange decorations, built on the parcel of ground pertaining to Mr. Shepstone Oglethorpe, were the only non-Establishers in the parish. Yet both, nevertheless, claimed to be the only true Church of Scotland, claimed it fiercely, with a fervour sharpened by the antiquity of their claims and the smallness of their numbers. This was especially true of the Cameronians, who were ever ready to give a reason for the faith that was in them. The Episcopalians lacked the Westminster Catechisms as a means of intellectual gymnastic. So far, therefore, they were handicapped, and indeed reduced to the mere persistent assertion that they, and they alone, were the apostolic Church, and if any out of their communion were saved, it must only be by the uncovenanted mercies of God.

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Yet, though not within the sacred triangle of gentility (as it was known in Eden Valley), of which the manse, the General's bungalow, and the residence of Mr. Shepstone Oglethorpe occupied the three angles, my grandmother was the first caller upon the lonely children in the great house of Marnhoul.

I shall never forget her indignation when I went in to the dairy and told her in detail what had happened—of the forcing of the gates, and the firing upon the back windows. My grandfather, seated within doors, in his great triangular easy-chair at his own corner of the wide fireplace, looked up and remarked in his serene and far-off fashion that "such proceedings filled him with shame and sorrow."

The words and still more the tone roused my grandmother.

"William Lyon," she said, standing before him in the clean middle of the hearth which she had just been sweeping, and threatening him with the brush (she would not have touched him for

anything in the world, for she recognized his position as an elder). "Hear to ye—'shame and sorrow'! Aye, well may ye say it. Had I been there I would have 'sinned and sorrowed' them. To go breaking into houses with swords and staves, and firing off powder and shot—all to frighten a pair of poor bairns! Certes, but I would have sorted them to rights—with tongue, aye, and with arm also."

And at this point Mary Lyon advanced a step so fiercely and with such martial energy, that, well inured as my grandfather was to the generous outbursts of his wife, he moved his chair back with a certain alacrity.

"Mary," he remonstrated, "Mr. Shepstone Oglethorpe was with them. So at least I understand, and also Mr. Kettle, who is a Justice of the Peace—these in addition to the constable—"

He got no further. My grandmother swooped upon the names, as perhaps he expected. It was by no means the first time that, in order to draw off the hounds of his wife's wrath, he had skilfully drawn a red herring across the trail.

"Shepstone—Shepstone!" she cried, "a useless, daidling body! What was he ever good for in this world but to tie his neckcloth and twirl his cane? Oh aye, he can maybe button his 'spats'! That is, if he doesna get the servant lass to do it for him. And Josiah Kettle! William, I wonder you are not shamed, goodman—to sit there in your own hearth-corner and name such a hypocrite to me —"

"Stop there, Mary," said her husband; "only a man's Maker has the right to call him a hypocrite —"

"Well, I am an Elder's wife, and I'll e'en be his Viceroy. Josiah Kettle *is* a hypocrite, and I hae telled him so to his face—not once, but a score of times. He has robbed the widow. He has impoverished the orphan. Fegs, if I were a man, I could not keep my hands off him, and, 'deed, I have hard enough work as it is. If there was a man about the house worth his salt—"

"Forgive your enemies—" suggested my grandfather, "do good—"

"So I would—so I would," cried my grandmother, "but first I would give the best cheese out o' the dairy-loft to see Josiah ducked head over heels in Blackmire Dub! Forgive—aye, certainly, since it is commanded. But a bit dressing down would do the like o' him no harm, and then the Lord could take His own turn at him after!"

Thus did my grandmother address all who came into contact with her, and there is every reason to believe that she had more than once similarly exhorted Mr. Josiah Kettle, rich farmer and money-lender though he was. Yet it is equally certain that if Mr. Kettle had been stricken with a dangerous and deadly malady which made his nearest kin flee from him, it would have been my grandmother who would have flown to nurse him with the same robust and forcible tenderness with which she oversaw the teething and other ills incidental to her daughter's children.

"As for Jocky Black," continued my grandmother, "the pomp of the atomy—'In the name of the law,' says he—I'd law him! I would e'en nip his bit stick from his pair twisted fingers and gie him his paiks—that is, if it were worth the trouble! As for me, get me my bonnet, Jen—my best Sunday leghorn with the puce *chenille* in it—I must look my featest going to a great house to pay my respects. And you shall come too, Duncan!" (She turned to me with her usual alertness.) "Run home and tidy—quick! Bid your mother put on your Sunday suit. No, Jen, I will *not* take you to fright the poor things out of their wits. Afterwards, we shall see. But at first, Duncan there, if he gets over his blateness, will be more of their age, and fear them less."

"If all I hear be true," said my Aunt Jen, pursing up her mouth as if she had bitten into a crab apple, "the lassie is little likely to be feared of you or any mortal on the earth!"

"Maybe aye—maybe no," snapped my grandmother, "at any rate be off with you into the back kitchen and see that the dishes are washed, so as not to be a show to the public. You and Meg have so little sense that whiles I wonder that I am your mother."

"You are not Meg's mother that I ken of!" her daughter responded acridly.

"I am her mistress, and the greater fool to keep such a handless hempie about the house! You, Janet, I have to provide for in some wise—such being the will of the Lord—His and your father's there. Now then, clear! Be douce! Let me get on my cloak and leghorn bonnet."

My grandmother being thus accoutred, and I invested with a black jacket, knee-breeches, shoes, and the regulation fluffy tie that tickled my throat and made me a week-day laughing stock to all who dared, Mistress Mary Lyon and I started to make our first call at the Great House of Marnhoul.

CHAPTER V

As my grandmother and I went down the little loaning from Heathknowes Farm she had an eye for everything. She "shooed" into duty's path a youngling hen with vague maternal aspirations which was wandering off to found a family by laying an egg in the underbrush about the saw-mill. She called back final directions to her daughter Jen and maidservant Meg, and saw that they were attended to before she would go on. She looked into the saw-mill itself in the by-going, and made sure that Rob McTurk was in due attendance on the whirling machinery which was turning off the spools, as it seemed to me, with the rapidity of light. She inquired as to the whereabouts of her husband.

"Oh, he was in a minute since!" said the politic Rob, who knew very well that my grandfather had climbed into the bark storage loft, and was at that moment sitting on a bundle, with a book in his hand and content in his heart at having escaped the last injunctions of his wife.

"Well, then," said Mistress Mary Lyon, "tell him from me—" And, as usual, a long list of recommendations followed.

"I'll see to it that he hears," said Rob McTurk imperturbably, knowing full well that his master could by no means help hearing, since my grandmother, in order to drown the noise of the whirling spindles and clattering cogs, had raised her voice till her every word must have penetrated to the pleasant, bark-scented place where, under his solitary skylight, Mr. William Lyon was so calmly reading his favourite *Memoirs of the Life of Thomas Boston of Ettrick*.

Besides my clothes, there were two things which interfered with the happiness of my jaunt. One was the presence of a third and most uncertain party to the affair—our rough, red house-collie Crazy, and the other was a doubt as to the way in which we would be received. For, be it remembered, I had seen Miss Irma Maitland shut the great door at the top of the Marnhoul steps on the raging crowd of assailants, and I wondered if we would not also find it slammed in our faces.

I had, however, confidence in my grandmother.

On the way to the padlocked gate at the entrance of the avenue which led to the Haunted House, my grandmother had abundant room for the exercise of her gifts. Never was there a woman who came across so many things that "she could not abide."

Such, for instance, were Widow Tolmie's ideas as to disposal of her nocturnal household rubbish on the King's highway. Into the Tolmie house went Mistress Mary Lyon, well aware that words would have no avail. In a minute she had requisitioned broom, bucket, and "claut," or byre-rake. In other three minutes all was over. Widow Tolmie had a clean frontage. The utensils had been washed and hung up, and my grandmother was delivering a lecture from one of the most frequently-quoted texts which are not to be found in Holy Writ, while she drew again upon her strong, energetic old hands the pair of lisle thread "mitts" she had taken off in order to effect her clean sweep.

After she had duly lectured the Widow Tolmie, she bade her in all amity "Good-day," and started to reform Crazy, who had been gyrating furiously across her path, trying apparently to bite his tail out by the roots. Crazy was, it appeared, a useless, good-for-nothing beast, a disgrace to a decent Elder's house, and I was ordered to stone him home.

Now I did not particularly wish Crazy to go with us to the Great House. I thought of the smiling carelessness of the girl's face I had seen there. Crazy might, and very likely would, misbehave himself. But still, Crazy was my friend, my companion, my joy. *Stone Crazy!* It was not to be thought of. He would certainly consider it some new kind of game and run barking after the missiles. I therefore shot so far beyond that the pebbles fell over the hedge, till my grandmother, whose sole method was an ungainly cross between a hurl and a jerk, took up the fusillade on her own account, with the result that Crazy was wrought up to the highest point of excitement, and, as I had foreseen, brought each stone back to my grandmother, barking joyously and pulling at her skirts for her to throw again.

"And just wait till I get you home," gasped Mrs. Mary Lyon, shaking her rough white head, "there shall a rope be put about your neck, my lad!"

But whether for the purpose of mere tying up, or to carry out the extreme sentence of the law, I did not gather. I resolved that, in the latter case, Crazy should come with me to the school-house. There was a place I knew of there, a crib at the end of the stick-cellar, which at a pinch would do admirably for Crazy. And I felt sure that Crazy, wholly incompetent at his own business of shepherding, would be a perfect "boys' dog" and a permanent acquisition to the Academy of Eden Valley. There was, of course, my father to consider. But I did not stop to think of that. The classics and Fred Esquillant were enough for him at the moment.

As she passed various cottage doors my grandmother had several bouts with joiners who blocked the road with unfinished carts and diffusive pots of red paint, with small wayside cowherds in charge of animals which considered the hedge-rows as their appointed pasturage, with boys going fishing who had learned at school that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points, and who practised their Euclid to the detriment of their neighbours' fences.

But nothing of great moment occurred till, on the same knoll from which he had summoned us to view the smoke of the ghost's afternoon fire at Marnhoul, we encountered Boyd Connaway. He was stretched at length, as usual, one leg crossed negligently over the other. He had pivoted

his head against a log for the purpose of seeing in three directions about him—towards the Great House, and both up and down the main road. A straw, believed to be always the same, was in his mouth.

A red rag to a bull, a match to tinder, are weak metaphors—quite incapable of expressing a tenth of what my grandmother felt at the sight of the pet idler of Eden Valley.

She rushed instantly to the assault, much as she would have led a forlorn hope. The dragoons who plunged their swords into great mows of straw in Covenanting barns, the unfortunates who pursued a needle through a load of hay, were employed in hopeful work when compared with Mistress Mary Lyon, searching with her tongue in this mass of self-sufficiency for any trace of Boyd Connoway's long-lost conscience.

"Why are you not at home?" she cried; "I heard Bridget complaining as I came by, that she could not feed the pig because she had nobody to bring her wood for her boiler fire—and she in the middle of her blanket washing!"

The husband whom fate and her own youthful folly had given to Bridget Connoway, took off his battered and weather-beaten hat with the native politeness of a born Irishman. He did not rise. That would have been too much to expect of him. But he uncrossed his legs and recrossed them the other way about.

"Mistress Lyon," he said indolently, but with the soft, well-anointed utterance of the blarneying islander, which does not die away till the third generation of the poorest exile from Erin, "now, mistress dear, consider!"

"I have considered you for seven years, and seven to the back of that, Boyd Connoway, and you are a lazy lout! Every year you get worse!"

My grandmother counted nothing so stimulating as truth spoken to the face. She acted, with all save her male grandchildren, on the ancient principle that "Praise to the face is an open disgrace!" And Boyd, in his time, had been singularly exempt from this kind of disgrace, so far as my grandmother was concerned.

"But consider, Mrs. Lyon," he went on tranquilly, while my relative stood in the road and eyed him with bitter scorn, "there's my wife, now she's up early and late. She's scrubbing and cleaning, and all for what?—just that yonder pack o' children o' hers should go out on the road and come trailing back in ten minutes dirtier than ever. She runs to Shepstone Oglethorpe's to give his maid a help in the mornings, all for a miserable three shillings a week. She takes no rest to the sole of her foot, nor gives nobody any either! Poor Bridget—I am sorry for Bridget. 'Take things easier, and you will feel better, Bridget,' I say. 'Trust in Providence, Bridget!' 'Think on what the Doctor said three Sundays but one ago from the very pulpit.' And would ye believe me, Mistress Lyon, that poor woman, being left to herself, threw all the weights at me one after the other—aye, and would have thrown the scales too if I had not come away!"

Here Connoway sighed and stretched himself luxuriously, rubbing the stiff fell of his hair meditatively as he did so.

"Ah, poor Bridget," he continued, with pathos in his voice, "Bridget is so dreadfully unresigned, Mistress Lyon. Often have I said to her, 'Be resigned, Bridget—trust in Providence, Bridget!' But as sure as I point out Bridget's duty, there is something broken in our house!"

"Pity but it was your head, Boyd Connoway! Come away, child!" cried my grandmother, "quickest I do that man an injury. He puts me in such a state that I declare to goodness I am thankful I have not a poker in my hand! Now there's your grandfather——"

But she went no further in the discussion of her own lesser household burden. For there right in front of us was the great gate, the battered notice to trespassers, the broken standard on which the padlock, now removed, had worn a rusty hollow, and in its place we read the little white notice concerning the hours at which the mistress of the mansion could receive visitors.

"Oh, the poor young things!" said my grandmother, her anger (as was its wont) instantly cooling, and even Boyd Connoway dropping back into his own place as perhaps a necessary factor in an ill-regulated but on the whole rather bearable world.

The gate creaked open slowly. My grandmother drew herself up. For did she not come of the best blood of the Westland Whigs, great-granddaughter of that Bell of Whiteside, kinsman of Kenmure's, who was shot by Lag on the moor of Kirkconnel, near to the Lynn through which the Tarff foams white?

For me, I was chiefly conscious of the bushes and shrubs on either side the avenue, broken and trampled in the tumultuous rush of the populace on the day of the discovery. I felt guilty. By that way Gerty Greensleeves and I had passed, Gerty very close to my elbow. And now, like the rolling away of a panorama picture in a show, Gerty Greensleeves, and all other maids save one, had passed out of my life. Or so, in my ignorance, I thought at the time.

For no woman ever passes wholly out of any man's life—that is, if he lives long enough. She steals back again with the coming of life's gloaming, with the shadows of night creeping across the hills, or the morning mists swimming up out of the valley. Sometimes she is weeping, but more often smiling. For there is time enough, since the man last thought of her, for all tears to be wiped from her eyes. But come she will. Yet sometimes it is not so. She does not smile. She only stands on the threshold of a man's soul with reproachful eyes, and lips drawn and mute. Then it is not good to be that man.

But in those days, being a boy, carried along in the waft of my grandmother's skirt, I knew nothing about such things.

I watched my grandmother take the antique knocker between her fingers, noting with housewifely approval that it had recently been polished. I have seldom passed a more uncomfortable time of waiting, than that between the resounding clatter of grandmother's knocking reverberating through the empty house, and the patter of feet, the whispering, and at last the opening of the door.

Then I saw again the tall girl with the proudly angled chin, the crown of raven curls, and the pair of brave outlooking eyes that met all the world with something that was even a little bold.

I had been afraid that my grandmother, so indiscriminating in her admonitions, might open fire upon this forlorn couple, isolated in the great haunted house of Marnhoul. But I need not have troubled.

My grandmother had the instinct of caressing maternity for all the young, the forlorn, the helpless. So she only opened her arms and cried out, "Oh, you dears—you poor darlings!"

And the little boy, moved by the instinctive yearning of all that needed protection, of everything of tender years and little strength towards the breast that had suckled and the hands that had nursed, let go his sister's hand and ran happily to my grandmother. She caught him in her arms and lifted him up with the easy habitual gesture of one long certified as a mother in Israel. He threw his little arms about my grandmother's neck, nestling there just as the rest of us used to do when we were in any trouble.

"I like you! You are good!" he said.

Miss Irma and I were therefore left eye to eye while Louis Maitland, in spite of his title, was so rapidly making friends with the actual head of our family.

Irma eyed me, and I did the like to Miss Irma—that is, to the best of my ability, which in this matter was nothing to hers. She seemed to look me through and through. At which I quailed, and then she appeared a little more content.

With the child still in her arms, and her voice, lately so harsh in rebuke, now tuned to the cooing of a nesting dove, my grandmother introduced herself.

"Child," she said to Miss Irma, "I am your nearest neighbour. Who should come to welcome you if not I? You will find me at the farm of Heathknowes. It is my goodman's saw-mills that you hear clattering from where you stand, and I am come to see if there is anything I can do to help you."

"I thank you——" began the girl, and then hesitated. She had meant to declare that they wanted for nothing, perhaps to indicate that the wife of a tenant was hardly a fitting "first-foot" to venture over the threshold of a baronet of ancient name and of the sister who acted as his sponsor, tutor and governor.

But then Miss Irma did not know my grandmother as Eden Valley did, still less as we who were, as one might say, of Cæsar's household.

"Let me come in—I will soon see for myself!" quoth my grandmother, and marched straight into the front hall of the Maitlands, that immense dusky cavern I had only once looked into over the pikes and pitchforks. She carried Sir Louis, tenth baronet of that name, on one arm. With her free right hand she went hither and thither, sweeping her hand along the ledges of great oak cabinets, blowing at the dust on the stone mantelpiece, and finally clearing the great curtained south-western window to let in the sun in flakes and patches of scarlet and gold.

Then she turned to Miss Irma and said in the tone of an expert who has inspected a grave piece of work and not found it wanting, "You have done very well, my dear!"

And at this Miss Irma changed the fashion of her countenance. Pleasure shone scarce concealed. It was certain that up to that moment she had regarded my grandmother somewhat in the light of an intruder, but she could not bear up against such an appeal from housewife to housewife.

"Will you come up-stairs?" she said, "I have hardly got begun here yet."

CHAPTER VI

THE APOTHEOSIS OF AGNES ANNE

No word or look included me in the invitation which Miss Irma tendered to my grandmother.

Nevertheless I followed, not knowing what else to do. I felt huge, awkward, clumsy of build and knotty of elbow and knee. I was conscious that my knuckles were red. I felt in the way and unhappy. In short, I hulked. Indeed, but that I was able to watch two eyes of darkest grey beneath a wisp of untamed curls on a small and shapely head, and the look of the thing, I would far rather have stopped out on the doorstep with Crazy.

And perhaps that would have been the best place for me, all things considered.

After we had passed two or three rooms in review, all of which were, as it appeared to me, garnished with the ordinary sheets and coverlets of a bedroom, my grandmother abruptly turned upon Miss Irma.

"Let me see your hands!" she said, in her ordinary brusque manner. I was in terror lest we should be shown to the door. But the freemasonry of work, the knowledge of things feminine, the fine little nod of appreciation at a detail which is perfectly lost on a man, the flush of answering approbation had done their perfect work between the old woman and the girl.

Such things were not within my ken, and my grandmother promptly banished me. She set down the little baronet at the same time with a "Run and play, my doo!" She issued directions for me to charge myself with the responsibility. I would much rather have stayed to hear what grandmother and Miss Irma had to say one to the other, because I was more interested in that. But the choice was not given to me. Go I must.

And with her first personal word of acknowledgment that I was a human being, Miss Irma, calling me by name, indicated the "drawing-room" as the place where we might await the end of this first congress of the Holy Alliance.

I was some little alarmed at the place, the name of which so far I had only seen in books, but little Sir Louis whispered in my ear as he took my hand, "We can play there. That's only what sister Irma calls it!"

When my grandmother and Miss Irma appeared after an absence of half-an-hour they found the two of us deep in a game of bat-ball. I made an attempt to hide the ball, fearing lest Miss Irma might think I usually carried such things about with me (I had confiscated it in class that day). But I need not have troubled, she paid no attention whatever to me, continuing to hold my grandmother's hand and look into the wise, stormy, tender, emphatic, much-enduring old face. And I wondered at my relative, and saw in this marvel one more proof of her own infallibility.

"You must not stay any longer in this great house alone," she was saying, "I will send you—somebody."

Then she looked again at Miss Irma's hands, and though I did not see why, nor understand at the time, she added, "No—no—it will never do—never do!" I wish I could say that on this first occasion of our meeting, Miss Irma devoted a little of her attention to me. But the truth is, she had eyes for nobody but Mistress Mary Lyon of Heathknowes. True, a glance occasionally came my way, which caused me instinctively to straighten myself up and square my shoulders, as I did in the playground when acting as drill sergeant to the juniors. But the very same glance with quite as much personality in it, passed on to Crazy, who, to the exuberant delight of little Louis, had by this time intruded himself. It was impossible for the most self-conceited to bring away much comfort or encouragement from favours so slight as these.

Even Louis, after the advent of Crazy, considered me only as his drill-sergeant, and valued me according as Crazy consented to show off his tricks at the word of command from me.

"Behave, sir! You are in the kirk!" cried I. And lo! to the boy's wonder Crazy, who had been gambolling about on the bare floor, sank down with his head between his paws and his eyes hypocritically closed, till I gave the signal, "Now fight the French!" Upon which uprose Crazy like a dancing bear on his hind legs, and jumped about with flaming eyes, barking with all his might. This, being the performance which pleased Crazy most, was also the favourite with the young Sir Louis.

Indeed leavetaking was difficult, though by no means on my account. For Miss Irma was all taken up with grandmother and little Louis with Crazy. Nobody minded me, and Miss Irma did not so much as reach me a finger, though at the last she just nodded, and Sir Louis had to be removed wailing, because he wished to keep his arms tight about the shaggy neck of Master Crazy, that singularly indifferent sheep-dog, but excellent variety entertainer.

It was, however, promised that Crazy should return, and as I knew that Crazy would by no means perform without me, considering himself bound to me by hours of patient labour and persistent fellow truantry, I saw some light on the horizon of an otherwise dark future. I must go back too. But in the meantime Louis wept uncomforted, and "batted" his sister with baby palms in the impotence of his anger as she carried him within.

My grandmother said nothing of any importance on the way home. She was evidently thinking deeply, and confined herself to "Hush, you there!" and "Do ye hear what I was saying to ye?" Under a fire of suchlike remarks, delivered more or less at random, and without the least discrimination between the barking of Crazy (the effect) and me (the cause)—I kept a little in the rear so that I might have a sober face on me when she turned round, while the less subtle Crazy galloped in furious circles yapping and leaping up even in my grandmother's face. He was, however, useful in drawing her fire, and though I had to keep a sharp look-out for the stones she caught up to throw at Crazy (who ran no personal danger) our home-coming was effected in good order and with considerable amusement to myself.

But on her arrival at Heathknowes, Mrs. Mary Lyon found that there were forces in the universe which even she was powerless to conquer.

Meg, the "indoor" lass at Heathknowes, refused point-blank to go one foot in the direction of the "Ghaist's Hoose." She persisted in her refusal even when addressed by the awe-inspiring baptismal name of Margaret Simprin Hetherington, and reminded of the terms of her engagement.

No, Margaret Simprin Hetherington would not—could not—dared not—stay a night in the great house of Marnhoul. Whatever my grandmother might say it was not so nominated in the bond. She had been hired to serve about the farmhouse of Heathknowes, and she did not mind carrying their dinners to the workmen in the saw-mill—

"No," interpolated my grandmother, "nor taking an hour-and-a-half to do it in!"

Upon which, as if stirred by some association of ideas, Meg added that she would go none to Marnhoul Big Hoose, "because not a soul would come near the place." It did not matter whether *she* believed in Grey Ladies with rain-drops pattering through them or not—other people did, and she would not be banished "among the clocks and rattons"—no, not for double wages!

My grandmother, indeed, explained that there was no question of ladies grey or rain-drops pattering, but of obedience to her legal mistress.

But she knew that the cause was lost, and I am quite sure anticipated the reply of Margaret Simprin Hetherington, which was to the effect that no lass, indoor or outdoor, was more willing to obey her mistress than she, but it would be in the place in which she had been hired to serve—there and not elsewhere.

For once my grandmother was nonplussed. Being a good Galloway woman she knew that of all things it is most impossible to run counter to the superstitions of her people. Perhaps she retained a touch of these herself. But, as she said, "The grace of the Lord can overcome all the wiles of the Evil One! And Mary Lyon would like to see witch or warlock, ghost or ghostling, that would come in her road when she went forth under His banner." On the darkest night she marched unafraid, conquering and to conquer, having the superstitions born in her, but knowing all the same (and all the better for that knowledge) on which side were the bigger battalions.

It was no use to send my Aunt Jen, who had once been "in a place" before. Aunt Jen would go, but—she would take her tongue with her. She had her mother's command of language, but was utterly destitute of her tact, lacking also, as was natural, the maternal instinct. As, in a moment of exasperation my grandmother once said of her, "Our Jinnet is dried up like a crab-tree in the east wind!"

She would certainly undo all that Mistress Mary Lyon had done, and "that puir young lassie" (as she called Miss Irma) carried a warlike flash in her eye which warned the rugged grandmotherly heart that she and our Aunt Jen could not long bide at peace in the same house.

My mother might have done, as far as temper was concerned, but she wanted what grandmother called the "needcessary birr." Besides which she had more than enough to do in caring for her own house, mending my father's clothes and misinforming the public as to Post Office regulations. On the whole, though she loved her married daughter, I think Mary Lyon was not a little sorry for my father, John MacAlpine, in his choice of a housekeeper. I could see this by the occasional descents she made upon our house, and the way she had of going about the rooms, setting things to rights, silent save for a running comment of soft sniffs upon the nose of contempt—the while my mother, after a sympathetic glance at me, devoted herself to silent prayer that grandmother would not light upon anything very bad.

With my grandmother, to fail in the due ordering of a house was a cardinal sin. And my poor mother sinned, not indeed by intention, hardly even in labour, but in that appearance of easy perfection, which in a household is the result of excellent plans thoroughly and timeously carried out. She was apt to be found late of an afternoon in a chair with a book—and the dinner dishes still unwashed. Then Agnes Anne, my sister, would come in without a word. Her school frock would be quickly shrouded under a great coarse apron. If I happened to be within doors I was beckoned to assist. If not, not—and Agnes Anne did them herself while my mother slept on.

But I do not think that grandmother knew this, for she very generally ignored Agnes Anne altogether, having a decided preference for boys in a family. It fell out, therefore, that when she came a little shamefacedly to consult my father, as she sometimes did in days of difficulty—for under a show of contempt she often really submitted to his judgment—it was given to Agnes Anne to say suddenly, "Let me go to Marnhoul, grandmother!" If Balaam's ass (or say, Crazy), had spoken these words, grandmother could not have been more astonished.

More so still when John MacAlpine nodded approval.

"Yes, let the lassie go—let her put her hand to the work. The burden cannot be too soon laid on young shoulders—that is, if they are strong enough."

Mary Lyon stared, as if both he and his daughter had suddenly taken leave of their senses.

"Why, what can the lassie *do*?" she cried; "I thought you were making her nothing but a don in the dead languages!"

"I can bake, and brew, and wash, and keep a house clean," said Agnes Anne, putting in her testimonials, since there was no one so well acquainted with them. My father nodded. He was

not so blind as many might suppose. My mother said, "Aye, 'deed, she can that. Agnes Anne is a good lass. I know not what I should do without her!"

My grandmother looked about at the new air of tidiness, and for the first time a suspicion crossed her mind that, out of a pit from which she was expecting no such treasure, some one in her own image might possibly have been dug among her descendants of the second generation. She looked at Agnes Anne with a ray of hope. Agnes Anne stood the awful searching power of that eye. Agnes Anne did not flinch. Mary Lyon nodded her head with its man's close-cropped locks of rough white hair in lyart locks about her ears.

"You'll do, Agnes Anne, you'll do," she said, adding cautiously, "that is, after a time"—so as not to exalt the girl above measure. It was, however, recognized by all as a definite triumph for my sister. My grandmother, a rigid Calvinist, who believed in Election with all her intellect, and acted Free Will with all her heart, elected Agnes Anne upon the spot. Had the girl not willed to rise out of the pit of sloth and mere human learning? And lo! she had arisen. Thenceforth Agnes Anne stood on a pedestal, and for a while one sturdy disciple of Calvin's thought heretically of the pure doctrine. Here was a human being who had willed, and, according to my grandmother, had made of herself a miracle of grace.

But she recalled herself to more orthodox sentiments. The steel was out of the sheath, indeed, but it had to be tried. Even yet Agnes Anne might be found wanting.

"When will you be ready to start?" she said, turning her black twinkling eyes upon her granddaughter.

"In five minutes," said Agnes Anne boldly.

"And you are not frightened?"

"Of what?"

"Of these vain tales—ghosts, hauntings, and so forth. Our Meg Simprin (silly maid!) would not move a foot, and you are far younger."

"I am no younger than those who are in the house already," said Agnes Anne, with great sense, which even I would hardly have expected from her, "and if ghosts are spirits, as the Bible says, I do not see that they can interfere with housework!"

My grandmother rose solemnly from her seat, patted Agnes Anne on the top-knot of her hair, shook hands with John MacAlpine, nodded meaningly at my mother, and said, "Come along, young lass," in a tone which showed that the aged shepherdess had unexpectedly found a lamb whom she long counted lost absolutely butting against the door of the sheep-fold.

This was the apotheosis of Agnes Anne. Her life dates from that evening in our kitchen, even as mine did from the afternoon when one half the fools of Eden Valley were letting off shot-guns at the back windows of Marnhoul Great House, while Miss Irma withstood the others on the threshold of the front door.

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CHAPTER VII

THE DOCTOR'S ADVENT

The firm of lawyers in Dumfries, the agents for the Maitland properties, did not seem to be taking any measures to dispossess Miss Irma and young Sir Louis. Perhaps they, too, had private information. Perhaps those who had brought the children to Marnhoul may have been in the confidence of that notable firm of Smart, Poole & Smart in the High Street. At any rate they made no move towards ejection. They may also have argued that any one who could dispossess the ghosts and make Marnhoul once more a habitable mansion, was welcome to the tenancy.

It was the Reverend Doctor Gillespie who, first of all the distinguished men of the parish, received in some slight degree the confidence of Miss Irma. Grandmother knew more, of course, and perhaps, also, Agnes Anne. But, with the feeling of women towards those whom they approve, they became Irma's accomplices. Women are like that. When you tell them a secret, if they don't like you, they become traitors. If they do, they are at once confederates. But the Doctor visited Marnhoul as a deputation, officially, and also for the purpose of setting the minds of the genteel at rest.

The Doctor's lady gave him no peace till he did his duty. The General's womenfolk at the Bungalow were clamorous. It was not seemly. Something must be done, and since the action of Mr. Shepstone Oglethorpe on the occasion of the assault on the house had put *him* out of the question, and as the General flatly refused to have anything to do with the affair, it was obvious

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that the duty must fall to the Doctor.

Nor could a better choice have been made. Eden Valley has known many preachers, but never another such pastor—never a shepherd of the sheep like the Doctor. I can see him yet walking down the manse avenue—it had been just “the Loaning” in the days before the advent of the second Mrs. Doctor Gillespie—a silver-headed cane in his hand, everything about him carefully groomed, and his very port breathing a peculiarly grave and sober dignity. Grey locks, still plentiful, clustered about his head. His cocked hat (of the antique pattern which, early in his ministry, he had imported by the dozen from Versailles) never altered in pattern. Buckles of unpolished silver shone dully at his knee and bent across his square-toed shoes.

Above all spread his neckcloth, spotless, enveloping, cumbrous, reverence-compelling, a cravat worthy of a Moderator. And indeed the Doctor—our Doctor, parish minister of Eden Valley, had “passed the Chair” of the General Assembly. We were all proud of the fact, even top-lofty Cameronians like my grandmother secretly delighting in the thought of the Doctor in his robes of office.

“There would be few like him away there in Edinburgh,” she would say. “The Doctor’s a braw man, and does us credit afore the great of the land—for a’ that he’s a Moderate!”

And had he been the chief of all the Moderates, the most volcanic and aggressive of Moderates, my grandmother would have found some good thing to say of a fellow-countryman of so noble a presence—“so personable,” and “such a credit to the neighbourhood.”

Wisdom, grave and patient, was in every line of his kindly face. Something boyish and innocent told that the shades of the prison-house had never wholly closed about him. It was good to lift the hat to Dr. Gillespie as he went along—hat a little tip-tilted off the broadly-furrowed brow. In the city he is very likely to stop and regard the most various wares—children’s dolls or ladies’ underpinnings. But think not that the divine is interested in such things. His mind is absent—in communion with things very far away. Lift your hat and salute him. He will not see you, but—it will do *you* good!

William Gillespie was the son of a good ministerial house. His father had occupied the same pulpit. He himself had been born in his own manse—which is to say, in all the purple of which our grey Puritan land can boast. We were proud of the Doctor, and had good reason therefor. I have said that even my field-preaching grandmother looked upon the Erastian with a moisture quasi-maternal in her eyes, and as for us who “sat under him and listened to his speech,” we came well-nigh to worship him.

Yet “the Doctor” was self-effacing beyond many, and only our proper respect for the “Lady of the Manse” kept the parishioners in their places. Discourses which he had preached in the callow days of his youth on the “Book of the Revelation” had brought hearers from many distant parishes, and at that time the Doctor had had several “calls” and “offers” to proceed to other spheres on account of their fame. But he had always refused to repeat any of them.

“I have changed my mind about many things since then,” he would say; “young men are apt to be hasty! The greatest of all heresies is dogmatism.”

But among the older saints of the parish that “series of expositions” was not forgotten. “It was” (they averred) “like the licht o’ anither world to look on his face—just heeven itsel’ to listen to him. Sirce me, there are no such discourses to be heard now-a-days—not even from *himself*!”

And be it remembered that our dear Doctor could unbend—that is, in fitting time and place. From the seats of the mighty, from Holyrood and the Moderator’s chair our Cincinnatus returned to shepherd his quiet flock among the bosky silences of Eden Valley. He wore his learning, all his weight of honour lightly—with a smile, even with a slight shrug of the shoulder. The smile, even the jest, rose continually to his lips, especially when his wife was not present. But at all times he remembered his office, and often halted with the ancient maxim at the sight of some intruder, “Let us be sober—yonder comes a fool!” And many of his visitors noticed this sudden sobriety without once suspecting its cause.

Even the Cameronians agreed that there was “unction” in the Doctor. For his brave word’s sake they forgave the heresies of his church about the Civil Magistrate, and said freely among themselves that if in every parish there was such a minister as Dr. Gillespie, the civil magistrate would be compelled to take a very back seat indeed. But it was on Communion Sabbath days that the Doctor became, as it were, transfigured, the face of him shining, though he wist not of it.

Something of the spirit of the Crucified was poured forth that day upon men and women humbly bowing their heads over the consecrated memorials of His love.

A silence of a rare and peculiar sanctity filled the little bare, deep-windowed kirk. The odour of the flowering lilacs came in like Nature’s own incense, and the plain folk of Eden Valley got a foretaste, faint and dim, but sufficient, of the Land where the tables shall never be withdrawn.

Better preachers than the Doctor?—We grant it you, though there are many in the Valley who will not agree, but not one more fitted to break the bread of communion before the white-spread tables.

It was Agnes Anne who opened the door of Marnhoul, and stood a moment astonished at the sight of the Doctor all in black and silver—hat, coat, knee-breeches, silken hose and leathern shoes of the first, locks, studs, knee-buckles, shoe-buckles all of the second.

But our Agnes Anne was truly of the race of Mary Lyon, so in a moment she said, “Pray come in,

sir!" with the self-respect of the daughter of a good house, as well as the dutifulness which she owed to one so reverend and so revered.

The Doctor was not surprised. He smiled as he recognized the school-master's daughter. But he betrayed nothing. He laid his hand as usual on her smooth locks by way of a blessing, and inquired if Miss Maitland and Sir Louis were at home.

"They are in the school-room," said Agnes Anne, in the most business-like tone in the world; "come this way, sir."

It was a very different house—that which Agnes Anne showed the Doctor—from the cobweb-draped, dust-strewn, deserted mansion of a few weeks ago. Simply considering them as caretakers, the Dumfries lawyers ought to have welcomed their new tenants. So far as cleanliness went, Miss Irma had done a great deal—so much, indeed, as to earn the praise of that severest of critics, my grandmother.

But there was much that no girl could do alone. Chair-seats and sofa-cushions had been beaten till no speck of dust was left. This had had to be carefully gone about. For though, apparently, no thieves had broken through to steal, it was evident that the house had last been occupied by people of excessively careless habits, who had put muddy boots on chairs and trampled regardlessly everywhere. But the other half of the text held good. Moth and rust had certainly corrupted.

However, Agnes Anne was handy with her needle, in spite of her father and his class on Ovid. There was always a good deal to do in our house, and since mother made no great effort, and was generally tired, it fell to Agnes Anne to do it.

She it was who had re-covered the worn old drawing-room chairs with brocade found in the deep, cedar-wood lined cupboards, along with wealth of ancient court dresses, provision of household linen, and all that had belonged to the Maitlands on the day when, after the falling of the head of their house upon Tower Hill, the great old mansion had been shut up.

The Doctor had been strictly enjoined to take good heed to write everything down on his mental tablets, and to give careful account to his lady. He found the two young Maitlands seated at a table from which the cloth had been lifted at one corner to make room for copybooks, ink, pens and reading-books. Evidently Miss Irma was instructing her brother.

"Now, Louis," they heard her say as they came in, "remember the destiny to which you are called, and that now is the time——"

"The Doctor to call upon you!" Agnes Anne announced in a tone of awe befitting the occasion.

Then the stately apparition in black and silver which followed her into the room came slowly forward, smiling with outstretched hand. Miss Irma was not in the least put out. She rose and swept a curtsy with bowed head. Little Sir Louis, evidently awed by the sedate grandeur which sat so well upon the visitor, paused a moment as if uncertain how he ought to behave.

He was a little behind his sister, and completely out of the range of her vision, so he felt himself safe in sucking the ink from the side of his second finger, and rubbing the wet place hard on his black velvet breeches. Then, as Miss Irma glanced round, he fell also to his manners and bowed gravely—unconsciously imitating the grand manner of the Doctor himself.

The room used for lessons was a wide, pleasant place, rather low in the roof, plainly panelled and wainscotted in dark oak, with a single line of dull gold beading running about it high up. There was a large fireplace, with a seat all the way round, and a stout iron basket to hold the fire of sea-coal, when such was used. Brass and irons stood at the side, convenient for faggots. A huge crane and many S-shaped pot-hooks discovered the fact that at some time this place had been occupied as a kitchen, perhaps in the straitened days of the last "attainted" Maitlands.

But now the chamber was pleasant and warm, the windows open to the air and the song of the birds. Dimity curtains hung on the great poles by the windows and stirred in the breeze, as if they had been lying for half a century in dusky cupboards. Agnes Anne looked carefully to see if the darning showed, and decided that not even her grandmother could spy it out—how much less, then, the Doctor.

She was, however, annoyed that the tall, brass-faced clock in the corner, dated "Kilmaurs, 1695," could not be made to go. But she had a promise from Boyd Connoway that he would "take a look at her" as soon as he had attended to three gardens and docked the tails of a litter of promising puppies.

The Doctor bowed graciously over the hand of Miss Irma, and shook hands gravely with Sir Louis, who a second time had rubbed his finger on his black velvet suit, just to make assurance doubly sure.

The conversation followed a high plane of social commonplace.

"Yes," said Miss Irma, "it is true that our family has been a long time absent from the neighbourhood, but you are right in supposing that we mean to settle down here for some time."

Then she deigned to enter into particulars. She had her brother to bring up according to his rank, for, since there was no one else to undertake the charge, it fell to her lot. Luckily she had received a good education up to the time when she had the misfortune——

"Ah," said the Doctor quickly, "I understand."

He said nothing further in words, but his sympathetic silence conveyed a great deal, and was

more eloquent and consolatory than most people's speech.

"And where were you educated?" asked the Doctor gently.

"My father sent me to the Ursuline Sisters in Paris," said Miss Irma calmly.

The Doctor was secretly astonished and much disappointed, but his face expressed nothing beyond his habitual good nature. He replied, "Then your father has had you brought up a Catholic, Miss Maitland?"

"Indeed, no," answered Miss Irma, "only he had often occasion to be away on his affairs, and to keep me out of mischief he left me with the Ursulines and my aunt the Abbess. At my father's death I might have stayed on with the good sisters, but I left because I was not allowed to see my brother."

"Then am I right in thinking that—that—in fact—you are a Presbyterian?" said the Doctor, playing with the inlaid snuffbox which he carried in his hand. The amount of time he occupied in tapping the lid and the invisibility of the pinches he had ever been seen to take were alike marvels in the district.

"I have no religious prejudices," said Miss Irma to the Doctor, in a calm, well-bred manner which must have secretly amused that distinguished theologian, fresh from editing the works of Manton.

"I did not speak of prejudices, dear young lady" (he spoke gently, yet with the thrill in his voice which showed how deeply he was moved), "but of belief, of religion, of principles of thought and action."

Miss Irma opened her eyes very wide. The sound of the Doctor's words came to her ears like the accents of an unknown tongue.

"The sisters were very good people," she said at last; "they give themselves a great deal of trouble——"

"What kind of trouble?" said the Doctor.

"Kneeling and scrubbing floors for one thing," said Miss Irma; "getting up at all hours, doing good works, praying, and burning candles to the Virgin."

"I should advise you," said the Doctor, with his most gentle accent, "to say as little as possible about that part of your experience here in Eden Valley."

Miss Irma looked exceedingly surprised.

"I thought I told you they were exceedingly good people. They were very kind to me, though they looked on me as a lost heretic. I am sure they said prayers for me many times a day!"

The Doctor looked more hopeful. He was thinking that after all he might make something of his strange parishioner, when the young lady recalled him by a repetition of her former declaration, "As I said, I have no religious prejudices!"

"No," said the Doctor a little sharply—for him, "but still each one of us ought to be fully persuaded in his own mind."

"And that means," Miss Irma answered, quick as a flash, "that most of us are fully persuaded according to our father and mother's mind, and the way they have brought us up. But then, you see, I never *was* brought up. I know very well that my family were Presbyterians. Once I read about their sufferings in two great volumes by a Mr. Wodrow, or some such name. But then my grandfather lost most of his estates fighting for the King——"

"For the Popish Pretender," said the Doctor, who could speak no smooth things when it was a matter of the Revolution Settlement and the government of King George.

"For the man he believed to be king, while others stayed snugly at home," persisted Miss Irma. "Then my mother was a Catholic, and my father too busy to care——"

"My poor young maid," said the Doctor, "it is wonderful to see you as you are!"

And secretly the excellent man was planning out a campaign to lead this lamb into the fold of that Kirk of Scotland, for the purity of whose doctrine and intact spiritual independence her forefathers had shed their blood.

"At any rate," said he, rising and bending again over the girl's hand with old-fashioned politeness, "you will remember that your family pew is in the front of our laft—I mean in the gallery of the parish kirk of Eden Valley."

And the Doctor took his leave without ever remembering that he had failed in the principal part of his mission, having quite forgotten to find out by what means these two young things came to find themselves alone in the Great House of Marnhoul.

CHAPTER VIII

KATE OF THE SHORE

It was, I think, ten days after Agnes Anne had left us for the old house of the Maitlands when she came to me at the school-house. My father had Fred Esquillant in with him, and the two were busy with Sophocles. I was sitting dreaming with a book of old plays in my hand when Agnes Anne came in.

"Duncan," she said, "I am feared to bide this night at Marnhoul. And I think so is Miss Irma. Now I would rather not tell grandmother—so you must come!"

"Feared?" said I; "surely you never mean ghosts—and such nonsense, Agnes Anne—and you the daughter of a school-master!"

"It's the solid ghosts I am feared of," said Agnes Anne; "haste you, and ask leave of father. He is so busy, he will never notice. He has Freddy in with him, I hear."

So Agnes Anne and I went in together. We could see the man's head and the boy's bent close together, and turned from us so that the westerling light could fall upon their books. Fred Esquillant was to be a great scholar and to do my father infinite credit when he went to the university. For me I was only a reader of English, a scribbler of verses in that language, a paltry essayist, with no sense of the mathematics and no more than an average classic. Therefore in the school I was a mere hewer of wood and drawer of water to my father.

"Duncan is coming with me to bide the night at Marnhoul," said Agnes Anne, "and he is going to take 'King George' with him to—scare the foxes!"

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"From the hen-coops?" said my father, looking carelessly up. "Let him take care not to shoot himself then. He has no nicety of handling!"

I am sure that really he meant in the classics, for his thoughts were running that way and I could see that he was itching to be at it again with Freddy.

"Tell your mother," he said, adjusting his spectacles on his nose, "and please shut the door after you!"

Having thus obtained leave from the power-that-was, the matter was broken to my mother. She only asked if we had told John, and being assured of that, felt that her entire responsibility was cleared, and so subsided into the fifth volume of Sir Charles Grandison, where thrilling things were going on in the cedar parlour. It was my mother's favourite book, but was carefully laid aside when my grandmother came—nay, even concealed as conscientiously as I under my coat conveyed away the bell-mouthed, silver-mounted blunderbuss which hung over the hat-rack in the lobby. Buckshot, wads, and a powderhorn I also secreted about my person.

On our way I catechized Agnes Anne tightly as to the nature of the danger which had put her so suddenly in fear. But she eluded me. Indeed, I am not sure she knew herself. All I could gather was that a letter which had reached Miss Irma that morning, had given warning of trouble of some particular deadly sort impending upon the dwellers in the house of Marnhoul. When Agnes Anne opened the door of the hall to let the sunshine and air into the gloomy recesses where the shadows still lurked in spite of the light from the high windows, she had found a folded letter nailed to the door of Marnhoul. The blade of a foreign-looking knife had been thrust through it deep into the wood, and the stag's-horn handle turned down in the shape of a reversed capital V—the spring holding the paper firm. It was addressed to Miss Irma Maitland, and evidently had reference to something disastrous, for all day Miss Irma had gone about with a pale face, and a pitiful wringing action of her fingers. No words, however, had escaped her except only "What shall I do? Oh, what shall I do? My Louis—my poor little Louis!"

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The danger, then, whatever it might be, was one which particularly touched the boy baronet. I could not help hoping that it might not be any plot of the lawyers in Dumfries to get him away. For if I were obliged to fire off "King George," and perhaps kill somebody, I preferred that it should not be against those who had the law on their side. For in that case my father might lose his places, both as chief teacher and as postmaster.

I got Agnes Anne to look after "King George," my blunderbuss, while I went round to the village to see if anything was stirring about the dwelling of Constable Jacky. She would only permit me to do this on condition that I proved the gun unloaded, and permitted her to lock it carefully in one cupboard, while the powder and shot reposed each on a separate shelf outside in the kitchen, lest being left to themselves the elements of destruction might run together and blow up the house.

I scudded through the village, passing from one end of the long street to the other. Constable Jacky in his shirt sleeves, was peaceably peeling potatoes on his doorstep, while with a pipe in his mouth Boyd Connaway was looking on and telling him how. The village of Eden Valley was

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never quieter. Several young men of the highest consideration were waiting within call of the millinery establishment of the elder Miss Huntingdon, on the chance of being able to lend her "young ladies" stray volumes of Rollin's *Ancient History*, Defoe's *Religious Courtship*, or such other volumes as were likely to fan the flame of love's young dream in their hearts. I saw Miss Huntingdon herself taking stock of them through the window, and as it were, separating the sheep from the goats. For she was a particular woman, Miss Huntingdon, and never allowed the lightest attentions to "her young ladies" without keeping the parents of her charges fully posted on the subject.

All, therefore, was peace in the village of Eden Valley. Yet I nearly chanced upon war. My grandmother called aloud to some one as I passed along the street. For a moment I thought she had caught me, in spite of the cap which I had pulled down over my eyes and the coat collar I had pulled up above my ears.

If she got me, I made sure that she would instantly come to the great house of Marnhoul with all the King's horses and all the King's men—and so, as it were, spoil the night from which I expected so much.

But it was the slouching figure of Boyd Connoway which had attracted her attention. As I sped on I heard her asking details as to the amount of work he had done that day, how he expected to keep his wife and family through the winter, whether he had split enough kindling wood and brought in the morning's supply of water—also (most unkindly of all) who had paid for the tobacco he was smoking.

To these inquiries, all put within the space of half-a-minute, I could not catch Connoway's replies. Nor did I wait to hear. It was enough for me to find myself once more safe between the hedges and going as hard as my feet could carry me in the direction of the gate of Marnhoul.

No sooner was I in the kitchen with the stone floor and the freshly scoured tin and pewter vessels glinting down from the dresser, than I heard the voice of Miss Irma asking to be informed if I had come. To Agnes Anne she called me "your big brother," and I hardly ever remember being so proud of anything as of that adjective.

Then after my sister had answered, Miss Irma came down the stairs with her quick light step, not like any I had ever heard. With a trip and a rustle she came bursting in upon us, so that all suddenly the quaint old kitchen, with its shining utensils catching the red sunshine through the low western window and the swaying ivy leaves dappling the floor of bluish-grey, was glorified by her presence.

She was younger in years than myself, but something of race, of refinement, of experience, some flavour of an adventurous past and of strange things seen and known, made her appear half-a-dozen years the senior of a country boy like me.

"Has he come?" she asked, before ever she came into the kitchen; "is he afraid?"

"Only of being in a house alone with two girls," said Agnes Anne, "but I am most afraid of father's blunderbuss which he has brought with him."

"Nonsense," said Miss Irma, determination marked in every line of her face. "We have a well-armed man on the premises. It is a house fit to stand a siege. Why, I turned away three score of them with a darning needle."

"Not but what it is far more serious this time!" she said, a little sadly. By this time I was reassembling the scattered pieces of "King George's" armament, while Agnes Anne, in terror of her life, was searching on the floor and along the passages for things she had not lost.

As soon as I had got over my first awe of Miss Irma, I asked her point-blank what was the danger, so that I might know what dispositions to take.

I had seen the phrase in an old book, thin and tall, which my father possessed, called *Monro's Expedition*. But Irma bade me help to make the ground floor of the mansion as strong as possible, and then come up-stairs to the parlour, where she would tell me "all that it was necessary for me to know."

I wished she had said "everything"—for, though not curious by nature, I should have been happy to be confided in by Miss Irma. To my delight, on going round I found that all the lower windows had been fitted with iron shutters, and these, though rusty, were in perfectly good condition. In this task of examination Miss Irma assisted me, and though I would not let her put a finger to the sharp-edged flaky iron, it was a pleasure to feel the touch of her skirt, while once she laid a hand on my arm to guide me to a little dark closet the window of which was protected by a hingeless plate of iron, held in position by a horizontal bar fitting into the stonework on either side.

There was not so much to be done above stairs, where the shutters were of fine solid oak and easily fitted. But I sought out an oriel window of a tower which commanded the pillared doorway. For I did not forget what I had seen when the Great House of Marnhoul was besieged by the rabble of Eden Valley. It was there that the danger was if the house should be attempted.

But I so arranged it, that whoever attacked the house, I should at least get one fair chance at them with "King George," our very wide-scattering blunderbuss.

In the little room in which this window was, we gathered. It made a kind of watch-tower, for from it one could see both ways—down the avenue to the main road, and across the policies towards the path that led up from the Killantringan shore.

I felt that it was high time for me to know against what I was to fight. Not that I was any way scared. I do not think I thought about that at all, so pleased was I at being where I was, and specially anxious that no one should come to help, so as to share with me any of the credit that was my due from Miss Irma.

Agnes Anne, indeed, was afraid of what she was going to hear. For as yet she had been told nothing definite. But then she was tenfold more afraid of "King George"—mostly, I believe, because it had been made a kind of fetish in our house, and the terrible things that would happen if we meddled with it continually represented to us by our mother. Finally, we arranged that "King George" should be set in the angle of the oriel window, the muzzle pointing to the sky, and that in the pauses of the tale, I should keep a look-out from the watch-tower.

"It is my brother Louis—Sir Louis Maitland—whom they are seeking!"

Miss Irma made this statement as if she had long faced it, and now found nothing strange about the matter. But I think both Agnes Anne and I were greatly astonished, though for different reasons. For my sister had never imagined that there was any danger worse than the presence of "King George" in the window corner, and as for me, the hope of helping to protect Miss Irma herself from unknown peril was enough. I asked for no better a chance than that.

"We have a cousin," she continued, "Lalor Maitland is his name, who was in the rebellion, and was outlawed just like my father. He took up the trade of spying on the poor folk abroad and all who had dealings with them. He was made governor of the strong castle of Dinant on the Meuse, deep in the Low Countries. With him my father, who wrongly trusted him as he trusted everybody, left little Louis. I was with my aunt, the Abbess of the Ursulines, at the time, or the thing had not befallen. For from the first I hated Lalor Maitland, knowing that though he appeared to be kind to us, it was only a pretence.

"He entertained us hospitably enough in a suite of rooms very high up in the Castle of Dinant above the Meuse river, and came to see us every day. He was waiting till he should make his peace with the English. Then he would do away with my brother and——"

She paused, and a kind of shuddering whiteness came across the girl's face. It was like the flashing of lightning from the east to the west that my grandmother reads about in her Bible—a sort of shining of hatred and determination like a footstep set on wet sand. "But no," she added, "he would not have married me, even if he had kept me shut up for ever in his Castle of Dinant on the Meuse!"

Then all at once I began very mightily to hate this Lalor Maitland, Governor of the Castle of Dinant. I resolved to charge "King George" to the very muzzle, wait till he was within half-a-dozen paces, and—let him have it. For I made no doubt that it was he who was coming in person to carry off Miss Irma and Sir Louis back again to his dungeons. For though Irma had not called them that, I felt sure that she had been shamefully used. And though I did not proclaim the fact, I knew the name and address of a willing deliverer. I grew so anxious about the matter that Agnes Anne three times bade me put down "King George" or I should be sure to shoot some of them, or, most likely of all, little Louis in his cot-bed up-stairs.

"However, at last we escaped" (Miss Irma went on), "and I will tell you how—what I have not told to any here—not even to your good grandmother or the clergyman. It was through our nurse, a Kirkbean woman and her name Kate Maxwell, called Mickle Kate o' the Shore. Her father and all her folk were smugglers, as, I understand, are the most of the farmers along the Solway side. Some of these she could doubtless have married, but Kate herself had always looked higher. The son of a farmer over the hill, from a place called the Boreland of Colvend, had wintered sheep on her father's lands. Many a sore cold morning (so she said) had they gone out together to clear the snow from the feeding troughs. I suppose that was how it began, but in addition the lad had ambition. He learned well and readily, and after a while he went into a lawyer's office in Dumfries, while Kate o' the Shore went abroad with the family of a Leith merchant, to serve at Rotterdam. She wanted to save money for the house she was going to set up with the lawyer's clerk. So, rather than come back at the year's end, she took the place which the Governor of Dinant Castle offered her, and he was no other than our cousin Lalor.

"In a little while Kate of the Shore had grown to hate our cousin. Why, I cannot tell, for he always bowed to her as to a lady, and indeed showed her far more kindness than ever he used to us. When we wanted a little play on the terrace or a sweetcake from the town, we tried at first to get Kate to ask for us. But afterwards she would not. And she grew determined to leave the Castle of Dinant as soon as might be, making her escape and taking us with her. Her Boreland lad, Tam Hislop, had told her all about the estates and the great house standing empty. So nothing would do but that Kate o' the Shore would come to this house with us, where we would take possession, and hold it against all comers.

"'It is very difficult,' said Kate's friend, the Dumfries clerk, 'to put any one out of his own house.' Indeed he did not think that even the very Court of Session could do it."

"So during the governor's absence we brought little Louis from Dinant to Antwerp, where we hid him with some friends of Kate's who are Free Traders, and ran cargoes to the Isle of Man and the Solway shore. Kind they were, stout bold men and appeared to hold their lives cheap enough—also, for that matter, the lives of those who withstood them.

"Many of them were Kirkbean men, near kinsfolk of Kate o' the Shore, and others from Colvend—Hislops, Hendersons and McKerrows, long rooted in the place. But when we were in mid-passage, we were chased and almost taken by a schooner that fired cannon and bade us heave to, but the Kirkbean men, who had Kate o' the Shore with them, bade our boat carry on, and

engaged the pursuer. We could see the flash of their guns a long distance, and cries came to us mixed with the thunderclap of the schooner's guns. The Colvend men would have turned back to help, but they had received strict orders to put us on shore, whatever might happen, the which they did at Killantringan.

"After that" (Miss Irma still went on) "I had so much ado to look after my brother, being fearful to let him out of my hands lest he should be taken from me, that I only heard the names of a place or two spoken among them—particularly the Brandy Knowe, a dark hole in a narrow ravine, under the roots of a great tree, with a burn across which we had to be carried. I remember the rushing sound of the water in the blackness of the night, and Louis's voice calling out, as the men trampled the pebbles, 'Are you there, sister Irma?'"

"But long before it was day they had finished stowing their cargo. We were again on the march and the men took good care of us, leaving us here according to their orders with plenty of provisions for a week—also money, all good unclipped silver pieces and English gold. They bade us not to leave the house on any account, and in case of any sudden danger to light the fire on the tower head!

"'For the present our duty is done,' said one of them, a kind of chief or leader who had carried me before him on his own horse, 'but there may be more and worse yet to do, wherein we of the Free Trade may help you more than all the power of King George—to whom, however, we are very good friends, in all that does not concern our business of the private Over-Seas Traffic'—for so they named their trade of smuggling."

"I would like much to see this beacon," I said; "perhaps we may have to light it. At any rate it is well to be sure that we have all the ingredients of the pudding at hand in case of need."

CHAPTER IX

THE EVE OF ST. JOHN

We went up the narrow stair—that is, Miss Irma and I—because, since I carried my father's blunderbuss, Agnes Anne would not come, but stopped half-way, where the little Louis lay asleep in his cot-bed. On the top of the tower, and swinging on a kind of iron tripod bolted into the battlements, we found an iron basket, like that in which sea-coal is burned, but wider in the mesh. Then, in the "winnock cupboard" at the turn of the stair-head, were all the necessaries for a noble blaze—dry wood properly cut, tow, tar, and a firkin of spirit, with some rancid butter in a brown jar. There was even a little kindling box of foreign make, all complete with flint, steel and tinder lying on a shelf, enclosed in a small bag of felt.

Whoever had placed these things there was a person of no small experience, and left nothing to chance. It was obvious that such a beacon lit on the tower of the ancient house of Marnhoul would be seen far and near over the country.

Who should come to our rescue, supposing us to be beset, was not so clear. I did not believe that we could depend on the people of the village. They would, if I knew them, cuddle the closer between their blankets, while as for Constable Jacky, by that time of night he would certainly be in no condition to know his right hand from his left.

"And the message fixed to the front door with the knife—of which my sister told me," I suggested to Miss Irma, "what did it threaten?"

For in spite of her obvious reluctance to tell me even necessary things, I was resolved to make her speak out. She hesitated, but finally yielded, when I pointed out that we must decide whether it came from a friendly or an unfriendly hand.

She handed it to me out of the pocket of her dress, the two of us standing all the while on the top of the tower, the rusty basket wheezing in the wind, and her blown hair whipping my cheek in the sharp breeze from the north.

I may say that just at that moment I was pretty content with myself. I do not deny that I had fancied this maid and that before, or that some few things that might almost be called tender had passed between me and Gerty Greensleeves, chiefly cuffing and pinching of the amicable Scottish sort. Only I knew for certain that now I was finally and irrevocably in love—but it was with a star. Or rather, it might just as well have been, for any hope I had with Miss Irma Maitland, with her ancient family and her eyes fairly snapping with pride. What could she ever have to say to the rather stupid son of a village school-master?

But I took the paper, and for an instant Irma's eyes rested on mine with something different in them from anything I had ever seen there before. The contemptuous chill was gone. There was

even a kind of soft appeal, which, however, she retracted and even seemed to excuse the next moment.

"Understand," she said, "it is not for myself that I care. It is for—for my brother, Sir Louis."

"But, Miss Irma, do not forget that I—" The words came bravely, but halted before the enormity of what I was going to say. So I had perforce to alter my formation in face of my dear enemy, and only continued lamely enough, "I had better see what the letter says."

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"Yes," she answered shortly, "I suppose that is necessary."

The letter was written on a sheet of common paper, ruled vertically in red at either side as for a bill of lading. It had simply been folded once, not sealed in the ordinary way, but thrust through sharply with the knife which had pinned it to the wood, traversing both folds. The knife, which I saw afterwards down-stairs, was a small one, with a broadish blade shaped and pointed like a willow leaf. I had it a good while in my hand, and I can swear that it had been lately used in cutting the commonest kind of sailor tobacco.

The message read in these words exactly, which I copied carefully on my killivine-tablets—

"The first danger is for this night, being the eve of Saint John. Admit no one excepting those who bring with them friends you can trust. Fear not to use the signal agreed upon. Help will be near."

Now this seemed to me to be very straightforward. None but a friend to the children would speak of the beacon so familiarly, yet so discreetly—"the signal agreed upon." Nor would an enemy advise caution as to any being admitted to the house.

But Miss Irma had not passed through so many troubles without acquiring a certain lack of confidence in the fairest pretences. She shook her head when I ventured to tell her what I thought. She was willing to take my help, but not my judgment.

The words, "Admit no one, *excepting those who bring with them friends you can trust,*" did not ring true in her ear. And the phrase, "the signal agreed upon," might possibly show that while the writer made sure of there being a signal of some kind, he was ignorant of its nature.

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In face of all this there seemed nothing for it but to wait—doors shut, windows barred, "King George" ready charged, and the stuff for the beacon knowingly arranged.

And this last I immediately proceeded to set in order. I had had considerable experience. For during the late French wars we of Eden Valley, though the most peaceful people in the world, had often been turned upside down by reports of famous victories. After each of these every one had to illuminate, if it were only with a tallow dip, on the penalty of having his windows broken by the mob of loyal, but stay-at-home patriots. At the same time, all the boys of Eden Valley had full permission to carry off old barrels and other combustibles from the houses of the zealous, or even to commandeer them without permission from the barns and fences of suspected "black-nebs" to raise nearer heaven the flare of our victorious bonfires.

With all the ingredients laid ready to my hand, it was exceedingly simple for me to put together such a brazier as could be seen over half the county. Not the least useful of my improvements was the lengthening of the chain, so that the whole fire-basket could be hoisted to the top of the tripod, and so stand clear of the battlements of the tower, showing over the tree-tops to the very cliffs of Killantringan, and doubtless far out to sea.

Last of all, before descending, I covered everything over with a thick mat of tarred cloth, which would keep the fuel dry as tinder even in case of rain, or the dense dews that pearly down out of the clear heavens on these short nights of a northern June.

It is a strange thing, watching together, and in the case of young people it is apt to make curious things hop up in the heart all unexpectedly. It was so, at least, with myself. As to Miss Irma I cannot say, and, of course, Agnes Anne does not count, for she sat back in the shelter of a great cupboard, well out of range of "King George," and went on with her knitting till she fell asleep.

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However, Miss Irma and I sat together in the jutting window, where, as the night darkened and the curtains of the clouds drew down to meet the sombre tree-tops, a kind of black despair came over me. Would "King George" really do any good? Would I prove myself stout and brave when the moment came? Would the beacon we had prepared really burn, and, supposing it did, would any one see it, drowned in woods as we were, and far from all folk, except the peaceable villagers of Eden Valley?

But I had the grace to keep such thoughts to myself, and if they visited Miss Irma, she did the like. The crying of the owls made the place of a strange eeriness, especially sometimes when a bat or other night creature would come and cling a moment under the leaden pent of the window.

Such things as these, together with the strain of the waiting on the unknown, drew us insensibly together—I do not mean Agnes Anne—but just the two of us who were shut off apart in the window-seat. No, whatever her faults and shortcomings (too many of them recorded in this book), Agnes Anne acted the part of a good sister to me that night, and her peaceful breathing seemed to wall us off from the world.

"Duncan?" queried Miss Irma, repeating my name softly as to herself; "you are called Duncan, are you not?"

I nodded. "And you?" I asked, though of course I knew well enough.

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"Irma Sobieski," she answered. And then, perhaps because everything inside and out was so still and lonely, she shivered a little, and, without any reason at all, we moved nearer to each other on the window-seat—ever so little, but still nearer.

"You may call me Irma, if you like!" she said, very low, after a long pause.

Just then something brushed the window, going by with a soft *woof* of feathers.

"An owl! A big white one—I saw him!" I said. For indeed the bird had seemed as large as a goose, and appeared alarming enough to people so strung as we were, with ears and eyes grown almost intolerably acute in the effort of watching.

"Are you not frightened?" she demanded.

"No, Irma—no, Miss Irma!" I faltered.

"Well, I am," she whispered; "I was not before when the mob came, because I had to do everything. But now—I am glad that you are here" (she paused the space of a breath), "you and your sister."

I was glad, too, though not particularly about Agnes Anne.

"How old are you, Duncan?" she asked next.

I gave my age with the usual one year's majoration. It was not a lie, for my birthday had been the day before. Still, it made Irma thoughtful.

"I did not think you were so much older than your sister," she said musingly; "why, you are older than I am!"

"Of course I am," I answered, gallantly facing the danger, and determined to brave it out.

On the spot I resolved to have a private interview with Agnes Anne as soon as might be, and, after reminding her of my birthday just past, tell her that in future I was to be referred to as "*going on for twenty*"—and that there was no real need to insert the words "going on for."

Irma Sobieski considered the subject a while longer, and I could see her eyes turned towards me as if studying me deeply. I wondered what she was thinking about with a brow so knotted, and I knew instinctively that it must be something of consequence, because it made her forget the letter nailed to the door, and the warning which might veil a threat. She fixed me so long that her eyes seemed to glow out of the pale face which made an oval patch against the darkness of the trees. Irma's face was only starlit, but her eyes shone by their own light.

"Yes, I will trust you," she said at last. "I saw you the day when the mob came. You were ashamed, and would have helped me if you could. Even then I liked your face. I did not forget you, and when Agnes Anne spoke of her brother who was afraid of nothing, I was happy that you should come. I wanted you to come."

The words made my heart leap, but the next moment I knew that I was a fool, and might have known better. This was no Gerty Gower, to put her hand on your arm unasked, and let her face say what her lips had not the words to utter.

"I want a friend," she said; "I need a friend—a big brother—nothing else, remember. If you think I want to be made love to, you are mistaken. And, if you do, there will be an end. You cannot help me that way. I have no use for what people call love. But I have a mission, and that mission is my brother, Sir Louis. If you will consent to help me, I shall love you as I love him, and you—can care about me—as you care about Agnes Anne!"

Now I did not see what was the use of bringing Agnes Anne into the business. At home she and I were quarrelling about half our time. But since it was to be that or nothing, of course I was not such a fool as to choose the nothing.

All the same, after the promising beginning, I was enormously disappointed, and if only it had been lighter, doubtless my chagrin would have showed on my face. It seemed to me (not knowing) the death-blow to all my hopes. I did not then understand that in all the unending and necessarily eternal game of chess, which men and women play one against the other, there is no better opening than this.

But I was still crassly ignorant, intensely disappointed. I even swore that I would not have given a brass farthing to be "cared about" by Irma as I myself did about Agnes Anne.

Dimly, however, I did feel, even then, that there was a fallacy somewhere. And that, however much human beings with youthful hearts and answering eyes may pretend they are brother and sister, there is something deep within them that moves the Previous Question—as we are used to say in the Eden Valley Debating Parliament, which Mr. Oglethorpe and my father have organized on the model of that in the *Gentleman's Magazine*.

But Irma, at least, had no such fear. She had, she believed, solved for ever a difficult and troublesome question, and, on easy terms, provided herself with a new relative, useful, safe and insured against danger by fire. Perhaps the underwriters of the city would not have taken the latter risk, but at that moment it seemed a slight one to Irma Sobieski.

At any rate, to seal the new alliance, in all sisterly freedom she gave me her hand, and did not appear to notice how long I kept it in the darkness. This was certainly a considerable set-off against the feeling of loneliness, and, if not quite content, I was at least more so. I wondered, among other things, if Irma's heart kept knocking in a choking kind of way against the bottom of her throat.

At least mine did, and I had never, to my knowledge, felt just so about Agnes Anne. Indeed, I don't think I had ever held Agnes Anne's hand so long in my life, except to pick a thorn out of it with a needle, or to point out how disgracefully grubby it was.

CHAPTER X

THE CROWBAR IN THE WOOD

We sat so long that I grew hungry. And then forethought was rewarded. For as I well knew, Agnes Anne had much ado to keep the house supplied (and the larder too often bare with all her trying!), I had done some trifle of providing on my own account. I had a flask of milk in my pouch—the big one in the skirt of the coat that I always wore when taking a walk in the General's plantations. Cakes, too, and well-risen scones cut and with butter between them, most refreshing. I gave first of all to Irma, and at the sound of the eating and drinking Agnes Anne awakened and came forward. So I handed her some, but with my foot cautioned her not to take too much, because it was certain that she would by no means do her share of the fighting.

Both were my sisters. We had agreed upon that. But then some roses smell sweeter than others, though all are called by the same name.

We had just finished partaking of the food (and great good it did us) when Agnes Anne heard a sound that sent her suddenly back to her corner with a face as white as a linen clout. She was always quicker of hearing than I, but certain it is that after a while I did hear something like the trampling of horses, and especially, repeated more than once, the sharp jingle which the head of a caparisoned horse makes when, wearied of waiting, it casts it up suddenly.

They were coming.

We said the words, looking at each other, and I suppose each one of us felt the same—that we were a lot of poor weak children, in our folly fighting against men. At least this is how I took it, and a sick disdain of self for being no stronger rose in my throat. A moment and it had passed. For I took "King George" in hand, and bidding Irma see that little Louis was sleeping, I ran up the stairs to the open tower-top. Here I had thought to be alone, but there before me, crouched behind the ramparts and looking out upon a dim glade which led down towards the landing-place at Killantringan, was Agnes Anne. In answer to my question as to what she was doing there, she answered at first that she could see in the dark better than I, and when I denied this she said that surely I did not think she was going to be left down there alone, nearest to the assailants if they should force a passage!

One should never encourage one's real sister in the belief that she can ever by any chance do right. So I said at once that whether she was behind the door or sitting on the weathercock at Marnhoul Tower would make no difference if the people were enemies and once got in.

"Hush!" she said. "What is that I hear now?"

And from away down the glade came slow and steady blows like those which a man might make as he lifts his axe and smites into the butt. There was a sort of reverberation, too, as if the tree were hollow. But that might only be the effect of the night, the stillness, and the heavy covert of great woods which lay like a big green blanket all about us, and tossed every sound back to us like a wall at ball-play.

"Oh, if we could only see what they were doing—who they are?" I groaned. "I could go out quite safely by the door in the tower, but then who would fire off 'King George'?"

"Toc! Toc!" came the sounds. And then a pause as if the woodsman had straightened himself up and was wiping his brow. The timing of the strokes was very slow. Probably, therefore, the labour itself was fatiguing. Sometimes, too, the axe fell with a different swing, as if other hands grasped it, but always with the same dull thudding and irritating slowness.

Then Agnes Anne made an astonishing proposition.

"See here, Duncan," she whispered, "let *me* out by the little postern door at the foot of the tower. Miss Irma can watch behind it to let me in if I come running back, and you stay on the top ready with 'King George.' I will find out for you everything you want to know." And I got ready to say, brother-like, "Agnes Anne, you are a fool—your legs would give way under you in the first hundred yards."

But somehow she saw (or felt) the speech that was coming, and cut me short.

"No, I wouldn't either," she said hurriedly and quite boldly. "You think that because I hate that great thing there filled with powder and slugs (which even you can't tell when it will go off, or

what harm it will do when it does) that I am a coward. I am no more frightened than you are yourself—perhaps less. Who was the best tracker when we played at Indians and colonists, I should like to know? Who could go most quietly through the wood? Or run the quickest? Just me, Agnes Anne MacAlpine!”

Well, I had to admit it. These things were true. But then they had little to do with courage. This was serious. It was taking one’s life in one’s hand.

“And pray what are we doing here and now?” snapped Agnes Anne. “If they are strong enough to break in one of the doors, or get through one of the windows, what can we do? Till we know what is coming against us, we are only going from one blunder to another!”

Now this was most astonishing of our Agnes Anne. So I told her that I had known that Irma was plucky, but not her. And she only said, very shortly, “Better come and see!”

So we went down and told Irma. At first she was all against opening any door, even for a moment, on any account. The strength of these defences was our only protection. She would rather do anything than endanger that. But we made her listen to the slow thud of the axe out in the wood, and even as we looked the figure of a man passed across the glade, black against the greyish-green of the grass, on which a thick rise of dew was catching the starlight.

This figure wrapped in a sea-cloak, with head bent forward, passing across the pale glimmer of the glade, sufficed to alter the mind of Irma. She agreed in a moment, and locking the door of little Louis’s room, she declared herself willing to keep watch behind the little postern door of the tower, ready to let Agnes Anne in again, on the understanding that I should be prepared from the open window above to deal with any pursuer.

I admit that in this I was persuaded against my judgment. For I felt certain that though Agnes Anne could move with perfect stillness through woods, and was a fleet runner, her nerve would certainly fail her when it came to a real danger. And so great was the sympathy of my imagination that I seemed already to feel the pursuer gaining at every stride, the muscles of my limbs failing beneath me and refusing to carry me farther, just as they do in a dream.

But Agnes Anne was serious and determined, and in the end had to have her way. I can see the reason now. She knew exactly what she meant to do, which neither Irma nor I did—though of course both of us far braver.

We got the door open quite silently—for it was the one Irma had used in her few and brief outgates. Then, shrouded in her school cloak of grey, and clad, I mean, in but little else, Agnes flitted out as silent as a shadow along a wall.

But oh, the agony I suffered to think what my father, and still more my grandmother, would say to me because I had let my sister expose herself on such an errand. Twenty times I was on the point of sallying forth after her. Twenty times the sight of the pale face of Irma waiting there stopped me, and the thought that I was the only protector of the two poor things in that great house. Also after all Agnes Anne had gone of her own accord.

All the same I shivered as I kneeled by the window above with the wide muzzle of “King George” pointing down the path which led from the glade. Every moment I expected to hear the air rent with a hideous scream, and “King George” wobbled in my hands as I thought of Agnes Anne lying slain in the glow-worm shining of that abominable glade, with that across her white neck for which my conscience and my grandmother would reproach me as long as I (and she) lived. One thing comforted me during that weary waiting. The hollow thudding as of axe on wood never ceased for a moment. So from that I gathered (and was blithe to believe) that the alarm had not been given, and that wherever Agnes Anne was, she herself was still undiscovered.

My eyes were so glued to that misty glade that presently I got a great surprise. “There she is!” cried Irma, looking round the door, and I saw a figure flit out of the dusk of the copse-covert within two yards of the postern door. The next moment, without advertisement or the least fuss, Agnes Anne was within. I heard the sliding of bolts, the hum of talk, and then the patter of returning feet on the stair.

CHAPTER XI

AGNES ANNE’S EXPERIENCES AS A SPY

“Well, at first I did not think much about anything” (said Agnes Anne), “except keeping quiet and doing what Duncan did not believe I could do. But I knew the wood. It was not so dark as one would think, and once out of the echo of the house walls I could hear far better. I leaned against a larch, holding on to the trunk and counting the sticky rosettes on its trailers to keep

me from thinking while I listened. Twice I thought I had made out exactly from which direction the sound came, and twice I found I was mistaken. But the third time I followed the ditch under the sunk fence till I came to the mound which is shaped like a green hat at the end next the house. The thudding came from there—I was sure of it. When I could hear men talking, I was (and I am not saying it to put Duncan in the wrong) more glad than afraid.

“The bottom of the ditch was full of all sorts of underbrush—hazel and birch roots mostly—growing pretty close as I found when once I got there, but rustling horribly while I was getting settled. However, there was nothing for it, if I wanted to find out anything, but to go on. So on I went. I was close to the mound now, and could hear the voices.

“‘Quiet there a moment!’ said some one, ‘I’ll swear I heard a noise in the ditch!’

“And as I crouched something like a blade of a sword or maybe a pike came high above me stabbing this way and that. Twigs and leaves pattered down, but I was safe behind the stump of a fallen tree. Presently the steel thing I had seen glinting struck the dead and sodden wood of the tree-trunk, and snapped with a sharp tang like a fiddle-string—a hayfork it may have been, or one of the long thin swords such as are hung up in the hall.

“But another and deeper voice—like that of a man somewhat out of breath, said gruffly, ‘Better get the job done! ‘Tis only a fox or a rabbit—what else would be out here at this hour?’

“And then, with the noise of spitting on the hands, the sound of the heavy tool began again. It had a ring in it like steel on stone. I think they had been chopping something with a pickaxe and had got through. For now the clink was quite different, though that again might be because I was nearer.

“‘Have you found the passage? Surely it is long in showing?’

“That was the first voice again, the better educated one, I take it. He spoke like a gentleman, like the General or even the Doctor himself, though there was much rudeness in the voice of the other when he answered him.

“‘D’ye think I am breaking my back over this stone-door for fun?’ growled the man in panting gasps. ‘If I imagined you were any hand at a tool, you should have a chance at this one quick enough!’

“‘Steady, Dick!’ said the first, always in his pleasant tone, ‘it can’t be far away at the farthest now!’

“‘Hang it, it may not be there at all. Did you ever hear of a mouldy old castle but had its tale about a secret passage? And did anybody ever see one? Better make the woman speak, I tell you!’

“‘Well,’ argued the first suavely, ‘it may come to that, of course. But let us give this a good trial first. To it, Dick—to it!’

“‘Aye, “To it, Dick—to it!” And your own arm up to the elbow in your blessed pocket,’ he grunted, and I could hear him set to work again with an angry snarl. ‘If this doesn’t fetch it—well—there’s always the woman!’

“‘Aye—but it *will* do it this time,’ said the man with the soft voice. ‘I hear by the clink of the crow that you are nearly through. My uncle used often to tell me about this. The big green mound is the ice-house of Marnhoul. It was his father that made it, and the passage also to connect with the cellar. See where it drains sideways into that ditch. That is what makes the green stuff grow so rank about there!’

“Between the noise of the heavy crowbar and the dispute, I ventured to edge a bit closer, so that at last I could make out the two men, and beyond them something that looked like a figure of a woman lying under a cloak. But all was under the dimness of the stars and the twinkling dew, so that I could see nothing clearly.

“But what I had heard was enough, for in the middle of the worker’s gasping and cursing there came a sudden crash and a jingle.

“‘She’s through—I told you so. Uncle Edward was right!’ cried the first and taller man, while the other only stared at the sudden disappearance of his tool, and stood looking blankly at his own empty hands.

“‘What’s to be done now?’ said the tall man.

“‘Lever it up with the nose of the pick!’ growled the short thick man; ‘here, you—hang on to that!’

“And then I knew that the sooner Duncan and ‘King George’ were down in the cellar of Marnhoul House, the better it would be for our lives.”

When Agnes Anne finished we sat a moment agape. But very evidently there was no time to be lost. They would be among us before we knew it, if once they got down into the passage. We tried to find out from Irma where the cellar was, but she was sunk in terrible thoughts, and for a long while she could say nothing but “Lalor Maitland—it is Lalor Maitland, come to kill my poor Louis!”

And indeed it was difficult to get her aroused sufficiently to help us. Left to herself I do not doubt that she would have gone up-stairs and fled with the child in her arms in the hope of hiding him in the wood.

At last we got it out of her that the keys of the cellar were in the great cupboard behind the door. She directed us to a double flight of broad stairs. Irma had only looked into the cellar when she first came, and had found it rifled, the barrels dry and gaping, full of dust, dry-rot and the smell of decay.

But she too had heard her father tell of the passage to the ice-house, and how he and his brothers had used it for their escapades when the house was locked up and the keys taken to their father's room.

We went down—I leading with "King George" under my arm and the two girls following. But on the stairway a sudden terror leaped upon Irma. While we were all down in the cellar, might not Lalor and his companion enter by the front door, or by some unguarded window. So she turned and ran back to the little boy's room to defend him with an old pistol I had found on the wall and loaded for her with powder and ball.

Then Agnes Anne and I made our way into the cellar. We had taken with us the lantern, which we had hitherto kept covered, lest by the moving of the light about the house we might be suspected of being on our guard.

Hastily I made the tour of the great cellar. The back of the place was full of the *débris* of ancient barrels, some intact, some with gaping sides, many held together with no more than a single hoop. But packed together in one corner and occupying a place about one third of the whole area of the floor was something very different. Tarpaulined, fastened together by ropes, and guarded from damp by planks laid below them, were some hundreds of kegs and packages—all, so far as I could see, marked with curious signs, and in some cases the names of places. One I remember, "Sallet Ooil—Apuglia," gave me a sense of such distance and strangeness, that for a moment I seemed to be travelling in strange countries and seeing curious sights, rather than going down to risk my life in Miss Irma's quarrel with men I had never seen.

It was very evident that there could be but one place where the passage Irma had spoken of (on her father's information) could debouch upon the great cellar of Marnhoul. In the angle behind the mass of kegs was an open space of some yards square, so clean that it looked as if it had been recently swept.

Beyond this again and quite in the corner, there was a step or two downwards, as if it were into the bowels of the earth. This was stopped with a door of stone accurately arranged and fitted with uncommon skill. And I could see at a glance that it was probably one of the same kind that the men whom Agnes Anne had seen were engaged in bursting by stroke of crow. I understood more than that. For there was all the winter in Eden Valley scarce any other subject of talk than the Free Trade (which is to say, plainly, smuggling), and concerning the various "ventures" or boats and crews attached to some famous leader engaged in it.

There was, in fact, no particular moral wrong attaching to the business in Eden Valley or along the Solway shore high and low—rather a sort of piety, since the common folk remembered that the excise had first been instituted by that perjured persecutor of the Church, Charles II. Even the Doctor, though he denounced the practice from the pulpit in befitting words, did so chiefly on the ground that the attractions of Free Trade, its dangers even, carried so many promising young men forth of the parish, and a goodly proportion of them to return no more.

But for all that, I never heard that he refused to partake of the anker of Guernsey which his lady found by chance in the milk-house among the creaming-pans, or by the tombstones of his predecessors in the "Ministers' Corner" of the kirkyard.

I looked at the means of defence, and hidden among the packages at the back I found two good muskets and one or two very worn ones—yet all bearing the marks of recent attention. So, since the smuggled casks formed a kind of breastwork right round the steps—up from the passage that was blocked by the stone door—it came into my head that I could there set up a kind of battery and run from one to the other of them, firing—that is, if the worst came to the worst and the passage were forced. So, having plenty of powder and shot and the wrappings of the lace packages making excellent wads, I set about loading all the muskets. I knew that Agnes Anne would be afraid of what I was doing, having had a horror of firearms ever since, as a child, she had seen Florrie, our old dun cow, shot dead by Boyd Connoway to be our "mart" of the year, and salted down for the winter's food in the big beef barrel. Agnes Anne would never be induced to eat a bit of Florrie, though indeed she was very good and sweet, because forsooth she had been used to milk her and give her handfuls of fresh grass. Since then she had never forgiven Boyd Connoway, and had never been able to look upon a gun with any complaisance.

Yet when I told her to stand back and keep away from the powder horn and the lantern (for it is none of the easiest to charge strange pieces in a dark cellar) she said that she would stand by "King George" while I was at hand—yes, and fire him off, too, if need were. Only I must show her how to pull the trigger, and also adjust the muzzle so as to bear on the steps by which the villains would come up!

This I relate to show how (for the time being) Agnes Anne was worked upon. For, as all have seen, she was naturally of a very timorsome and quavering disposition. At any rate I did get the muskets, all five of them, loaded, and set in position with their noses cocked over the squared bulwarks of Mechlin and Vallenceens, of Strasburg yarn, and Italian silver-gilt wire.

And I can tell you they looked imposing in the light of the lantern, though I was more than a little doubtful about some of them going off without blowing themselves up. But it was no time to cavil about small matters like that, and I said nothing about this to Agnes Anne, who, for her part, continued to glance along the barrel of "King George" at the stone door with the fixity of

my father viewing a star through his large brass spy-glass. Only Agnes Anne, being unable to keep one eye shut and the other open, had to hold the lid of the unoccupied organ hard down with her left hand, as if it too were about to bounce out on us like the two men she had seen in the ice-house mound by the edge of the sunk fence.

We waited a good while with the light of the lamp smothered—all, that is, but barely sufficient to give air to the flame. And I tell you our hearts were gigotting rarely. Even Agnes Anne had taken a sudden liking to “King George,” and would not let him go as I proposed to her, now that all the other muskets were loaded and ready.

“You would do better service with the lantern,” I told her, “you could hold it up to let us see them better.”

But she answered that the lantern could take care of itself. She was going to do some of the real fighting, and so I should not scorn her any more. But I knew very well that it was only a kind of hysteria and would all go off at the dangerous moment. Down she would go on the floor like a bundle of wet rags!

However, to encourage Agnes Anne (as one must do to a girl), I said that she was not to fire till she saw the white of their eyes. I remembered that my father, in speaking of some battle or other, told how the general had given his men that order, so that they might not miss. I thought it very fine.

But Agnes Anne said promptly that she would not wait for the white of anybody’s eyes. She would fire and run for it as soon as she saw their ugly heads coming up out of the ground. This shows how little you can do with a girl, even if she have occasional fits of bravery. And I do not deny that Agnes Anne had, though not naturally brave like myself and Miss Irma.

It was anywhere between five minutes and a century before we heard the first stroke of the crow behind the barricade. It sounded dull and painful, as if inside of one’s head. At first we heard no talking such as Agnes Anne had described at the entrance of the ice-house.

Also, as they had been a good while on the way; I believe that they had found other difficulties which they had not counted upon in traversing the passage. But they were very near now, for presently, after perhaps twenty strokes we could hear the striker sending out his breath with a “*Har*” of effort each time he drove his crow home.

It was very dark in the cellar, for we had covered the lamp more carefully and almost ceased to breathe. But we saw through certain chinks that our assailants had a light of some sort with them. We could discern a faint glimmering all round the upper portion of the stone, and stray rays also pierced at various places elsewhere.

The long line of light at the top suddenly split and seemed to break open in the middle. There came a fierce “*Hech*” from the assailant, and the point of his crowbar showed, slid, and was as sharply recovered. Next moment it came again.

“Lever it!” cried the gruff voice, “if you have the backbone of a windlestraw, lever!”

And after a short, hard-breathing struggle, the stone door fell inwards, the aperture was filled with intense light, dazzling, as it appeared to us—and in the midst we saw two fierce and set faces peering into the dark of the cellar.

CHAPTER XII

THE FIGHT IN THE DARK

One of the peering faces was hot and angry, bearded too, which few then used to do except such as followed the sea. The other was dark and beaked like a hawk, so that the shadow of an aquiline nose fell on the man’s chin as he held the lantern high above his head.

At first we could only see them to about the middle of the breast, as for a little space of time they stood thus, hearkening with their heads thrust forward.

“Not a ratton—forward there, Dick!” said the man behind, and the man with the bushy beard advanced, rising as he did so till I could see the ties of tarry cord with which he looped up his corduroy small-clothes.

Now it was high time to act. The game had been played far enough.

“Hold there—stand!” I cried. “Not a step further or we fire!”

I suppose my voice was echoed and fortified by the hollow vault. Certainly in my own ears it roared like the sound of many waters. At any rate the men stood, dumb-stricken, the tarry

sailorly man a little in front with his mouth open and his yellow dog-teeth gleaming. The other, he who had given the orders, held the lantern higher in the air almost against the stones of the vault, so as to see over the barricade of boxes and barrels.

"'Tis no more than the——" he was beginning. But he never got the sentence completed. For I took good aim from a rest upon a package of cloth, and let fly with the best of the muskets—but at the clear lowe of the lantern, not at the man's face, as I had at first intended. Somehow, a kind of pity came over me. I did not want to slay such men, who, taken in their iniquity, must go right to their accounts. But the lantern was hit clean, and the glass went jingling to the ground in a hundred fragments.

I judge also that some of the slugs must have strayed a little, for out of the darkness came curses and the voice of the commander crying on Dick to get back—that they were too strong for only two men. But the sailor man advanced till I could hear him actually pulling himself over the breastwork, gasping (or, as we say, "pech-"ing) with the effort. Then I ran along my battery, and directing the next two of the old muskets to the arched roof, I fired them off, bringing down with a crash handfuls of rough lime and small bits of stone, mingled no doubt with the ricocheted bullets themselves. At any rate our tarry Galligaskins soon had enough of it. He turned and made good his retreat towards the stairs up which he had forced his way.

Then Agnes Anne, who had no chivalrous ideas of sparing anybody who came assaulting the house of her friends, pulled the trigger of "King George," and in a moment all lesser sounds were drowned in a roar loud as of a piece of ordnance.

The blunderbuss had been trained on the opening with some care, and it was lucky for the men that they happened to be in retreat, and so presenting their backs at the time—lucky, also, that only buckshot had been used instead of the bullets and slugs with which the other guns were loaded. But even so it was enough. She was always careless and scattery, our old "King George." And from the marks on the lintels afterwards she had sprinkled her charge pretty freely. Also there were tokens, besides the yells and imprecations of the assailants and the threats of Galligaskins to come back and do for us, that both of them (as Constable Jacky would have said) "carried off concealed about their persons an indictable quantity of my father's good lead drops."

So far, good. Better than good, indeed—better than we had the least reason to expect, all owing to my presence of mind, and the fortunate nervousness of Agnes Anne—which, however, in the case under review, Providence directed to a wise and good end. I was for running immediately back up the stairs to put the mind of Miss Irma at rest, but Agnes Anne, with that stubbornness which she will often manifest throughout this history, withstood me.

"What is it now?" I asked her, somewhat impatiently, I am bound to admit. For I was all in a sweat to tell Irma about my victory, and how I fought—and also, of course, about Agnes Anne pulling the trigger of "King George" at random in the dark.

"This is the matter," said she, "Irma can wait. But if we do not improve our victory, they will be back again with a whole army of men before we can wink."

"Well," I answered, "I will load the guns first and then go up!"

"Loading the guns is good," said Agnes Anne. "But before that we must blind up this hole by which they climbed in. We will give them something more difficult to break through in this narrow passage than a stone door which they can make holes in with a crowbar!"

And I caught at the idea in a moment, wondering how I had not thought of it myself. But of course, though I did not actually suggest it, Agnes Anne could never have carried it through without me.

We set about the work immediately. I took the big stone they had loosened with their tools and tumbled it down the well of the stairway, where, after rebounding once, it stuck at the turn and made a good foundation for the barrels, boxes and packages we threw down till the whole space was choke full, and then I danced on the top and defied the lantern-man and Dick to get through in a week.

"Now go and tell your Irma!" said Agnes Anne, and I went, while she stopped behind with the lantern and a gun to watch if anything should be attempted against the cellar.

But I knew right well that no such thing was possible. Nothing short of such a charge of gunpowder as would rive the whole house of Marnhoul asunder would suffice to clear the staircase of the packing I had given it. So Agnes Anne might just as well have come her ways up-stairs with me. Still, I do not deny that it was thoughtful of her; Agnes Anne meant well.

Irma had heard the firing, and I found her with her little brother in her arms, sitting by the window of the parlour overlooking the pilasters of the front door. She held little Louis wrapped in a blanket, and kept both herself and him out of sight as much as possible behind the curtain. But she had the horse pistol I had given her on the ledge of the sill close at her hand.

She listened to my tale with a white intensity which was very pitiful. Her eyes seemed so big that they almost overran her face, and there were little sparks of light like fairy candles lit at the bottom of each.

"Lalor Maitland—it was no other man!" she said in an awed voice. "And now he is wounded he will be furious. He has many men always in his power. For he can make or mar a man in the Low Countries, and even bad men will do much for his favour. He will gather to him all who are waiting. They will be here immediately and burst in the doors. Oh, what shall we do? My poor,

poor Louis!"

"There is the woman whom Agnes Anne saw," I said. "Can you guess what she has to do with it? They said they would try her if they did not succeed."

"Why not light the beacon now?" said a voice from the door. It was Agnes Anne, who, being left to herself, the thought had come to her in the dark of the cellar, and had run up to propose it. For me, I was too much occupied with Irma, and I am sure that Irma was far too troubled concerning her brother to think about the beacon. Yet it was the obvious thing to do, and if I had had a moment to spare I would have thought of it myself. So Agnes Anne had no great credit, after all, when you come to look at it rightly.

But the effect of the suggestion on Irma was very remarkable. It was as if the voice of my sister actually raised her from the place where she had been listlessly sitting with her brother in her arms. She snatched the lantern from the hands of Agnes Anne and put little Louis back on his pillow, bidding him stay there till the time should come for him to get up.

"Are the bad men all killed, Irma?" he asked.

"We are going to bring the good people to help us!" she cried. And with that she ran up-stairs, and I after her, in a great pothor of haste. For the candle in her hand was the only bit of fire we had, and I did not want it blown out if I could help it.

CHAPTER XIII

A WORLD OF INK AND FIRE

The idea of Irma's danger on the open house-top and in the full glare of the beacon acted on me like a charm—yet people will say that there is nothing at all in such a relationship as ours. Why, I would not have been half as much concerned for Agnes Anne! And as a matter of fact, I had not been so anxious down there behind the barrels and packages in the cellar, when Lalor Maitland and Galligaskins were coming at us.

Besides which, I knew that Irma, being unused to fire-building, would only waste the excellent provision of kindling, and perhaps do us out of our beacon altogether.

So having joined her, it was not long till we had the tarred cloth off, and, through the interstices of the iron bucket, the little blue and yellow flames began chirping and chattering. But as I pulled the basket up to the height of its iron crane, the wind of the night sent the fire off with a mighty roar. The tops of the nearer trees stood out, every leaf hard and distinct, but the main body of the woods all about Marnhoul remained dark and solid, as if you could have walked upon them without once breaking through.

I stood there watching, with the chain still in my hand, though I had run the ring into the hoop on the wall. We had been very clever so far, and I was full of admiration for ourselves. But a bullet whizzing very near my head, struck the basket with a vicious "scat," doing no harm, of course, but extending to us an urgent invitation to get out of range, that was not to be disregarded.

Irma was close beside me, following with her eyes the mounting crackle of the beacon, the sudden jetting of the tall pale flames that ran upward into the velvet sky of night. For from a pale and haunting grey the firmament had all of a sudden turned black and solid. Middle shades had been ruled out instantly. It was a world of ink and fire.

But that sharp dash of danger cooled admiration in my heart. I caught Irma by the shoulders and, roughly enough, pulled her down beside me on the platform behind the stone ramparts. For a moment I think she was indignant, but the next thankful. For half-a-dozen balls clicked and whizzed about, passing through the square gaps that went all round the tower, as if the wall had had a couple of teeth knocked out at regular distances every here and there.

Very cautiously we crawled to the stair-head, leaving our invisible enemies cracking away at the fire basket, knocking little cascades of sparks out of it, indeed, but doing no harm. For the beacon was thoroughly well alight, and the chain good and strong.

As we descended the ladder I went first so as to help Irma. She was a little upset, as indeed she might well be. For it was quite evident that the number of our assailants had singularly increased, and we did not in the least know whether our signal would do us any good or not.

"It may waken Boyd Connaway," I thought, "but that will be all. He will come sneaking through the wood to see what is the matter so as to tell about it, but he never used a weapon more deadly than a jack-knife with a deer-horn handle."

As Irma's foot slipped on the bottom rung of the ladder, I caught her as she swayed, and for a moment in that dark place I held her in my hands like a posy, fresh and sweet smelling, but sacred as if in church. She said, without drawing herself away, at least not for a moment longer than she need, "Duncan, you saved my life!"

I had it on my tongue tip to reply, "And my own at the same time, for I could not live without you!"

When one is young it is natural to talk like that, but my old awe of Miss Irma preserved me from the mistake. It was too early days for that, and I only said, "I am glad!" And when we got down there was Agnes Anne, with her finger on her lip, watching little Sir Louis sleeping. She whispered to me to know why we had made such a noise firing on the top of the tower.

"It isn't like down in the cellar," she said, "you came as near as you can think to wakening him!"

I was so astonished that I could not even tell Agnes Anne that she would soon find it was not we who had done the firing. The most part of the guns were in the cellar any way, as she might have remembered. Besides, what was the use? She had caught that fell disease, which is baby-worship.

Instead, I posted myself in the window, my body hidden in the red rep curtain, and only my eyes showing through a slit I made with my knife as I peered along the barrel of "King George." I had resolved that with an arm of such short "carry," I would not fire till I had them right beneath the porch, or at least coming up the steps of the mansion.

It was in my mind that there would be a brutal rush at the door, perhaps with pickaxes, perhaps with one of the swinging battering-rams I had read of in the Roman wars, that do such wondrous things when cradled in the joined hands of many men.

But in this I was much mistaken. The assailants were indeed rascals of the same tarry, broad-breeched, stringfasted breed as Galligaskins of the cellar door. But Galligaskins himself I saw not. From which I judge that Agnes Anne had sorted him to rights with the contents of "King George," laid ready for her pointing at the top of the steps by which an enemy must of necessity appear.

But they had a far more powerful weapon than any battering-ram. We saw them moving about in the faint light of a moon in her last quarter just risen above the hills—a true moon of the small hours, ruddy as a fox and of an aspect exceedingly weariful.

Presently there came toward the door two men with a strange and shrouded figure walking painfully between them, as if upon hobbled feet. I could see that one of the men was the tall man of the cave, he in whose hand I had smashed the lantern. I knew him by a wrist that was freshly bandaged, and also by his voice when he spoke. The other who accompanied him was a sailor of some superior grade, a boatswain or such, dressed in good sea cloth, and with a kind of glazed cocked hat upon his head.

It was a very weird business—the veiled woman, the dim skarrow of the beacon, the foxy old moon sifting an unearthly light between the branches, everything fallen silent, and our assailants each keeping carefully to the back of a tree to be out of reach of our muskets.

They came on, the two men leading the woman by the arms till they were out of the flicker of the flames both outside and under the shadow of the house.

Then the tall man, whom in my heart I made sure to be Lalor Maitland, as Irma said, held up his bandaged hand as a man does when he is about to make a speech and craves attention.

"I have been ill-received," he cried, "in this the house of my fathers——"

"Because you have striven to enter it as a thief and a robber!" cried Irma's voice, close beside me. She had passed behind me, slid the bolt of the window, and was now leaning out, resting upon her elbows and looking down at the men below. She was apparently quite fearless. The appearance of her cousin so near seemed somehow to sting her.

"Your brother and yourself are both under my care—I suppose, Mademoiselle Irma, you will not deny that?"

"We were," Irma answered, in a clear voice; "but then, Lalor Maitland, I heard what the fate was you were so kindly destining for me after having killed my brother——"

"And I know who put that foolishness into your head," said Lalor Maitland; "she regrets it at this moment, and has now come of her own will to tell you she lied!"

And with a jerk he loosened the apron which, as I now saw, had been wrapped about the head of the swathed figure. I shall never forget the face of the woman as I saw it then. The uncertain flicker of the flames and sparks from our beacon (which, though itself invisible, darkened and lightened like sheet lightning), the dismal umbery glimmer of the waning moon, and the pale approach of day over the mountains to the east, made the face appear almost ghastly. But I was quite unprepared for the effect which the sight produced upon Irma.

"Kate," she cried, "Kate of the Shore!"

The woman did not reply, though there was an obvious effort to speak—a straining of the neck muscles and a painful rolling of the eyes.

"Yes," said Lalor calmly, as if he were exhibiting a curiosity, "this is your friend to whom you owe your escape. She was doubtless to have received a reward, and in any case we shall give her a fine one. But if you will return to your protector, and come with me immediately on board

the good ship *Golden Hind*, which in some considerable danger, is beating off and on between the heads of Killantringen—then I promise you, you will save the life of our friend Kate here. If not——” (He waved his hand expressively.)

“You dare not kill her,” cried Irma; “in an hour the country will be up, and you will be hunted like dogs.”

“Oh, it is not I,” said Lalor calmly, “I do not love the shedding of blood, and that is why I am here now. But consider those stout fellows yonder. They are restive at having to wait for their pay, and the loss of their captain, wounded in aiding me in obtaining my rights in a quiet and peaceable manner, has by no means soothed them. I advise you, Mistress Irma, to bring down the boy and let us get on board while there is yet time. No one in the house shall be harmed. But listen to Kate—Kate of the Shore. She will speak to you better than I! But first we must perform a little surgical operation!”

And with that he whipped out a bandanna handkerchief, which had been knotted and thrust into her mouth in the manner of a gag.

“Now then,” he said, “put a pistol to her head, Evans! Now, Kate, you have told many lies about your master, the late Governor of the fortress of Dinant. Speak the truth for once in a way. For if you do not tell these foolish children that they have nothing to fear—nay more, if you cannot persuade them to quit their foolish conduct and return to their rightful duty and obedience, it will be my painful duty to ask Evans there, who does not love you as I do, to—well, you know what will happen when that pistol goes off!”

But even in such straits Kate of the Shore was not to be frightened.

“You hear me, Miss Irma,” she said, “I know this bad man. He is only seeking to betray you as he betrayed me. Defend your castle. Open not a window—keep the doors barred. They cannot take the place in the time, for they have the tide to think of.”

“I expected this,” said Lalor, with a vaguely pensive air, “it has ever been my lot to be calumniated, my motives suspected. But I have indeed deserved other things—especially from you, Irma, whom (though your senior in years, and during the minority of my ward Sir Louis, the head of the house), I have always treated with affectionate and, perhaps, too respectful deference!”

“Miss Irma,” cried Kate of the Shore, “take care of that man. He has a pistol ready. I can see the hilt of it in his pocket. You he will not harm if he can help it, but if that be your brother whom I see at the fold of the window-hanging, bid him stand back for his life.”

“Drop your pistol, Evans,” commanded Lalor Maitland, “this part of the play is played out. She will not speak, or rather what she says will do us no good. Women are thrown contrary things at the best, Evans, as I dare say you have noticed in your Principality of Wales. But take heed, you and your precious defenders, I warn you that in an hour the house of Marnhoul shall be flaming over your heads with a torch that shall bring out, not your pitiful burghers from their rabbit-holes, but also the men of half a county.

“Hear me,” he raised his voice suddenly to a strident shout, “hear me all you within the house. Give up the girl and the child to their legal protectors, and no harm shall befall either life or property. We shall be on shipboard in half-an-hour. I shall see to it that every man within the castle is rewarded from the Maitland money that is safe beyond seas, out of the reach of King George! Of that, at least I made sure, serving twice seven years for it in the service of a hard master. I offer a hundred pounds apiece to whoever will deliver the boy and the maid!”

This was a speech which pleased me much, for it showed that from the stoutness of our defence, and the many guns which had been shot off, Lalor was under the impression that the house was garrisoned by a proper force of men—when in truth there was only Miss Irma and me—that is, not counting Agnes Anne.

CHAPTER XIV

THE WHITE FREE TRADERS

But the country was by no means so craven as Lalor supposed. There were bold hearts and ready saddles still in Galloway. The signal from the top of the beacon tower of Marnhoul was seen and understood in half-a-dozen parishes.

Not that the young fellows who saw the flame connected it with the two children who had taken refuge in the old place of the Maitlands. In fact, most knew nothing about their existence. But their alacrity was connected with quite another matter—the great cargo of dutiable and

undutied goods stored away in the cellars of Marnhoul!

There was stirring, therefore, in remote farms, rattling on doors, hurried scrambling up and down stable ladders. Young men on the outskirts of villages might have been seen stealing through gardens, stumbling among cabbage-stocks and gooseberry bushes as they made their way by the uncertain flicker of our far-away beacon to the place of rendezvous.

Herds rising early to "look the hill" gave one glance at the red dance of the flames over the tree-tops of Marnhoul great wood, and anon ran to waken their masters.

For in that country every farmer—aye, and most of the lairds, including a majority of the Justices of the Peace—had a share in the "venture." Sometimes the value of the cargo brought in by a single run would be from fifty to seventy thousand pounds. All this great amount of goods had to be scattered and concealed locally, before it was carried to Glasgow and Edinburgh over the wildest and most unfrequented tracks.

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The officers of the revenue, few and ill-supported, could do little. Most of them, indeed, accepted the quiet greasing of the palm, and called off their men to some distant place during the night of a big run. But even when on the spot and under arms, a cavalcade of a couple of hundred men could laugh at half-a-dozen preventives, and pass by defiantly waving their hands and clinking the chains which held the kegs upon their horses. The bolder cried out invitations to come and drink, and the good-will of the leaders of the Land Free Traders was even pushed so far that, if a Surveyor of Customs showed himself pleasantly amenable, a dozen or more small kegs of second-rate Hollands would be tipped before his eyes into a convenient bog, so that, if it pleased him, he could pose before his superiors as having effected an important capture.

The report which he was wont to edit on these occasions will often compare with the higher fiction—as followeth:—

"Supervisor Henry Baskett, in charge of the Lower Solway district, reports as follows under date June 30th: Found a strong body of smugglers marching between the wild mountains called Ben Tuthor and Blew Hills. They were of the number of three hundred, all well mounted and armed, desperate men, evidently not of this district, but, from their talk and accoutrement, from the Upper Ward of Lanerickshire. Followed them carefully to note their dispositions and discover a favourable place for attack. I had only four men with me, whereof one a boy, being all the force under my command. Nevertheless, at a place called the Corse of Slakes I advanced boldly and summoned them, in the King's name and at the peril of their lives, to surrender.

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"Whereat they turned their guns upon us, each man standing behind his horse and having his face hidden in a napkin lest he should be known. But we four and the boy advanced firmly and with such resolution that the band of three hundred law-breakers broke up incontinent, and taking to flight this way and that through the heather, left us under the necessity of pursuing. We pursued that band which promised the best taking, and I am glad to intimate to your Excellencies, His Majesty's Commissioners, that we were successful in putting the said Free Traders to flight, and capturing twenty-five casks best Hollands, six loads of Vallengeen, etc., etc., as per schedule appended to be accounted for by me as your lordship's commissioners shall direct. In the hope that this will be noted to our credit on the table of advancement (and in this connect I may mention the names of the three men, Thomas Coke, Edward Loyal, Timothy Pierce, and the boy Joseph McDougal, whom I recommend as having done their duty in the face of peril), I have the honour to sign myself,

"My Lords and Hon. Commissioners of H. M. Excise,
"Your obedient, humble servant,
"HENRY BASKETT (Supervisor)."

The other view of this transaction I find more concisely expressed in a memorandum written in an old note-book belonging to my Uncle Tom.

"Baskett held out for forty best French, but we fobbed him off with twenty-five low-grade Rotterdam—the casks being leaky, and some packs of goods too long left at Rathen Cave, which is at the back of the isle, and counted scarce worth the carrying farther. The night fine and business most successful—thanks to an ever-watchful Providence."

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The reader of these family memoirs will perhaps agree with me that, if any one could do without an ever-watchful Providence troubling itself about him, that man was my Uncle Tom.

While, therefore, we in the House of Marnhoul were in the wildest alarm—at least Agnes Anne was—forces which could not possibly be withstood were mustering to hasten to our assistance. The tarry jackets of the *Golden Hind* would doubtless have rushed the front door with a hurrah, as readily as they would have boarded a prize, but Lalor Maitland ordered them to bring wood and other inflammable material. At least, so I judge, for presently I could see them running to and fro about the edges of the wood. They had now learned the knack of keeping in shelter most of the way. But I did not feel really afraid till I saw some of them with kegs of liquor making towards the porch. There they stove them in, and proceeded to empty the contents on the dry branches and fuel they had collected. The matter was now beginning to look really serious. To make things worse, they were evidently digging out the bottom of our cellar-stair barricade, and if they succeeded in that they would turn our position and take us in the rear.

So I sent down Agnes Anne (she not being good for much else) to the cellar to see how things were looking there, bidding her to be careful of the lantern, and to bring back as many of the

five muskets as she could carry, so that I might keep the fellows in check above.

Agnes Anne came flying back with the worst kind of news. A great flame of fire was springing up out of the well of the staircase into which we had tumbled the barrels and boxes. It threatened, she said, to blow us sky-high, if there were any barrels of powder among the goods left by the smugglers. 113

At any rate, the flame was rapidly spreading to the other packages which had formed our breastwork of defence, and was now like to become our ruin.

For, once fairly caught, the spirit would flame high as the rigging of Marnhoul, and we should all be burnt alive, which was most likely what Lolar Maitland meant by his parting threatening.

"And it is more than likely," Agnes Anne added, "that some of the barrels burst as we threw them down the stairs, and so, with the liquor flowing among their feet, the assailants got the idea of thus burning us out."

At all events something had to be done, and that instantly. So I had perforce to leave Agnes Anne in charge of "King George" again, cautioning her not to pull the trigger till she should see the rascals actually bending to set fire to the pile underneath the porch of the front door. I also told her not to be frightened, and she promised not to.

Then I went down to the cellar. The heat there was terrible, and I do not wonder that Agnes Anne came running back to me. A pillar of blue flame was rising straight up against the arched roof of the cellar. I could hear the cries of the men working below in the passage.

"Hook it away—give her air—she will burn ever the brisker and smoke the land-lubbers out!"

Some few of the boxes in the front tier were already on fire, and still more were smouldering, but the straightness of the vent up which the flame was coming, together with the closeness and stillness of the vault, made the flame mount straight up as in a chimney. I therefore divined rather than saw what remained for me to do. I leaped over and began, at the risk of a severe scorching, to throw back all the boxes and packages which were in danger. It was lucky for me that the smugglers had piled them pretty high, and so by drawing one or two from near the foundation, I was fortunate enough to overset the most part of it in the outward direction. 114

But the fierceness of the flame was beginning to tell upon the building-stone of Marnhoul, which was of a friable nature—at least that with which the vault was arched.

Luckily some old tools had been left in the corner, and it struck me that if I could dig up enough of the earthen floor or topple over the mound of earth which had been piled up at the making of the underground passage, the fire must go out for lack of air; or, better still, would be turned in the faces of those who were digging away the barrels and boxes from the bottom of the stair-well.

This, after many attempts and some very painful burns, I succeeded in doing. The first shovelfuls did not seem to produce much effect. So I set to work on the large heap of hardened earth in the corner, and was lucky enough to be able to tumble it bodily upon the top of the column of fire. Then suddenly the terrible column of blue flame went out, just as does a Christmas pudding when it is blown upon. And for the same reason. Both were made of the flames of the French spirit called cognac, or brandy.

Then I did not mind about my burns, I can assure you. But almost gleefully I went on heaping mould and dirt upon the boxes in the well of the staircase, stamping down the earth at the top till it was almost like the hard-beaten floor of the cellar itself. I left not a crevice for the least small flame to come up through. 115

Then I bethought me of what might be going on above, and the flush of my triumph cooled quickly. For I thought that there was only Agnes Anne, and who knows what weakness she may not have committed. She would never have thought, for instance, of such a thing as covering in the flame with earth to put it out. To tell the truth, I did think very masterfully of myself at that moment, and perhaps with some cause, for not one in a thousand would have had the "engine" to do as I had done.

When I got to the top of the stairs, I heard cries from without, which had been smothered by the deepness of the dungeon in which I had been labouring to put out the fire. For a moment I thought that by the failure of Agnes Anne to fire off "King George" at the proper moment, the door had been forced and we utterly lost. Which seemed the harder to be borne, that I had just saved all our lives in a way so original and happy.

But I was wrong. The shouting came not from the wicked crew of the privateersman, but from the shouting of a vast number of people, most of them mounted on farm and country horses, with some of finer limb and better blood, managed by young fellows having the air of laird's sons or others of some position. None of these had his face bare. But in place of the black highwayman masks of the followers of Galligaskins, these wore only a strip of white kerchief across the face, though, as I could see, more for the form of the thing than from any real apprehension of danger.

Indeed, in the very forefront of the cavalcade I saw our own two cart horses, Dapple and Dimple, and the lighter mare Bess, which my grandfather used for riding to and fro upon his milling business. I had not the least doubt that my three uncles were bestriding them, though I never knew that there were any arms about the house except the old fowling-piece belonging to grandfather, with which on moonlight nights he killed the hares that came to nibble the plants in his cabbage garden. 116

Soon the sailors and their abettors were fleeing in every direction. But, what took me very much by surprise, there was no firing or cutting down, though there was a good deal of smiting with the flat of the sword. And at the entrance of the ice-mound I saw a great many very scurvy fellows come trickling out, all burned and scorched, to run the gauntlet of a row of men on foot, who drubbed them soundly with cudgels before letting them go.

Seeing this, I opened the window and shouted with all my might.

“Apprehend them! They are villains and thieves. They have broken into this house and tried to kill us all, besides setting fire to the cellar and everything in it!”

The men without, both those on foot and those on horseback, had been calm till they heard this, and then, lo! each cavalier dismounted and all came running to the door, calling on us to open instantly.

“Not to you any more than to the others!” I cried. For, indeed, I saw not any good reason. It appeared to me, since there was no real fighting, that the two parties must be in alliance, or, at least, have an understanding between them.

But Agnes Anne called out, “Nonsense, I see Uncle Aleck and Uncle Ebenezer. I am going to open the door to them, whatever you say!”

So all in a minute the house of Marnhoul, long so desolate and silent, wherein such deeds of valour and strategy had recently been wrought, grew populous with a multitude all eager to win down to the cellar. But Agnes Anne brought up my three uncles (and another who was with them) and bade them watch carefully over the safety of Louis and Miss Irma. (For so I must again call her now that she had, as it were, come to her own again.)

As for me they carried me down with them, to tell all about the attempt to burn the goods in the cellar. And angry men they were when they saw so many webs of fine cloth, so many bolts of Flanders lace, so many kegs of rare brandy damaged and as good as lost. But when they understood that, but for my address and quickness, all would have been lost to them, they made me many compliments. Also an old man with a silver-hilted sword, who carried himself like some great gentleman, bade me tell him my *name*, and wrote it down in his note-book, saying that I was of too good a head and quick a hand to waste on a dominie.

And, indeed, I was of that mind (or something very much like it) myself. An old haunted house like Marnhoul to defend, a young maid of high family to rescue (and adopt you as her brother for a reward) did somehow take the edge off teaching the Rule of Three and explaining the *De Bello Gallico* to imps who cannot understand, and would not if they could.

PART II

CHAPTER XV

MY GRANDMOTHER SPEAKS HER MIND

“There is no use talking” (said my grandmother, as she always did when she was going to do a great deal of it), “no, listen to me, there is no use talking! These two young things need a home, and if *we* don’t give it to them, who will? Stay longer in that great gaol of a house, worse than any barn, they shall not—exposed day and night to a traffic of sea rascals, thieves and murderers, *they shall not*—”

“What I want to know is who is to keep them, and what the safer they will be here?”

It was the voice of my Aunt Jen which interrupted. None else would have dared—save mayhap my grandfather, who, however, only smiled and was silent.

“Ne’er you mind that, Janet,” cried her mother, “what goes out of our basket and store will never be missed. And father says the same, be sure of that!”

My grandfather did say the same, if to smile quietly and approvingly is to speak. At any rate, in a matter which did not concern him deeply, he knew a wiser way than to contradict Mistress Mary Lyon. She was quite capable of keeping him awake two-thirds of the night arguing it out, without the faintest hope of altering the final result.

“The poor things,” mourned my grandmother, “they shall come here and welcome—that is, till better be. Of course, they might be more grandly lodged by the rich and the great—gentlefolk in their own station. But, first of all, they do not offer, and if they did, they are mostly without

experience. To bring up children, trust an old hen who has clucked over a brood of her own!"

"Safer, too, here," approved my grandfather, nodding his head; "the tarry breeches will think twice before paying Heathknowes a visit—with the lads about and the gate shut, and maybe the old dog not quite toothless yet!"

This, indeed, was the very heart of the matter. Irma and Sir Louis would be far safer at the house of one William Lyon, guarded by his stout sons, by his influence over the wildest spirits of the community, in a house garrisoned by a horde of sleepless sheep-dogs, set in a defensible square of office-houses, barns, byres, stables, granaries, cart-sheds, peat-sheds and the rest.

"And when the great arrive to call," said Aunt Jen, with sour insight, "you, mother, will stop the churning just when the butter is coming to put on your black lace cap and apron. You will receive the lady of the manse, and Mrs. General Johnstone, and——"

"And if I do, Jen," cried her mother, "what is that to you?"

"Because I have enough to do as it is," snapped Jen, "without your butter-making when you are playing the lady down the house!"

Grandmother's black eyes crackled fire. She turned threateningly to her daughter.

"By my saul, Lady Lyon," she cried, "there is a stick in yon corner that ye ken, and if you are insolent to your mother I will thrash you yet—woman-grown as ye are. Ye take upon yourself to say that which none of your brothers dare set their tongue to!"

And indeed there is little doubt but that Mary Lyon would have kept her word. So far as speech was concerned, my Aunt Jen was silenced. But she was a creature faithful to her prejudices, and could express by her silence and air of injured rectitude more than one less gifted could have put into a parliamentary oration.

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Her very heels on the stone floor of the wide kitchen at Heathknowes, where all the business of the house was transacted, fell with little raps of defiance, curt and dry. Her nose in the air told of contempt louder than any words. She laid down the porridge spurtle like a queen abdicating her sceptre. She tabled the plates like so many protests, signed and witnessed. She swept about the house with the glacial chill which an iceberg spreads about it in temperate seas. Her displeasure made winter of our content—of all, that is, except Mary Lyon's. She at least went about her tasks with her usual humming alacrity, turning work over her shoulder as easy as apple-peeling.

Being naturally lazy myself (except as to the reading of books), I took a great pleasure in watching grandmother. Aunt Jen would order you to get some work if she saw you doing nothing—malingerer, she called it—yes, and find it for you too, that is, if Mary Lyon were not in the house to tell her to mind her own business.

But you might lie round among grandmother's feet for days, and, except for a stray cuff in passing if she actually walked into you—a cuff given in the purest spirit of love and good-will, and merely as a warning of the worse thing that might happen to you if you made her spill the dinner "sowens"—you might spend your days in reading anything from the *Arabian Nights* in Uncle Eben's old tattered edition to the mighty *Josephus*, all complete with plans and plates—over which on Sundays my grandfather was wont to compose himself augustly to sleep.

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Well, Miss Irma and Sir Louis came to my grandmother's house at Heathknowes. Yes, this is the correct version. The house of Heathknowes was Mary Lyon's. The mill in the wood, the farm, the hill pastures—these might be my grandfather's, also the horses and wagons generally, but his power—his "say" over anything, stopped at the threshold of the house, of the byre of cows, at the step of the rumbling little light cart in which he was privileged to drive my grandmother to church and market. In these places and relations he became, instead of the unquestioned master, only as one of ourselves, except that he was neither cuffed nor threatened with "the stick in the corner." All the same, this immunity did not do him much good, for many a sound tongue-lashing did he receive for his sins and shortcomings—indeed, far more so than all the rest of us. For with us, my grandmother had a short and easy way.

"I have not time to be arguing with the likes of you!" she would cry. And upon the word a sound cuff removed us out of her path, and before we had stopped tingling Mary Lyon had plunged into the next object in hand, satisfied that she had successfully wrestled with at least one problem. But with grandfather it was different. He had to be convinced—if possible, convicted—in any case overborne.

To accomplish this Mary Lyon would put forth all her powers, in spite of her husband's smiles—or perhaps a good deal because of them. Upon her excellent authority, he was stated to be the most irritating man betwixt the Brigend of Dumfries and the Braes of Glenap.

"Oh, man, say what you have to say," she would cry, when reduced to extremities by the obvious unfairness of his silent mode of controversy, "but don't sit there girning like a self-satisfied monkey!"

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"Mother!" exclaimed Aunt Jen, horrified. For she cherished a secret tenderness for my grandfather, perhaps because their natures were so different, "How can you speak so to our father?"

"Wait till you get a man of your ain, Janet," my grandmother would retort, "then you will have new light as to how it is permitted for a woman to speak."

With this retort Aunt Jen was well acquainted, and had to be thankful that it was carried no

further, as it often was in the case of any criticisms as to the management of children. In this case Aunt Jen was usually invited not to meddle, on the forcible plea that what a score of old maids knew about rearing a family could be put into a nutshell without risk of overcrowding.

The room at Heathknowes that was got ready for the children was the one off the parlour—"down-the-house," as it was called. Here was a little bed for Miss Irma, her washstand, a chest of drawers, a brush and comb which Aunt Jen had "found," producing them from under her apron with an exceedingly guilty air, while continuing to brush the floor with an air of protest against the whole proceeding.

From the school-house my father sent a hanging bookcase—at least the thing was done upon my suggestion. Agnes Anne carried it and Uncle Ebie nailed it up. At any rate, it was got into place among us. The cot of the child Louis had been arranged in the parlour itself, but at the first glance Miss Irma turned pale, and I saw it would not do.

"I have always been accustomed to have him with me," she said; "it is very kind of you to give us such nice rooms—but—would you mind letting him sleep where I can see him?"

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It was Aunt Jen who did the moving without a word, and that, too, with the severe lines of disapproval very nearly completely ruled off her face. It was, in fact, better that they should be together. For while the parlour looked by two small-paned windows across the wide courtyard, the single casement of the little bedroom opened on the orchard corner which my grandfather had planted in the first years of his taking possession.

The house of Heathknowes was of the usual type of large Galloway farm—a place with some history, the house ancient and roomy, the office houses built massively in a square, as much for defence as for convenience. You entered by a heavy gate and you closed it carefully after you. From without the walls of the quadrangle frowned upon you unbroken from their eminence, massy and threatening as a fortress. The walls were loopholed for musketry, and, in places, still bore marks of the long slots through which the archers had shot their bolts and clothyard shafts in the days before powder and ball.

Except the single gate, you could go round and round without finding any place by which an enemy might enter. The outside appearance was certainly grim, unpromising, inhospitable, and so it seemed to Miss Irma and Sir Louis as they drove up the loaning from the ford.

But within, everything was different. What a smiling welcome they received, my grandfather standing with his hat off, my grandmother with the tears in her motherly vehement eyes, gathering the two wanderers defiantly to her breast as if daring all the world to come on. Behind a little (but not much) was Aunt Jen, asserting her position and rights in the house. She did not seem to see Miss Irma, but to make up, she never took her eyes off the little boy for a moment.

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Then my uncles were ranged awkwardly, their hands lonesome for the grip of the plough, the driving reins, or the water-lever at the mill in the woods.

Uncle Rob, our dandy, had changed his coat and put on a new neckcloth, an act which, as all who know a Scots farm town will understand, cost him a multitude of flouts, jeers and upcasting from his peers.

I was also there, not indeed to welcome them, but because I had accompanied the party from the house of Marnhoul. The White Free Traders had established a post there to watch over one of their best "hidie-holes," even though they had removed all their goods in expectation of the visit of a troop of horse under Captain Sinclair, known to have been ordered up from Dumfries to aid the excise supervisor, as soon as that zealous officer was sure that, the steed being stolen, it was time to lock the stable door.

But when the dragoons came, there was little for them to do. Ned Henderson, the General Surveyor of the Customs and head of the district in all matters of excise, was far too careful a man to allow more to appear than was "good for the country." He knew that there was hardly a laird, and not a single farmer or man of substance who had not his finger in the pie. Indeed, after the crushing national disaster of Darien, this was the direction which speculation naturally took in Scotland for more than a hundred years.

In due time, then, the dragoons arrived, greatly to the interest of all the serving lasses—and some others. There was, of course, a vast deal of riding about, cantering along by-ways, calling upon this or that innocent to account for his presence at the back of a dyke or behind a whin-bush—which he usually did in the most natural and convincing manner possible.

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The woods were searched—the covers drawn. Many birds were disturbed, but of the crew of the *Golden Hind*, or the land smugglers by whose arrival the capture and burning of Marnhoul had been prevented, no trace was found. Even Kate of the Shore's present address was known to but few, and to these quite privately. There was no doubt of her faithfulness. That had been proven, but she knew too much. There were questions which, even unanswered, might raise others.

Several young men, of good family and connections, thought it prudent to visit friends at a distance, and at least one was never seen in the country more.

One of his Majesty's frigates had been sent for to watch the Solway ports, much to the disgust of her officers. For not only had they been expected at the Portsmouth summer station by numerous pretty ladies, but the navigation between Barnhourie and the Back Shore of Leswalt was as full of danger as it was entirely without glory. If they were unlucky, they might be cashiered for losing the ship. If lucky, the revenue men would claim the captured cargo. If they

secured the malefactors they would sow desolation in a score of respectable families, with the daughters of which they had danced at Kirkcudbright a week ago.

In Galloway, though a considerable amount of recklessness mingled with the traffic, and there were occasional roughnesses on the high seas and about the ports and anchorages of Holland and the Isle of Man, there was never any of the cruelty associated with smuggling along the south coast of England. The smugglers of Sussex killed the informer Chater with blows of their whips. A yet darker tragedy enacted farther west, brought half-a-dozen to a well-deserved scaffold. But, save for the losses in fair fight occasioned by the intemperate zeal of some new broom of a supervisor anxious for distinction, the history of Galloway smuggling had, up to that time, never been stained with serious crime.

Meantime the two Maitlands, Sir Louis and Miss Irma, were safely housed within the defenced place of Heathknowes, guarded by William Lyon and his three stout sons, and mothered by all the hidden tenderness of my grandmother's big, imperious, volcanic heart.

Only my Aunt Jen watched jealously with a half-satisfied air and took counsel with herself as to what the end of these things might be.

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CHAPTER XVI

CASTLE CONNOWAY

Meanwhile Boyd Connoway was in straits. Torn between two emotions, he was pleased for once to have found a means of earning his living and that of his family—especially the latter. For his own living was like that of the crows, "got round the country somewhere!" But with the lightest and most kindly heart in the world, Boyd Connoway found himself in trouble owing to the very means of opulence which had brought content to his house.

On going home on the night after the great attack on Marnhoul, weary of directing affairs, misleading the dragoons, whispering specious theories into the ear of the commanding officer and his aides, he had been met at the outer gate of his cabin by a fact that overturned all his notions of domestic economy. Ephraim, precious Ephraim, the Connoway family pig, had been turned out of doors and was now grunting disconsolately, thrusting a ringed nose through the bars of Paradise. Now Boyd knew that his wife set great store by Ephraim. Indeed, he had frequently been compared, to his disadvantage, with Ephraim and his predecessors in the narrow way of pigs. Ephraim was of service. What would the "poor childer," what would Bridget herself do without Ephraim? Bridget was not quite sure whether she kept Ephraim or whether Ephraim kept her. At any rate it was not to Boyd Connoway that she and her offspring were anyways indebted for care and sustenance.

"The craitur," said Bridget affectionately, "he pays the very rint!"

But here, outside the family domain, was Ephraim, the beloved of his wife's heart, actually turned out upon a cold and unfeeling world, and with carefully spaced grunts of bewilderment expressing his discontent. If such were Ephraim's fate, how would the matter go with him? Boyd Connoway saw a prospect of finding a husband and the father of a family turned from his own door, and obliged to return and take up his quarters with this earlier exile.

The Connoway family residence was a small and almost valueless leasehold from the estate of General Johnstone. The house had always been tumbledown, and the tenancy of Bridget and her brood had not improved it externally. The lease was evidently a repairing one. For holes in the thatch roof were stopped with heather, or mended with broad slabs of turf held down with stones and laboriously strengthened with wattle—a marvel of a roof. It is certain that Boyd's efforts were never continuous. He tired of everything in an hour, or sooner—unless somebody, preferably a woman, was watching him and paying him compliments on his dexterity.

The cottage had originally consisted of the usual "but-and-ben"—that is to say, in well regulated houses (which this one was not) of a kitchen—and a room that was not the kitchen. The family beds occupied one corner of the kitchen, that of Bridget and her husband in the middle (including accommodation for the latest baby), while on either side and at the foot, shakedown were laid out "for the childer," slightly raised from the earthen floor on rude trestles, with a board laid across to receive the bedding. There was nothing at either side to provide against the occupants rolling over, but, as the distance from the ground did not average more than four inches, the young Connoways did not run much danger of accident on that account.

Disputes were, however, naturally somewhat frequent. Jerry or Phil would describe himself as "lying on so many tatures"—Mary or Kitty declare that her bedfellow was "pullin' every scrap off of her, that she was!"

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To quell these domestic brawls Bridget Connoway kept at the head of the middle bed a long peeled willow, which was known as the "Thin One." The Thin One settled all night disputes in the most evenhanded way. For Bridget did not get out of bed to discriminate. She simply laid on the spot from which the disturbance proceeded till that disturbance ceased. Then the Thin One returned to his corner while innocent and guilty mingled their tears and resolved to conduct hostilities more silently in future.

In the daytime, however, the "Thick One" held sway, which was the work-hardened palm of Mistress Bridget Connoway's hand. She was ambidextrous in correction—"one was as good as t'other," as Jerry remarked, after he had done rubbing himself and comparing damages with his brother Phil, who had got the left. "There's not a fardin' to pick between us!" was the verdict as the boys started out to find their father, stretched on his favourite sunny mound within sight of the Haunted House of Marnhoul—now more haunted than ever.

But on this occasion Boyd Connoway was on his return, when he met the exiled Ephraim. His meditations on his own probable fate have led the historian into a sketch of the Connoway establishment, which, indeed, had to come in somewhere.

For once Boyd wasted no time. With his wife waiting for him it was well to know the worst and get it over. He opened the door quickly, and intruding his hat on the end of his walking stick, awaited results. It was only for a moment, of course, but Boyd Connoway felt satisfied. His Bridget was not waiting for him behind the door with the potato-beetle as she did on days of great irritation. His heart rose—his courage returned. Was he not a free man, a house-holder? Had he not taken a distinguished part in a gallant action? Bridget must understand this. Bridget should understand this. Boyd Connoway would be respected in his own house!

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Nevertheless he entered hastily, sidling like a dog which expects a kick. He avoided the dusky places instinctively—the door of the "ben" room was shut, so Bridget could not be lying in wait there. Was it in the little closet behind the kitchen that the danger lurked? The children were in bed, save the two youngest, all quiet, all watching with the large, dreamy blue (Connoway) eyes, or the small, very bright ones (Bridget's) what his fate would be.

He glanced quaintly, with an interrogative lift of his eyebrows, at the bed to the left. Jerry of the twinkling sloe-eyes answered with a quick upturn of the thumb in the direction of the spare chamber.

Boyd Connoway frowned portentously at his eldest son. The youth shook his head. The sign was well understood, especially when helped out with a grin, broad as all County Donegal 'twixt Killibegs and Innishowen Light.

The "Misthress" was in a good temper. Reassured, on his own account, but inwardly no little alarmed for his wife's health in these unusual circumstances, Boyd began to take off his boots with the idea of gliding safely into bed and pretending to be asleep before the wind had time to change.

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But Jerry's mouth was very evidently forming some words, which were meant to inform his father as to particulars. These, though unintelligible individually, being taken together and punctuated with jerks in the direction of the shut door of "doon-the-hoose," constituted a warning which Boyd Connoway could not afford to neglect.

He went forward to the left hand bed, cocked his ear in the direction of the closed door, and then rapidly lowered it almost against his son's lips.

"She's gotten a hurt man down there," said Jerry, "she has been runnin' wi' white clouts and bandages a' the forenigh. And I'm thinkin' he's no very wise, either—for he keeps cryin' that the deils are comin' to tak' him!"

"What like of a man?" said Boyd Connoway.

But Jerry's quick ear caught a stirring in the room with the closed door. He shook his head and motioned his father to get away from the side of his low truckle bed.

When his wife entered, Boyd Connoway, with a sober and innocent face, was untying his boot by the side of the fire. Bridget entered with a saucepan in her hand, which, before she deigned to take any notice of her husband, she pushed upon the red ashes in the grate.

From the "ben" room, of which the door was now open, Boyd could hear the low moaning of a man in pain. He had tended too many sick people not to know the delirium of fever, the pitiful lapses of sense, then again the vague and troubled pour of words, and at the sound he started to his feet. He was not good for much in the way of providing for a family. He did a great many foolish, yet more useless things, but there was one thing which he understood better than Bridget—how to nurse the sick.

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He disengaged his boot and stood in his stocking feet.

"What is it?" he said, in an undertone to Bridget.

"No business of yours!" she answered, with a sudden hissing vehemence.

"I can do *that* better than you!" he answered, for once sure of his ground.

His wife darted at him a look of concentrated scorn.

"Get to bed!" she commanded him, declining to argue with such as he—and but for the twinkling eyes of Jerry, which looked sympathy, Boyd would have preferred to have joined the exiled Ephraim under the dark pent among the coom of the peat-house.

He looked to Jerry, but Jerry was sound asleep. So was Phil. So were all the others.

"Very well, däärlin'!" said Boyd Connoway to himself as his wife left the room. "But, sorrow am I for the man down there that she will not let me nurse. She's a woman among a thousand, is Bridget Connoway. But the craitur will be after makin' the poor man eat his poultices, and use his beef tay for outward application only!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE MAN "DOON-THE-HOOSE"

But Bridget Connoway, instant and authoritative as she was, could not prevent her down-trodden husband from thinking. Who was the mysterious wounded man "down-the-house"? One of the White Smugglers? Hardly. Boyd had been in the thick of that business and knew that no one had been hurt except Barnboard Tam, whose horse had run away with him and brushed him off, a red-haired Absalom in homespuns, against the branches in Marnhoul Great Wood.

One of the crew of the *Golden Hind*, American-owned privateersman with French letters of marque? Possibly one of the desperate gang they had landed called the Black Smugglers, scum of the Low Dutch ports, come to draw an ill report upon the good and wholesome fame of Galloway Free Trade.

In either case, Boyd Connoway little liked the prospect, and instead of going to bed, he remained swinging his legs before the fire in a musing attitude, listening to the moaning noises that came from the chamber he was forbidden to enter. He was resolved to have it out with his wife.

He had not long to wait. Bridget appeared in the doorway, a bundle of dark-stained cloths between her palms. She halted in astonishment at the sight which met her eyes. At first it seemed to her that she was dreaming, or that her voice must have betrayed her. She gave her husband the benefit of the doubt.

"I thought I tould ye, Boyd Connoway," she said in a voice dangerously low and caressing, "to be getting off to your bed and not disturbin' the childer'!"

"Who is the man that had need of suchlike?" demanded Boyd Connoway, suddenly regaining his lost heritage as the head of a house, "speak woman, who are ye harbouring there?"

Bridget stood still. The mere unexpectedness of the demand rendered her silent. The autocrat of all the Russias treated as though he were one of his own ministers of state could not have been more dumbfounded.

With a sudden comprehension of the crisis Bridget broke for the poker, but Boyd had gone too far now to recoil. He caught at the little three-legged stool on which he was wont to take his humble frugal meals. It was exactly what he needed. He had no idea of assaulting Bridget. He recognized all her admirable qualities, which filled in the shortcomings of his shiftlessness with admirable exactitude. He meant to act strictly on the defensive, a system of warfare that was familiar to him. For though he had never before risen up in open revolt, he had never counted mere self-preservation as an insult to his wife.

"*Whack!*" down came the poker in the lusty hand of Bridget Connoway. "*Crack!*" the targe in the lifted arm of Boyd countered it. At arm's-length he held it. The next attack was cut number two of the manual for the broad-sword. Skilfully with his shield Boyd Connoway turned it to the side, so that, gliding from the polished oak of the well-worn seat, the head of the poker caught his wife on the knee, and she dropped her weapon with a cry of pain. Jerry and the other children, in the seventh heaven of delight at the parental duel, were sitting up in their little night-shirts (which for simplicity's sake were identical with their day-shirts); their eyes, black and blue, sparkled unanimous, and they made bets in low tones from one bed to another.

"Two to one on Daddy!"

"Jerry, ye ass, I'll bet ye them three white chuckies^[1] he'll lose!"

"Hould your tongue, Connie—mother'll win, sure. The Thick 'Un will get him!"

Such combats were a regular interest for them, and one, in quiet times, quite sympathized in by their father, who would guide the combat so that they might have a better view.

"Troth, and why shouldn't they, poor darlints? Sure an' it's little enough amusement they have!"

He had even been known to protract an already lost battle to lengthen out the delectation of his offspring. The Cæsars gave to their people "Bread and the circus!" But they did not usually enter the arena themselves—save in the case of the incomparable bowman of Rome, and then

only when he knew that no one dared stand against him. But Boyd Connoway fought many a losing fight that his small citizens might wriggle with delight on their truckles. "The Christians to the lions!" Yes, that was noble. But then they had no choice, while Boyd Connoway, a willing martyr, fought his lioness with a three-legged stool.

This time, however, the just quarrel armed the three-legged, while cut number two of Forbes's Manual fell, not on Boyd Connoway's head, for which it was intended, but on Bridget's knee-cap. Boyd of the tender heart (though stubborn stool), was instantly upon his knees, his buckler flung to the ground and rubbing with all his might, with murmurings of, "Does it hurt now, darlint?—Not bääd, sure?—Say it is better now thin, darlint!"

Boyd was as conscience-stricken as if he had personally wielded the poker. But the mind of Bridget was quite otherwise framed. With one hand she seized his abundant curly hair, now with a strand or two of early grey among the straw-colour of it, and while she pulled handfuls of it out by the roots (so Boyd declared afterwards), she boxed his ears heartily with the other. Which, indeed, is witnessed to by the whole goggle-eyed populace in the truckle bed.

"Didn't I tell ye, Jerry, ye cuckoo," whispered Connie, "she'd beat him? He's gettin' the Thick 'Un, just as I told ye!"

"But it's noways fair rules," retorted Jerry; "father he flung down his weepion for to rub her knee when she hurt it herself wid the poker!"

Jerry had lost his bet, as indeed he usually did, but for all that he remained a consistent supporter of the losing side. Daily he acknowledged in his body the power of the arm of flesh, but the vagrant butterfly humour of the male parent with the dreamy blue eyes touched him where he lived—perhaps because his, like his mother's, were sloe-black.

Nevertheless, in spite of mishandling and a scandalous disregard of the rules of the noble art of self-defence (not yet elaborated, but only roughly understood as "Fair play to all"), Boyd Connoway carried his point.

He saw the occupant of the bed "doon-the-hoose."

He was a slim man with clean-cut features, very pale about the gills and waxen as to the nose. He lay on the bed, his head ghastly in its white bandages rocking from side to side and a stream of curses, thin and small of voice as a hill-brook in drought, but continuous as a mill-lade, issuing from between his clenched teeth.

These adjurations were in many tongues, and their low-toned variety indicated the swearing of an educated man.

Boyd understood at once that he had to do with no vulgar Tarry-Brecks, no sweepings of a couple of hemispheres, but with "a gentleman born." And in Donegal, though they may rebel against their servitude and meet them foot by foot on the field or at the polling-booths, they know a gentleman when they see one, and never in their wildest moods deny his birthright.

Boyd, therefore, took just one glance, and then turning to his wife uttered his sentiment in three words of approval. "I'm wid ye!" he said.

Had it been Galligaskins or any seaman of the *Golden Hind*, Boyd would have had him out of the house in spite of his wife and all the wholesome domestic terror she had so long been establishing.

But a Donegal man is from the north after all, and does not easily take to the informer's trade. Besides, this was a gentleman born.

Yet he had better have given hospitality to Galligaskins and the whole crew of pirates who manned the *Golden Hind* than to this slender, clear-skinned creature who lay raving and smiling in the bedroom of Boyd Connoway's cabin.

[1] "Chuckies," white pebbles used, in these primitive times, instead of marbles.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF AUNT JEN

Never was anything seen like it in our time. I mean the transformation of Aunt Jen, the hard crabapple of our family, after the entrance of the Maitland children into the household of Heathknowes. Not that my aunt had much faith in Irma. She had an art, which my aunt counted uncanny, indeed savouring of the sin of witchcraft. It mattered not at all what Irma was given to wear—an old tartan of my grandmother's Highland Mary days when she was a shepherdess by

the banks of Cluden, a severe gown designed on strictly architectural principles by the unabashed shears of Aunt Jen herself, a bodice and skirt of my mother's, dovelike in hue and carrying with them some of her own retiring quality in every line. It was all the same, with a shred or two of silk, with a little undoing here, a little tightening there, a broad splash of colour cut from one of my Uncle Rob's neckcloths—not anywhere, but just in the right place—Irma could give to all mankind the impression of being the only person worth looking at in the parish. With these simple means she could and did make every other girl, though attired in robes that had come all the way from Edinburgh, look dowdy and countrified.

Also she had the simple manner of those who stand in no fear of any one taking a liberty with them. Her position was assured. Her beauty spoke for itself, and as for the old tartan, the slab-sided merino, the retiring pearl-grey wincey, their late owners did not know them again when they appeared in the great square Marnhoul pew in the parish church, which Irma insisted upon occupying.

I think that a certain scandal connected with this, actually caused more stir in the parish than all the marvel of the appearance of the children in the Haunted House. And for this reason. Heathknowes was a Cameronian household. The young men of Heathknowes were looked upon to furnish a successor to their father as an elder in the little meeting-house down by the Fords. But with the full permission of my grandmother, and the tacit sympathy of my grandfather, each Sabbath day Miss Irma and Sir Louis went in state to the family pew at the parish kirk (a square box large enough to seat a grand jury). The children were perched in the front, Irma keeping firm and watchful guard over her brother, while in the dimmer depths, seen from below as three sturdy pairs of shoulders against the dusk of a garniture of tapistry, sat the three Cameronian young men of Heathknowes.

Nothing could so completely and fully have certified the strength of my grandmother's purpose than that she, a pillar of the Covenant, thus complacently allowed her sons to frequent the public worship of an uncovenanted and Erastian Establishment.

But there was at least one in the house of Heathknowes not to be so misled by the outward graces of the body.

"Favour is vain and the eye of Him that sitteth in the heavens regardeth it not," she was wont to say, "and if Rob and Thomas and Ebenezer come to an ill end, mother, you will only have yourself to thank for it!"

"Nonsense, Jen," said her mother, "if you are prevented by your infirmities from talkin' sense, at least do hold your tongue. Doctor Gillespie is a Kirkman and a Moderate, but he is—well, he is the Doctor, and never a word has been said against him for forty year, walk and conversation both as becometh the Gospel——"

"Aye, but *is* it the Gospel?" cried Jen, snipping out her words as with scissors; "that's the question."

"When I require you, Janet Lyon, to decide for your mother what is Gospel and what is not, I'll let ye ken," said my grandmother, "and if I have accepted a responsibility from the Most High for these children, I will do my best to render an account of my stewardship at the Great White Throne. In the meantime, *you* have no more right to task me for it, than—than—Boyd Connoway!"

"There," cried Jen, slapping down the last dish which she had been drying while her mother washed, "I declare, mother, I might just as well not have a tongue at all. Whatever I say you are on my back. And as if snubbing me were not enough, down you must come on me with the Great White Throne!"

Her aggrieved voice made my grandmother laugh.

"Well-a-well!" she said, in her richly comfortable voice of a mother of consolation, "you are of the tribe of Marthas, Jen, and you certainly work hard enough for everybody to give your tongue a right to a little trot now and then. You will have all the blessings, daughter Janet—except that of the peacemaker. For it's in you to set folk by the ears and you really can't help it. Though who you took it from is more than I can imagine, with a mother as mild as milk and a father——"

"Well, what about the father—speak of the—um-um—father and he will appear, I suppose!"

It was my grandfather who had come in, his face bronzed with the sun and a friendly shaving tucked underneath his coat collar at the back, witnessing that some one of his sons, in the labours of the pirn-mill, had not remembered the first commandment with promise.

His wife removed it with a smile, and said, "I'll wager ye that was yon rascal Rob. He is always at his tricks!"

"Well, what were you saying about me, old wife?" said grandfather, looking at his wife with the quiet fondness that comes of half-a-century of companionship.

"Only that Jen there had a will-o'-the-wisp of a temper and that I knew not how she got it, for you only go about pouring oil upon the waters!"

"As to that, you know best, guidwife," he answered, smiling, "but I think I have heard of a wife up about the Heathknowes, who in some measure possesses the power of her unruly member. It is possible that Jen there may have picked up a thorn or two from that side!"

William Lyon caught his daughter's ear.

"Eh, lass, what sayest thou?" he crooned, looking down upon her with a tenderness rare to him

with one of his children. "What sayest thou?"

"I say that you and mother and all about this house have run out of your wits about this slip of a girl? I say that you may rue it when you have not a son to succeed you at the Kirk of the Covenant down by the Ford."

The fleeting of a smile came over my grandfather's face, that quiet amusement which usually showed when my grandmother opposed her will to his, and when for once he did not mean to give in.

"It's a sorrowful thing—a whole respectable household gone daft about a couple of strange children;" he let the words drop very slowly. "Specially I was distressed to hear of one who rose betimes to milk a cow, so that the cream would have time to rise on the morning's milk by their porridge time!"

"Father," said Jen, "that was for the boy bairn. He has not been brought up like the rest of us, and he does not like warm milk with his porridge."

"Doubtless—ah, doubtless," said William Lyon; "but if he is to bide with us, is it not spoiling him thus to give way to suchlike whims? He will have to learn some day, and when so good a time as now?"

Aunt Jen, who knew she was being teased, kept silence, but the shoulder nearest my father had an indignant hump.

"Wheesht, William," interposed grandmother good-naturedly, "if Jen rose betimes to get milk for the bairn, ye ken yoursel' that ye think the better of her for it. And so do I. Jen's not the first whose acts are kindlier than her principles."

But Jen kept her thorns out and refused to be brought into the fold by flattery, till her father said, "Jen, have ye any of that fine homebrewed left, or did the lads drink it a' to their porridges? I'm a kennin' weary, and nothing refreshes me like that!"

Jen felt the artfulness of this, nevertheless she could not help being touched. The care of the still-room was hers, because, though my grandmother could go through twice the work in the day that her daughter could, the brewing of the family small beer and other labours of the still-room were of too exact and methodical a nature for a headlong driver like Mary Lyon.

My grandfather got his ale, of the sort just then beginning to be made—called "Jamaica," because a quantity of the cheap sugar refuse from the hogsheads was used in its production. In fact, it was the ancestor of the "treacle ale" of later years. But to the fabrication of this beverage, Jen added mysterious rites, during which the door of the still-room was locked, barred, and the keyhole blinded, while Eben and Rob, my uncles, stood without vainly asking for a taste, or simulating by their moans and cries the most utter lassitude and fatigue.

William Lyon sat sipping his drink while Jen eyed him furtively as she went about the house, doing her duties with the silence and exactitude of a well-oiled machine. She was a difficult subject, my aunt Jen, to live with, but she could be got at, as her father well knew, by a humanizing vanity.

He sat back with an air of content in his great wide chair, the chair that had been handed down as the seat of the head of the house from many generations of Lyonses. He sipped and nodded his head, looking towards his daughter, and lifting the tankard with a courtly gesture as if pledging her health.

Jen was pleased, though for a while she did not allow it to be seen, and her only repentance was taking up the big empty goblet without being asked and going to the still-room to refill it.

During her absence my grandfather shamelessly winked at my grandmother, while my grandmother shook her fist covertly at her husband. Which pantomime meant to say on the part of William Lyon that *he* knew how to manage women, while on his wife's side it inferred that she would not demean herself to use means so simple and abject as plain flattery even with a "camsteary" daughter.

But they smiled at each other, not ill-content, and as my grandmother passed to the dresser she paused by the great oak chair long enough to murmur, "She's coming round!" But my grandfather only smiled and looked towards the door that led to the still-room, pantries and so forth, as if he found the time long without his second pot of sugar ale.

He was something of a diplomat, my grandfather.

It was while sitting thus, with the second drink of harmless "Jamaica" before him, my aunt and grandmother crossing each other ceaselessly on silent feet, that a knock came to the front door.

Now in Galloway farm houses there is a front door, but no known use for it has been discovered, except to *be* a door. Later, it was the custom to open it to let in the minister on his stated visitations, and later still to let out the dead. But at the period of which I write it was a door and nothing more.

Both of these other uses are mere recent inventions. The shut front door of my early time stood blistering and flaking in the hot sun, or soaking—crumbling, and weather-beaten—during months of bad weather. For, with a wide and noble entrance behind upon the yard, so well-trodden and convenient, so charged with the pleasant press of entrants and exodants, so populous with affairs, from which the chickens had to be "shooed" and the moist noses of questing calves pushed aside twenty times a day—why should any mortal think of entering by the front door of the house. First of all it was the front door. Next, no one knew whether it

would open or not, though the odds were altogether against it. Lastly, it was a hundred miles from anywhere and opened only upon a stuffy lobby round which my grandmother usually had her whole Sunday wardrobe hung up in bags smelling of lavender to guard against the moths.

Nevertheless, the knock sounded distinctly enough from the front door.

"Some of the bairns playing a trick," said my grandmother tolerantly, "let them alone, Janet, and they will soon tire o't!"

But Jen had showed so much of the unwonted milk of human kindness that she felt she must in some degree retrieve her character. She waited, therefore, for the second rap, louder than the first, then lifted a wand from the corner and went "down-the-house," quietly as she did all things.

Aunt Jen concealed the rod behind her. Her private intention was to wait for the third knock, and then open suddenly, with the deadly resolve to teach us what we were about—a mental reservation being made in the case of Baby Louis, who (if the knocker turned out to be he) must obviously have been put up to it.

The third knock fell. Aunt Jen leaped upon the door-handle. Bolts creaked and shot back, but swollen by many rainy seasons, the door held stoutly as is the wont of farm front doors. Then suddenly it gave way and Aunt Jen staggered back against the wall, swept away by the energy of her own effort. The wand fell from her hand, and she stood with the inner door handle still clutched in nervous fingers before a slight dapper man in a shiny brown coat, double-breasted and closely buttoned, even on this broiling day—while the strident "*weesp-weesp*" of brother Tom down in the meadow, sharpening his scythe with a newly fill "strake," made a keen top-note to the mood of summer.

"Mr. Poole," said the slim man, uncovering and saluting obsequiously, and then seeing that my aunt rested dumb-stricken, the rod which had been in pickle fallen to the floor behind her, he added with a little mincing smile and a kind of affected heel-and-toe dandling of his body, "I am Mr. Wrighton Poole, of the firm of Smart, Poole, and Smart of Dumfries."

CHAPTER XIX

LOADED-PISTOL POLLIXFEN

Now Aunt Jen's opinion of lawyers was derived from two sources, observation and a belief in the direct inspiration of two lines of Dr. Watts, his hymns.

In other words, she had noticed that lawyers sat much in their offices, twiddling with papers, and that they never went haymaking nor stood erect in carts dumping manure on the autumnal fields. So two lines of Dr. Watts, applicable for such as they, and indeed every one not so aggressively active as herself, were calculated to settle the case of Mr. Wrighton Poole.

"Satan finds some mischief
For idle hands to do."

Indeed, I had heard of them more than once myself, when she caught me lying long and lazy in the depths of a haymow with a book under my nose.

At any rate Aunt Jen suspected this Mr. Poole at once. But so she would the Lord Chancellor of England himself, for the good reason that by choice and custom he sat on a woolsack!

"I'd woolsack him!" Aunt Jen had cried when this fact was first brought to her notice; "I'd make him get up pretty quick and earn his living if he was my man!"

My grandfather had pointed out that the actual Lord Chancellor of the moment was a bachelor, whereupon Aunt Jen retorted, "Aye, and doubtless that's the reason. The poor body has nobody to do her duty by him!"

For these excellent reasons my Aunt Jen took a dislike to Mr. Wrighton Poole (of the firm of Smart, Poole, and Smart, solicitors, Dumfries) at the very first glance.

And yet, when he was introduced into the state parlour with the six mahogany-backed, haircloth-seated chairs, the two narrow arm-chairs, the four ugly mirrors, and the little wire basket full of odds and ends of crockery and foreign coins—covered by the skin of a white blackbird, found on the farm and prepared for stuffing—he looked a very dapper, respectable, personable man. But my Aunt Jen would have none of his compliments on the neatness of the house or the air of bien comfort that everything about the farm had worn on his way thither.

She drew out a chair for him and indicated it with her hand.

"Bide there," she commanded, "till I fetch them that can speak wi' you!" An office which, had she chosen, Jen was very highly qualified to undertake, save for an early and deep-rooted conviction that business matters had better be left to the dealing of man and man.

This belief, however, was not in the least that of my grandmother. She would come in and sit down in the very middle of one of my grandfather's most private bargainings with the people to whom he sold his spools and "pirns." She had her say in everything, and she said it so easily and so much as a matter of course that no one was ever offended.

Grandfather was at the mill and in consequence it was my grandmother who entered from the dairy, still wiping her hands from the good, warm buttermilk which had just rendered up its tale of butter. There was a kind of capable and joyous fecundity about my grandmother, in spite of her sharp tongue, her masterful ways, the strictness of her theology and her old-fashioned theories, which seemed to produce an effect even on inanimate things. So light and loving was her hand—the hand that had loved (and smacked) many children, brooded over innumerable hatchings of things domestic, tended whole byrefuls of cows, handled suckling lambs with dead mothers lying up on the hill—aye, played the surgeon even to robins with broken legs, for one of which she constructed a leg capable of being strapped on, made it out of the whalebone of an old corset of her own for which she had grown too abundant!

So kindly was the eye that could flash fire on an argumentative Episcopalian parson—and send him over two pounds of butter and a dozen fresh-laid eggs for his sick wife—that (as I say) even inanimate objects seemed to respond to her look and conform themselves to the wish of her finger tips. She had been known to "set" a dyke which had twice resolved itself into rubbish under the hands of professionals. The useless rocky patch she had taken as a herb garden blossomed like the rose, bringing forth all manner of spicy things. For in these days in Galloway most of the garnishments of the table were grown in the garden itself, or brought in from the cranberry bogs and the blaeberry banks, where these fruits grew among a short, crumbly stubble of heather, dry and elastic as a cushion, and most admirable for resting upon while eating.

Well, grandmother came in wiping her hands. It seems to me now that I see her—and, indeed, whenever she does make an entry into the story, I always feel that I must write yet another page about the dear, warm-hearted, tumultuous old lady.

She saw the slender lawyer with the brown coat worn shiny, the scratch wig tied with its black wisp of silk, and the black bag in his hand. He had been taking a survey of the room, and started round quickly at the entrance of my grandmother. Then he made a deep bow, and grandmother, who could be very grand indeed when she liked, bestowed upon him a curtsy the like of which he had not seen for a long while.

"My name is Poole," he said apologetically. "I presume I have the honour of speaking to Mistress Mary Lyon, spouse and consort of William Lyon, tacksman of the Mill of Marnhoul with all its lades, weirs, and pendicles—"

"If you mean that William Lyon is my man, ye are on the bit so far," said my grandmother; "pass on. What else hae ye to say? I dinna suppose that ye cam' here to ask a sicht o' my marriage lines."

"It is, indeed, a different matter which has brought me thus far," said the lawyer man, with a certain diffidence, "but I think that perhaps I ought to wait till—till your husband, in fact—"

"If you are waiting for Weelyum," said Mary Lyon, "ye needna fash. He is o' the same mind as me—or will be after I have spoken wi' him. Say on!"

"Well, then," the lawyer continued, "it is difficult—but the matter resolves itself into this. I understand—my firm understands, that you are harbouring in or about this house a young woman calling herself Irma Sobieski Maitland, and a child of the male sex whom the aforesaid Irma Sobieski affirms to be the rightful owner of this estate—in fact, Sir Louis Maitland. Now, my firm have been long without direct news of the family whom they represent. Our intelligence of late years has come from their titular and legal guardian, Mr. Lalor Maitland, Governor of the district of the Upper Meuse in the Brabants. Now we have recently heard from this gentleman that his wards—two children bearing a certain resemblance to those whom, we are informed, you have been harbouring—"

My grandmother's temper, always uncertain with adults with whom she had no sympathy, had been gradually rising at each repetition of an offending word.

"Harbouring," she cried, "harbouring—let me hear that word come out o' your impident mouth again, ye upsettin' body wi' the black bag, and I'll gie ye the weight o' my hand against the side o' your face. Let me tell you that in the house of Heathknowes we harbour neither burrowing rats nor creepin' foumarts, nor any manner of unclean beasts—and as for a lawvier, if lawvier ye be, ye are the first o' your breed to enter here, and if my sons hear ye talkin' o' harbourin'—certes, ye stand a chance to gang oot the door wi' your feet foremost!"

"My good woman," said the lawyer, "I was but using an ordinary word, in perfect ignorance of any—"

"Come na, nane o' that crooked talk! Mary Lyon is nae bit silly Jenny Wren to be whistled off the waa' wi' ony siccan talk. Dinna tell me that a lawvier body doesna ken what 'harbouring rogues and vagabonds' means—the innocent lamb that he is—and him reading the *Courier* every Wednesday!"

"But," said the solicitor, with more persistent firmness than his emaciated body and timorous manner would have led one to expect, "the children are here, and it is my duty to warn you that in withholding them from their natural guardian you are defying the law. I come to require that the children be given up to me at once, that I may put them under their proper tutelage."

"Here, William," my grandmother called out, recognizing the footsteps of her husband approaching, "gae cry the lads and lock the doors! There's a body here that will need some guid broad Scots weared on him."

But the lawyer was not yet frightened. As it appeared, he had only known the safe plainstones of Dumfries—so at least Mary Lyon thought. For he continued his discourse as if nothing were the matter.

"I came here in a friendly spirit, madam," he said, "but I have good reason to believe that every male of your household is deeply involved in the smuggling traffic, and that several of them, in spite of their professions of religion, assaulted and took possession of the House of Marnhoul for the purpose of unlawfully concealing therein undutied goods from the proper officers of the crown!"

"Aye, and ken ye wha it was that tried to burn doon your Great House," cried my grandmother—"it was your grand tutor—your wonderfu' guardian, even Lalor Maitland, the greatest rogue and gipsy that ever ran on two legs. There was a grandson o' mine put a charge o' powder-and-shot into him, though. But here come the lads. They will tell ye news o' your tutor and guardian, him that ye daur speak to me about committing the puir innocent bairns to—what neither you nor a' the law in your black bag will ever tak' frae under the roof-tree o' Mary Lyon. Here, this way, lads—dinna be blate! Step ben!"

And so, without a shadow of blateness, there stepped "ben" Tom and Eben and Rob. Tom had his scythe in his hand, for he had come straight from the meadow at his father's call, the sweat of mowing still beading his brow, and the broad leathern strap shining wet about his waist. Eben folded a pair of brawny arms across a chest like an oriel window, but Rob always careful for appearances, had his great-grandfather's sword, known in the family as "Drumclog," cocked over his shoulder, and carried his head to the side with so knowing an air that the blade was cold against his right ear.

Last of all my grandfather stepped in, while I kept carefully out of sight behind him. He glanced once at his sons.

"Lads, be ashamed," he said; "you, Thomas, and especially you, Rob. Put away these gauds. We are not 'boding in fear of weir.' These ill days are done with. Be douce, and we will hear what this decent man has to say."

There is no doubt that the lawyer was by this display of force somewhat intimidated. At least, he looked about him for some means of escape, and fumbled with the catch of his black hand-bag.

"Deil's in the man," cried Mary Lyon, snatching the bag from him, "but it's a blessing I'm no so easy to tak' in as the guidman there. Let that bag alane, will ye, na! Wha kens what may be in it? There—what did I tell you?"

Unintentionally she shook the catch open, and within were two pistols cocked and primed, of which Eben and Tom took instant possession. Meanwhile, as may be imagined, my grandmother improved the occasion.

"A lawvier, are you, Master Wringham Poole o' Dumfries," she cried? "A bonny lawvier, that does his business wi' a pair o' loaded pistols. Like master, like man, I say! There's but ae kind o' lawvier that does his business like that—he's caa'ed a cut-purse, a common highwayman, and ends by dancing a bonny saraband at the end o' a tow-rope! Lalor Maitland assaulted Marnhoul wi' just such a band o' thieves and robbers—to steal away the bairns. This will be another o' the gang. Lads, take hold, and see what he has on him."

But with one bound the seemingly weak and slender man flung himself in the direction of the door. Before they could move he was out into the lobby among the lavender bags containing Mary Lyon's Sunday wardrobe, and but for the fact that he mistook the door of a preserve closet for the front door, he might easily have escaped them all. But Rob, who was young and active, closed in upon him. The slim man squirmed like an eel, and even when on the ground drew a knife and stuck it into the calf of Rob's leg. A yell, and a stamp followed, and then a great silence in which we looked at one another awe-stricken. Mr. Wringham Poole lay like a crushed caterpillar, inert and twitching. It seemed as if Rob had killed him; but my grandfather, with proper care and precautions drew away the knife, and after having passed a hand over the body in search of further concealed weapons, laid him out on the four haircloth chairs, with a footstool under his head for a pillow.

Then, having listened to the beating of the wounded man's heart, he reassured us with a nod. All would be right. Next, from an inner pocket he drew a pocket-book, out of the first division of which dropped a black mask, like those worn at the assault upon Marnhoul, with pierced eyeholes and strings for fastening behind the ears. There were also a few papers and a card on which was printed a name—

"Wringham Pollixfen Poole"; and then underneath, written in pencil in a neat lawyer-like hand, were the words, "Consultation at the Old Port at midnight to-morrow."

At this we all looked at one another with a renewal of our perturbation. The firm of Smart, Poole and Smart had existed in Dumfries for a long time, and was highly considered. But in these

troubled times one never knew how far his neighbour might have been led. A man could only answer for himself, and even as to that, he had sometimes a difficulty in explaining himself. One of the firm of lawyers in the High Street might have been tempted out of his depth. But, at any rate, here was one of them damaged, and that by the hasty act of one of the sons of the house of Heathknowes—which in itself was a serious matter.

My grandfather, therefore, judged it well that the lawyers in Dumfries should be informed of what had befallen as soon as possible. But Mr. Wringham Pollixfen Poole, if such were his name, was certainly in need of being watched till my grandfather's return, specially as of necessity he would be in the same house as Miss Irma and Sir Louis.

None of the young men, therefore, could be spared to carry a message to Dumfries. My father could not leave his school, and so it came to pass that I was dispatched to saddle my grandfather's horse. He would ride to Dumfries with me on a pillion behind him, one hand tucked into the pocket of his blue coat, while with the other I held the belt about his waist to make sure. I had to walk up the hills, but that took little of the pleasure away. Indeed, best of all to me seemed that running hither and thither like a questing spaniel, in search of all manner of wild flowers, or the sight of strange, unknown houses lying in wooded glens—one I mind was Goldielea—which, as all the mead before the door was one mass of rag-weed (which only grows on the best land), appeared to me the prettiest and most appropriate name for a house that ever was.

And so think I still.

CHAPTER XX

THE REAL MR. POOLE

So in time we ran to Dumfries. And my grandfather put up at a hostelry in English Street, where were many other conveyances with their shafts canted high in the air, the day being Wednesday. He did not wait a moment even to speak to those who saluted him by name, but betook himself at once (and I with him) to the lawyers' offices in the High Street—where it runs downhill just below the Mid Steeple.

Here we found a little knot of people. For, as it turned out (though at the time we did not know it), Messrs. Smart, Poole and Smart were agents for half the estates in Dumfriesshire, and our Galloway Marnhoul was both a far cry and a very small matter to them.

So when we had watched a while the tremors of the ingoers, all eager to ask favours, and compared them with the chastened demeanour of those coming out, my grandfather said to me with his hand on my shoulder, "I fear, Duncan lad, we shall sleep in Dumfries Tolbooth this night for making so bauld with one of a house like this!"

And from this moment I began to regard our captive Mr. Poole with a far greater respect, in spite of his pistols—which, after all, he might deem necessary when travelling into such a wild smuggling region as, at that day and date, most townsbodies pictured our Galloway to be.

We had a long time to wait in a kind of antechamber, where a man in a livery of canary and black stripes, with black satin knee-breeches and paste buckles to his shoes took our names, or at least my grandfather's and the name of the estate about which we wanted to speak to the firm.

For, you see, there being so many to attend to on market day, they had parted them among themselves, so many to each. And when it came to our turn it was old Mr. Smart we saw. The grand man in canary and black ushered us in, told our name, adding, "of Marnhoul estate," as if we had been the owners thereof.

We had looked to see a fine, noble-appearing man sitting on a kind of throne, receiving homage, but there was nobody in the room but an old man in a dressing-gown and soft felt slippers, stirring the fire—though, indeed, it was hot enough outside.

He turned towards us, the poker still in his hand, and with an eye like a gimlet seemed to take us in at a single glance.

"What's wrong? What's wrong the day?" he cried in an odd sing-song; "what news of the Holy Smugglers? More battle, murder, and sudden death along the Solway shore?"

I had never seen my grandfather so visibly perturbed before. He actually stammered in trying to open out his business—which, now I come to think of it, was indeed of the delicatest.

"I have," he began, "the honour of speaking to Mr. Smart the elder?"

"It is an honour you share with every Moffat Tam that wants a new roof to his pigstye," grumbled the old man in the dressing-gown, "but such as it is, say on. My time is short! If ye want mainners ye must go next door!"

"Mr. Smart," said my grandfather, "I have come all the way from the house of Heathknowes on the estate of Marnhoul to announce to you a misfortune."

"What?" cried the old fellow in the blanket dressing-gown briskly, "has the dead come to life again, or is Lalor Maitland turned honest?"

But my grandfather shook his head, and with a lamentable voice opened out to the head of the firm what had befallen their Mr. Poole, how he had come with pistols in his bag, and gotten trodden on by Rob, my reckless uncle, so that he was now lying, safe but disabled, in the small wall cabinet of Heathknowes.

I was expecting nothing less than a cry for the peace officers, and to be marched off between a file of soldiers—or, at any rate, the constables of the town guard.

But instead the little man put on a pair of great glasses with rims of black horn, and looked at my grandfather quizzically and a trifle sternly to see if he were daring to jest. But presently, seeing the transparent honesty of the man (as who would not?), he broke out into a snort of laughter, snatched open a door at his elbow, and cried out at the top of his voice (which, to tell the truth, was no better than a screech), "Dick Poole—ho there, big Dick Poole!—I want you, Dickie!"

I could see nothing from the next room but a haze of tobacco smoke, which presently entering, set the old man in the dressing-gown a-coughing.

"Send away thy rascals, Dick," he wheezed, "and shut that door, Dickie. That cursed reek of yours would kill a hog of the stye. Hither with you, good Dick!"

And after a clinking of glasses and the trampling of great boots on the stairs, an immense man came in. His face was a riot of health. His eyes shone blue and kindly under a huge fleece of curly black hair. There was red in his cheeks, and his lips were full and scarlet. His hand and arm were those of a prizefighter. He came in smiling, bringing with him such an odour of strong waters and pipe tobacco that, between laughing and coughing, I thought the old fellow would have choked. Indeed, I made a step forward to pat the back of his dressing-gown of flannel, and if Mary Lyon had been there, I am sure nothing would have stopped her from doing it.

Even when he had a little recovered, he still stood hiccoughing with the tears in his eyes, and calling out with curious squirms of inward laughter, "Dick, lad, this will never do. Thou art under watch and ward down at the pirn-mill of Marnhoul! And it was a wench that did it. Often have I warned thee, Dick! Two pistols thou hadst in a black bag. Dick—for shame, Dick—for shame, thus to fright a decent woman! And her son, Rob (I think you said was the name of him), did trample the very life out of you—which served you well and right, Dickie! Oh, Dickie, for shame!"

The big man stood looking from one to the other of us, with a kind of comical despair, when, hearing through the open door between the old gentleman's room and his own, the sounds of a noisy irruption and the clinking of glasses beginning again, he went back, and with a torrent of rough words drove the roysterers forth, shutting and locking the door after them.

Then he came strolling back, leaned his arm on the mantelpiece, and bade my grandfather tell him all about it. I can see him yet, this huge ruddy man, spreading himself by the fireplace, taking up most of the room with his person, while he of the flannel dressing-gown wandered about *tee-heeing* with laughter—and, round one side or the other, or between the legs of the Colossus, making an occasional feeble poke at the fire.

It was curious also to see how my grandfather's serene simplicity of manner and speech compelled belief. I am sure that at first the big man Dick had nothing in his mind but turning us out into the street as he had done the roysterers. But as William Lyon went on, his bright eye grew more thoughtful, and when my grandfather handed him the slip with the name of Mr. Wringham Pollixfen Poole upon it, he absolutely broke into a hurricane of laughter, which, however, sounded to me not a little forced and hollow—though he slapped his leg so loud and hard that the little man in the dressing-gown stopped open-mouthed and dropped his poker on the floor.

"It seems to me," he cried shrilly, "that if you hit yourself like that, Dick Poole, you will split your buckskin breeches, which appear to be new."

But the big man took not the least notice. He only stared at the scrap of paper, and then started to laugh again.

"Oh, don't do that!" cried his partner. "You will blow my windows out, and you know how I hate a draught!"

And indeed they were rattling in their frames. Then the huge Dick went forward and took my grandfather by the hand.

"You are sure you have got him?" he inquired; "remember, he is slippery as an eel."

"My wife is looking after him—my three sons also," said William Lyon, "and I think it likely that the stamp he got from Rob will keep him decently quiet for a day at least. You see," he added apologetically, "he drave the knife into the thick of the poor lad's leg!"

"Wringham?" cried the big man, "why, I did not think he had so muckle spunk!"

"Is he close freend of yours?" my grandfather inquired a little anxiously. For he did not wish to land himself in a blood-feud with the kin of a lawyer.

"Friend of mine!" cried the big man, "no, by no means a friend—but, as it may chance, some sort of kin. However that may be, if you have indeed got Pollixfen safe, you have done the best day's work that ever you did for yourself and for King George, God bless him!"

"Say you so?" said my grandfather. "Indeed, I rejoice me to hear it. I have ever been a loyal subject. And as to the Maitland bairns—you see no harm in their making their home with my goodwife, where the lads can take care of them—in the unsettled state of the country!"

The senior partner at last got in a poke at the fire, for which he had been long waiting his chance.

"And you, Master Lyon, that are such a good kingsman," he kekkled, "do you never hear the blythe Free Traders go clinking by, or find an anker of cognac nested in your yard among the winter-kail?"

"Mr. Smart," said the big man, "this is a market day, but I shall need to ride and see if this is well founded. You will put on your coat decently and take my work. Abraham has already as much as he can do. Be short with them—they will not come wanting to drink with you as they do with me! If what this good Cameronian says be true at this moment, as I have no doubt it was when he left Marnhoul, the sooner I, Richard Poole, am on the spot the better."

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So he bade us haste and get our beast out of the yard. As for him he was booted and spurred and buckskinned already. He had nothing to do but mount and ride.

All this had passed so quickly that I had hardly time to think on the strangeness of it. *Our* Mr. Poole, he to whom my uncle Rob had given such a stamp, was not the partner in the ancient firm of Smart, Poole and Smart of the Plainstones. Of these I had seen two, and heard the busy important voice of the third in another room as we descended the stairs. They were all men very different from the viper whom my grandmother had caught as in a bag. Even Mr. Smart was a gentleman. For if he had a flannel dressing-gown on, one could see the sparkle of his paste buckles at knee and instep, and his hose were of the best black silk, as good as Doctor Gillespie's on Sacrament Sabbath when he was going up to preach his action sermon. But our Mr. Wringham Pollixfen Poole—I would not have wiped my foot on him—though, indeed, Uncle Rob had made no bones about that matter.

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CHAPTER XXI

WHILE WE SAT BY THE FIRE

Through the deep solitude of Tereggles Long Wood, past lonely lochs on which little clattering ripples were blowing, into a west that was all barred gold and red islands of fire, we rode. Or rather grandfather and I went steadily but slowly on our pony, while beside us, sometimes galloping a bit, anon trotting, came big Mr. Richard Poole on his black horse. Sometimes he would ride off up a loaning to some farm-town where he had a job to be seen to, or rap with the butt of his loaded whip at the door of some roadside inn—the Four Mile house or Crocketford, where he would call for a tankard and drain it off, as it were, with one toss of the head.

It was easy to be seen that, for some reason of his own, he did not wish to get to Heathknowes before us. Yet, after he had asked my grandfather as to the children, and some details of the attack on the house of Marnhoul (which he treated as merely an affair between two rival bands of smugglers) he was pretty silent. And as we got nearer home, he grew altogether absorbed in his thoughts.

But I could not help watching him. He looked so fine on his prancing black, with the sunset glow mellowing his ruddy health, and his curious habit of constantly making the thong of his horsewhip whistle through the air or smack against his leg.

I had met as big men and clever men, but one so active, so healthy, so beautiful I had never before seen. And every time that a buxom wife or a well-looking maid brought him his ale to the door of the change-house, he would set a forefinger underneath her chin and pat her cheek, asking banteringly after the children or when the wedding was coming off. And though they did not know him or he them, no one took his words or acts amiss. Such was the way he had with him.

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And about this time I began to solace myself greatly with the thought of the meeting there would be between these two—the false Poole and the true.

At last we came in the twilight to the Haunted House of Marnhoul, and Mr. Richard made his

horse rear almost as high as the unicorn does in the sign above the King's Arms door, so suddenly did he swing him round to the gate. He halted the beast with his head against the very bar and looked up the avenue. The grass in the glade was again covered with dew, for the sky was clear and it was growing colder every minute. It shone almost like silver, and beyond was the house standing like a dim dark-grey patch between us and the forest.

"This gate has been mended," he remarked, tapping the new wooden post that had come down from the mill a day or two before.

"I saw to that myself, sir," said my grandfather. "I also painted it."

"Ha, well done—improving the property for your young guests!" said Mr. Richard, and then quite suddenly he turned moodily away. All at once he looked at my grandfather again. "You had better know," he said, "that the girl will have no money. So she ought to be taught dairymaking. I am partial to dairymaids myself! If she favours the Maitlands, she ought to make a pretty one."

My grandfather said nothing, for he did not like this sort of talk, and was utterly careless whether Miss Irma were penniless or the greatest heiress in the country. 164

Then the long whitewashed rectangle of the Heathknowes office-houses loomed above us on their hill. In a minute more we were at the gate. My grandfather called, and through the door of the kitchen came a long vertical slab of light that fell in a broad beam across the yard. Then one of the herd-lads hurried across to open the barred "yett" and let us in.

"Is all safe?" said my grandfather.

"As ye left him," was the answer. "The mistress and the lads have never taken their eyes off him for a moment!"

"Take this gentleman's horse, Ben," said my grandfather. But Mr. Richard preferred to be his own hostler, nor did he offer to go near the house or speak a word of his business till he had seen his splendid black dully stalled.

Then my grandmother was summoned, the children brought down, and immediately stricken, Sir Louis with an intense admiration of the great strong man in riding boots, and Miss Irma with a dislike quite as intense. I could see her averting her eyes and trying to hide it. But over all the other women in the house he established at once a paramount empire. Even my Aunt Jen followed him with her eyes, so much of the room did he take up, so large and easy were his gestures, and with such a matter-of-course simplicity did he take the homage they paid him.

Yet he seemed to care far more about Miss Irma than even my grandmother, or the fellow of his name whom he had ridden so far to see.

He asked her whether she would rather stay where she was or come to Dumfries, to be near the theatre and Assembly balls. As for a chaperon, she could make her choice between Mrs. Hope of the Abbey and the Provost's lady. Either would be glad to oblige the daughter of a Maitland of Marnhoul—and perhaps also Mr. Richard Poole. 165

Then, after hearing her answer, he asked for pen and paper and wrote a few lines—

"As Miss Irma Maitland urgently desires that her brother and she should remain under the care of Mr. William Lyon and his wife at Heathknowes, and as the aforesaid William and Mary Lyon are able and willing to provide for their maintenance, we see no reason why the arrangement should not be an excellent and suitable one, at least until such time as Sir Louis must be sent to school, when the whole question will again come up. And this to hold good whatever may be the outcome of this interview with the person calling himself Wringham Pollixfen Poole,

"For Smart, Poole and Smart,
"R. POOLE."

He handed the paper across to my grandmother, in whom he easily recognized the ruling spirit of the household.

"There, madam," he said, "that will put matters on a right basis with my firm whatever may happen to me. And now, if you please, I should like to see my double at once. I suspect a kinsman, but do not be afraid of a vendetta. If Master Robin, of whose prowess I have already heard, has crushed in a rib or two, so much the better. Even if he had broken my worthy relative's back, I fear me few would have worn mourning!"

They found the three young men still in the room, and my grandmother did no more than assure herself of the presence of the still white-wrapped figure on the shakedown in the corner, before leading Mr. Richard into the parlour. 166

He went out from us with a jovial nod to my father, a low bow to Miss Irma, and mock salutation to little Sir Louis, his head high in the air, his riding whip swinging by its loop from his arm, and as it seemed, a vigour of blood sufficient for a dozen ordinary people circulating in his veins.

"Thank you, gentlemen," he said to my uncles, as soon as he had looked at the bed and lifted the kerchief which Mary Lyon had laid wet upon the brow. "I recognize, as I had reason to expect, a scion of my house, however unworthy, with whom it will be necessary for me to communicate privately. But if you will retire to the kitchen, I shall easily signal you should your services become again necessary."

He stood with the edge of the door in his hand, and with a slight bow ushered each of my uncles out. I was there, too, of course, seeing what was to be seen. His eye lighted on me, and a

slinking figure I must have presented in spite of my usual courage, for he only turned one thumb back over his shoulder with a comical smile, and bade me get to bed, because when he was young he, too, knew what keyholes were good for.

The word "too" hurt me, for it meant that he thought I was going to eavesdrop, whereas I was merely, for the sake of Irma and the family, endeavouring to satisfy a perfectly legitimate curiosity.

I did, however, hear him say as he shut and locked the parlour door, "Now, sir, the play is played. Sit up and take off that clout. Let us talk out this affair like men!"

It was now night, and we were gathered in the kitchen. I do not think that even Rob took much supper. I know that but for my grandfather the horses would have had to go without theirs—and this, the most sacred duty of mankind about a farm, would for once have been neglected. We sat, mainly in the dark, with only the red glow of the fire in our faces, listening to the voice of a man that came in stormy gusts. The lamp had been left on the parlour table to give them light, and somehow we were so preoccupied that none of us thought of lighting a candle.

The great voice of Mr. Richard dominated us—so full of contempt and anger it was. We could not in the least distinguish what the impostor said in reply. Indeed, Rob and I could just hear a kind of roopy clattering like that of a hungry hen complaining to the vague Powers which rule the times and seasons of distribution from the "daich" bowl.

There was something very strange in all this—so strange that when my grandfather came back, for the first time in the history of Heathknowes, no chapter was read, no psalm sung or prayer read. Somehow it seemed like an impiety in the face of what was going on down there. Mr. Richard talked far the most. At first his mood was all of stormy anger, and the replies of the other, as I have said, almost inaudible.

But after a while these bursts of bellowing became less frequent. The low replying voice grew, if not louder, more persistent. Mr. Richard seemed to be denying or refusing something in short gruff gasps of breath.

"No, no—no! By heaven, sir, NO!" we heard him cry plainly. And somehow hearing that, Irma crept closer to me, and slid her hand in mine, a thing which she had not done since the night of watching in the Old House of Marnhoul.

Somehow both of us knew that it was a question of herself.

Then suddenly upon this long period of to-and-fro, there fell (as it were) the very calmness of reconciliation. Peace seemed to be made, and I think that all of us were glad of it, for the suspense and an increasing tension of the nerves were telling on us all.

"They are shaking hands," whispered my grandmother; "Mr. Richard has brought him to his senses. Fine I knew he would."

"I wonder if they will put him in prison or let him off because of the family?" said Rob, adjusting the bandage about his wounded leg. "Anyway, I am glad of the bit tramp he got from my yard clogs!"

"Wheesht!" whispered my grandfather, inclining his ear in the direction of the parlour door. We all listened, but it was nothing. Not a murmur.

"They will be writing something—some bond or deed, most likely."

"They are long about it," said William Lyon uneasily.

The silence endured and still endured till an hour was passed. My grandfather fidgeted in his chair. At last he said in a low tone, "Lads, we have endured long enough. We must see what they are at. If we are wrong, I will bear the weight!"

As one man the four moved towards the door, through the keyhole of which a ray of light was stealing from the lamp that had been left on the table.

"Open!" cried my grandfather suddenly and loudly. But the door remained fast.

"Is all right there, Master Richard?" he shouted. Still there was silence within.

"Put your shoulders to it, lads!" Eben and Tom were at it in a moment, while strong Rob, springing from the far side of the passage, burst the lock and sent the door back against the inner wall, the hinges snapped clean through.

Mr. Richard was sitting in a quiet room, his head leaning forward on his hands. His loaded riding whip was flung in a corner. The window was wide open, and the night black and quiet without. Sweet odours of flowers came in from the little garden. The lamp burned peacefully and nothing in the room was disturbed. But Mr. Wringham Pollixfen was not there, and when we touched him, Mr. Richard Poole was dead, his head dropped upon his arms.

PART III

CHAPTER XXII

BOYD CONNOWAY'S EVIDENCE

The loop of the riding-whip on Mr. Richard's wrist was broken, and behind his ear there was a lump the size of a small hen's egg. There were no signs of a struggle. The two men had been sitting face to face, eye to eye, when by a movement which must have been swift as lightning, one had disarmed and smitten the other.

Tom, Eben and Rob armed themselves and went out. But the branches of Marnhoul wood stood up against the sky, black, serried and silent. The fields beneath spread empty and grey. The sough of the wind and the fleeing cloud of night was all they saw or heard. They were soon within the house again, happy to be there and the door barred stoutly upon them.

Except for little Louis, who was already in bed on the other side of the house where his chamber was, and so knew nothing of the occurrence till the morning, there was no sleep for any that night at Heathknowes. At the first clear break of day Tom and Eben took the cart-horses and rode over to tell Dr. Gillespie, General Johnstone, and Mr. Shepstone Oglethorpe, who were all Justices of the Peace, of what had happened. They came, the General the most imposing, with a great army cloak and a star showing beneath the collar.

In the little detached sitting-room, which till the coming of the Maitlands had been used as a cheese-room, Mr. Richard Poole sat, as he had been found, his head still bowed upon his arms, but on his face, when they raised it to look, there was an absolute terror, so that even the General, who had seen many a day of battle, was glad to lay it down again. 171

They took such testimony as was to be had, which was but little, and all tending to one startling conclusion. Suddenly, swiftly, noiselessly, within hearing of eight or nine people, in a defensible house, with arms at hand, Mr. Richard Poole, of the firm of Smart, Poole and Smart, had been done to death.

Yet he had known something, though perhaps not the full extent of his danger. We recalled his silences, his moodiness as he approached the farm—the manner in which he had at once put aside all claims, even on a market Wednesday, that he might ride and speak with a man who, if he were not a felon, was certainly no honourable acquaintance for such as Mr. Richard.

The three gentlemen looked at each other and took snuff from the Doctor's gold box.

"Very serious, sir!" said Mr. Shepstone tentatively. For indeed he had not many ideas—a fact which the others charitably put down to his being an Episcopalian. Really he wanted to find out what they thought before committing himself.

"Tempestuous Theophilus!" cried the General, who in the presence of the Doctor always swore by unknown saints—to relieve himself, as was thought—"but 'tis more serious than you think. A fellow like this alive, at large, in our parish——"

"In *my* parish——" corrected the Doctor, who was the only man alive with a legal right to speak of Eden Valley parish as his own.

About noon the Fiscal, responsible law officer of the Crown, arrived from Kirkcudbright escorted by Tom and Eben. The evidence was all heard over again, the chamber—ex-cheese room, present parlour—again inspected, but nothing further appeared likely to be discovered, when a shadow fell across the threshold. 172

For some time, indeed, I had sat quaking in my corner, all cold with the fear of a flitting figure, appearing here and there, seen with the tail of the eye, and then disappearing like the black cat I see in corners when my eyes are overstrained with Greek.

Of course I thought at once of the murderer Wringham Pollixfen lurking catlike among the office-houses in the hope of striking again, perhaps at Miss Irma—perhaps, also, as I now see, at Sir Louis. But indeed I never thought of him, at least not at the time. It was not the pretended Poole, however. It was a presence as quick, as agile, but more perfectly acquainted with the hidie-holes of the farmyard—in fact, Boyd Connaway.

Long before the others I got my eyes on him, and with the joy of a boy when a visitor enters the school at the dreariest hour of lessons, I rushed after him. To my surprise he went round the angle of the barn like a shot. But I had played at that game before. I took one flying leap into the little orchard from the window of the parlour which had been given up to the Maitlands, Louis and Miss Irma. Then I glided among the trees, choosing those I knew would hide me, and leaped on Master Boyd from behind as he was craning his neck to peer round the corner in the direction of the house door.

To my utter amaze he dropped to the ground with a throttled kind of cry as if some one had smitten him unawares. Here was surely something that I did not understand.

"Boyd, Boyd," I said in his ear, for I began to grow a little concerned myself—not terrified, you know, only anxious—"Boyd, it is only Duncan—Duncan MacAlpine from the school-house." 173

He turned a white, bewildered face to me, cold sweats pearling it, and his jaw worked in spasms. "Oh yes," he muttered, "Agnes Anne's brother!"

Now I did not see the use of dragging Agnes Anne continually into everything. Also I was one of the boys who had gone with Boyd Connoway oftenest to the fishing in Loch-in-Breck, and he need not have been afraid of me. But I think that he was a little unsettled by fear.

He did not explain, however, only bidding me shudderingly, "not to come at him that way again!" So I promised I would not, all the more readily that I heard him muttering to himself, "I thought he had me that time—yes, sure!"

Then I knew that he too was afraid of the man who called himself Wringham Pollixfen Poole and had killed the real Mr. Richard in our old cheese-room. But I was not a bit afraid, for had I not jumped through the orchard window, and run and clapped my hand on his shoulder without a thought of the creature ever crossing my mind.

At any rate I took him in with me—that is, Boyd Connoway. I cannot say that he wanted very much to go "before them Justices," as he said. But at least he preferred it to stopping outside. I think he was frightened of my coming out again and slapping down my hand on his shoulder. Lord knows he need not have been, for I promised not to. At any rate he came, which was the main thing.

He did not enjoy the ceremony, but stood before them with his blue coat with the large rolling collar, which had been made for a bigger man, buttoned about his waist, and his rig-and-furrow stockings of green, with home-made shoes called "brogues," the secret of making which he had brought with him from a place called Killybegs in County Donegal. He was all tashed with bits of straw and moss clinging to him. His knees too were wet where he had knelt in the marsh, and there was a kind of white shaking terror about the man that impressed every one. For Boyd Connoway had ever been the gayest and most reckless fellow in the parish.

When he was asked if he knew anything about the matter he only stammered, "Thank you kindly, Doctor, and you, General, and hoping that I have the honour of seein' you in good health, and that all is well with you at home and your good ladies and the childer!"

The General, who thought that he spoke in a mood of mockery, cautioned him that they were met there on a business of life and death, and were in no mood to be trifled with. Therefore, he, Boyd Connoway, had better keep his foolery for another time!

But the Doctor, being by his profession accustomed to diagnose the moods of souls, discerned the laboured pant of one who has been breathed by a long run from mortal terror—who has, as my father would have said, "ridden a race with Black Care clinging to the crupper"—and took Boyd in hand with better results. He agreed to tell all he knew, on being promised full and certain protection.

And it was something like this that he told his story, as it proved the only direct evidence in the case, at least for many and many a day.

"Doctor dear," he began, "ye are a married man yourself, and you will not be misunderstanding me when I ask that anything I may say shall not be used against me?"

The Fiscal looked up quickly.

"I warn you that it will," he said, "if you have had any hand in this murder!"

"Murder, is it?"—(Boyd Connoway gave a short grunting laugh)—"Aye, maybe, but 'tis not the murder that has been, but the murder that will be, if my wife Bridget gets wind of this! That's why I ask that it should be kept between ourselves—so that Bridget should not know!"

"Women," said the Fiscal oracularly, "must not be allowed to interfere with the evenhanded and fearless administration of justice."

"Then I take it," said Boyd, with a twinkle of the old mirth flickering up into his white and anxious face, "that your honour is not a married man!"

"No," said the Fiscal, with a smile.

"Then, if I may make so bould, your honour knows nothing about how it is 'twixt Bridget and me. His riverence the Doctor now——"

"Tell us what you know without digressions," said the Fiscal; "no use will be made of your evidence save in pursuing and bringing to justice the criminal."

"He's gone," said Boyd Connoway solemnly, "and a good riddance to the parish!"

"Wha-a-at?" cried the three magistrates simultaneously. And the Fiscal started to his feet.

"Who has gone?" he cried, and mechanically he drew from his pocket a silver call to summon his constables from the kitchen, where my uncles and they were having as riotous a time as they dared while so many great folk sat pow-wowing in the parlour near at hand.

"Who?" repeated Boyd Connoway, "well, I don't know for certain, but perhaps this little piece of paper will put you gentlemen on the track."

And he handed over a letter, much stained with sea-water and sand. The heel of a boot had trodden upon and partly obliterated the writing, the ink having run, and the whole appearance of the document being somewhat draggled-tailed.

But there was no doubt about the address. That was clearly written in a fine flowing English hand, "To His Excellency Lalor Maitland, late Governor of the Meuse, Constable of Dinant, etc., etc. *These*"—

We all looked at each other, and the Fiscal began to doubt whether the new evidence as to the suspected murderer would prove so valuable after all.

"Your Excellency" (the letter ran), "according to the promise made to you, the lugger *Bloomendahl*, of Walchern, Captain Vandam, has been cleared of cargo and is exclusively reserved for your Excellency's use. It will be well, therefore, to dispatch your remaining business in Scotland, as it is impossible to send back the *Golden Hind* or a vessel of similar size without causing remark. At the old place, then, a little after midnight of Thursday the 18th, a boat will be waiting for you at the eastern port or the western of Portowarren according to the wind. The tide is full about one."

"How came you by this?" the Fiscal demanded.

"Shall I tell ye in bits, sorr?" said Boyd, "or will ye have her from the beginning?"

"From the beginning," said the Fiscal, "only with as few digressions as possible."

"Sure," said Boyd innocently, "I got none o' them about me. Your honour can saarch me if ye like!"

"The Fiscal means," said the Doctor, "that you are to tell him the story as straightly and as briefly as possible."

"Straightly, aye, that I will," said Boyd, "there was never a crooked word came out of my mouth; but briefly, that's beyond any Irishman's power—least of all if he comes from County Donegal!"

"Go on!" cried the Fiscal impatiently.

"As all things do in our house, it began with Bridget," said Boyd Connoway; "ye see, sorr, she took in a man with a wound—powerful sick he was. The night after the 'dust-up' at the Big House was the time, and she nursed him and she cured him, the craitur. But, whatever the better Bridget was, all that I got for it was that I had to go to Portowarren at dead of night, and that letter flung at me like a bone to a dog, when I told him that I might be called in question for the matter of my wife."

"'Aye, put it on your wife,' says he, 'they will let you off. *You* have not the pluck of a half-drowned flea!"

"But when I insisted that I should have wherewith to clear me and Bridget also, he cast the letter down, dibbling it into the pebbles and sand with his heel just as he was going aboard.

"'There,' he cried, 'now you can put it on me!'"

"Lalor Maitland," said the Fiscal, ruminating, with his brow knit at the letter in his hand. "Where is that maid? Bring her here!"

I sprang away at once to knock on Irma's door, and bid her come, because the great folk were wanting her. And it seemed as if she had been expecting the summons too, for she was sitting ready close by little Louis. She cast a white shawl about her shoulders, crossed the kitchen and so into the room where the four gentlemen were sitting about the table—the Fiscal with his papers at the end, and behind the curtains drawn close about the press-bed where lay that which it was not good for young eyes to see.

"Miss Maitland, will you describe to us your cousin, Lalor Maitland, of whom you have already spoken to me?"

It was the Doctor who took her hand, while on the other side Boyd Connoway in his flapping clothes of antique pattern with brass buttons stood waiting his turn. Irma took one look about which I intercepted. And I think my nod together with the presence of my grandmother gave her courage, for she answered—

"Lalor Maitland? What has he to do with us? He shall not have us. We would kill ourselves if we could not run away. You would never think of giving us up to him—?"

"Never while I am alive!" cried my grandmother, but Dr. Gillespie signed to her to be silent.

"Will you describe him to us?" suggested the Doctor suavely, "what sort of a man, dark or fair, stout or spare, how he carries himself, what he came over to this country for, and where he is likely to have gone, if we find that he has left it?"

Irma thought a moment and then said, "Perhaps I shall not be quite just because I hated him so. But he was a man whom most call handsome, though to me there was always something dreadful about his face. His hair was dark brown mixed with grey. His features were cut like those of a statue, and his head small for his height. He was slender, light on his feet, and walked silently—*ugh*—yes, like a cat."

The Fiscal looked an interrogation at Boyd Connoway.

"That is the man," he answered unhesitatingly, "though most of the time while he stayed with Bridget and me he kept his bed. Only from the way he got along the cliff by Portowarren, I judge he was only keeping out of sight and by no means so weak with his wound as he would have had us believe."

"And tell us what you saw of him yesterday, Wednesday?"

It was the Fiscal who asked the question, but I think all of us held our breaths to catch Boyd Connoway's answer. He shook his head with a disconcerted air like a boy who is set too hard a problem.

"I was from home most of the day, and when I came in, with a hunger sharp-set with half-a-dozen hours struggling with the wind, Bridget bade me be off at once to the Dutchman's Howff, which is in Colvend, just where the Boreland march dyke comes down to the edge of the cliff. I was to wait there on the edge of the heugh till one came and called me by name. When I complained of hunger, she put some dry bread into my hand, crying out that I might seek meat where I had worked my work.

"I saw that the 'ben' room was empty, and the blankets thrown over the three chair backs. But when I asked where the sick man was, Bridget stamped her foot and bade me attend to my business and she would take care of hers. But Jerry, my oldest boy, had a word with me before I left for the march dyke. He told me that the man 'down-the-house' had gone that morning as soon as my back was turned, after paying his mother in gold sovereigns, which she had immediately hidden.

"So I went and waited by the Boreland march dyke—a wild place where even the heather is laid flat by the wind. The gulls and corbies were calling down the cliff, and at the foot the sea was roaring through a narrow gully and spreading out fan-shaped along the sands of the Dutchman's Howff.

"I waited long, having nought to eat except the sheaf of loaf bread I gat with such an ill grace from Bridget, and at the end I was beginning to lose patience, when from the other side of the gully I heard a crying and a voice bade me follow the dyke upwards and stand by to help.

"So upon the top of the wall I got, and there beneath me was the man I had last seen lying in Bridget's best bed, cossetted and cared for as if he were a prince. But for all that he was short and angry, bidding me dispatch and help him or he would lose his tide."

"And did he wear the same clothes as when last you saw him?" said Shepstone Oglethorpe, with a shrewd air.

At which Boyd Connaway laughed for the first time since he had come into the presence of his betters.

"No," he said, "for the last time I saw him he was under the sheets with one of my sarks on, and Bridget's best linen sheet tied in ribbons about his head."

"And how, then, was he dressed?" said the Fiscal, with a glance of scorn at Shepstone.

"Oh," answered Boyd Connaway, "just like you or me. I took no particular notice. More than that, it was an ill time for seeing patterns, being nigh on to pit mirk. He bade me lead the way. And this, to the best of my knowledge and ability, I did. But the track is not canny even in the broad of the day. Mickle worse is it when the light of the stars and the glimmer o' the sea three hunder feet below are all that ye hae to guide ye! But the man that had been hidden in our 'ben' room was aye for going on faster and faster. He stopped only to look down now and then for a riding light of some boat. And I made so bold, seeing him that anxious, as to tell him that if it were a canny cargo for the Co'en lads, waiting to be run into Portowarren, never a glim would he see."

"'You trust a man that kens,' I said to him, 'never a skarrow will wink, nor a lantern swing. The Isle o' Man chaps and the Dutchmen out yonder have their business better at their fingers' ends than that. But I will tell ye what ye may hear when we get down the hill by the joiner's shop—and that's the clink o' the saddle irons, and the waff o' their horses' lugs as they shake their necks—they no liking their heads tied up in bags.'

"'Get on,' he said, 'I wish your head were tied up in a bag!' And he tugged at my tail-coat like to rive it off me, your honour. 'Set me on the shore there at Portowarren before the hour of two, or maybe ye will get something for your guerdon ye will like but ill.'

"This was but indifferent talk to a man whose bread you have been eating (it is mostly porridge and saps, but no matter) for weeks and weeks!

"We climbed down by the steep road over the rocks—the same that Will of the Cloak Moss and Muckle Sandy o' Auchenhay once held for two hours again the gaugers, till the loaded boats got off clear again into deep water. And when we had tramped down through the round stones that were so hard on the feet after the heather, we came to the edge of the sea water. There it is deep right in. For the tide never leaves Portowarren—no, not the shot of a pebble thrown by the hand. Bending low I could see something like the sail of a ship rise black against the paler edge of the sea.

"Then it was that I asked the man for something that might clear me if I was held in suspicion for this night's work—as also my wife Bridget.

"After at first denying me with oaths and curses, he threw down this bit paper that I have communicated to your worship, and in a pet trampled it into the pebbles among which the sea was churning and lapping. He pushed off into the boat, sending it out by his weight.

"'There,' he cried back, 'let them make what they will of that if ye be called in question. And, hear ye, Boyd Connaway, this I do for the sake of that hard-working woman, your wife, and not for you, that are but a careless, idle good-for-nothing!'"

"Deil or man," broke in my grandmother, who thought she had kept silence long enough, "never was a truer word spoken!"

Boyd Connaway looked pathetically about. He seemed to implore some one to stand up in his defence. I would have liked to do it, because of his kindness to me, but dared not before such an

assembly and on so solemn an occasion.

"I put it to the honourable gentlemen now assembled," said Boyd Connaway, "if a man can rightly be called a lazy good-for-nothing when he rose at four of the morning to cut his wife's firewood—"

"Should have done it the night before," interrupted my grandmother.

"And was at Urr kirkyard at ten to help dig a grave, handed the service of cake and wine at twelve, rung the bell, covered in the corp, and sodded him down as snug as you, Mr. Fiscal, will sleep in your bed this night—!"

"That will do," said the Fiscal, who thought Boyd Connaway had had quite enough rope. "Tell us what happened after that—and briefly, as I said before."

"Why, I went over to Widow McVinnie's to milk her cow. It calved only last Wednesday, and I am fond of 'beesten cheese.' Besides, the scripture says, 'Help the widows in their afflictions'—or words to that effect."

"After this man Lalor Maitland had got into the boat, what happened?"

The Fiscal spoke sharply. He thought he was being played with, when, in fact, Boyd was only letting his tongue run on naturally.

"Nothing at all, your honour," said Boyd promptly. "The men in the boat just set their oars to the work and were round the corner in a jiffey. I ran to the point by the narrow square opening into the soft sandstone rock, and lying low on my face I could see a lugger close in under the heugh of Boreland, where she would never have dared to go, save that the wind was off shore and steady. But after the noise of the oars in the rowlocks died away I heard no more, and look as I would, I never saw the lugger slip out of the deep shadow of the heughs. So, there being nothing further to be done, I filled my pockets with the dulse that grows there, thin and sweet. For nowhere along the Solway shore does one get the right purple colour and the clean taste of the dulse as in that of Portowarren, towards the right-hand nook as you stand looking up the brae face."

Having tendered this very precise indication to whom it might concern, Boyd bowed to the company and took his leave.

The Fiscal was for holding him in ward lest he should escape, being such a principal witness. But the three Justices knew well that there was no danger of this, and indeed all of them expressed their willingness to go bail for the appearance of Boyd Connaway whenever he should be wanted.

"And a great many times when he is not!" added my grandmother, with tart frankness.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE SHARP SPUR

Though, therefore, the mystery remained as impenetrable as ever, I think that the fact of the absence of Lalor Maitland put new vigour into all of us. Richard Poole was buried in Dumfries, where all the "good jovial fellows" of a dozen parishes gathered to give him an impressive funeral. The firm closed up its ranks and became merely Messrs. Smart and Smart. There was a new and loquacious tablet in St. Michael's relating in detail (with omissions) the virtues and attainments of the deceased Mr. Richard. But of the other Mr. Poole, calling himself Wringham Pollixfen, not a trace, not a suggestion, not a suspicion of his whereabouts had he left behind since he stepped out of our window into the dark.

But, nevertheless, in Eden Valley the air was clearer, the summer day longer and brighter, and the land had rest. It was an impressive day when Irma brought Louis to my father's school. The Academy remembers it yet.

The morning had opened rather desolately. With the dawn the slate-grey fingers of the rain clouds had reached down, spanning from Criffel to Screel. The sea mist did what faith also can do. It removed mountains. One after another they faded and were not. A chillish wind began to blow up from the Solway, and even in Eden Valley was heard the distant roar of the surf, through the low pass which is called the Nick of Benarick. The long grass first stood in beads and then began to trickle. Flowers drooped their heads if of the harebell sort, or stood spikily defiant like the yellow whin and the pink thistle.

I had got ready cloaks and hoods, you may be sure. I was on the spot at my grandmother's door a full hour before the time. Within I found Mary Lyon raging. Neither of the bairns should go out

of her house on such a day! What for could they not be content to take their learning from Duncan and Agnes Anne? Miss Irma, she was sure, was well able to teach the bairn. It was all a foolishness, and very likely would end in something uncanny. If it did—well, let nobody blame her. She had lifted up her testimony, and thrown away her wisdom on deaf ears.

Which, indeed, was something not unlike the case.

For just then the sun shone out. The clouds divided to right and left, following the steep purpling ridges on either side of Eden Valley—and in the middle opening out a long sweet stream of brightness. Little Louis clapped his hands. He ached for the company of his kind. He talked “boys.” He dreamed “boys”—not grown-up boys like me, but children of his own age. He despised Irma because she was a girl. Only Agnes Anne could anyways satisfy him, when she put on over her dress a pair of her grandfather’s corduroy trousers, buttoned them above her shoulder, and pretended to give orders as in the pirn-mill. Even then, after a happy hour with the toys which Agnes Anne contrived for him, all at once Louis grew whimpering disappointedly, stared at her and said, “You are not a real little boy.”

And I, who had the pick of the Eden Valley boys on my hand every time I went near my father’s (and knew them for little beasts), wondered at his taste, when he could have Irma’s company, not to speak of Agnes Anne’s. But I resolved that I should keep a bright look-out and make the little villains behave. For at an early age our Eden Valley boys were just savages, ready to mock and rend any one of themselves who was a little better dressed, who wore boots instead of clogs with birch-wood soles, or dared to speak without battering the King’s English out of all recognition.

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My father and Miss Huntingdon would, of course, be ready to protect our small man as far as was in their power. But they, especially my father, were often far removed in higher spheres of work, while Miss Huntingdon was never in the boys’ playground at all. But I had none of these disabilities. I was instructed, sharp-eyed, always on the spot, with fists in good repair—armed, too, with a certain authority and the habit of using it to the full.

So little Louis found himself among his boys. I picked him out half-a-dozen of the most peaceable to play with, after he had received his first lesson from a very proud and smiling Miss Huntingdon. Miss Irma, after being formally introduced to the school, left the sort of throne which had been set for her beside my father, to go and sit beside Agnes Anne at the top of the highest form of girls.

Her presence made a hush among the elder boys, and such of the young men as happened to be there that day. For though we had scholars up to the age of twenty, most of these were at work during the summer and came only in the winter season—though in the interval betwixt sowing and hay-harvest and between that again and the ripening of the corn we would receive stray visits from them, especially in the long wet spells of weather.

It was at noon and the girls were walking in their playground talking with linked arms, apart from the noisy sportings of the boys, when I caught my first glimpse of Uncle Rob. He was standing right opposite the school in the big door of the Eden Valley Mill. I wondered what he was doing there, for it was not the season for grinding much corn. Besides, it would have been handier to send it down and call for it again during such a busy season on the farm.

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So I ran across and asked him what he was doing there. I could hardly hear his answer, for the loud *plash-plash* of the buckets of water as they fell into the great pool underneath the wheel.

I understood him, however, to say that it was open to me to attend to my own business and leave him to look after his.

In a moment the demon of jealousy entered into my soul. Could it be that he came there to be near Irma—Irma, whom I had fought for and saved half-a-dozen times over all by myself—for it is not worth while going back to what Agnes Anne did, as it were, accidentally. I was so angry at the mere thought that there and then I charged him with his perfidy. He laughed a short, contemptuous laugh.

“And what for no,” he answered; “at least *I* have a trade at my finger-ends. I can drive a plough. I can thresh a mow. At a pinch I can even shoe a horse. But you—you have quit even the school-mastering!”

I do not know whether or not he said it unwittingly or with intent to sting me. But at any rate the thrust went home. I could hardly wait till my father had got through with his work that night, and was stretched in his easy-chair, his long pipe in one hand and a volume of Martial in the other. I broke in upon him with the words, “Father, I want to go to college with Freddie Esquillant!”

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My father looked at me in surprise. I can see him still staring at me bemazed with his pipe half-way to his mouth, and the open book laid face downward upon his knee.

“Go to college—you?” His surprise was more cutting than Uncle Rob’s mockery. Because, you see, my father knew. That is, he knew my scholarship. What he did not know was how much of my grandmother’s spirit there was in me, and how I could keep working on and on if I had the chance.

“You have thought of this long?” he asked.

“No, father!”

“Ah, well, what put it into your head?” he asked kindly.

This I could hardly tell him without entering into my furious foolish jealousy of Uncle Rob, his waiting at the mill, and our exchange of words. So I only said, "It just came to me that I would like to get learning, father!"

"Ah, yes," he meditated, "that is mostly the way. It is like heavenly grace. It comes to a man when he least expects it—the desire for learning. We seek it diligently with tears. It comes not. We wake in the morning and lo! it is there!"

It is characteristic of my father that even then he did not concern himself about ways and means. For at the colleges of our land are "bursaries" provided by pious patrons, once poor themselves, and often with a thirst for knowledge unquenched—boys put too early to the bench or the counter. Now my father had the way of winning these for his pupils. He did not teach them directly how to gain them, but he supplied the inspiration.

"Read much and well. Get the spirit. Learn the grammar, certainly. But read Latin—till you can speak Latin, think Latin. It is more difficult to think Greek. Our stiff-necked, stubborn Lowland nature, produce of half-a-score of conquering nations, has not the right suppleness. But if there is any poetry in you, it will find you out when you read Euripides."

So though certainly I never got so far—the verbs irregular giving me a distaste for the business—at least I fell into line, and in due time—but there I am anticipating. I am writing of the day, the wonderful day when the sharp spur of Uncle Rob's reproach entered into my soul and I resolved to be—I hardly knew what. A band of little boys, all eager to see the pin-mill in the Marnhoul wood, volunteered to accompany Louis home. They went on ahead, gambolling and shouting. Agnes Anne would have come also, but I suggested to her that she had better stay and help her mother.

She gave me one look—not by any means of anger. Rather if Agnes Anne had ever permitted herself to make fun of me, I should have set it down to that. But I knew well that could not be. She stayed at home, contentedly enough, however.

I went home with Irma. I did so because I had the cloaks and hoods to carry. Also I had something to tell her. It seemed something so terrible, so mighty, so full of risk and danger that my heart failed me in the mere thinking of it. I was to go away and leave her, for many years, seeing her only at intervals. It seemed a thing more and more impossible to be thought upon.

At the least I resolved to make myself out a martyr. It would be a blow to Irma also, and the thought that she would feel it so almost made up to me for my own pain, an ache which at the first moment had been of the nature of a sudden and deadly fear.

Yet I might have saved myself the trouble. Irma looked upon the matter in a very different light. She was not moved in the least.

"Yes, of course," she said, "you are only wasting your time here. Men must go out and see things in the world, that afterwards they may do things there. Here it is very well for us who have no friends and nowhere else to go. But as soon as Louis is at school or has to leave me—oh, it will happen in time, and I like looking forward—I shall go too."

"But what could you do?" I cried in amazement, for such a thing as a girl of her rank finding a place for herself was not dreamed of then. Only such as my grandmother and Aunt Jen worked "in the sphere in which Providence had placed them," as the minister said in his prayer.

"Never trouble your head," said Irma, "there never was a Maitland yet but gat his own will till he met with a Maitland to counter him!"

"Lalor!" I suggested. At the name she twisted her face into an expression of great scorn.

"Lalor!" she said; "well, and have I not countered him?"

She had, of course, but as far as I remembered there was something to be said about another person who had at least helped. Now that is the worst of girls. They are always for taking all the credit to themselves.

It was a grave day when I quitted Eden Valley for the first time. Every one was affected, the women folk, my mother, my grandmother, even Aunt Jen, went the length of tears. That is, all with only two exceptions, my father and Miss Irma. My father was glad and triumphant—confident that, though never the scholar Freddie Esquillant was bound to be, I was yet stronger in the more material parts of learning—those which most pleased the ordinary run of regents and professors.

I had already seen Irma early in the morning in that clump of trees beyond the well where the flowering currants made a scented wall, and in the midst the lilac bushes grow up into a cavern of delicately tinted, constantly tremulous shade.

I told her of my fears, whereat she scorned them and me, bidding me go forward bravely.

"I have never promised to be anybody's friend before," she said; "I shall not break my word!"

"But, Irma," I urged, for indeed I could not keep the words back, they being on the tip of my tongue, "what if in the meantime, when I am away so far and seeing you so little, you should promise somebody else to be more than a friend!"

She stood a moment with the severe look I had grown to fear upon her face. Then she smiled at me, at once amused and forgiving.

"You are a silly boy," she said; "but after all, you are but a boy. You will learn that I do not say one thing one day and another the next. There—I promised you a guerdon, did I not? That is the

picture of my mother. You can open the back if you like!"

I set my thumb-nail to it, and there, freshly cut and tied with a piece of the very blue ribbon she was wearing, lay a lock of her hair, a curl curiously and as it seemed wilfully twisted back upon itself, as if it had refused to be so imprisoned—just, in fact, like Irma herself.

I should have kissed her hand if I had known how, but instead I kissed the lock of hair. When I looked up I am afraid that there was most unknighly water in my eyes.

"Come," she said, "this will never do. There must be none of that if you are to carry Irma Sobieski's pledge. Stand up—smile—ah, that is better. Look at me as if I were Lalor Maitland himself, rather than cry about it. You have my pledge, have you not—signed, sealed, and delivered? There!"

But how the legal formula was carried out by Miss Irma is nobody's business except our own—hers and mine, I mean. But at all events I went forth from the lilac clump by the well, and picked up my full water cans with a heart wondrously strengthened, and so up the path to Heathknowes with a back straight as a ramrod, because of the eyes that I knew were watching me through the chinks in the wall of summer blossom.

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CHAPTER XXIV

THE COLLEGE OF KING JAMES

I arrived at Edinburgh with the most astonishing ache in my heart (or, at least, in the parts adjoining), and had I met with the least pitifulness I think I should have broken down entirely. But I found a very necessary stimulus in the details of the examination for the bursary. I had no doubt as to being nominated, but when the results were posted I felt shame to be whole three places in front of Freddie Esquillant, my master in all real scholarship, almost as much as my father was—but who, on the day of trial, had spent his time in answering thoroughly half-a-dozen questions without attempting the others.

At any rate it was none such bad news to send by the carrier, who put up at the Black Bull in the Grassmarket, down to my mother and grandmother in Eden Valley. I wrote to them separately, but to my father first, because he understood such things and I knew that his heart was set on Freddie and myself, though he thought (and rightly) that I was a mere clodhopper at my books compared to Fred. As far as the classics went, my father was in the right of it. But then Freddie could not write English, except in a kind of long-winded, elaborate way, as if he were translating from Cicero, which very likely was the case.

Well, the need of keeping my head for the examiners' questions, the mending of my pens, the big barren room with the books about and the other fellows scribbling away for dear life, the landladies in this close and that square, with faces hardened and tempers sharpened by generations of needy students, out of whom they must nevertheless make their scanty livings, the penetrating Edinburgh airs, the thinness of my cloak and the clumsiness of my countrified rig—these all kept me singularly aware of myself, and prevented any yielding to the folly of homesickness, or, as in my case, "Irma-sickness," to give the trouble its proper name.

After long search I took up my lodging in a new house at the end of Rankeillor Street, in a place where there was the greenness of fields every way about, except behind in the direction of the college. It was the very last house, and from my garret window I could see the top of Arthur's Seat and the little breakneck path feeling its way round the foot of the Salisbury Crags, afterwards to be widened into the "Radicals' Road." Southward all was green and whaup-haunted to the grey hip of Pentland, and we saw the spread of the countryside when we—that is, Freddie and I—went down the Dalkeith Road to the red-roofed hamlet of Echobank. Here, four times a week we bought a canful of milk that had to do us two days. For there was something about the taste of the town milk that scunnered us—Freddie especially being more delicately stomachached than I.

Here, too, was a red-cheeked serving maid who provoked us—but more especially poor Fred, who asked nothing better than that the wench should let him alone. But I cared not so greatly—though, of course, she was nothing to me. How could she be with the gage of Miss Irma hard under my armpit, just where the Eden Valley tailor had placed my inside pocket?

Which reminds me that Fred, fluttering the leaves of his lexicon, or mooning over his beloved Greek verses (which the professor discouraged because he could not make as good himself), would sigh a little ghost of a sigh as often as he saw me take it out and lay it on the table beside me like a watch. For long I thought it was because he feared it would make me neglect my work, but now, looking back, I can see with great clearness that it was because he felt that love and

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suchlike were ruled out of his life. It was quite a year before I first mentioned Irma to him by name. Yet he never asked, nor showed that he noticed at all, save for that quick, gentle sigh.

As portrayed in the miniature, Irma's mother was a gentle fair-haired woman, with a face like a flower sheltered under a broad-brimmed white beaver hat, the very mate and marrow of those I have since seen in the pictures by the great Sir Joshua. She had a dimpled chin that nested in a fluffy blurr of lace. She was as unlike as possible to my dear brave Irma, with her curls like shining jet, and the clean-cut, decisive profile. But I saw at once from whom Baby Louis had gotten his fair soft curls, his blue eyes, and the wistful appeal of his smile. They were always before me as I sat with my elbows on the ink-splattered table, and I did all my work conscious of the rebellious twist of raven curl that was on the other side. I did not open this often, only when by myself, and then with extreme care, for the glass, being old, was a little loose, and it seemed as if the vivid life in the swirl of hair actually moved it out of its place. For even so much of Irma as a curl of her locks perforce retained something of her extraordinary vitality.

It often used to come to me that Irma must be like her father over again, only with all his faults turned to good, strengthened by the determination he lacked. She had his restlessness, his brilliancy, his power over men and women. Only along with these she had strength to guide herself (which he, poor man, never had), and enough over for me also. And I have my father's word and my own consciousness that I needed that guidance.

College life is strange and solitary at these northern universities—especially at those in the two great cities of Edinburgh and Glasgow. The lad comes up knowing perhaps one other of his age and standing. If he has a family one or two elder students will be ordered by their people to look him up. Seldom do they repeat the visit. Their circle is formed. They want no "yellow nebs."

For the rest he is alone, protected from the devil and the young lusts of the flesh by the memory of his mother, perhaps by the remembrance that about that time his father is striving hard to pinch to pay his fees, but lastly, chiefly and most practically by those empty pockets.

If he have a family in the town, he is hardly a student like the others. He has his comrades within cry, his houses of call, girls here and there whom he has met at dances in friendly houses, sisters and cousins of his own or of his friends—in short, all the machinery of social life to carry him on.

But for the great majority life is other and sterner. As Milton lamenting his blindness, the stranger student mourns wisdom and life "at one entrance quite shut out." The influence of women, sweeter than that of the Pleiades, is absent, save in the shape of seamy-faced grim-mouthed landladies, or, in a favourable case, which was ours (or might have been), our red-cheeked, frank-tongued, oncoming wench in the milk-house at Echobank, and the baker's daughter across the way.

The first result of this is a great outbreak of sentimentality among the callowings. They have pictures (oh, such caricatures!) to carry in breast-pockets—or locks of hair, like mine. Their hearts are inflammable as those of the flaxen-haired youths I met afterwards in the universities of Germany, only living on oatmeal, without sausages, and less florid with beer. Yet on the whole, the aforesaid empty purse aiding, we were filled with not dishonest sentiment, keen as sleuth-hounds on the track of knowledge, and disputatious as only lads of Calvinistic training can be.

Our landladies were much alike, our rooms furnished with the same Spartan plainness. Only in Mistress Craven I happened on a good one, and abode with her all the days of my stay at College, till the way opened out for me to wider horizons and a humaner life.

But I can see the room yet, and the narrow passage which led to it. Here, close to the door, was a clock with a striking apparatus of surprising shrillness to warn us of the flight of the half-hours. "Ting!" another gone! Then, as the hour drew near, this academic clock cleared its decks for real action—almost it might be said that it cleared its throat, such a roopy gasping crow did it emit. This was technically called "the warning."

And three times a day at the sound of it we rose, gathered our books and fled fleetfoot for the college. The clock at Mistress Craven's was set ten minutes fast, so as to leave us time to flee down the Pleasance, dodge through a side alley, cut Simon's Square diagonally, debouch upon Drummond Street (shunning Rutherford's change-house, with its "kittle" step down into the cellar), and lo! there, big, barren, grey, grave, cauldrie as a Scots winter, was the College of King James—with the bell, unheard in the side-streets, fairly "gollying" at us—an appalling volume of sound—yet one which, on the whole, we minded less than the skirl and rasp of Mistress Craven's family clock.

I have been speaking for myself. Fred Esquillant was always in time, easy, quiet, letting nothing interfere with his duty. But for me I was not built so. I watched for adventure and followed it. The dog I had met yesterday looked not in vain for a pat. A girl waved a kerchief to the student passing with the books under his arm. She did not know me, nor I her. But in the general interests of my class I had to wave back—without prejudice, be it said, to the black lock behind the miniature in my pocket.

We came back, as we had occasion, from our classes to the crowded stair of our "land"—with its greasy handrail, and the faint whiff of humanity clinging about the numbered doorways. Our key grated in the lock. Mrs. Craven opened the kitchen door with a cry that our dinners would be ready in a jiffey. We were done with the world for the day. Henceforth four walls contained us. Many books lay tumbled about, or had to be heaped on the floor whenever the half of the table was laid for a meal.

I sat farthest from the fire, but facing it. Above and directly before my eyes was a full-rigged ship, sailing among furious painted billows directly against the lofty cliffs of a lea-shore, the captain on the bridge regarding this manoeuvre with the utmost complaisance. Beneath was a china shepherdess without the head—opposite a parrot with a bunch of waxen cherries in its beak.

When we took the room, the backs of the chairs had been covered with newly-washed embroidery in raspy woollens and starched linen thread. There had also been a tablecloth, and upon it (neatly arranged by Mrs. Craven's daughter Amelia) a selection of the family "good books"—to wit, the Holy Bible containing entries of the Craven family, with the dates of birth altered or erased, Josephus with steel pictures, the *Saint's Rest* and some others. These had at once been removed, according to agreement made before taking possession, and now, wrapped in the tablecloth, reposed in a cupboard.

Only *The Cloud of Witnesses* and Fox's *Martyrs* were spared at my special request. As for Freddie, he needed no other literature than his text-books, and set himself to win medals like one who had been fitted by machinery for that purpose.

Mrs. Craven was an Englishwoman who had brought herself to this by marrying a carter from Gilmerton. So she retained a pleasant habit of curtsying which her daughter, born in Edinburgh and given to snuffing up the east wind, did not in the least strive to imitate, so far at least as we were concerned.

But on the whole those rooms in Rankeillor Street were pleasant and even model lodgings. Many a fine gentleman settled in the new town fared worse, even artistically. We had on the wall in little black frames many browned prints by a man of whom we had never heard, one Hogarth by name, some of the details of which made Freddie blush and me laugh aloud. But these doubtful subjects were counterbalanced by an equal number illustrative of the Pilgrim's Progress, beginning at the sofa-back with the Slough of Despond, going through the Wicket Gate, past fierce Giant Pope and up craggy Hills of Difficulty to a flaming Celestial City apparently being destroyed by fire with extreme rapidity.

In a glass-fronted corner cupboard were memorials of the late Mr. Craven. To wit, a large punch-bowl, remarkable for having melted down a flourishing business in the "carrying" way, four pair of horses with wagons to match, a yard and suitable stabling, and, finally, Mr. Craven, late of Gilmerton, himself.

On the top shelf was all that remained of the tea-service he had presented to his "intended" when he was still at the head of the Gilmerton "yard"—she being at the time lady's-maid at Dalkeith Palace and high in favour with "her Grace." Much art was needed in dusting these and arranging them to make cups and saucers stand so that their chipped sides would not show.

I was strictly forbidden ever to dance, flap my long arms, or otherwise disport myself near this sacred enclosure, as I sometimes did when the blood ran high or the temperature low. As for Freddie, he could do no wrong. At least, he never did. I was in despair about him, and foresaw trouble.

As to situation, we had the Meadows behind us, and (except the Sciennes and Merchiston), all was free and open as far as Bruntsfield and the Borough Muir. But towards Holyrood and the College, what a warren! You entered by deep archways into secluded yards. Here was a darksome passage where murder might be (and no doubt had been) done. Here was an echoing gateway to a coaching inn, with a watchman ready to hit evil boys over the head with his clapper if they tried to ring his bell, the bell that announced the arrival of the Dumfries coach "Gladiator" after thirty hours' detention at the Beetub in Moffatdale, or the shorter breathed "four" from Selkirk and Peebles that had changed horses last at Cockmuir Inn at the back of Kingside.

All this I describe so minutely, once for all, because there is more to come of it, and these precincts on the southern border of Edinburgh, where Cromwell had once encamped, were mightily familiar to me before all was done.

CHAPTER XXV

SATAN FINDS

Of course Christmas time soon came, when we collegers had our first vacation, and Fred and I footed it down to Eden Valley. They had been preparing for us, and the puddings, white and black, hung in rows along the high cross-bars in the kitchen.

Everybody was glad to see us, except, as it appeared at first, Miss Irma. I called her Irma when I thought of the round locket with the hair and her mother's picture in it, also the letters she had sent me—though these were but few, and, for all that was in them, might have been written to the Doctor. But when I returned and met her full in the doorway of my grandmother's house, she gave me her hand as calmly as if she had clean forgotten all that had ever been between us.

For me, I was all shaken and blushing—a sight to be seen. So much so that Aunt Jen, coming in with the milk for the evening's porridge, cocked an eye at me curiously. But if Irma felt anything, I am very sure that it did not show on her face. And that is one of the greatest advantages girls have—care or not care, they can always hide it.

My mother shed tears over me. My father took stock of my progress, and asked me for new light on certain passages we had been reading, but soon deserted me with the familiar contemptuous toss of the head, which meant that he must wait for Fred Esquillant. He might have learned by this time. At anything practical I was miles ahead of Freddie, who had no world outside of his classical books. But then my father was of the same type, with, in addition, the power of imparting and enthusing strong in him—*his* practical side, which Freddie did not possess—indeed, never felt the lack of, much less the ambition to possess. He was content to know. He had no desire to impart his knowledge.

I spent six mornings and five evenings out of my scanty twenty days at the little thicket by the well. But the lilac was leafless now, and the path which led back to the house of Heathknowes empty and deserted.

Once while I was in hiding my Uncle Rob came and stood so long by his water-pails, looking across the hills in the direction of the Craig Farm, that I made sure he had found me out, or was trying for a talk with Miss Irma on his own account.

But Rob, as I might have known, was far too inconstant. As the saying went, "He had a lass for ilka day in the week and twa for the Sabbath." It is more than likely that his long rumination at the well was the result of uncertainty as to whether it was the turn of Jeannie at the Craig or Bell down by at Parkhill.

At any rate, it had no connection with me, for he went off home with his burden, where presently I could hear him arranging with Eben as to the foddering of the "beasts" and the "bedding" of the horses. For my three uncles kept accounts as to exchanges of work, and were very careful as to balancing them, too—though Rob occasionally "took the loan" of good-tempered Eben without repayment of any sort.

After my fifth solitary vigil among the rustling of the frozen stems and the dank desolation of the icebound copse on the edge of the marsh, I began to go about with a huge affectation of gloom on my face. It was clear that I was being played with. For this I had scorned the red-cheeked dairy-lass at Echobank, and the waved kerchiefs of the baker's daughter opposite. And the more unhappy and miserable I looked, the closer I drew my inky cloak about me, the gayer, the more light-hearted became Miss Irma.

I plotted deep, dark, terrible deeds. She urged me to yet another help of dumpling. She had made the jam herself, she said. Or the shortbread—now there *was* something like shortbread, made after a recipe learned in Brabant! (I wondered the word did not choke her, thinking of Lalor—but, perhaps, who knew? she would not after all be so unwilling!) I had shed my blood for naught—not that I had really shed any, but it felt like that. I had gone forth to conquer the world for the sake of a faithless girl—though, again, I had not even done quite that, seeing that Freddy Esquillant bade fair to beat me in all the classes—except, perhaps, in the Mathematic, for which he had no taste. But the principle was the same. I was deserted, and my whole aspect became so dejected that my mother spoke to my father about my killing myself in Edinburgh with study, which caused that good (and instructed) man to exclaim, "Fiddlesticks!" Then she went to my grandmother, who prescribed senna tea, which she brewed and stood by till I had drunk. I resolved to wear my heart a little less on my sleeve, and always after that assured my grandmother that I was feeling very well indeed. Also I made shift to eat a little, even in public, contriving it so, however, that the effort to appear brave and gay ought to have been evident even to Miss Irma.

Every day Louis and she went to the Academy, and I went with them, one of the uncles—generally Eben, the universally disposable—following to the village with a loaded pistol in his tail-coat pocket.

For though there had been, as yet, no more than the ordinary winter traffic by the well-recognized Free Traders of the Solway board, no man could tell when the lugger from the Texel, or even the *Golden Hind* herself might try again the fortune of our coasts. The latter vessel had been growing famous, multiplying her captures and cruelties; indeed, behaving little otherwise than if she carried the black flag with the skull and cross-bones. And though a large part of his Majesty's navy had been trying to catch her, hardly a monthly number of the *Scots Magazine* came to my father without some new exploit being deplored in the monthly chronicle over near the end.

Nearer home, Messrs. Smart and Smart had offered by post to occupy themselves with the future of the young baronet Sir Louis, on condition that he should be given up to them to be sent to school, but in their communication nothing was said about Miss Irma. So my grandfather sent word that, subject to the law of the land, he would continue to protect both the children whom Providence had placed in his care. And this was doubtless what the Dumfries lawyers expected. The care and culture of the estate during a long minority was what they thought about as being

most to their advantage, and it was quite evident that little Louis, for the present, could hardly be better situated than at Heathknowes. Messrs. Smart and Smart sent a man down to spy out the land, on pretext of offering compensation, but his report must have been favourable both as to the security of the farm-town and as to my grandfather's repute for generosity and open-handedness. For he did not return, and as to payment, nothing more was ever heard at Heathknowes about the matter.

The young people were now quite fixtures there, and though they were spoken of as Miss Irma and Master Louis, Irma had carried her main point, which was that they should be treated in all respects as of the family. The sole difference made was that now the farm lads and lasses, and the two men from the pirn-mill (whom my grandfather's increasing trade with the English weavers had compelled him to take on), had their meals at a second table, placed crosswise to that at which the family dined and supped. But this was chiefly to prevent little Louis from occupying himself with watching to see when they would swallow their knives, and nudging his neighbours Irma and Aunt Jen to "look out," at any particular dangerous and intricate feat of conjuring.

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As for me, I could not at all understand why Irma cold-shouldered me during these first Christmas vacations, and indeed I had secretly resolved to return no more to the house of Heathknowes till I had made sure of a better reception. I began to count it a certainty that Irma, feeling that she had gone too far and too fast with me before I went off, was now getting out of the difficulty by a régime of extraordinary coldness and severity. And if that were the case, I was not the man to baulk her.

For about this time a man I began to count myself.

Worst of all, going home to the school-house there came into my head one of the most stupid ideas that had ever got lodging there—though, according to my grandmother, I am rather a don at harbouring suchlike.

It occurred to me that a plan I had read of in some book or other might suit my case. If I could only make Irma jealous, the tables might be turned, and she become as anxious and desirous of making up as I was.

It seemed to me a marvellously original idea. Irma had cared enough to give me her mother's miniature. She had cut off a lock of her hair, which she had not done for all the world of her admirers—else she would long have gone bald.

Now it happened that though there were a good many dressmakers in Eden Valley, including some that worked out for so much a day, there was only one Ladies' Milliner and Mantua-maker. This was the sister of our infant-mistress, Miss Huntingdon. Her establishment was in itself a kind of select academy. She had an irreproachable connection, and though she worked much and well with her nimble fingers, she got most of her labour free by an ingenious method.

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She initiated into her mysteries none of the poorer girls of the place, who might in time be tempted to "set up for themselves," and so spoil their employer's market. She received only, as temporary boarders, daughters of good houses, generally pretty girls looking forward with some confidence to managing houses of their own. At that time every girl who set up to be anything in our part of the country aspired to make her own dresses and build the imposing fabric of her own bonnets.

So Miss Huntingdon had a full house of pretty maidens who came as "approvers"—a fanciful variation of "improvers" invented by Miss Huntingdon herself, and used whenever she spoke of "My young ladies," which she did all day long—or at least as often as she was called into the "down-stairs parlour," where (as in a nunnery) ordinary business was transacted.

A good many of the elder girls whom I had known at the Academy had migrated there at the close of their period of education—several who, though great maidens of seventeen or eighteen, had hardly appeared upon my father's purely classical horizon—seen by him only at the Friday's general review of English and history, and taught for the rest of the week by little Mr. Stephen, by myself—and in sewing, fancy-work, and the despised samplers by Miss Huntingdon, the ever diligent, who, to say the truth, acted in this matter as jackal to her elder sister's lion.

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In return she got a chamber, a seat at the table with the young ladies, and a home. Nor will I say that Miss Seraphina, Ladies' Milliner and Mantua-maker, was not a good and kind sister to Miss Rebecca, the little teacher at thirty pounds a year in the Infant Department at the Academy of Eden Valley.

But my mother in her time—Aunt Janet, even—had passed that way, though Miss Huntingdon considered Jen one of her failures because she had not "married from her house." Most of the well-to-do farmers within ten miles sent their daughters to complete their education at Miss Huntingdon's academy of the needle and the heavy blocking-iron. My father, when he passed, did not know them, so great in his eyes was their fall. Yet by quiet persistence, of which she had the secret, my mother wore him down to winking at her sending Agnes Anne there for three hours a day.

"I'm sure," she said, "I used to watch for *you* every time you went by to school, and one day the frill of your shirt sleeve was hanging down, torn on a nail. I was sorry, and wished that I could have run out and mended it for you!"

What this reminiscence had to do with Agnes Anne's being allowed to go to Miss Huntingdon's I do not quite see. But learned men are much like others, and somehow the little speech softened my father. So Agnes Anne went, as, indeed, my mother had resolved from the beginning that she

should. And it was through Agnes Anne that my temptation came.

She made a friend there. Agnes Anne always must have one bosom friend of her own sex. For this Irma was too old, as well as too brilliant, too fitful, fairylike, changeful in her mood to serve long. Besides, she awed Agnes Anne too much to allow her to confide in her properly. And without hour-long confessions all about nothing, Agnes Anne had no use for any girl friend. There was an unwritten convention that one should listen sympathetically to the other's tale of secrets, no matter how long and involved, always on the supposition that the service should be mutual.

Charlotte Anderson was the name of Agnes Anne's friend. In a week's time these two were seldom separate, and wandered about our garden, and under the tall pine umbrellas with bent heads and arms lovingly interlaced. Charlotte was a pretty girl, blooming, fresh, rosy, with a pair of bold black eyes which at once denied and defied, and then, as it were, suddenly drooped yieldingly. I was a fool. I might have known—only I did not.

Now my idea was to make just as much love to Charlotte as would warn Miss Irma that she was in danger of losing me and to assist me in this (though I did not reveal my intention of merely baiting my trap with her) who more willing than Charlotte Anderson!

But I had counted without two somewhat important factors—Miss Irma, and Miss Seraphina Huntingdon. I was utterly deceived about the character of Irma, and I had no idea of the extreme notions of rigid propriety upon which Miss Seraphina conducted her business, nor of the explanation of the large proportion of successful weddings in which the lady mantua-maker had played the part of subordinate providence.

Indeed, certain of the light-minded youth of Eden Valley called the parlour with the faded red velvet chairs by the name of "Little Heaven"—because so many marriages had been made there.

CHAPTER XXVI

PERFIDY, THY NAME IS WOMAN!

Old Robert Anderson of Birkenbog was known to me by sight—a huge, jovial, two-ply man, chin and waistcoat alike testifying to good cheer. He wore a large horse-shoe pin in his unstiffened stock. A watch that needed an inch-thick chain to haul up its sturdy Nuremburg-egg build, strained the fob on his right side, as if he carried a mince-pie concealed there. His laugh dominated the market-place, and when he stood with his legs wide apart pouring a sample of oats slowly from one hand into the palm of the other, his red face with the cunning quirks in it had always a little gathering of admirers, eager for the next high-spiced tale. He had originally come from the English border, and in his "burr" and accent still bore token of that nationality.

Nevertheless, he had his admirers, some of them fervent as well as constant.

Cochrane of the Holm would be there, his hand on the shoulder of Blethering Johnny from the Dinnance. These two always laughed before a word was uttered. They thought Birkenbog so funny that everything he said was side-splitting even before he had said it.

I remember being a great deal impressed myself by Old Birkenbog. He was a wonderful horseman as a boy, and when he came to the market alone he rode a big black horse of which even the head ostler stood in awe in the yard of the King's Arms. Once he had thrashed a robber who had assailed him on his way to pay his rent, and had brought him into town trotting cross-handed at his horse's tail, the captive of his loaded whip and stout right arm. It is doubtful if this draggled Dick Turpin, lying in Bridewell, appreciated Birkenbog's humour quite so much as did Cochrane and Blethering Jock when he told them the story afterwards.

If I had any common-sense I might have seen that Birkenbog was not a safe man to trouble in the matter of an only daughter, without the most serious intentions in the world. But, truth to tell, I never thought of him knowing, which was in itself a thing quite superfluous and altogether out of my calculations. I had had some small experience of girls even before Miss Irma came to change everything. And the fruit of my observations had been that, though girls tell each other's secrets freely enough, they keep a middling tight grip on their own. Nay, they can even be trusted with yours, in so far as these concern themselves—until, of course, you quarrel with them—and then—well, then look out!

Certainly I found lots of chances to talk to Charlotte. In fact Agnes Anne made them for me, and coached me on what to say out of books. Also she cross-examined Charlotte afterwards upon my performances, and supplemented what I had omitted by delivering the passage in full. My poor version, however, pleased Charlotte just as much, for merely being "walked out" gave her a standing among Miss Seraphina's young ladies, who asked her what it felt like to be engaged.

All had to be gone about in so ceremonious a manner, too, at least at first—when I made my formal call on Miss Huntingdon, who received me in her parlour with prim civility, as if I had come to order a leghorn hat of the best.

“My mother’s compliments, and might Miss Charlotte Anderson be allowed to accompany Agnes Anne to tea at four hours that day? I would be responsible—yes, I knew Miss Huntingdon to be most particular upon this point—for the convoy of the young ladies to the school-house, and would see Miss Anderson safe home again.”

My mother winked at these promenades, because in her heart of hearts she was more than a little jealous of Irma. Charlotte Anderson she could understand. She was of her own far-off kin, but Irma and her brother had descended upon us, as it were, from another world.

Why Agnes Anne meddled I cannot so well make out, unless it were the mania which at a certain age attacks most nice girls—that of distributing their brothers among their dearest friends—as far, that is, as they will go round.

So Charlotte and I walked under the tall firs of the Academy wood in the hope that Irma might be passing that way. I escorted her home in full sight of all Eden Valley—that was always on the look-out for whatever might happen in the way of courtship about the shop of the famous mantua-maker.

And yet (I know people will think I am lying) never, I say, did I find Miss Irma so desirable in my eyes as when I saw her at Heathknowes during these days of folly. It was not that she was kinder to me. She appeared not to think of me either one way or the other. She curtsied to me, like a bird, flirting the train of her gown like a wagtail on a stone by the running stream. One forenoon she met us, strolling with little Louis by the hand, her black hair crowned with scarlet hips—those berries of the wild dog-rose which grow so great in our country lanes. She waved us a joyous little salute from the top of a stile, on which she perched as lightly as if joyful graces were fluttering about her, and she herself ready to take wing.

But she never so much as looked wistful, but let me go my way with a single flirt of a kerchief she was adjusting about her brother’s neck. As for me I was ready to hang myself in self-contempt and hatred of poor innocent Charlotte Anderson, who smiled and imagined, doubtless, that she was fulfilling the end for which she had come to Miss Huntingdon’s.

After we had separated I went to thinking sadly on the stupidity of my performances. This field of thought was a large one and the consideration of it, patch by patch, took some time. It was market day. The bleating of flocks was about me, a pleasant smell of wool and tar and heather—and of bullocks blowing clouds of perfumed breath that condensed upon the frosty air. I was leaning my arms upon the stone dyke of the Market Hill and thinking of Irma, now by my own act rendered more inaccessible than ever—when a hand, heavy as a ham falling from a high ceiling, descended upon my shoulder. A voice of incomparable richness, a little husky perhaps with the morning’s moistening at the King’s Arms, cried out, “So ho, lad! thou dost not want assurance! Thinking on the lasses at thy age! You’re the chap, they tell me, that’s been walkin’ out my daughter in broad daylight! Well, well, cannot find it in my heart to be too hard—did the like mysel’ thirty years ago, and never regretted it. School-master’s son, aren’t ye? Thought I kenned ye by sight! Student lad at the College of Edinburgh? Yes, yes—knew thy father any time ever since he came from the North. No man has anything to say again thy father! Except that he does not lay on the young rascals’ backs half heavily enough! I dare say thou would be noways the worse of a dressing down thysel’!”

All this time he was thumping me on my back, and I was standing before him with such a red face, and (I doubt not) such a compound of idiocy and black despair upon it, that I might have been listening to my doom being pronounced by the mouth of some full-blooded, jovial red judge, with a bunch of seals the size of your fist dangling from his fob and the loaded whip with which he had brought down the highwayman, under his arm.

“Come thou up to the King’s Arms!” he cried; “don’t stand there looking like a dummy. Let’s have the matter out! Thour’t noan shamed, surely! There’s no reason for why. At thy age, laddie—hout-hout—there’s no wrong as young folks go. Come thy ways, lad!”

Obediently I followed in his wake as he elbowed a way through the crowd, salutations pouring in upon him on every side.

“Ah, Birkenbog, what’s brought you into the market this day—sellin’ lambs?”

“That’s as may be—buyin’ calves more belike!”

This was for my benefit, and the old brute, tasting his sorry jest, turned and slapped me again, winking all the time with his formidable brows in a spasmodic and horrible manner, that was like a threat.

Now, I did not mind Lalor Maitland or Galligaskins when my blood was up. But now it was down—far down—indeed in my very boots.

All the time and every step of the way, I was trying in a void and empty brain to evolve plans of escape. I could only hear the rich port-wine chuckle of that great voice, and watch the gleam of those huge silver spurs.

And so presently we came to the King’s Arms. Never was bold wooer in a more hopeless position. Whichever way I turned the case was desperate—if I resisted, I could not expect to fare better than Tam Haggart, whom that whip shank had beaten to the ground on the Corse o’ Slakes. If I let myself drift, then farewell all hope of Irma Maitland.

I hesitated and was lost. But who in my place could have bettered it—save by not being such a portentous fool to begin with? But when that is in a man, it will out.

I entered the King's Arms meekly, and before I knew what I was doing I had been presented to three or four solid-thighed, thick-headed, stout-legged farmers as "Our Lottie's intended." They laughed, and came near to shaking my hand off. I felt that if I backed out after that, I never could show my face in Eden Valley again.

Then we proceeded to business. I had not been accustomed to drink anything stronger than water, and I was not going to begin now—so much of sense I had left in me. So as often as the mighty farmer of Birkenbog had his tankard pointed at the cornice of the commercial room of the King's Arms, I poured the contents of mine carefully among the sawdust on the floor.

And then my formidable "future" father-in-law got to the root of the matter.

"Father know about this?" He shot out the question as from a catapult.

"No, sir," said I, "I did not think of troubling him just yet—till—"

"Till what?"

"Till things were a bit more settled," I faltered. He put his loosely clenched fist on my knee. It appeared as large as the flat part of a pair of smith's bellows. 215

"Well, that's what we are here now for, eh?" he said. "I doan't blame ye, you young dog. Now I like a fine up-standing wench myself, well filled out, none o' your flails done up in a bean-sack, nor yet a tea-pot little body that makes the folk laugh as they see her trotting alongside a personable man like me. Lottie will do ye fine. She's none great at the books—takes after her mother in that, but she's a good girl, and I'll warrant ye, she will keep up her end of an argument well enough after a year or two's practice. But, mind you, lad, there's to be nothing come of this till I see you safe through college as a doctor. Fees? Nonsense! Go to the hospitals, man, I'll pay for that part. It can come off what I have put aside to give the man that took Lottie off my hands! A doctor—yes, that's the business, and one sore needed here in this very Eden Valley! *Whisht*—there—who think ye bought old Andrew Leith's practice and house? Who keeps the lads from the college there and sends them packing at the end of every six months? Why, me—Anderson of Birkenbog. So haste ye fast, and when ye are ready, the house is ready, and the practice and the tocher—and as for the lass ye have made it up with her yourself, as I understand."

Never was there a poorer-spirited wooer! No, never one. The very pour of words stunned me. Had it not been for the coming and going of Dutch-girthed brother-farmers, dumping bags of "samples" on the table, and hauling at purses tied with leathern strings out of tight breeches pockets, the "What's your will, sir?" of Tom the drawer, and the clink of cannikins, I must have been found out even then. 216

But the part of the trouble which was to be mine personally was coming to an end. After all, his daughter's future was only an item in Birkenbog's programme of the day.

"Well, then, lad"—he clapped me again on the shoulder (I sitting there with the soul of an oyster)—"we have arranged everything comfortable—eh? Now you can go and tell Lottie. Aye, and ye can say to Miss—what's her name—Thimbolina, the old dowager with the corkscrews—with my compliments, that there's a sweet-milk cheese ripening on the dairy shelves for her at Birkenbog. Hear ye that, lad?"

I took my leave as best I could. I felt I had hopelessly committed myself. For though I had not said a word, I had not dared to reveal to this fierce father, that being in love with another, I had been using his daughter as a stalking horse.

"And, look here, Duncan lad," he said, "I'll just step up and have a word with your father. The clearer understanding there is between families on such like arrangements, the less trouble there will be in the future!"

And he strode away out into the yard, halting, however, at the door to call out in a voice that could be heard all over the neighbourhood, "Come thy ways up to Birkenbog on Sunday and take a bit o' dinner wi' us! Then thou canst see our Lottie and tell her how many times sweeter she is than a sugar-plum! Ho, ho!"

He was gone at last and I fairly blushed myself down the street, pushing my way between the ranks of the market stalls and the elbowing farmers.

"Are ye blind or only daft?" one apple wife called out, as I shook her rickety erection of trestles and boards. She was as red in the face as Birkenbog himself, for a cur with a kettle tied to its tail had taken refuge under her stall, and she had been serving a writ of ejectment with the same old umbrella with which she whacked thievish boys and sheltered her goods on rainy days. 217

But I heeded not. I was seeking solitude. I felt that I wanted nothing from the entire clan of human beings. I had lost all that I should ever really love. Irma—Irma! And here was I, settled for life with one for whom I cared not a penny!

By the time I had reached this stage, I had come out upon the bare woods that mount the path by the riverside. I came to the great holly, a cave of green shade in summer, and now a warm shelter in these tall solitudes of wattled branches standing purple and black against the winter sky.

Ah, there was some one there already. I stepped out again quickly, but not too fast to see that it was Charlotte Anderson herself I had stumbled upon—and *that she was crying!*

CHAPTER XXVII

“THEN, HEIGH-HO, THE MOLLY!”

“Charlotte!” said I, taking in a sudden pity a step nearer and holding out my hand; but she only snatched her arm away fretfully and cried the more bitterly.

“Has your father been speaking unkindly to you?” I asked her, being much surprised.

She shook her head, and a wet handkerchief plashed on my hand like a sob as she shook it out.

“What is it, then?” I asked, more and more amazed at the turn things were taking. Never had I thought for a moment that Charlotte would not be as pleased and happy to have me as I was the reverse.

“Oh,” she burst out at last, sobbing between each hurried phrase, “I don’t blame you, Duncan. It’s all that horrid old cat, Miss Seraphina—Diabolina, the girls call her—she writes everything we do to our people at home. She’s always writing, and she spies on us, too, and listens—opens our letters! She has brought all this on me——”

“Brought what on you?” I inquired blankly.

“Having to marry you and all!” she said, and had recourse to her wet handkerchief again. But that being altogether too sodden to afford her any relief, she signalled to me, as if I had been Agnes Anne or another girl, to pass her mine. Fortunately for once I could do so without shame. For Miss Irma had been teaching me things—or at least the desire to appear well in her eyes.

Charlotte Anderson did not appear to notice, but went on crying.

“And don’t you want to marry me, Lottie?” I said softly, taking her hand. She let me now, perhaps considered as the proprietor of the handkerchief.

“Of course I don’t,” said she. “Oh, how could I?”

Now this, considered apart, was certainly hurtful to my pride. For, having frequently considered my person, as revealed in my mother’s big Sunday mirror, I thought that she could very well. On my side there was certainly nothing to render the matter impossible. Moreover, how about our walks and talks! She had, then, merely been playing with me. Oh, Perfidy, thy name is Woman!

I was silent and paused for an explanation. I soon got it, considered as before, as the sympathetic owner of the handkerchief.

“It’s Tam Galaberry,” she said, “my cousin, you know, Duncan. He used to come to see me ... before ... before you! But his sister went to Dumfries to learn the high-class millinery, and since then Miss Seraphina cannot thole him. As if he had anything to do with that. And she wrote home, and my father threatened Tam to shoot him with the gun if he came after me—all because we were cousins—and only seconds at any rate. Oh-h-h-h! What *shall* I do?”

I had to support Charlotte here—though merely as handkerchief-holder and in the purest interests of the absent Mr. Thomas Gallaberry.

But the relief to my own mind, in spite of the hurt to my pride, was immediate and enormous. But a thought leaped up in my heart which cooled me considerably.

“Oh, Lottie,” I said, as sadly as I could, “you have been false and deceitful. You have come near to breaking my heart——”

“I ken I have—I ken I have!” she cried. “Oh, can you ever forgive me?”

“Only, Charlotte,” I answered nobly, “because I care for your happiness more than for my own!”

“Oh, Duncan, but you are good!” She threw herself into my arms. I really think she mistook me for Agnes Anne for the moment. But any consolations I applied were, as before, in the interests of Tam Gallaberry.

“I knew I was wicked and wrong all the time,” she said, “but when we walked out, you remember the dyke we used to lean against” (she glanced up at me with simple child-like eyes, tear-stained), “you must remember? Well, one of the stones was loose. And Tam used to put one letter there, and I took it out and slid it in my pocket, and put mine back the same! Agnes Anne was looking the other way, of course, and you—you——”

“Was otherwise employed than thinking of such deceit!” I said grandly.

“You were kissing me! And I let you—for Tam’s sake,” Charlotte murmured, smiling. “Otherwise the poor fellow would have had five miles to come that next day, and I could not bear that he should not find his letter!”

"No!" I answered dryly, "it would certainly have been a pity."

She looked at me curiously.

"Do you know," she said, "I always thought that *you* were playing, too!"

"Playing!" I exclaimed tragically. "Is it possible? Oh, Lottie!"

"Oh, I just thought it," she said remorsefully. "I am sorry if it was true—if you do really care about me so much—as all that!"

I was still thinking of Tam Gallaberry. So apparently was she.

Virtue is its own reward, and so is mutual consolation. It is very consoling. Half the happy love stories in the world begin that way—just with telling about the unhappy ones that went before. You take my word for it—I, Duncan MacAlpine, know what I am talking about. Charlotte Anderson too.

So finally, after a while, I became very noble and said what a fine thing it was to give up something very precious for others. And I asked her if she could think of anything much nobler than willingly to give up as fine a girl as herself—Charlotte Anderson—for the sake of Tam Gallaberry? She thought awhile and said she could not.

So I told her we must keep up appearances for a time, till we had made our arrangements what to do. Charlotte said that she had no objections as long as Tam Gallaberry did not know. So I said that she could write a long letter that very night, and give it to Agnes Anne in the morning, and I would go out to the stone, and put it underneath.

Then she cried, "Oh, will you?" And thanked me ever so sweetly, asking if, when I was about it, would I bring back the one I found there and send it to her by my sister, in another envelope—"just over the top, you know, without breaking the seal. Because such letters were sacred."

I said she need not trouble herself. I was only doing all this for her sake. I did not want to see what another man had to say to her!

And, if you will believe me, she was delighted, and said, "Now I know that you were not all pretending, but do care for me a little wee bit!"

Indeed, Charlotte was so delighted that it was perhaps as well for the smooth flowing of their love story that Tam Gallaberry was at that moment investigating their joint post office. For Lottie was a generous girl when her heart was moved, and though she kept the grand issues clear, she often confused details—as, for instance, whether the handkerchief was mine or my sister's, and whether I was myself or Tam Gallaberry.

But I considered such slips as these pardonable at twenty. At that age forgetfulness is easy. Afterwards the prison doors close, and now I am not mistaken for Tam Gallaberry any more—and what is more, I don't want to be. However, after a while I brought Charlotte to earth again, out of the exaltation of our mutual self-sacrifice, by the reminder that at that moment our fathers would be arranging as to our joint future—and that without the least regard for our present noble sentiments, or those of the happily absent Mr. Thomas Gallaberry.

She got down and looked at me, affrighted, her lips apart, and all panting like a bird newly ta'en in the hand.

"Oh, Duncan," she cried, "you will help me, won't you? You see how fond I am of you!"

I saw, exactly, but refrained from telling her that she had a strange way of showing it.

"I would do anything in the world for you," she added,—"only I want to marry Tom. Ye see? I have always meant to marry Tom! So I can't help it, can I?"

Her logic had holes in it, but her meaning was starry clear. I thanked her, and said that the best thing we could do was to take counsel together. Which we did there under the shelter of the great holly-bush. So much so that any one passing that way might have taken us for foolish lovers, instead of two people plotting how to get rid the one of the other.

What helped the illusion greatly was that it was a cold day, with every now and then a few driving flecks of snow. I had on a great rough Inverness cloak of my father's, far too large for me. I asked Charlotte if she were warm. She said she was, but did not persist too much in the statement. So we left Tom Gallaberry out of the question, and set ourselves to arrange what we were to say to our two fathers.

"It will be terrible hard to pretend!" I said, shaking my head.

"It will be a sin—at least, for long!" she answered.

I exposed the situation. There was to be no immediate talk of marriage. Even her father had allowed that I must get through college first. He was to pay my fees as a doctor. I did not want to be a doctor. Besides, I could not take her father's money—

Here Charlotte turned with so quick a flounce that she nearly landed herself in the little gutter which I had made with my stick to carry off the drainage of the slope behind.

"Not take the money? Nonsense!" she cried. "Father has more than he knows what to do with!"

She paused a while, finger on lip, meditating, the double ply of calculation, stamped on her father's brow, very strongly marked on hers.

"Look here, Duncan," she said caressingly, like a grown woman wooing to get her own way, so deep her voice was, "daddy is giving you that money because you are going to marry me, isn't

he?"

I signed, as well as I could, that Mr. Robert Anderson of Birkenbog considered himself as so doing.

She clapped her hands and cried out, as if she had stumbled on the solution of some exceedingly difficult problem, "Why, then, take the money and give it to Tom! He needs it for his farm—oh, just dreadful. He says the hill is not half stocked, and that a hundred or two more ewes would just be the saving of him!"

"But," said I, "I shall be entering into an agreement with your father, and shall have to give him receipts!"

"Well," she continued boldly, "Thomas will enter into an agreement with you, if he doesn't marry me—that is, if I am left on your hands—he will pay you the money back—or else give you the sheep!"

It will hardly be believed the difficulty I had to make Charlotte see the impossibility—nay, the dishonesty of an arrangement which appeared so simple to her. She thought for a while that I was just doing it out of jealousy, and she sulked.

I reasoned with her, but I might as well have tried logic on the Gallaberry black-faced ewes. She continued to revolve the project in her own mind.

"Whatever you—I mean *wæ*—can get out of father is to the good," she said. "He will never miss it. If you don't, I will ask him for the money for your fees myself and give it to Tom——"

"If you do!" I cried in horror,— "oh—you don't know what you are talking about, girl!"

"You don't love me a bit," she said. "What would it matter to you? Besides, if it comes to giving a receipt, I can imitate your signature to a nicety. Agnes Anne says so."

"But, Charlotte, it would be forgery," I gasped. "They hang people for forgery."

"No, they don't—at least, not for that sort," she argued, her eyes very bright with the working of her inward idea. "For how can it be forgery when it is *your* name I write, and I've told you of it beforehand? It's my father's money, isn't it, and he gives it to you for marrying me? Very well, then, it's yours—no, I mean it's Tom's because he means to marry me. At least I mean to marry him. Anyway, the money is not my father's, because he gives it freely to you (or Tom) for a certain purpose. Well, Tom is going to be the one who will carry out that purpose. So the money is his. Therefore it's honest and no forgery!"

These arguments were so strong and convincing to Charlotte that I did not attempt to discuss them further, salving my conscience by the thought that there remained his Majesty's post, and that a letter addressed to her father at the Farmers' Ordinary Room, in care of the King's Arms, would clear me of all financial responsibility. But this I took care not to mention to Lottie, because it might have savoured of treachery and disturbed her.

On the other hand, I began urging her to find another confidant than Agnes Anne. She would do well enough for ordinary letters which I was to send on to Cousin Tom. But she must not know they were not for me. She must think that all was going on well between us. This, I showed her, was a necessity. Charlotte felt the need also, and suggested this girl and that at Miss Seraphina Huntingdon's. But I objected to all. I had to think quick, for some were very nice girls, and at most times would have served their country quite well. But I stuck to it that they were too near head-quarters. They would be sure to get found out by Miss Huntingdon.

"It is true," she meditated, "she *is* a prying old cat."

"I don't see anybody for it but Miss Irma, over at my grandmother's!" I said, boldly striking the blow to which I had been so long leading up.

Charlotte gazed at me so long and so intently that I was sure she smelt a rat. But the pure innocence of my gaze, and the frank readiness with which I gave my reasons, disarmed her.

"You see," I said, "she is the only girl quite out of the common run to whom you have access. You can go to Heathknowes as often as you like with Agnes Anne. Nobody will say a word. They will think it quite natural—to hear the latest about me, you know. Then when you are alone with Miss Irma, you can burst into tears and tell her our secret——"

"All——?" she questioned, with strong emphasis.

"Well," I hastened to reply, "all that is strictly necessary for a stranger to know—as, for instance, that *you* don't want to marry me, and that *I* never wanted to marry you——"

"Oh," she cried, moving in a shocked, uneasy manner, "but I thought *you* did!"

"Well, but—," I stammered, for I was momentarily unhinged, "you see you must put things that way to get Miss Irma to help us. She can do anything with my father, and I believe she could with yours too if she got a chance."

"Oh, no, she couldn't!"

"Well, anyway, she would serve us faithfully, so long as we couldn't trust Agnes Anne. And you know we agreed upon that. If you can think of anything better, of course I leave it to you!"

She sat a long while making up her mind, with a woman's intuition that all the cards were not on the table. But in the long run she could make no better of it.

"Well, I will," she said; "I always liked her face, and I don't believe she is nearly so haughty as

people make out."

"Not a bit, she isn't——" I was beginning joyously, when I caught Lottie's eye; "I mean——" I added lamely, "a girl always understands another girl's affairs, and will help if she can—unless she has herself some stake in the game!"

And in saying this, I believe that for once in a way I hit upon a great and nearly universal truth.

CHAPTER XXVIII

LOVE AND THE LOGICIAN

I knew that the Yule Fair was going on down in the village, and that on account of it all Eden Valley was in an uproar. The clamour was deafening at the lower end of the "clachan," where most of the show folk congregated. The rooks were cawing belatedly in the tall ashes round the big square—into which, in the old times of the Annandale thieves, the country folk used to drive the cattle to be out of the way of Johnstones and Jardines.

I skirted the town, therefore, so as not to meet with the full blast of the riot. With such an unruly gang about, I kept Charlotte Anderson well in sight till I saw her safe into Miss Seraphina's. Of course, nobody who knew her for a daughter of Fighting Rob of Birkenbog would have laid hand upon her, but at such a time there might be some who did not know the repute of her father.

The great gong in front of the "Funny Folks" booth went "Bang! bang!" Opposite, the fife and drum spoke for the temple of the legitimate drama. At the selling-stalls importunate vendors of tin-ware rattled their stock-in-trade and roared at the world in general, as if buyers could be forced to attend to the most noisy—which, indeed, they mostly did.

From the dusky kennels in which the gipsies told fortunes and mended the rush-bottomed chairs of the Valley goodwives came over the wall a faint odour of mouldy hay, which lingered for weeks about every apartment to which any of their goods were admitted.

As for me, I had had enough of girls for one day, and I was wondering how best to cut across the fields, take a turn about the town, and so get home to my father's by the wood of pines behind the school, when suddenly a voice dropped upon me that fairly stunned me, so unexpected it was.

"Mr. Duncan MacAlpine," it said, "I congratulate you on your choice of a father-in-law. You could not have done better!"

It was Miss Irma herself, taking a walk in a place where at such a time she had no business to be—on the little farm path that skirts the woods above the town. Louis was with her, but I thought that in the far distance I could discern the lounging shadow of the faithful Eben.

I stood speechless straight before her, but she passed on, lightly switching the crisped brown stalks of last year's thistles with a little wand she had brought. I saw that she did not mean to speak to me, and I turned desperately to accompany her.

"I will thank you to pass your way," she said sharply. "I am glad you are to have such a wife and such a dowry. Also a father-in-law who will be at the kind trouble of paying your college fees till you are quite ready to marry his daughter. It is a thing not much practised among gentlefolk, but, what with being so much with your mantua-makers, you will doubtless not know any better!"

"Irma—Irma," I cried, not caring any more for Eben, now in the nearer distance, "it is all a mistake—indeed, a mistake from the beginning!"

"Very possibly," she returned, with an airy haughtiness; "at any rate, it is no mistake of mine!"

And there, indeed, she had me. I had perforce to shift my ground.

"I am not going to marry Charlotte Anderson," I said.

"Then the more shame of you to deceive her after all!" she cried. "It seems that you make a habit of it! Surely I am the last person to whom you ought to boast of that!"

"On the contrary, you are the first!"

But she passed on her way, her head high, an invincible lightness in the spring of every footstep, a splash of scarlet berries making a star among her dark hair, and humming the graceless lilt which told how—

"Willie's ga'en to Melville Castle,
Boots an' spurs an' a'—!"

As for me, I was ready to sink deep into the ground with despondency, wishful to rise never more. But I stopped, and though Uncle Eben was almost opposite to me, and within thirty yards, I called after her, "The day will come, Irma Maitland, when you will be sorry for the injustice you are doing!"

For I thought of how she would feel when Charlotte told about her cousin Tam Gallaberry and all that I had done for them—though, indeed, it was mostly by accident. Only I could trust Charlotte to keep her thumb upon that part of it.

I did not know what she felt then, nor, perhaps, do I quite know yet; but she caught a tangle of wild cut-leafed ivy from a tree on which I had long watched it grow, and with a spray of small green leaves she crowned herself, and so departed as she had come, singing as if she had not a care in the world, or as if I, Duncan MacAlpine, were the last and least of all.

And yet I judged that there might be a message for me in that very act. She had escaped me, and yet there was something warm in her heart in spite of all. Perhaps, who knows, an angel had gone down and troubled the waters; nor did I think, somehow, that any other would step in there before me.

After that I went down to see Fred Esquillant, who listened with sad yet brilliant eyes to my tangled tale.

"You are the lucky one," I said, "to have nothing to do with the lasses. See what trouble they lead you into."

He broke out suddenly.

"Be honest, Duncan," he said, "if you must boast! If you are bound to lie, let it not be to me. You would not have it otherwise. You would not be as I am, not for all the gold of earth. No"—he held his breath a long while—"no, and I, if I had the choice, would I not give all that I have, or am ever likely to have, for—but no, I'm a silent Scot, and I canna speak the word——"

"I'm the other sort of Scot," I cried, "and I'll speak it for you. Man, it's the first decent human thing I have ever heard come out o' your mouth. You would give all for LOVE!"

"Oh, man," he cried, snatching his fingers to his ears as if I blasphemed, "are ye not feared?"

"No, I'm not," I declared, truly enough; "what for should I be feared? Of a lassie? Tell a lassie—that ye—that ye——"

"No, no," cried Fred Esquillant, "not again!"

"Well, then, that ye 'like' her—we will let it go at that. She will want ye to say the other, but at least that will do to begin on. And come, tell me now, what's to hinder ye, Fred?"

"Oh, everything," he said; "it's just fair shameless the way folk can bring themselves to speak openly of suchlike things!"

"And where would you have been, my lad, if once on a day your faither had not telled your mither that she was bonny?"

"I don't know, and as little do I care," he cried.

"Well, then," said I, "there's Amaryllis—what about her?"

"That's Latin," said Fred, waving his arm.

"And there's Ruth, and the lass in the Song of Solomon!"

"That's in the Bible," he murmured, as if he thought no better of the Sacred Word for giving a place to such frivolities.

"Fred," I said, "tell me what you would be at? Would you have all women slain like the babes of Bethlehem, or must we have you made into a monk and locked in a cell with only a book and an inkhorn and a quill?"

"Neither," he said; "but—oh, man, there is something awesome, coarse-grained and common in the way the like o' you speak about women."

"Aye, do ye tell me that?" I said to try him; "coarse, maybe, as our father Adam, when he tilled his garden, and common as the poor humanity that is yet of his flesh and blood."

"There ye go!" he cried; "I knew well that my words were thrown away."

"Speak up, Mr. Lily Fingers," I answered; "let *us* hear what sort of a world you would have without love—and men and women to make it."

"It would be like that in which dwell the angels of heaven—where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage!"

"Well," said I, "speaking for myself and most lads like me, we will mend our ways before we get a chance of trying that far country! And in the meantime here we are—our feet in the mire, and our heads not so very near the sky. Talk of angels—where are we to get their society? And the likest to them that I have ever heard tell of are just women—good women, innocent lasses, beginning to feel the stir of their own power—and all the better and the stronger are they for that! Oh, Fred, I saw an angel within the last half-hour! There she stood, her eyes shooting witcheries, poised for flight like a butterfly, the dimples playing hide-and-seek on her face, and her whole soul and body saying to the sons of men, 'Come, seek me on your knees—you know you can't help loving me! It is very good for you to worship me!'"

"And you are not ashamed, Duncan MacAlpine, to speak such words?"

"Oh, ye Lallan Scot!" I cried; "ye Westland stot! Is there no hot blood of the Celt in you? What brought *you* to Galloway, where the Celt sits on every hill-top, names every farm and lea-rig, and lights his Baal-fires about the standing stones on St. John's Eve?"

"Man," said Fred, shaking his head, "I aye thought ye were a barbarian. Now I know it. If you had your way, you would raid your neighbours' womenfolk and bring them in by the hair of their heads, trailing them two at a time. For me, I worship them like stars, standing afar off."

"Aye," said I, "that would be a heap of use to the next generation, and the lasses themselves would like it weel!"

But what Freddy Esquillant said about the next generation was unworthy of him, and certainly shall not sully this philosophic page. Besides, he spake in his haste.

All the same, I noticed that, if ever any of the stars came near to his earth, it would be a certain very moderately brilliant planet, bearing the name of Agnes Anne or, more scientifically, MacAlpine Minima, which would attract Master Fred's reluctant worship.

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CHAPTER XXIX

THE AVALANCHE

And now there was a second and longer probation in that gaunt town of Edinburgh, without any miniature to lie beside me on my work-table like a tickless watch, and help along the weary hours. And though the session before I had thought but little of the letters (and indeed there was nothing in them), yet this time there were none at all, which suited me far worse. For, as it seemed, the mere sight of the hand-of-write would have cheered me.

Henceforward I could only learn, as it were, by ricochet what was going on. My grandmother never set pen to paper. Her tongue to guide was trouble enough to her without setting down words on paper to rise up in judgment against her. True, my father wrote regularly to inquire if my professor had any new light on the high things of Plato, the Iberian flavour in Martial's Epigrams, and such like subjects which were better fitted to interest a learned dominie who had lost the scholar of his choice than to comfort a young fellow who has only lost his sweetheart.

For her part Agnes Anne wrote me reams about Charlotte, but never mentioned a word as to the Maitlands, though she did say that Charlotte was a good deal at Heathknowes, and (a trifle spitefully, perhaps) that she did not know what took her there unless it were to see Uncle Rob! This poor Uncle Rob of ours—his reputation was in everybody's mouth, certainly. He had been, so they said, a runagate, a night-raker, and in the days of his youth a trifle wild. But now with the shadows of forty deepening upon him, it was not fair that all the hot blood of his teens and twenties should rise up in judgment against him. Still so it was. And the reason of it was, he had not, as he ought, married and settled. For which sin of omission, as the gossips of Eden Valley said, "there was bound to be a reason!"

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Charlotte herself did not send a line, excepting always the letters I was to forward to Tom Gallaberry at his farm of Ewebuchts on the Water of Ae. This at the time I judged unkind, but afterwards I found that Cousin Tom had insisted upon it, on the threat of going to her father and telling him the whole affair. For, in spite of all, Cousin Thomas was jealous—as most country lads are of college-bred youths, and he pinned Charlotte carefully down in her correspondence. However, I made him pay his own postages, which was a comfort, and as Agnes Anne and often my father would slip their letters into the same packet, after all I had only the extra weight to pay.

Still, I did think that some of them might have told me something of Irma. But none did, till one great day I got a letter—from whom think you? I give you fifty guesses—well, from my Aunt Jen. And it contained more than all the rest put together, though all unconsciously, and telling me things that I might have gone a long time ignorant of—if she had suspected for a moment I was keen about them.

Heathknowes, this the thirteenth Aprile.

"DEAR NEPHEW DUNCAN,

"Doubtless you will be having so many letters that you will not be caring for one from a cross auld maid, who is for ever finding fault with you when ye are at home. But who, for all that, does not forget to bear ye up in the arms of her petitions before the Throne—no, night and morning both.

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"This is writ to tell you that I have sent ye, by the wish of my mither, one cheese of seven pounds weight good, as we are hearing that you are thinking to try and find something to do in Edinburgh during the summer time. Which will be an advisable thing, if it be the Lord's will—for faint-a-hait do ye do here except play ill pranks and run the country.

"However, what comes o't we shall see. Also there is a pig of butter. It may be the better of a trifle more salt, that is, if the weather is onyway warm. So I have put in a little piece of board and ye can work the salt in yourself. Be a good lad, and mind there are those here that are praying for ye to be guided aright. Big towns are awful places for temptation by what they say, and that ye are about the easiest specimen to be tempted, that I have yet seen with these eyes. Howsomever, maybe ye will have gotten grace, or if not that, at least a pickle common-sense, whilk often does as well—or better.

"It's a Guid's blessing that ye have been led to stop where ye are. For that lassie Charlotte Anderson is going on a shame to be seen. Actually she is never off our doorstep—fleeing and rinning all hours of the day. At first I thought to mysel', it was to hear news of you. But she kens as weel as us when the posts come in, besides the letters she gets from Agnes Anne—some that cost as muckle as sevenpence—a ruination and a disgrace!" [Tom Gallaberry must have been prolix that week.] "Then I thought it was maybe some of the lads—for, like it or no, ye had better ken soon as syne, that maiden's e'e is filled with vanity and the gauds o' grandeur, disdaining the true onputting of a meek and quiet spirit!

"But, for your comfort, if ye are so far left to yourself as to take comfort in the like—and the bigger fool you—it is no the lads after all. It's just Irma Maitland!

"I declare they two are never sindry. They will be out talk-talking, yatter-yattering when the kye are being milked in the morning. Irma makes her carry the water, that's one comfort. But I wonder at that silly auld clocking hen, Seraphina Huntingdon. It's a deal of work she will be getting, but I suppose the premium pays for all, and she will not care a farthing now that Charlotte's market is made. Not that I would trust you (or any student lad) the length of my stirabout potstick—or indeed (not to shame my own father) anything that wears hose and knee-breeches. And maybe that's the reason every silly birkie thinks he has the right to cast up to me that I am an auld maid. Faith, there's few that wear the wedding ring with whom I would change places. But what of that?

"The folk are all well here, both bairns and grown folk, and we will be blithe to hear from you, and if you have the time to send a scraps of your pen to your auld maiden aunt, that mony a time (though Lord knows not half often enough) has garred your lugs ring for your misdeeds—she will be pleased to hear if the butter and cheese were some kitchen to your tasteless town's bread.

"Your obdt. servt. and affectionate aunt,
"JANET LYON."

From this information I hoped great things—at least a letter demanding pardon from Irma, or an account of how she had confessed all from that graceless and thankless forgetful besom Charlotte. But I heard nothing further till, one day going past after another, about a twelvemonth after amazing word came. It was when I was busy with some literary work I had gotten from one of the printers in the town—correcting proofs and looking out for misspellings in the compositions of an eminent hand. I will be plain—it was poor work, and as poorly paid. But I could live on it, and in any case it was better than slaving at tutoring. That is, as tutoring was at that time in Edinburgh—a dull boy whom none could make anything of, insolent servants, sneering elder sisters and a guinea a month to pay for all. However, I tried it and made some of them stop sneering—at least the sisters.

I was, I say, in the Rankeillor Street lodgings and Amelia was going out at the door with my tea-things—as usual calling me names for "idling within doors" when Fred was out at his classes. Freddie had private permission from one of the professors to read in his library, so often did not come home till late. But I stuck to my arm-chair and my printer's slips like a burr to homespun. Suddenly there was a great noise on the stairs. "There," cries Amelia, "that's one of your countrymen, or I'm no judge of the Galloway bray!"

For, as I have indicated before, Amelia was far from imitating her mother's English politeness.

The next moment the front door was driven in with a mighty brange against the wall (for Amelia had been out the moment before on the landing to throw some turnip-tops on the ash "bucket"). A huge man in many swathes of riding-coat dashed in and caught me by the throat. Amelia had the two-pronged carving fork in her hand, and seeing her mother's lodger (as she thought) in danger of being choked to death, without having regulated his week's bill, she threw herself upon my assailant and struck vehemently with the fork.

The huge man in the many capes doubtless suffered no grievous harm. It had hardly been possible for a pistol-ball to penetrate such an armature, but still the sudden assault from behind, and perhaps some subtle feminine quality in Amelia's screams, made him turn about to see what was happening.

The man was Fighting Anderson of Birkenbog himself, and he kept crying, "Where have you hidden her, rascal, thief? I will kill you, villain of a scribbler! It was because you were plotting

this that you dare not show your face in the country!"

But every time he threw himself upon me, Amelia, who did not want for spunk, dug at him with the two-pronged fork, and stuck it through so many plies of his mantle till he was obliged to cry out, "Here, lassie, lay down that leister, or ye will hae me like miller Tamson's riddle, that the cat can jump through back-foremost."

After adjusting his coat collar he turned to me and demanded, in a more sensible and quiet way, what had become of his daughter.

At the question, Amelia went into one of her foolish fits of laughter and cried out, "What, anither of them?"

Whereupon to prevent misunderstandings, I explained that the young lady was my landlady's daughter, and a friend of Freddy Esquillant's.

"Oh, you students," he said, and sat down to wipe his brow, having seen from the most cursory examination of our abode, wholly open to the view, and exiguous at the best, that certainly Charlotte was not hidden there.

"She left home three days syne as if to go to Miss Huntingdon's," he said, "and ever since her mother has gone from one hysteric to another. So, knowing nothing better to do, and maybe judging you by myself in my own young days (for which I am sure I ask your pardon) I started out to make sure that everything had been done decently and in order. Though as sure as my name is Robert Anderson, I cannot think why you did not come and wed the lass decently at home——"

We were at this point in our explanation, Amelia's ear was (doubtless) close to the back of the door, and Birkenbog was relapsing into his first belief, when I heard the key in the lock and the light foot of Freddy in the passage.

It came as a huge relief, for here was my witness.

He entered, and, seeing the visitor, bowed and deposited his books in the corner. He was for going out again, doubtless thinking that Charlotte's father and I were at business together. So, indeed, we were—but not such as I wished to keep anyways private between us. I could not, with any self-respect, go on depending any longer on Amelia's two-pronged fork.

So I said, "Freddy, bear me witness that I have not been out of the house this week, except to go to the printer's with my work——"

"Fegs," cried a voice through the jar of the door, "there is no need for Freddy to bear ye out in that. You have only to look at the carpet under the legs of your chair. It has gotten a tairgin', as if all the hosts of King Pharaoh had trampled over it down to the Red Sea!"

But I would not keep the old man any longer in suspense.

"I fear, Birkenbog," I said, "that you have given yourself a bootless journey. From what I suspect, your flown bird will be nested nearer home."

"Where?" he cried; "tell me the scoundrel's name."

"Fairly and soothly, Birkenbog," said I, "peace is best among near friends—not to speak of kinsfolk!"

"Aye," said he, "fairly and soothly be it! But I have to ken first that it is fairly and soothly. Who is the man?"

"I do not know for certain," I said, "but I have every reason to believe that your daughter is at this moment Mistress Thomas Gallaberry of Ewebuchts, on the Water of Ae!"

"Oh, the limmer," he cried, and started up as if to fly at me again. His face was indeed a study. First there appeared the usual hot wrath, overlapping in ruddy fold on fold, and revealing the owner's full-fed intent to punish. This gradually gave way to a look of humorous appreciation, and then all of a sudden, he slapped his thigh in an agony of joyous appreciation.

"Oh, the limmer," he cried, "only a week since my kinsman Tam Gallaberry asks me brave and canny for the lend of five hundred to stock his Back Hill. He offered decent enough security, and as usual I took Charlotte's opinion on the business. For it's her that has the great head for the siller. Oh yes, she has that. And as soon as they gat the tocher, he's off wi' the lassie. Certes, but he is the cool hand."

"If you allow me to judge, I should say the cool hand was Charlotte!" I ventured.

"Right, man," he cried, "little do I doubt it! Tam Gallaberry has led a grey mare to his stable that will prove the better horse, and that he will ken before he is a fortnight older."

Then he turned upon me, short and sharp.

"You have kenned this some while, I'm jaloosin'?"

"Yes," said I, for I felt that he might have me awkwardly trapped if he went on, "that is one of the reasons why I did not come home. I knew that Charlotte had made up her mind never to marry me——"

"And ye took it like that?" he cried; "man, ye havena muckle spunk!"

"It was not generally so thought at the time of the assault on the great house of Marnhoul," I answered; "and indeed I remember one old gentleman about your figure, with a white crape over his nose, that shook me by the hand and took my name down in his book——"

"*Wheesh!—wheesh!*" he said, looking about uneasily, "siccan things are better never minted so close to the Parliament House where bide the Red Fifteen!"

"Well," said I, "that's as may be, but I cannot have it said by you or any man that I lack spunk!"

"Oh," said he, "though I never was troubled that gate mysel'—there's mony a bold man has turned hen-hearted when it came to a question of the lasses. There's Freddy here, one wad never think it of him, but there has he gotten yon lass that nearly did for me with her twa-pronged fork. She's a smart hizzy, and will make a lively wife to some man. But I maun e'en be riding back to put a question or so to the man that has stown awa' my bit ewe-lamb and put her in fold by the Water of Ae."

At that moment Amelia came in with a triumphant smile. "It's a laddie from the post, and he winna gie up the letter unless you pay him sevenpence for postage dues and a penny for himself!"

"There's the sevenpence, and clash the door in his face!" I cried. For I was bravely well acquainted with the exigencies of these post-office "keelies."

But Birkenbog, who was in good humour at the way he had been done by his daughter, threw a handful of copper "bodles" across the table to Amelia.

"There's for the messenger!" he said. And I could see that he looked at the letter when it came with some anxiety.

As I supposed, it was from Charlotte, and the thinnest and least bulky of her billets that had ever come up these stairs. I handed it across to him, where he sat newly glooming at me.

"Open it!" I said.

"Since when has Robert Anderson of Birkenbog taken to opening letters addressed to other men?"

"Never heed—not till this very minute, maybe. Open that one, at any rate!" And I ran my finger along the sealed edge.

This was Charlotte's letter to me.

From our home at Ewebuchts, Tuesday.

"DEAR DUNCAN,

"How can we ever make it up to you? We were married yesterday by Mr. Torrance, the minister at Quarrelwood, and came home here in time for the milking of the cows. My father has kindly given my Thomas five hundred on account of my marriage portion, but he does not know it yet. I left all well. Thomas joins in kind messages to all inquiring friends. He is looking over my shoulder now, as perhaps you may be already aware from the style of composition.

"Yours truly,
"CHARLOTTE GALLABERRY.

"P.S.—Oh, I forget to tell you, it will be as well to barricade your door. For I left word with one of the servant lasses that I was off to Edinburgh. Father will likely call to see you, and he is sure to have with him the whip wherewith he downed the highwayman. But I know well your bravery, and do sincerely thank you for all you may have to undergo for me.

"CHARLOTTE."

"Humph," said her father, as he flung it across the table to me, "in my opinion ye are well shut of her! She will twist that Tam Gallaberry round her finger and then—whizz—she will make him spin like a peerie!"

He rose, and without any adieus stamped his way down the stairs, sniffing as he went at every landing. We stood at the window watching his progress along the street—capas swaying, broad bonnet of blue cocked at an angle on top, red double-chinned face looking straight ahead. Amelia came over to my shoulder and looked too.

But all she said was, "And now, when it's past and gone, will ye tell me if *Yon* is what you learned folk caa' an avalanche?"

CHAPTER XXX

During the next three years (and that is a long driech time) I made many excuses for not going down to Eden Valley. I cannot say whether I managed to get myself believed or not. But the fact of the matter is, that, as things were, I could not bring myself to face Irma again and so bring back the pain. My father had come up to see me twice. Once he had brought my mother, of whom Mrs. Craven had made much, recognizing a kindred refinement of spirit. But Amelia and my Aunt Jen (who came at the time of the General Assembly) learned to respect one another—all the more that they had been highly prejudiced before meeting.

"She seems a weel-doing lass, wi' no feery-faries aboot her!" declared my aunt, speaking of Amelia Craven. While that young woman, delivering her mind after the departure of Miss Janet Lyon, declared that she was a "wiselike woman and very civil—but I'll wager she came here thinking that I was wanting ye. Faith, no, I wadna marry any student that ever stepped in leather—I ken ower muckle aboot them!"

"There's Freddie!" I suggested.

"Oh," said Amelia shortly, "he's different, I allow. But then, there's a medium. One doesna want a man with his nose aye in a book. But one that, when ye spit at him, will spit back!"

"Try me!" I said, daring her in conscious security.

"Goliah of Gath," cried she, "but I wad be sair left to mysel'!"

We continued, however, to be pretty good friends always, and in a general way she knew about Irma. She had seen the oval miniature lying on the table. She had also closely interrogated Freddy, and lastly she had charged me with the fact, which I did not deny.

Freddy was now assistant to the professor of Humanity, which is to say of the Latin language, while besides my literary work on the *Universal Review* I was interim additional Under-secretary to the University Court. In both which positions, literary and secretarial, I did the work for which another man pocketed the pay.

But after all I was not ill-off. One way and another I was making near on to a hundred pounds a year, which was a great deal for the country and time, and more than most ministers got in country parts. I wrote a great many very learned articles, though I signed none. I even directed foreign affairs in the *Review*, and wrote the most damaging indictments against "the traditional policy of the house of Austria."

Then the other man, the great one in the public eye, he who paid me—put in this and that sonorous phrase, full of echoing emptiness, launched an antithesis which had done good service a time or two on the hustings or in the House of Commons, and—signed the article. Well, I do not object. That was what I was there for, and after all I made myself necessary to the *Universal Review*. It would never have appeared in time but for me. I verified quotations, continued articles that were too short by half-a-dozen pages, found statistics where there were blanks in the manuscript, invented them if I could not find them, generally bullied the printers and proof-readers, saw to the cover, and never let go till the "Purple-and-Green," as we were called, was for sale on all the counters and speeding over Britain in every postboy's leathers.

Now one of my employers (the best) lived away among the woods above Corstorphine and another out at the Sciennes—so between them I had pretty long tramps—not much in the summer time when nights hardly existed, but the mischief and all when for weeks the sun was an unrealized dream, and even the daylight only peered in for a morning call and then disappeared.

But at the time of which I write the days were lengthening rapidly. I was deep in our spring number of the *Universal*. Only the medical students were staying on at the University, and the Secretary's spacious office could safely be littered with all sort of printing *débris*. My good time was beginning.

Well, in one of my walks out to Corstorphine, I was aware, not for the first time, of the figure of a girl, carefully veiled, that at my approach—we were always meeting one another—slipped aside into a close. I thought nothing of this for the first two or three times. But the fourth, I conceived there was something more in it than met the eye. So I made a detour, and, near by the end of George Street—unfinished at that time like all the other streets in that new neighbourhood—I met my vanishing lady face to face as she emerged upon the Queensferry Road. She had lifted her veil a little in order the better to pick her way among the building and other materials scattered there.

It was Irma—Irma Maitland herself, grown into a woman, her eyes brighter, her cheeks paler, the same Irma though different—with a little startled look certainly, but now not proud any more, and—looking every day of her twenty-two years.

"Irma!" I gasped, barring the way.

She stopped dead. Then she clutched at her skirt, and said feverishly, "Let me pass, sir, or I shall call for help!"

"Call away," I answered cheerfully. "I will only say that you have run off from the home which has sheltered you for many years, and that your friends are very anxious about you. Where are you staying?"

I glanced at her black dress. It was not mourning exactly, but then Irma never did anything like any one else. A fear took me that it might be little Louis who was dead, and yet for the life of me I dared not ask, knowing how she loved the child.

When I asked where she was staying, she plucked again at her skirt, lifting it a little as when she was being challenged to run a race. But seeing no way clear, she answered as it were under compulsion, "With my Aunt Kirkpatrick at the Nun's House!"

At first I had the fear that this might prove to be some Catholic place like the convent to which she had been sent in Paris. But it turned out to be only a fine old mansion, standing by itself in a garden with a small grey lodge to it, far out on the road to the Dean.

"Take me there!" I said, "for I must tell my grandmother what I have seen of you, or she will be up here by the coach red and angry enough to dry up the Nor' Loch!"

Irma walked by my side quite silent for a while, and I led her cunningly so as not to get too soon to our destination. I knew better than to ask why she had left Heathknowes. If I let her alone, she would soon enough begin to defend herself. And so it was.

"The lawyers took Louis away to put him to a school here," she said. "It was time. I knew it, but I could not rest down there without him. So I came also. I left them all last Wednesday. Your grandmother came herself with me to Dumfries, and there we saw the lawyers. They had not much to say to your grandmother, while she——"

"I understand," said I; "she had a great deal to say to them!"

Irma nodded, and for the first time faintly smiled.

"Yes," she answered, "the little old man in the flannel dressing-gown, of whom you used to tell us, forgot to poke the fire for a long time!"

"So you left them all in good heart about your coming away?" I said.

"Oh, the good souls," she cried, weeping a little at the remembrance, "never will I see the like till I am back there again. I think they all loved me—even your Aunt Jen. She gave me her own work-basket and a psalm book bound in black leather when I came away."

And at the remembrance she wept afresh.

"I must stop this," she said, dabbing her eyes with a very early-April smile, "my Aunt Kirkpatrick will think it is because of meeting you. She is always free with her imagination, my Lady Kirkpatrick—a clever woman for all that—only, what is it that you say, 'hard and fyky!' She has seen many great people and kings, and was long counted a great beauty without anything much coming of it."

I thought I would risk changing the subject to what was really uppermost in my mind.

"And Charlotte?" I ventured, as blandly as I could muster.

"I wonder you are not shamed!" she said, with a glint in her eye that hardly yet expressed complete forgiveness. "I know all about that. And if you think you can come to me bleating like a sore wronged and innocent lamb, you are far mistaken!"

So this was the reason of her long silence. Charlotte had babbled. I might have known. Still, I could not charge my conscience with anything very grave. After all, the intention on both sides—Charlotte's as well as mine,—had been of the best. She wanted to marry her Tam of the Ewebuchts, which she had managed—I, to wed Irma, from which I was yet as far off as ever.

So I made no remark, but only walked along in a grieved silence. It was not very long till Irma remarked, a little viciously, but with the old involuntary toss of her head which sent all her foam-light curls dipping and swerving into new effects and combinations—so that I could hardly take my eyes off her—"Would you like to hear more about Charlotte?"

"Yes!" said I boldly. For I knew the counter for her moods, which was to be of the same, only stronger.

"Well, she has two children, and when the second, a boy, was born, she claimed another five hundred pounds from her father to stock a farm for him—the old man called it 'a bonny bairn-clout' for our Lottie's Duncan!"

"What did you say the bairn's name was?"

"Duncan—after you!" This with an air of triumph, very pretty to see.

"And the elder, the girl?" I asked—though, indeed, that I knew—from the old letters of my Aunt Jen.

"Irma!" she answered, some little crestfallen.

"After you?"

She had barely time to nod when we passed in at the lodge gate of the Nun's House. The old porter came to the gate to make his reverence, and no doubt to wonder who the young lady, his mistress's kinswoman, had gotten home with her.

I found the Lady Kirkpatrick—Lady by courtesy, but only known thus by all her circle—to be a little vivid spark of a white-haired woman, sitting on a sofa dressed in the French fashion of forty years ago, and with a small plume of feathers in a jewelled turban that glittered as she moved. At first she was kind enough to me.

"Hey, Master-of-Arts Duncan MacAlpine, this is a bonny downcome for your grandfather's son, and you come of decent blood up in Glen Strae—to be great with the Advocate, and scribbling his blethers! A sword by your side would have suited ye better, I'm thinking!"

"Doubtless, my lady," I answered, "if such had been my state and fortune. Nevertheless, I can take a turn at that too, if need be."

"Aha, ye have not lost the Highland conceit, in drawing water from the wells of Whiggery!"

"If I mistake not," I replied, "your ladyship did not care to bide always about a king's court when she had the chance."

For I knew her history, as did everybody in Edinburgh—a little gossiping town at that time—now, they say, purged of scandal—which is a Heaven's miracle if ever there was one.

"Och, hear him!" she cried, throwing up her fan with a jerk to the end of its tether with a curious flouting disdain, "politics are very well when it is 'Have at them, my merry men a'!' But after, when all is done and laid on the shelf like broken bairns'-plaiks, better be a Whig in the West Bow than a Jesuit in a king's palace abroad!"

And, like enough (so at least it was whispered), the choice had been offered her.

Then all in a moment she turned to me with a twinkle in her eye that was hardly less than impish. Indeed, I may say that she flew at me much like an angry wasp when a chance of your walking-stick stirs its nest.

"It's prophesied," she said, "that some day a Kirkpatrick of Closeburn will be greater than a queen. For me it was, 'Thank you kindly! I would rather dwell in the Nun's House of the Dean than possess the treasures of Egypt!' But this lass is a Kirkpatrick too, though only through her grandmother, and I troth it may be her that's to wear the crown. At any rate, mind you, no dominie's son with his fingers deep in printer's ink, and in the confidence of our little Advocate that rideth on the white horse—only it's a powny—must venture any pretensions—"

"You mistake me," said I, suddenly very dignified, "my family—"

"Fiddlesticks," cried the old lady; "there's Bellman Jock wha's father was a prince o' the bluid. But what the better is he o' that? Na, na, there's to be no trokin', nor eyesdropping, nor yet slipping of notes into itching palms, nor seeing one another to doors!—Och, aye, I ken the gait o't fine. Mony is the time I have seen it travelled. This young leddy is for your betters, sirrah, and being but the son of a village dominie, and working for your bread among Leein' Johnny's hundred black men in Parliament Close, ye may—an it please ye, and *if* ye please, gie this door a wide gae-by. For if ye come a second time, Samuel Whan, the porter, will have his orders to steek the yett in your face!"

"Madame," said I, very fine, "it shall not be done twice!"

I stole a glance at Irma, who was standing with her face white and her lips trembling.

"No," said she, "nor yet once. I came here at your request, Aunt Kirkpatrick. For years and years my brother and I have sorned on the family of this gentleman—you yourself grant he is that—"

"No such thing!" snapped my lady Kirkpatrick, "gentleman indeed—a newsmonger's apprentice! That's your gentrice!"

"We dwelt there, my brother and I," Irma went on, "none of my family troubling their heads or their purses about us, yet without a plack we were treated as brother and sister by all the family."

"Be off, then, with your brother, since you are so fond of him!" cried the fiery old lady, rising with a long black cane in her hand, a terrier yelping and snapping at her heels. "I am for London next week, and I cannot be at the chairge of a daft hempie, especially one of such low, common tastes."

At these words, so unexpected and uncalled for, Irma put out her hand and took mine. She spoke very gently.

"Duncan," she said, "we are not wanted here. Let us be going!"

"But—Irma—!" I gasped, for even then I would take no advantage. "Whither shall I conduct you? Have you other friends in Edinburgh?"

"Before a minister!" she said. "That will be best. I have no friends but you!"

"Aye, there ye are!" cried the old lady, "I was sure there was something at the back of this sudden flight to Edinburgh. The dear little brother—oh, but we were that fond of him—the poor, poor innocent bairn. Such a comfort for him to know his sister near at hand! Yet, though I have done with you, Mistress Irma Sobieski, I may say that I wish you no ill. Make a better use of your youth than maybe I have done. If ye need a helping hand, there's my sister Frances out at the Sciennes. She's fair crammed like a Strasburg goose wi' the *belles-lettres*. She will maybe never let ye within the door, but a shilling a week of outdoor relief ye are sure of—for she sets up for being full of the milk of human kindness. She set her cap at John Home when he came home from London. She would never even allow that Davie Hume was an atheist, whilk was as clear as that I hae a nose to my face!— Off with you to Fanny's at the Sciennes. And a long guid day to the pair of ye—ye are a disobedient regardless lassock, and ye are heapin' up wrath again the day of wrath, but for all that I'm no sayin' that I'll forget you in my will! There are others I like waur nor you, when all's said and done!"

"I would not take a penny of yours if I were starving on the street!" cried Irma.

"Save us!" said the old lady, lifting up her black wand, "ye will maybe think different when ye

are real hungrysome. The streets are nae better than they are caa'ed. But off wi' ye, and get honestly tied up! Bid Samuel Whan shut the yett after ye!"

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CHAPTER XXXI

TWICE MARRIED

Now I have never to this day been able to make up my mind whether the Lady Kirkpatrick was really stirred with such anger as she pretended, whether she was only more than a little mad, or if all was done merely to break down Irma's reserve by playing on her anger and pride.

If the last was the cause of my lady's strange behaviour to us, it was shiningly successful.

"We will not go a step to find my Lady Frances," said Irma when we were outside; "if she be so full of all the wisdoms, she would very likely try to separate us."

And certainly it was noways my business to make any objections. So, hardly crediting my happiness, I went southwards over the Bridges, with Irma by my side, my heart beating so rarely that I declare I could hardly bethink me of a minister to make me sure of Irma before she had time to change her mind. As was usual at that hour at the Surgeon's Hall, we met Freddy Esquillant coming from the direction of Simon Square. Him I sent off as quickly as he could to Rankeillor Street for Amelia Craven. I felt that this was no less than Amelia's due, for many a time and oft must she have been wearied with my sighs and complaints—very suitable to the condition of a lover, but mightily wearisome to the listener.

Irma said nothing. She seemed to be walking in a dream, and hardly noticed Freddy—or yet the errand upon which I sent him.

It came to me that, as the matter was of the suddenest, Amelia Craven might help us to find a small house of our own where we might set up our household gods—that is, when we got any.

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An unexpected encounter preceded the one expected. I was marching along to our rendezvous with Freddy and Amelia at the crossing from Archers' Hall to the Sciennes, when all of a sudden whom should we meet right in the face but my rosy-cheeked, bunchy little employer—my Lord Advocate in person, all shining as if he had been polished, his face smiling and smirking like a newly-oiled picture, and on his arm, but towering above him, a thin, dusky-skinned woman, plainly dressed, and with an enormous bonnet on her head, obviously of her own manufacture—a sort of tangle of black, brown and green which really had to be seen to be believed.

"Aha!" cried my Lord Advocate; "whither away, young sir? Shirking the proofs, eh, my lad? And may I have the honour to be presented to your sister from the country—for so, by her fresh looks, I divine the young lady to be."

"If you will wait a few minutes till we can find a minister, I will say, 'This, sir, is my wedded wife,'" I declared manfully.

"And is the young lady of the same mind?" quoth my Lord, with a quick, gleg slyness.

"I am, sir—if the business concerns you!" said Irma, looking straight at him.

"What, and dare you say that you will take a man like this for your wedded husband?" he demanded, with the swift up-and-down play of his bushy brows which was habitual to him.

"I see not what business it is of yours," Irma answered, as sharply, "but I do take him for my husband."

"There!" cried the lawyer, pulling out his snuffbox and tapping it vehemently, "it is done. I have performed my first marriage, and all the General Assembly, or the Gretna Green Welder himself, could not have done it neater or made a better job. Declaration before witnesses being sufficient in the eye of the law of Scotland, I declare you two man and wife!"

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Irma looked distressed.

"But I do not feel in the least married," she said; "I must have a minister!"

"You can have all the ministers in Edinburgh, my lass, but you have been duly wedded already in the presence of the first legal authority of your kingdom, not to mention that of the Lady Frances Kirkpatrick——"

"My aunt Frances, after all!" cried Irma, suddenly flushing.

"Who may you be?" said the tall lady, with the face like sculptured gingerbread.

"Who *was* she, you mean, my Lady Frances?" said the Advocate blandly, helping himself to a pinch of snuff. "I can tell you who she is—Mrs. Duncan MacAlpine, wife of my private assistant

and the sub-editor of the *Universal Review*."

It was the first time he had given me that title, which pleased me, and led me to hope that he meant to accompany the honour by a rise in salary.

"I am—I was—Irma Sobieski Maitland," the answer was rather halting and faint, for Irma was easily touched, and it was only when much provoked that she put on her "No-one-shall-touch-me-with-impunity" air.

"If the bride be at all uneasy in her mind," said the Lord Advocate, "here we are at Mr. Dean's door. I dare say he will step down-stairs into the chapel and put on his surplice. From what I judge of the lady's family, she will probably have as little confidence in a Presbyterian minister as in a Presbyterian Lord Advocate!"

Freddy and Amelia were waiting across the street. I beckoned to them, and they crossed reluctantly, seeing us talking with my Lord Advocate, whom, of course, all the world of Edinburgh knew. I was not long in making the introductions.

"Miss Craven, late of Yorkshire, and Mr. Frederick Esquillant, assistant to Professor Greg at the College."

"Any more declarations before witnesses to-day?" said my Lord, looking quaintly at them. "Ah—the crop is not ripe yet. Well, well—we must be content for one day."

And he vanished into a wide, steeply-gabled house, standing crushed between higher "lands."

"The Dean will officiate, never fear," said Lady Frances. "So you have been staying with my sister, and of course she turned you out. Well, she sent you to me, I'll wager, and you were on your way. You could not have done better than come direct to me."

"Indeed it was quite an accident," said Irma, who never would take credit for what she had not deserved; "you see, I did not know you, and I thought that one like my Lady Kirkpatrick was quite enough—"

"Hush, hush," said the tall brown woman; "perhaps she means better than you give her credit for. She is a rich woman, and can afford to pay for her whimsies. Be sure she meant some kindness. But, at any rate, here comes the Advocate with our good Dean."

We mounted into a curiously arranged house. At first one saw nothing but flights on flights of stairs, range above range apparently going steeply up to the second floor, without any first floor rooms at all.

Mr. Dean was a handsome old man with white hair, and he took our hands most kindly.

"My friend here," he said, smiling at my Lord Advocate, "tells me that he has not left very much for me to do from a legal point of view. But I look upon marriage as a sacrament, and though the bridegroom is not, as I hear, of our communion, I have no difficulty in acceding to the request of my Lord—especially since our good Lady Frances has deigned to be present as a near relative of the bride."

He called something into a sort of stone tube. Then bidding us to be seated, he went into another room to array himself in his surplice, from which, presently, he came out, holding a service-book in his hand.

We followed him down-stairs—I with Lady Frances on my arm, the Lord Advocate preceding us with Irma, whom he was to give away. He appeared to take quite a boyish interest in the whole affair, from which I augured the best for our future.

We were rather hampered at the turning of the stair, and had to drop into single file again, when Irma clutched suddenly at my hand, and in the single moment we had together in the dusk, she whispered, "Oh, I am so glad!"

Lady Frances told me as we passed into the little half-underground chapel, low and barrel-shaped as to the roof, with the candles ready alight on the altar, that all this secrecy had come down from the time when the service according to the Episcopal form had been strictly forbidden in Edinburgh—at least in any open way.

I cannot describe what followed. I must have stood like a dummy, muttering over what I was prompted to say. But the responses came to Irma's lips as if she had many times rehearsed them—which perhaps was the case—I know now that she had always kept her father's King Edward prayer-book, and read it when alone. We stood by the rails of what I now know to have been the altar. All about was hung with deep crimson, and the heavy curtains were looped back with golden cord. A kind of glory shone behind the altar, in the midst of which appeared, in Hebrew letters, the name of God. Irma, who was far more self-possessed than I, found time to wonder and even to ask me what it meant. And I, translating freely (for I had picked up somewhat of that language from Freddy Esquillant), said, "Thou, God, seest me."

Which, at any rate, if not exactly correct, was true and apt enough.

"Well, are you well married now, babes?" said the Advocate, and I tried to answer him as we made our way to the vestry—I stumbling and self-abased, Irma with the certainty and calmness of a widow at least thrice removed from the first bashfulness of a bride.

We signed the register, in which (the Advocate took care to inform us) were some very distinguished names indeed. Which, however, was entirely the same to me.

Then as I thanked Mr. Dean for his kindness, not daring to offer any poor fee, the Advocate

chatted with Amelia Craven with great delicacy and understanding, inquiring chiefly as to Freddy's attainments and prospects.

But what was my surprise when, as soon as we were on the cobble stones, the Lady Frances turned sharply upon Irma, and said, quite in the style of my Lady Kirkpatrick, "And now, Irma Maitland, since your husband has no house or any place to take you to, you had better come to my house in the Sciennes till he can make proper arrangements. It is not at all suitable that a Maitland should be on a common stair like a travelling tinker looking for lodgings."

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Hearing which the neat, shining, dimpling little Advocate turned his bright eyes from one to the other of us, and tapped his tortoise-shell snuffbox with a kind of elvish joy. It was clear that we were better than many stage-plays to him.

As for Irma, she looked at me, but now sweetly and innocently, as if asking for counsel, not haughty or disdainful as had been her wont. The accusation of poverty touched me, and I was on the point of telling her to choose for herself, that I would find her a house as soon as possible, when Amelia Craven thrust herself forward.

Up to this point she had kept silent, a little awed by the great folk, or perhaps by the church, with the red hangings and twinkling, mysterious candles on the altar.

"I do not know a great deal," she said, "but this I do know, that a wife's place is with her husband—and especially when the 'love, honour and obey' is hardly out of her mouth. She shall come home to my mother's with me, even if Duncan MacAlpine there has not enough sense to bid her."

Upon which the Advocate strove (or at least appeared to strive) to please everybody and put everybody in the right. It was perhaps natural that, till arrangements were completed, so young a bride should remain with her family. But, on the other hand, young people could not begin too soon to face the inevitable trials of life. The feelings of the young lady who had expressed her mind in so lively a manner—Miss—Miss—ah yes, Craven—Miss Amelia Craven—did her all honour. It only remained to hear the decision of—of (a smirk, several dimples and a prolonged tapping on the lid of his snuffbox)—*Mistress Duncan MacAlpine*.

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"I will go with my husband," said Irma simply.

"There's for you, Frances!" cried the Advocate, turning to his companion with a little teasing "hee-hee" of laughter, almost like the neigh of a horse; "there spoke all the woman."

But Lady Frances had very deliberately turned about and was walking, without the least greeting or farewell, in the direction of her own house of Sciennes.

"There goes a Kirkpatrick," said the Advocate, tapping his box cynically; "cry with them, they will hunt your enemies till they drop. Cry off with them, and it's little you will see of them but the back of their hand."

He touched my Irma on her soft cheek with the tips of his fingers. "And I wish, for your goodman's sake," he said, "that this little lady's qualities do not run in the female line."

"I hope," said Irma, "that I shall always have grace to obey my husband."

"Graces you have—overly many of them, as it is easy to see," quoth the gallant Advocate, taking off his hat and bowing low, "but it is seldom indeed that ladies use either Grace or their graces for such a purpose!"

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CHAPTER XXXII

THE LITTLE HOUSE ON THE MEADOWS

Irma and I had a great seeking for the little house, great enough for two, with such convenience as, at the time, could be called modern, and yet within reach of our very moderate means. First of all Freddy and I had gone to the Nun's House to ask for Irma's box and accoutrement. These made no great burden. Nevertheless, we borrowed a little "hurley," or handcart, from the baker's girl opposite, who certainly bore no malice. I had our marriage lines in my pocket, lest any should deny my rights. But though we did not see the Lady Kirkpatrick, the goods were all corded and placed ready behind the door of the porter's lodge. We had them on the "hurley" in a minute. The Lady Frances passed in as we were carrying out the brass-bound trunk of Irma's that had been my grandmother's. She went by as if she had not seen us, her curiously mahogany face more of the *punchinello* type than ever—yet somehow I could not feel but that most of this anger was assumed. These women had shown Irma no kindness, indeed had never troubled themselves about her existence, all the long time she had stayed at Heathknowes. Why, then,

begin so suddenly to play upon the sounding strings of family and long descent?

Indeed, we two thought but little more about the matter. Our minds were fully enough occupied. The wonder of those new days—the unexpected, unforeseen glory of the earth—the sudden sweetness of love, unbelievable, hardly yet realized, overwhelmed and confounded us.

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And, more than all, there was the search for a house. The Advocate met me every day with his queer smile, but though he put my salary on a more secure basis, and arranged that in future I should be paid by the printer and not by himself, the sum total of my income was not materially altered.

“What’s enough for one is abundance for two!” was his motto. And the aphorism rang itself out to his tiny rose-coloured nails on the lid of the tortoise-shell snuffbox. Then he added a few leading cases as became one learned in the law.

“I began the same way myself,” he said, “and though I have a bigger house now and serving men in kneebreeks and powder in their hair, I never go by that cottage out by Comely Bank without a ‘pitter-patter’ of my sinful old heart!”

He thought for a while, and then added, “Aye, aye—there’s no way for young folk to start life like being poor and learning to hain on the gowns and the broadcloth! What matter the trimmings, when ye have one another?”

As to the house, it was naturally Irma who did most of the searching. For me, I had to be early at the secretary’s office, and often late at the printer’s. But there was always some time in the day that I had to myself—could I only foresee it before I left home in the morning. “Home” was, so far, at Mrs. Craven’s, where the good Amelia had given us up her chamber, and Freddy rose an hour earlier, so that his wall-press bed might be closed and the “room” made ready for Irma’s breakfast parlour.

All the three begged that we might stay on. We were, they declared with one voice, not putting them to the smallest inconvenience. But I knew different, and besides, I had a constant and consuming desire for a house of mine own, however small.

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Ever since I first knew Irma, a dream had haunted me. In days long past it had come, when I was only an awkward laddie gazing after her on the Eden Valley meadows. Often it had returned to me during the tedious silences of three years—when, quite against the proverb, love had grown by feeding upon itself.

And my dream was this.

I was in a great city, harassed by many duties, troubled by enemies open and concealed. There was the drear emptiness of poverty in my pocket, present anxiety in my heart, and little hope in the outlook. But I had work—I did not know in my dream what that work was—only that it sufficed to keep body and soul together, but after it was done I was weak and weary, a kind of unsatisfied despondency gnawing at my heart.

Then I got loose for an hour or so from my unknown tasks. My path lay across a kind of open place into which many narrow streets ran, while some dived away into the lower deeps of the city. People went their ways as I was doing mine, dejected and sad. But always, as I crossed toward the opening of a wide new street, where against the sky were tall scaffoldings and men busy with hod and mortar, I saw Irma coming towards me. She was neat and youthful, but dressed poorly in plain things—homespun, and in my dream, I judged, also home-made.

I saw her afar off, and the heart within me gave a great leap. She came towards me smiling, and lo! I seemed to stand still and worship the lithe carriage and elastic step. The world grew all sweet and gay. The lift above became blue and high. The sun shone no longer grey and brown, but smiling and brilliant—as—as the face of Irma.

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Strangely enough she did not greet me nor hold out her hand as acquaintances do. She came straight up to me as if the encounter were the merest matter-of-course, while as I stood there, with the hunger and the wretchedness all gone out of me, the weariness and misery melted in the grace of that radiant smile, she uttered just these words, “I have found the Little House Round the Corner!”

Now I will tell of a strange thing—so strange that I have consulted Irma about it, whether I should write it down here or keep it just for ourselves.

And she said, “It is true—so why not set it down?” Well, this is what happened. One day I had arranged to meet Irma at the corner of the quaint little village of Laurieston, which, as all the world knows, looks down on the saughs of the Meadows and out upon the slopes of Bruntfield where, among the whins, the city golfers lose their balls.

At that time, as all the world knows, there was undertaken a certain work of opening out that part of the ancient wall which runs westward from Bristo Port at the head of the Potter Row. Some great old houses had gone down, and I mind well that I was greatly attracted by the first view of the Greyfriars Kirk that ever I had from that quarter. (It was soon lost again behind new constructions, but for a time it was worth seeing, with its ancient “through” stones, and the Martyrs’ Monument showing its bossy head over the low wall.)

So much taken up with this was I, that I did not notice the altered aspect of the place. Yet I looked about me like one who is suddenly confronted by something very familiar. There was the wide space. There were the narrow streets I knew so well. Yonder was the Candlemaker Row diving down into the bowels of the earth. Away towards the Greyfriars were the tall “lands”

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which the masons were pulling down. Nearer were men climbing up ladders with hods on their shoulders. Highest of all, against the blue sky, naked as a new gibbet, stood out the framework of a crane.

It was the very place of my dream. I knew it well enough, indeed, but never until that day it had looked so. And there, coming smiling down the midst, easily as one might down the aisle of an empty church, was Irma herself, as plain and poor in habiliment as my dream, but smiling—ah, with a smile that turned all my heart to water, so dear it was. It was good of God to let us love each other like that—and be poor.

And as she came nearer, she did not hold out her hand, nor greet me—but when she was quite close she said, exactly as in the dream, “I have found the Little House round the Corner!” Yet she had never heard of my dream before.

That this is true, we do solemnly bear witness, each for our own parts, thereof, and hereto append our names—

DUNCAN MACALPINE.

IRMA MACALPINE.

Irma had found it, indeed, but as I judged at the first sight of the house, it was bound to be too expensive for our purses. I immediately decided that something must be wrong somewhere, when I heard that we could have this pleasant cottage with its scrap of garden, long and narrow certainly, but full of shade and song of birds, for the inconsiderable rent of ten pounds a year. We thought of many dangers and inconveniences, but Irma was infinitely relieved when it came out to be only ghosts. Servants, it appeared, could not be got to stay.

“Is that all?” said Irma scornfully. “Well, then, I don’t mean to keep any servants, and as for ghosts, Louis and I have lived in a big house in a wood full of them from cellar to roof-tree! You let ghosts alone, they will let you alone! ‘Freits follow them that look for them!’”

CHAPTER XXXIII

AND THE DOOR WAS SHUT

We were poor, very poor indeed in these days. Irma had many a wrinkled brow and many an anxious heart over the weekly expenses—so much to be set aside for rent, so much for mysterious things called taxes—which, seeing no immediate good arise from them, my little rebel hated with all her heart, and devised all sorts of schemes to evade.

But every week there was the joy of a victory won. Untoward circumstances had been vanquished—the butcher, the baker had been settled with or—done without. For sometimes Amelia Craven came to give us a day’s baking, and an array of fragrant scones and girdle-cakes, which I was taken into the kitchen to see on my return home, gave us the assurance of not having to starve for many days yet.

I was glad, too, for it was my busy season, and I had to be much from home. There was, indeed, a certain nondescript Mistress McGrier, who came to help with the heavier duties of the house. She was the daughter of one janitor at the college, the wife of yet another (presently suspended for gross dereliction of duty), and she did some charring to earn an honest penny. But there was little human to be found about her. Whisky, poor food, neglect, and actual ill treatment had left her mind after the pattern of her countenance, mostly blank. Yet I was not sorry when she stayed, especially as the autumnal days shortened, till near the time of my return. Mrs. McGrier frankly tarried for her tea, and her conversation was not enlivening, since she could talk of little save her sorrows as a wife, and how she was trusting to some one in the office (meaning me) for the future reinstatement of her erring janitor.

Sometimes, on Sundays, she would bring him, as it were framed and glazed to a painful pitch of perfection. His red hair was plastered with pomatum, identical with that which had been used upon his boots. Janitor McGrier had been a soldier, and always moved as if to words of command unheard to other mortals. If he had only two yards to go, he started as if from the halt. His pale blue eyes were fixed in his head, and he chewed steadily at lozenges of peppermint or cinnamon to hide the perfume of the glass of “enlivener” with which his wife had bribed him as an argument for submitting to get up and be dressed.

It was only on such show occasions that Mrs. McGrier was voluble. And that, solely, because “Pathrick” said nothing. Even as I remembered him in the days of his pride at the door of the Greek classroom, Pathrick had always possessed the shut mouth, the watery, appealing eye, and the indicative thumb which answered the question of a novice only with a quick jerk in the

requisite direction.

I think Pathrick sometimes conceived dark suspicions that I had changed Irma in the intervals of his visits. You see, this small witch had but two dresses that were any way respectable—that is to say, street-going or Sabbath-keeping. But then she had naturally such an instinct of arrangement that a scrap of ribbon, or the lace scarf my grandmother had given her, made so great a difference that she seemed to have an entire wardrobe at her command. No doubt a woman would have picked out the fundamental sameness at a glance. But it did very well for men, who only care for the effect.

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Even the Advocate would look in on his way to or from the Sciennes for a cup of tea from Irma. And in our little parlour he would sit and rap on his snuffbox, talking all the while, and forgetting to go till it was dark—as gentle and human as any common man.

When Freddy and Amelia Craven came in he would give the student advice about his work, or ask Amelia when she was going to call in his assistance to get married—which was his idea of jocularly, and, I must admit, also, that of Amelia. Indeed, we were wonderfully glad to see him, and he brightened many a dull afternoon for Irma.

Sometimes, if I got away early, I would find him already installed, his hat stuck on his gold-headed cane in the corner—as it were, all his high authority laid aside, while he regarded with moist eyes the work-basket in which Irma kept her interminable scraplets of white things which I would not have meddled with the tip of one of my fingers, but which the Advocate turned over with an ancient familiarity, humming a tune all the while—a tune, however, apt to break off suddenly with a "*Humph*," and an appeal to the much-enduring lid of the tortoise-shell snuffbox.

But I think the dearest and best remembered of all these early experiences happened one winter's evening in the midst of the press and bustle which always attended the opening of the autumn session. The winter number of the *Universal* was almost due, and we were backward, having had to wait for the copy of an important contributor, whose communication, in the present state of affairs, might even overturn a policy—or, at least, in the opinion of the Advocate, could not be done without. I need not say that the article in question represented his own views with remarkable exactitude, and he looked to it to further his rising influence in London. As he grew greater, he was more often in the south, and we saw less and less of him. On the other hand, the practical work of the *Review* fell more and more upon me.

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So this night, as I say, I was late, and on turning out into the south-going street which leads past the Surgeons' Hall and St. Patrick's Square—my mind being busy with an extra article which I must write to give our readers the necessary number of sheets—for the first and certainly for the last time in my life I continued my train of thought without remembering either that I was a married man, or that my little Irma must be tired waiting for me.

In mitigation of sentence I can only urge the day-long preoccupations in which I had been plunged, and the article, suddenly become necessary, which I must begin to write instanter. But at any rate, excuse or no excuse, it is certain that I woke from my daydream to find myself in Rankeillor Street, almost at the foot of the old Craven stairs which, as a bachelor, I had climbed so often.

Then, with a sudden shamed leap of the heart and a plunge of the hand into my breeches pocket for my door key, I turned about. I had forgotten, though only for a moment, the little wife working among her cloud of feathery linen and trimmings, and the little white house round the corner above the Meadows. You may guess whether or no I hurried along between ash "buckets" of the most unparklike Gifford Park, how sharply I turned and scudded along Hope Park, dodging the clothes' posts to the right, from which prudent housewives had removed the ropes with the deepening of the twilight.

The dark surface of the Meadows spread suddenly before me in an amplitude of bleakness. A thin, sleety scuff of passing snow-cloud beat in my face. A tall man wrapped in a cloak edged suspiciously nearer as if to take stock of me, but my haste, and perhaps a certain wildness in the disorder of my dress and hat made him think better of it—that is, if indeed he ever thought ill of it—and with a muttered "Good-e'en to ye," he passed upon his way.

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I could see it now. The light in the window, the two candles that were always set at the elbow of the busy little housewife, the supper, frugal but well-considered, simmering on the hob, the table spread white and dainty, with knives and forks of silver (the Advocate's gift) laid out in order.

Then all the warm and loving things that sleep in the breast of a man rose up within me. The long, weary day was forgotten. The article I must write was shoved into a corner out of the way. For this one hour, in spite of whistling wintry winds and scouring sleet-drifts, the little light yonder in the window was sufficient.

Two farthing dips, a hearth fire, and a loving heart! Earth had nothing more to give, and my spirit seemed glorified within me. I had a curious feeling of melting within me, which was by no means a desire to weep, but rather as if all the vital parts of the man I was had been suddenly turned to warm water. I cannot tell if any one has ever felt the like before, but certainly I did that night, and "warm water" comes as near to the real thing as I can find words to express.

It seemed an age while I was crossing the short, stubbly grass of the Meadows. The light within beamed redder and warmer. On the window-blind I saw a gracious silhouette. Then there was the putting aside the edge of the blind with exploring finger—sure sign that my little wife had been regarding the clock and finding me a little late in getting home.

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As I ran up the short path to the gate I blew into my key. The latch of the garden-gate clicked in the blast which swept across from the Blackfords. But there at last before me was the door. The key glided, well-accustomed, into its place, not rattling, but with the slide of long-polished and intimate steel—soft, like silk on silk.

But the key never turned. The door opened, seemingly of itself, and, gloriously loving, a candle held high in her hand, her full, white house-gown sweeping to her feet, the little wife stood waiting.

I said nothing about the overplus of work that had filled my head as I turned from the high, bleak portals of the University—nothing of how, all unknowing, my traitor feet had carried me to the stairway in Rankeillor Street—nothing of the long way, or the suspicious man in the cloak, of the blast and the bent and the sting of the sleet in my face.

I was at home, just she and I—the two of us alone. And upon us two the door was shut.

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CHAPTER XXXIV

A VISIT FROM BOYD CONNOWAY

“I wonder,” said Irma one Saturday morning when, by a happy accident, I had no pressing need to go from home, so could stay and linger over breakfast with my little wife like a Christian, “I wonder what that man is doing down there? He has been sitting on the step outside our gate ever since it was light, and he looks as if he were taking root there!”

I made but one bound from the table to the window. For I remembered the cloaked man who had crossed me in the Meadows the other night. Also my inbred, almost instinctive curiosity as to the purposes and antecedents of lurking folk of all kinds, pricked me. We were easy enough to get on with in Eden Valley once you knew us, but our attitude towards strangers was distinctly hostile.

This man was muffled to the nose in a cloak, and might very well have been my inquiring friend of the other night. But when I had opened the door and marched with the firm ringing steps of a master down the paven walk towards the gate, the face I saw turned to my approach, altered my mood in a second.

“Why, Boyd Connoway,” I cried, “who would have thought of seeing you here? What are you doing in Edinburgh? But first come in—there is a friend here who will be glad to see you!”

“Eh, Mr. Duncan, but I am not sure that I dare venture. ’Tis no more than decent I am, and the young lady, your wife—oh, but though to see her sweet face would be a treat for poor Boyd Connoway, what might she not be sayin’ about me dirtying her carpets, the craitur? And as for sittin’ in her fine arm-chairs—”

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“Come your ways in, Boyd,” I cried. “Have you had any breakfast? No—then you are just in time! And you will find that our chairs are only wood, and you would not hurt our fine carpets, not if you danced on them with clogs!”

“D’ye tell me, now?” said Boyd, much relieved. “Sure, and it’s a told tale through the whole parish that you are livin’ in the very lap of luxury—with nothing in the world to do for it but just make scratch-scratches on paper with a quill-pen!”

By this time Irma was at the door, hiding herself a little, for she had still the morning apron on—that in which she had been helping Mrs. Pathrick. But she was greatly delighted to see Boyd, who, if the truth must be told, made his best service like an Irishman and a gentleman—for, as he said, “Even five-and-thirty years of Galloway had not wiped the slate of his manners!”

Now Boyd was always a favourite with Irma, and I fear that she was fonder of him than she ought to have been, instead of pitying his hard-driven Bridget—just because Bridget had not his beautiful manners. Presently, as his mouth ceased to fill and empty itself so wonderfully expeditiously, Boyd began to talk.

“As to what fetched me, Miss Irma,” he said, in answer to questions, “faith, I walked all the road, taking many a house on the way where kenneled folk dwelt. Here were pigs to kill and cure. And I killed and cured them. Farther on there were floors to lay, and I laid them, or fish-hooks to busk, and I busked them.”

I put a question here.

“Oh, Bridget,” he said, shrugging his shoulders with a wearied air, “Bridget doesn’t know when she’s well off. Och, the craitur! It began with the night of the September Fair. Now, it is known to all the countryside that Boyd Connoway is no drinker. He will sit and talk, as is just and

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sociable, but nothing more. No, Miss Irma. And so I told Bridget. But it so chanced that Fair Monday was a stormy day, which is the most temptatious for poor lads in from the country, with only two holidays in the year, most of them. And what with the new watch and the councilmen being so strict against disorder—why, I could not let a dog get into trouble if I could help it. So I spent the most of the night seeing them home out of harm's way—and if ever there was a work of necessity and mercy, that was.

"But Bridget, she thought different, and declared that I had never so much as thought of her and the childer all day, but left her at the wash-tub, while they, the poor craiturs, were poppin' out and in of the stalls and crawlin' under the slatting canvas of the shows, as happy as larks, having their fun all for nothing, and double rations of it when they were caught, cuffed, and chased out. Well, Bridget kept it up on me so long and got so worked up that she would not have a bite ready for me when I came home tired and weary, bidding me go and eat my meat where I had worked my work. So it seemed a good time for me to be off somewhere for my health. But—such was my consideration, that not to leave Bridget in distress I went asking about till I got her the washin' at General Johnstone's—the minister's she had before—so there was Bridget well provided for, Miss Irma—and here am I, Boyd Connoway, a free man on my travels!"

We asked news of friends and acquaintances—the usual Galloway round of questions.

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"Faith," said Boyd, "but there's just one cry among them—when are ye coming down to let us have a look at your treasure, Mister Duncan? Sure, it's selfish ye are, now, to keep her all this long time to yourself! The little chap's holidays! Ah, true for you. We had forgotten him. And ye are sure that he is well done to, and safely lodged where they have put him, Miss Irma?"

"If you bide a minute or two, Boyd," said Irma, smiling, well-pleased, "you may very likely have the chance of judging for yourself. For it is almost his time to be here, for to-day is a holiday!"

In fact, it was not a quarter of an hour before a shout, the triumphal opening of the outer gate with a rush and a clang, and a merciless pounding on the front door announced the arrival of Sir Louis. He had grown out of all knowledge, declared the visitor, "but no doubt the young gentleman had forgotten old Boyd Connoway."

"Oh, no," said Louis; "come and show me some more cat's cradles; I know two more 'liftings' already than any boy in the school. But *you* can do at least a dozen!"

And so, with the woven string about his long clever fingers, Louis watched the deft and sure manipulation of Boyd Connoway as he "lifted" and wove, changing the pattern indefinitely. For the time being the village "do-nothing"—in the sense that he was the busiest man in the place about other folk's business—was merely another boy at Louis's school. And as he worked, he talked, delightfully, easily, dramatically. He made the old life of Eden Valley pass before us. We heard the brisk tongue of my grandmother from the kitchen, that of Aunt Jen ruling as much of the roost as was permitted to her, but constantly made aware of herself by her mother's dominating personality.

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With equal facility he recalled my father in his classes, looking out for collegers to do him credit, my mother passing silently along her retired household ways, Agnes Anne dividing her time between helping her mother in the house, and teaching the classes for which I used to be responsible in the school.

It was a memorable day in the little house above the Meadows. Louis played with Boyd Connoway all the time, learning infinite new tricks with string, with knife-blades, perfecting himself in the art of making fly-hooks, of kite manufacture, and the art of lighting a fire.

He had presented to him Boyd's spare "sulphur" box, in which were tinder, flint and steel, matches dipped in brimstone, and a pair of short thick candles which could be set one at a time in a socket formed by the box itself, the raised lid sheltering the flame from the wind.

Never was a happier boy. And when the Advocate looked in, the surprising boyishness of Boyd rubbed off even on him. We did not inform our old friend of the high place which "the Advocate" held in the judicial hierarchy of his country. For we knew well that nothing Boyd said in our house would ever be used as evidence against him.

But no doubt my lord gained a great deal of useful information as to the habits of smugglers, their cargoes, destinations, ports of call and sympathizers. Boyd crowned his performances by inviting the Advocate down to undertake the defence of the next set of smugglers tried at the assizes, a task which the Advocate accepted with apparent gratitude and humility. For from the little man's snuff-taking and easy-going, idling ways, Boyd had taken him for a briefless advocate.

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"Faith, sir, come to Galloway," he cried open-heartedly—"there's the place to provide work for the like of you lads. And it's Boyd Connoway will introduce you to all the excise-case defendants from Annan Port to Loch Ryan. It's him that knows every man and mother's son of them! And who, if ye please, has a better right?"

CHAPTER XXXV

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW

"The strongest mental tonic in the world is solitude, but it takes a strong mind, fully equipped with thoughts, aims, work, to support it long without suffering. But once a man has made his best companion of his own mind, he has learned the secret of living."

So I had written in an essay on Senancour during the days when the little white house was but a dream, and Irma had never come to me across the cleared space in front of Greyfriars Kirk amid the thud of mallets and the "chip" of trowels. But Irma taught me better things. She knew when to be silent. She understood, also, when speech would slacken the tension of the mind. As I sat writing by the soft glow of the lamp I could hear the rustle of her house-dress, the sharp, almost inaudible, *tick-tick* of her needle, and the soft sound as she smoothed out her seam. Little things that happen to everybody, but—well, I for one had never noticed them before.

It seemed as if this period of contentment would always continue. The present was so good that, save a little additional in the way of income, I asked for no better.

But one day the Advocate rudely shook my equanimity.

"You must have some of your family—some good woman—to be with Irma. Write at once!"

I could only look at him in amazement.

"Why, Irma is very well," I said; "she never looked better in her life."

"My boy," said the Advocate, laying his hand gently on my arm, "I have loved a wife, and I have lost a wife who loved me; I do not wish to stand by and let you do the same for the want of a friend's word. Write to-night!"

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And he turned on his heel and marched off. At twenty steps' distance he turned. "Duncan," he said, "we will need all your time at the *Review*; you had better give up the Secretary's office. I have spoken to Morrison about it. I shall be so much in London for a year or two that you will be practically in charge. We will get a smart young colleger to take your place."

That night I wrote to my Aunt Janet. It was after Irma, fatigued more easily than was usual with her, had gone to bed. Four days afterwards, I was looking over some manuscript sheets which that day had to go to the printer. Mistress Pathrick, who had just arrived to prepare the breakfast (I had lit the kitchen fire when I got up), burst in upon me with the announcement that there was "sic a gathering o' folk" at the door, and a "great muckle owld woman coming in!"

I hastened down, and there in the little lobby stood—my grandmother. She was arrayed in her oldest black bombazine. A travel-crushed beaver bonnet was clapped tightly on her head. The black velvet band about her white hair had slipped down and now crossed her brow transversely a little above one bushy eyebrow, giving an inconceivably rakish appearance to her face. She held a small urchin, evidently from the Grassmarket or the Cowgate, firmly by the cuff of his ragged jacket. She was threatening him with her great blue umbrella.

"If ye hae led me astray, ye skirmishing blastie, I'll let ye ken the weight o' this!"

The youth was guarding himself with one hand and declaring alternately that, "This is the hoose, mem," and, "I want my saxpence!"

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A little behind two sturdy porters, laden with a box apiece, blocked up the doorway, and loomed large across the garden.

"Eh, Duncan, but this is an awesome place," cried my grandmother. "So many folk, and it's pay this, and so much for that! It's a fair disgrace. There's no man in Eden Valley that wadna hae been pleased to gie me a lift from the coach wi' my bit boxes. But here, certes, it's sae muckle for liftin' them up and sae muckle more for settin' them doon, and to crown a' a saxpence to a laddie for showin' me the road to your house! It's a terrible difference to Heathknowes, laddie. Now, I wadna wonder if ye hae to pay for your very firewood!"

I assured her that we had neither peat nor woodcutting privileges on the Meadows, and to change the subject asked her if she would not go up and see Irma.

"A' in guid time," she said. "I hae a word or two to ask ye first, laddie. No that muckle is to be expected o' a man that wad write to puir Janet Lyon instead o' to *me*, Duncan MacAlpine!"

As I did not volunteer anything, she exclaimed, stamping her foot, "Dinna stand there glowering at me. Man alive, Duncan lad, ye can hae no idea how like an eediot ye can look when ye put your mind to it!"

I had been reared in the knowledge that it was a vain thing to argue with my grandmother, so I listened patiently to all she had to say, and I answered, to the best of my ability, all the

questions she asked. Most she seemed to have no need to ask at all, for she knew the answers before they were out of my mouth, and paid no attention to my words when I did get in a word.

"Humph, you are stupider than most men, and that's saying no trifle!" was her comment when all was finished.

I asked Mary Lyon if there was nothing I could do to assist her—help with her unpacking, or any trifle like that.

"Aye, there is," she answered, with her old verve, "get out o' the house, man, and leave me to my work while you do yours."

I took my hat, the cane which the Advocate had given me, and with them my way to the office of the *Universal Review*. I had a busy day, which perhaps was as well, for all the time my mind was wandering disconsolate about the little white house above the Meadows.

I returned to find all well, my supper laid in the kitchen and the contents of grandmother's trunks apparently filling the rest of the house. Irma gave me a little, perfunctory kiss; said, "Oh, if you could only——!" and so vanished to where my grandmother was unfolding still more things and other treasures to the rustle of fine tissue paper, and the gasps and little hand-clappings of Irma.

Those who know my grandmother do not need to be told that she took possession of our house and all that was therein, of Irma so completely that practically I was only allowed to bid my wife "Good-morning" under the strictest supervision, and of Mistress Pathrick—who, after one sole taste of my grandmother's tongue, had retired defeated with the muttered criticism that "that tongue o' the auld leddy's could ding a' the Luckenbooths—aye, and the West Bow as weel." However, once subjected, she proved a kindly and a willing slave. I have, however, my suspicions that in these days Mr. Pathrick McGrier, ex-janitor of the Latin classroom, had but a poor time of it so far as the preparation of his meals went, and as to housekeeping she was simply not there.

For she slept now under the stairs in a lair she had rigged up for herself, which she said was "rale comfortable," but certainly to the unaccustomed had an air of great stuffiness.

But I need not write at large what, after all, is no unique experience. One night, upon my grandmother's pressing invitation, I walked out on Bruntsfield Links, and kicked stones into the golfers' holes for something to do. It was full moon, I remember, and away to the north the city slept while St. Giles jangled fitfully. I had come there to be away from the little white house, where Irma was passing through the first peril of great waters which makes women's faces different ever after—a few harder, most softer, none ever the same.

Ten times I came near, stumbling on the short turf, my feet numb and uncertain beneath me, my limbs flageolating, and my heart rent with a man's helplessness. I called upon God as I had not done in my life before. I had been like many men—so long as I could help myself, I saw no great reason for troubling the Almighty who had already so much on His hands. But now I could do nothing. I had an appalling sense of impotence. So I remembered that He was All-powerful, and just because I had never asked anything with true fervour before, He would the more surely give this to me. So at least I argued as I prayed.

And, sure enough, the very next time I coasted the northern shore of the Meadows, as near as I dared, there came one running towards me, clear in the moonlight—Mistress Pathrick it was and no other.

"A laddie—a fine laddie!" she panted, waving both her hands in her enthusiasm.

"And Irma?" I cried, for that did not interest me at that moment, no, not a pennyworth.

"A bhoy—as foine a bhoy——"

"Tell me, how is Irma?" I shouted—"quick!"

"Wud turn the scale at eleven, divil a ounce less——"

"Woman, tell me how is my wife!" I thundered, lifting up my hands, "or I'll twist your foolish neck!"

"Keep us!" said Mrs. Pathrick, "why, how should she be? Did ye expect she would be up and bating the carpets?"

In half-a-dozen springs, as it seemed, I was within the gate. Then the clear, shrill wail with which a new soul prisoned in an unfamiliar body trumpets its discontent with the vanities of this world stopped me dead. Scarce knowing what I did, I took off my boots. I trod softly.

There was a hush now in the house—a sudden stoppage of that shrill bugle-note. I came upon my grandmother, as it seemed, moulding a little ruddy bundle, with as much apparent ease and absence of fuss as if it had been a pat of butter in the dairy at home.

And when she put my firstborn son into my arms, I had no high thoughts. I trembled, indeed, but it was with fear lest I should drop him.

Presently his nurse took him again, grumbling at the innate and incurable handlessness of men. Could I see Irma? Certainly not. What would I be doing, disturbing the poor thing? Very likely she was asleep. Oh, I had promised to go, had I? Well, she had nothing to do with that. But Irma would be expecting me! Oh, as to that, lad, lad, do not trouble yourself. She will be resting in a peace like the peace of the Lord, as you might know, if ever a man could know anything about such things.

Just for a minute? Well, then—a minute, and no more. Mind, she, Mary Lyon, would be at the door. I was not to speak even.

As I went in, Irma lifted her arms a little way and then let them fall. There was a kind of shiny dew on her face, little but chill to the touch of my lips. And, ah, how wistful her smile!

“Your ... little ... girl,” she whispered, “has deserved ... well ... of her country. I hope he will be brave ... like his father. I prayed all might be well ... for your sake, my dear. His name is to be Duncan.... Yes, Duncan Louis Maitland!”

I had been kneeling at the bedside, kneeling and, well—perhaps sobbing. But at that moment I felt a hand on my collar. The next I was on my feet, and so, with only one glimpse of Irma’s smile at my fate, I found myself outside the room.

“What was it I telled ye?—Not to excite her! Was it no?”

And Mary Lyon showed me the way down to the kitchen, which I had forgotten, where, on condition of not making a noise, I was to be permitted for the present to abide.

“But mind you,” she added, threateningly, “not a foot-sole are ye to set on thae stairs without my permission. Or, my certes, lad, but ye will hear about it!”

Decidedly I was a man under authority. The extraordinary thing was that I was cautioned to make no noise, and there in the next room was that red imp yelling the roof off, yet neither of his female relatives seemed to mind in the least, though his remarks interfered very seriously with the article on “Irrigation Systems of Southern Europe,” which I was working up for the *Universal*.

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But when was a mere man (and breadwinner) considered at such times?

In all truly Christian and charitable cities refuges should be built for temporarily dispossessed, homeless, and hungry heads of families.

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CHAPTER XXXVI

THE SUPPLANTER

Never did I realize so clearly the difference between what interests the people in a great city and those inhabiting remote provinces as when, in mid-August, I took Irma and my firstborn son down to the wholesome breath and quiet pine shadows of Heathknowes. I had seen the autumnal number of the *Universal* safe into its wrapper of orange and purple. In Edinburgh the old town and the new alike thrilled and hummed with the noise of a contested election. There were processions, hustings, battles royal everywhere, the night made hideous, the day insupportable.

But here, looking from the door out of the sheltering arms of Marnhoul wood into the peace of the Valley, the ear could discern only the hum of the pirn-mill buzzing like a giant insect in the greenest of the shade, and farther off the whisper of the sea on the beaches and coves about Killantringan.

Now we had taken rather a roundabout road and rested some nights on the way, for I had business at Glasgow—a great and notable professor to visit at the college, and in the library several manuscripts to consult. So Irma remained with the Wondrous Duncan the Second at the inn of the White Horse, where the coach stopped.

When I came back I thought that Irma’s face looked a trifle flushed. I discovered that, having asked the hostler to polish her shoes, he had refused with the rudeness common to his class when only rooms of the cheaper sort are engaged. Whereupon Irma, who would not let her temper get the better of her, had forthwith gone down to the pantry, taken the utensils and done them herself.

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I said not much to her, but to the landlord and especially to the man himself I expressed myself with fulness and a vigour which the latter, at least, was not likely to forget for some time.

It was as well, however, that my grandmother was not there. For in that case murder might have been done, had she known of the scullion’s answer and what Irma had done. Well also, on the whole, for us that she had refused to keep us company. For having been only once in a great city in her life, and never likely to be there again, Mary Lyon made the most of her time. She had had two trunks when she came to our gate. Four would not have held all that she travelled with on her way back. And when we remonstrated on the cost, she said, “Oh, fidget! ’Tis many a day since I cost anything to speak of to the goodman. He can brave and weel afford to pay for a trifle o’ luggage.”

Accordingly she never passed a fruit stall without yearning to buy the entire stock-in-trade “for the neighbours that have never seen siccan a thing as a sweet orange in their lives—lemons being the more marketable commodity in Eden Valley.”

She had also as many commissions, for which she looked to be paid, as if she had been a commercial traveller. There were half-a-dozen “swatches” to be matched for Aunt Jen—cloth to supply missing “breadths,” yarn to mend the toes of stockings, ribbons which would transform the ancient dingy bonnet into a wonder of beauty on the day of the summer communion. She had “patterns” to buy dress-lengths of—from the byre-lasses brown or drab to stand the stress of out-of-door—checked blue and white for the daintier dairy-worker among her sweet milk and cheese.

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Even groceries, and a taste of the stuff they sell in town for “bacon ham”—to be sniffed at and to become the butt for all the goodwives in the parish—no tea, for Mary Lyon knew where that could be got better and cheaper, but a *Pilgrim’s Progress* for a neighbour lad who was known to be fond of the reading and deserved to be encouraged—lastly, as a vast secret, a gold wedding-ring which could not be bought without talk in Eden Valley itself. Grandmother did not tell us for whom this was intended. Nor did we know, till the little smile lurking at the corner of her mouth revealed the mystery, when Agnes Anne came home from the kirk and named who had been “cried” that day. It was no other than our sly Eben—and Miss Gertrude Greensleeves was the name of the bride—far too young for him, of course, but—he had taken his mother into his confidence and not a man of us dared say a word. Doubtless the women did, but even they not in the hearing of Mary Lyon.

But now we were at rest, and quite ten days ago grandmother had arrived with her cargo. The commissions were all distributed. The parish had had a solid week to get over its amazement. And, to put all in the background, there had been a successful run into Portowarren and another the same night to Balcary—a thing not often done in the very height of summer. Yet, because the preventive men were not expecting it, perhaps safer then than at any other time.

And above all and swamping all the endless talk of a busy, heartsome farm-town! Ah, how good it was. Even the little god in the “ben” room, Master Duncan Maitland MacAlpine, had times and seasons without a worshipper, all because there was a young farmer’s son in the kitchen telling of his experiences “among the hills,” with the gaugers behind them, and the morn breaking fast ahead.

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How they must get to a place where they could hide, a place with water, where they could restore their beasts and repose themselves, a place of great shadowing rocks in a weary land. For of a certainty the sun would smite by day, even if the moon afforded them guidance over the waste by night.

Or Boyd Connaway would tell of the *Golden Hind* having been seen out in the channel, of rafts of “buoyed” casks sunk to within three foot of the bottom, to be fished up when on a dark night the herring craft slipped out of Balcary or the Scaur, silent as a shadow.

Or mayhap (and this, married or single, Irma liked best of all) there came in some shy old farmer from the uplands, or perhaps a herd, to whose boy or girl “out at service” the mistress of Heathknowes had brought home a Bible. These had come to thank Mary Lyon, but could not get a word out. They sipped their currant wine as if it were medicine and moved uneasily on the edges of their chairs. They had excellent manners stowed away somewhere—the natural well-bredness of the hill and the heather, but in a place like that, with so many folk, it seemed as if they had somehow mislaid them.

Then was Irma’s time. She would glide in, her face still pale, of course, but with such a gracious sweetness upon it that the shyest was soon at his ease. Here was a cup, an embarrassment to the hand. She would fill its emptiness, not with Aunt Jen’s currant wine, but with good Hollands—not to the brim, because the owner would spill it over and so add the finishing touch to his bashfulness. She sat down by the oldest, the shaggiest, the roughest, and in a moment (as if, like a fairy of Elfland, she had waved her wand) old Glencross of Saltflats, who only talked in monosyllables to his own wife, was telling Irma all about the prospects of his hay crop, and the bad look-out there was along the Colvend shore owing to the rabbits breeding on the green hill pastures.

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“Oh, but I’ll thin them, missie,” he affirmed, in response to her look of sympathy, “ow aye, there are waur things than hare soup and rabbit pie. Marget” (his wife) “is a great hand at the pie. Ye maun come ower some day and taste—you and your guidman. I will send ye word by that daft loon Davie.”

Then with hardly an effort, now that the ice was broken, turning to my grandmother, “Eh, mistress, but it was awesome kind and mindfu’ o’ you to fetch the laddie a Bible a’ the road frae Enbra. I hae juist been promising him a proper doing, a regular flailing if he doesna read in it every nicht afore he says his prayers.”

Needless to say Davie had promised—but as to Davie’s after performance no facts have been put on record. Still, he had his Bible and was proud of it.

Then Irma, safe in her married state, would set herself down by some shy, horny-fisted fellow, all nose and knuckles. She would draw him away from his consciousness of the Adam’s apple in his throat (which he privately felt every one must be looking at) and give him a good sympathetic quarter of an hour all to himself. She would smile and smile and be a villain to her heart’s content, till the lad’s tongue would at last be loosened, and he would tell how he tried for first prize at the last ploughing match, and boast how he would have been first only for his

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“coulters blunting on a muckle granite stane.” He would relate with exactness how many queys his father had, the records of mortality among the wintering sheep, the favourable prospects of the spring lambs—“abune the average—aye, I will not deny, clean abune the average.”

So he would sit and talk, and gaze and gaze, till there entered into his soul the strong desire to work, to rise up and conquer fate and narrow horizons—so that in time, like a certain Duncan MacAlpine (whom very likely, as a big country fellow, he had thrashed at school), it might happen to him to have by his fireside something dainty and sweet and with great sympathetic eyes and a smile—*like that!*

We had only a little while of this, however, for on the morrow Louis was to arrive from school, safely escorted by Freddy Esquillant and half-a-dozen students, who had made a jovial party all the way from Edinburgh.

Now I may write myself down a selfish brute by the confession I am going to make. But all the same, the thing is true and had better be owned up to, all the more in the light of what afterwards happened. I had no great wish that Louis should join our little party, which with the advent of little Master Red Knuckles, had been rendered quite complete. It was, I admit, an unworthy jealousy. But I thought that as Irma had always been so passionately devoted to Louis—and also because she had, as I sometimes teased myself by imagining, only come to me because she had lost Louis—his coming back would—*might*, I had the grace to say on second thoughts, deprive me of some part of my hard-earned heritage—the love of the woman who was all to me. For with me, his unworthy father, even Duncan Maitland had not yet begun to count. With a man that comes later.

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This is my confession, and once made, let us pass on. I had even then the grace to be ashamed—at least, rather.

Louis arrived. He had grown into a tall lad with long hair of straw-coloured gold, that shone with irregular reflections like muffled moonlight on a still but gently rippling sea. He was quieter, and seemed somehow different. He was now all for his books and solitude, and sat long in the room that had been given him for a bedroom and study—that with the window looking out on the wood. It was the quietest in the house—not only because of our youthful bull of Bashan and his roaring, but because it was at the farthest end of the long rambling house, away from the stables and cattle sheds.

However, he seemed delighted to see Irma, and sat a long time with her hand in his. But I, who knew her well, noticed that there was not now on her face the old strained attention to all that her brother said or did. It was in another direction that her ears and thoughts were turned, and at the first cry from baby's cot she rose quietly, disengaging her hand without remark before disappearing into the bedroom-nursery. In another moment I could see my grandmother pass the window drying her hands on her apron. I knew from the ceasing of the plunging thud of the dasher that she had called a substitute to the churning. The dasher was now in the hands of Aunt Jen, who handled it with a shorter, more irascible stroke.

Left alone with him, I talked to Louis a while of his studies, of the games the boys played at school, of the length of the holidays. But to all these openings and questionings he responded in a dull and uninterested fashion. I could not but feel that he resented bitterly the marriage which had come between his sister and himself. He had had, of course, a place to come to on Saturdays and Sunday afternoons, but I had seen little of him then. My work was generally absorbing, and when I had time to give to Irma, I wanted her all to myself. So I had fallen into a habit, neither too kind nor yet too wise, of taking to my writing or my proofs as often as Louis came to our house.

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Now, from the glances he cast at the door by which Irma had gone out, I saw that he too was suffering from jealousy—even as I had done. He was jealous of that inarticulate Jacob which comes into so many houses as a tiny Supplanter—the first baby!

After a quarter of an hour he rose and got out of the room quickly. I could hear him go to his own room and shut the door. When Irma and Mary Lyon had reduced our small bundle of earthquake to a sulky and plaintive reason, she came back to talk to her brother. Finding him gone, she asked where Louis was, and immediately followed him to his chamber, doubtless to continue their conversation.

But she returned after a while with a curious gleam on her face, saying that doubtless travel had given her brother a headache. He had shut his door with the bolt, and was lying down.

I was on the point of asking Irma if he had answered when she called to him, but remembered in time that I had better not meddle in what did not concern me. If Louis behaved like a bear, it would only throw Irma the more completely upon me. And this, at the time, I was selfish enough to wish for.

Afterwards—well, I had, as all men have, many things to reproach myself for—this stupid jealousy being by no means the least or the lightest.

Still, on the whole I had a great deal of peace and the composure of the quiet mind during these first days at Heathknowes. My father, almost for the first time in his life, withdrew himself from his desk, and took a walk beyond the confines of the Academy Wood to see his grandson, keeping, however, his hands still behind him according to his custom in school. My mother, even, arranged with Agnes Anne to take the post-office duties during her absence, and seemed pleased in her quiet way to hold the boy in her arms. In this, however, she was not encouraged by Mary Lyon, who soon took Duncan away on the plea that he cried, except with her. Duncan

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the Second certainly stopped as soon as he felt my grandmother's strong, well-accustomed hands grasp him. Yet she was not in the least tender with him. On the contrary, she heaved him, as it were promiscuously, over one shoulder with his head hanging down her back, and tucking his swathed legs under one armpit she proceeded about her household business, as if wholly disembarrassed—all the while Duncan never uttering a word.

But through all the talk of the weather and the crops, the night runs to Kirk Anders and the Borgue shore, the capture made by the preventives at the Hass of the Dungeon, the misdoings of Tim Cleary who had got seven days for giving impudence to the Provost of Dumfries in his own court-room, there pierced the strange sough of politics.

The elections were upon us also in Galloway, and the Government candidate was reported to be staying at Tereggles with the Lord Lieutenant. He had not yet been seen, but (it was, of course, Boyd Connaway who brought us word) his name was the Honourable Lalor Maitland, late Governor of the Meuse—a province in the Low Countries.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE RETURN OF THE SERPENT TO EDEN VALLEY

I did not tell Irma, and I enjoined silence on all about the house. But there was no keeping such a thing, and perhaps it was as well. Jo Kettle's father, always keen to show his wit at the expense of his betters, cried out to me in the hearing of Irma, "How much, besides his pardon, has that uncle of yours gotten in guineas for his treachery?"

And when I protested ignorance, he added, "I mean the new grand Government candidate, that has been sae lang in the Netherlands, and was a rebel not so long ago—many is the braw lad's head that he has garred roll in the sawdust, I warrant."

For it was currently reported of Lalor in his own day that he had been a spy for the King of France as well as for King George—aye, and afterwards against the emigrants at Coblenz in the service of the Revolution. Indeed, I do think there is little doubt but that, at some time of his life, the man had been in such a desperate way that he had spied and betrayed whoever trusted him to whomsoever would pay for his treachery.

"Lalor Maitland—is he, then, in the country?" said Irma, with a white and frightened look. "I must get home—to Baby!"

So completely had her heart changed its magnetic pole. Poor Louis, small wonder he was jealous—and rightly, not of me, but of the small and leathern-lunged person who from his cot ruled the order of the house, and made even the cheerful hum of the fireside, the yard cock-crowing of the fowls, and the egg-kekklung in the barn yield to his imperious will. For he had them banished the precincts and shut up till his highness should please to awaken.

But when we got to the Heathknowes road-end, we beheld a yellow coach, with four horses, a coachman and two outriders, all three in canary-coloured suits.

It was early days for such equipages to be seen in Galloway, where, excluding the post-road on which the Irish mail ran from Dumfries to Stranraer, there were few roads and fewer bridges which would bear a coach-and-four. Owing to the pinn-mill, our bridges were a little stronger than usual, though the roads were worn into deep ruts by the "jankers," or great two-wheeled wagons for the transport of trees out of the woods.

The carriage drove right up to the outer gate of the yard of Heathknowes, half the idle laddies of Eden Valley running shouting after it. The "yett," as usual, was barred, and it is more than doubtful whether, even if open, the coach could safely have passed within—so narrow was the space between post and post.

But the man inside put his head out of the window and gave a short, sharp order. Whereupon the postilions leaped down and stood to their horses' heads. The canary coachman held his hands high, with the reins drooping upon his knees. A footman jumped out of a little niche by the side of one window in which his life must have been almost shaken out of him. He opened the door with the deepest respect, and out there stepped the bravest and finest-dressed gentleman that had ever been seen.

He was middle-sized and slight, no longer young, but of an uncertain age. He wore a powdered wig, with sky-blue coat and shorts, a white waistcoat embroidered with dainty sprig patterns of lavender and forget-me-not. He had on white silk stockings and the most fashionable shoes, tied with blue-and-gold governmental favours instead of ordinary buckles. By his side was a sword with a golden hilt—in short, such a cavalier had never been seen in Galloway within living

memory.

And at the sight of him Louis ran forward, calling, "Uncle, uncle!" But Irma sank gently down on my shoulder, so that I had to take her in my arms and carry her to her chamber.

At first I stood clean dumfounded, as indeed well I might. When Lalor came last to Eden Valley he had been one of the Black Smugglers, a great man on the *Golden Hind*—little better, to be brief, than a common pirate. He and his had assaulted the house of Marnhoul, with a pretence of legal purpose, no doubt, but really merely levying war in a peaceful country.

Now here he was back, arrayed sumptuously, the favourite of the Government at London, the guest of the Lord Lieutenant of the county.

I could not explain it, and, indeed, till Irma came to herself, I had little time or inclination to think the matter out. But afterwards many things which had been dark became clear, while others, though still remaining mysterious, began to have a certain dim light cast upon them.

What seemed clear was that Lalor had all along benefited by mysterious protections, and the authorities, though apparently anxious for his capture, never really put themselves about in the least. They did not want to catch or imprison Lalor Maitland. He was much more useful to them elsewhere. Whereas the children of a disaffected rebel, considered as claimants to the Maitland estates, were of little account.

But the action of Louis Maitland for the first time opened my eyes to another matter. A corner of the veil which had hid a plot was lifted. During all the time that Irma had been with her Aunt Kirkpatrick, ever since Louis entered Sympson's Classic Academy (kept by Dr. Sympson, grandson of the old Restoration Curate of Kirkmabreck), Lalor had been in Edinburgh, pursuing his plans in secret, perhaps (who knows?) with the learned assistance and council of Mr. Wringham Pollixfen Poole, that expert with the loaded riding-whip.

We had been far too busy with our own affairs—the marriage, the little house, my work at the *Review*, and more recently the appearance and providing for of Duncan the Second. We had seen Louis on Saturdays, and on Sundays, too, at times. But, to our shame be it said, we knew very little about his life at school, who were his friends, what his actual thoughts. For this I shall never cease to reproach myself—at least occasionally, when I think about it.

But Lalor had appeared in splendour at Dr. Sympson's, had introduced himself as an uncle from abroad. He was in high favour with the Government. He had the most magnificent coach in the city, and, apparently, plenty of money. He had early warned Louis that we—that is, Irma and I—must hear nothing of his visits, otherwise these pleasant jaunts would be stopped—the afternoon treats to Duddingstone and Lochend, the sails on the Firth with young Walter, the Doctor's son, as his companion. For Lalor was so wise that he never asked him out alone. So Louis had been silent, bribed by the liberty and the golden guineas, which were as plentiful with Lalor as they were scarce with Irma and myself. The Doctor was charmed with his visitor, the ex-governor of a great province in the Netherlands (which he looked out in the Encyclopædia and lectured upon)—and as for Walter, his son, at that date he would have bartered his soul for five hours' absence from the paternal academy and a dozen sticks of toffee.

Then with what unwonted and flattering deference the boy's entertainer had treated him. To him he was Sir Louis, the head of the house. He would heir its great properties, the value and extent of which had been hidden from him by Irma and myself. Doubtless we had our own reasons for thus concealing the truth, but Uncle Lalor's position with the Government enabled him to assure Sir Louis that, through his influence, all its ancient dignities would be restored to the family.

Hence it was that, at the first sight of the slim man with the powdered wig tied in a gay favour behind his back, Louis had run and flung himself into his arms. Perhaps, also, it had something to do with his disappointment in Irma, and it was in this open way that he chose to punish her.

Yet when Lalor Maitland had come into the parlour, and I had spoken with him, the man's frank and smiling recognition of the circumstances, his high, easy manner, an old-world politeness as of one long familiar with courts, yet a kindly gentleman withal, prepossessed me in his favour even against myself.

"Well," he said, with that rare smile which distinguished him, "here we have the fortune of war. You and I have met before, sir, and there are few that have faced me as you did, being at the time only a boy—and not myself only, but Dick, the boldest man on the *Golden Hind*."

He tapped a careless tattoo on the table with his fingers.

"Ah, they were good days, after all," he said; "mad days—when it was win ten thousand or walk the plank every time the brig put her nose outside the harbour bar!"

"It turned out the ten thousand, I presume?" I said, without too much unbending.

"Oh," he answered lightly, "as to myself, I was never very deeply entered. I had ever an anchor out to windward. It was rare that I acted without orders, and, having been in a high official position, it was in my power to render certain important services to the Government of this country—for which, I may say, they have not proved themselves less ungrateful than is the way of governments."

"So it would seem," I answered.

"But," he continued, "I called chiefly to renew my acquaintance with my sometime wards—though one of them has sought another and a better guardian" (here he bowed very gracefully

to me), "and the other—well, Louis lad, what have you to say to your old uncle?"

The boy came bounding up, and stood close by his chair, smoothing the lace of Lalor's sleeve, his eyes full of happiness and confidence. It was a pretty sight, and for a moment I confess I was baffled. Could it be that after all Louis was right and Irma wrong? Could this man have supposed that the children were being held against their will and interest, or at least fraudulently removed from their legal guardian, when he assaulted the old house of Marnhoul?

Perhaps, as I began to surmise, we had on that occasion really owed our lives to him. For had the *Golden Hinds* all come on at a time, they would undoubtedly, being such a crew of cut-throats, have rushed us and eaten us up in no time.

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Women, I tried to persuade myself, had dislikes even more inexplicable than their likings. Some early, unforgiven, childish prejudice, perhaps. Women do not easily forgive, except those whom they love, and even these only so long as they continue to love them. For many women the phrase in the Lord's Prayer, "as we forgive them that trespass against us," had better be expunged. It is a dead letter. The exceptions are so rare as to prove the rule—and even they, though they may forgive their enemies, draw the line at forgiving their neighbours.

"And am I not to see my fair enemy, Madame—ah, Duncan MacAlpine? I wish to have the honour of felicitating her infinite happiness, and I have taken the liberty of bringing her an old family jewel for her acceptance."

"My wife, sir," I said, "is not yet well. She is subject to sudden shock, and I fear——"

"Ah, I understand," he said, bowing gravely, and with a touch of melancholy which became him vastly; "I never had the good fortune to please the lady—as you have done."

He smiled again, and waved away a clumsy attempt of mine to reply.

"But that is my misfortune—perhaps, though unconsciously, my fault. Still, there is the trinket. I leave it in your hands, in trust for those of your wife. My respectful duty and service to her and—to the heir of your house! Come, Louis, will you have a ride in the coach as far as the bridge and back? I have left my Lord Lieutenant there visiting some of his doubtful tenants. I will pick him up when he is ready, and then bring this little friend of mine back."

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That night Louis wept and stamped in a black anger.

"I don't want to stop here," he said; "I want to go with Uncle Lalor in the gilded coach."

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CHAPTER XXXVIII

BY WATER AND THE WORD

During my holidays at Heathknowes I found myself necessarily in frequent communication with my Lord Advocate. For though I was the actual, he was the ultimate editor of the *Universal Review*. I felt that he had done so much for me, and that we were now on such terms that I might without presumption ask him a private question about Lalor Maitland. Because, knowing the man to have been mixed with some very doubtful business, I wondered that a man of such honour and probity as the Advocate would in any circumstances act by such means—much less countenance his being put forward in the Government interest at a contested election.

I will give the text of the Advocate's reply in so far as it deals with Lalor: "Have as little as possible to do in a private capacity with 'your Connection by Marriage'" (for so he continued to style him). "In public affairs we must often use sweeps to explore dark and tortuous passages. Persons who object to fyle themselves cannot be expected to clean drains. You take my metaphor? Your 'Relative by Marriage' has proved himself a useful artist in cesspools. That is all. He has not swept clean, but he has swept. He has, on several occasions, been useful to the Government when a better man would never have earned salt to his kail. Publicly, therefore, he is an estimable servant of the Government. Privately I would not touch him with the point of my shoe. For in personal relations such men are always dangerous. See to it that you and yours have as little to do with him as possible."

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There in a nutshell was the whole philosophy of politics. "For dirty jobs use dirty tools"—and of such undoubtedly was Lalor Maitland.

But I judged that, having come through so many vicissitudes, and moving now with a certain name and fame, he would, for his own sake, do us no open harm. Rather, as witness little Louis, he would exploit the ancient renown of the Maitlands, their standing in Galloway, and his friendship with the heir of their estates.

It seemed to me that Louis was entirely safe, especially in the good hands of the Lord

Lieutenant, and that the great rewards which Lalor Maitland had received from the Government constituted in some measure the best security against any dangerous plotting.

And in all the electoral campaign that followed, certain it is that Lalor showed only his amiable side, taking all that was said against him with a smiling face, yet as ready with his sword as with his tongue, and so far as courage went (it must be allowed) in no way disgracing the old and well-respected name of the Maitlands of Marnhoul. But I must tell you of the fate which befell the jewel he had left in my hands for Irma. Whether it had ever belonged to the family of Maitland or not, I should greatly doubt. It was a hoop of rubies set with brilliants, which at will could make a bracelet for the wrist, or a kind of tiara for the hair. It was placed in a lined box of morocco leather, called an "ecrin," and stood out as beautifully against the faded blue of the velvet as a little tangled wisp of sunset cloud lost in an evening sky.

But Irma flashed out when I showed it her.

"How dare you?" she cried, and seizing the box she shut it with a snap like her own white teeth. Then, the window being open, she threw it into the low shrubbery at the orchard end, whence, after she had gone to baby, I had no great trouble in recovering it. For it seemed to me too good to waste, and would certainly be of more use to me than to the first yokel who should pass that way.

Under ordinary circumstances Lalor would certainly have been defeated. First of all, though doubtless belonging to an ancient family of the country, he was, with his gilded coach and display of wealth gotten no one could just say how or where, in speech and look an outsider. His opponent, Colonel MacTaggart of the Stroan, called familiarly "The Cornel" was one of the brave, sound, stupid, jovial country gentlemen who rode once a week to market at Dumfries, never missed a Court day at Kirkcudbright, did his duty honourably in a sufficiently narrow round, and was worshipped by his tenantry, with whose families he was on terms of extraordinary fondness and friendship. Altogether, to use the vulgar idiom, "The Cornel" was felt to be a safe man to "bring back Galloway fish-guts to Galloway sea-maws." Or, in other words, he would see to it that patronage, like charity, should begin at home—and stop there.

To set off against this, there was a strong feeling that Galloway had been long enough in opposition. There appeared to be (and indeed there was) no chance of overturning the Government. Why, then, should Galloway dwell for seven more years in the cold and hungry shades of opposition—able to growl, but quite unable to get the bone?

Lalor was brim-full of promises. He had been, if not a smuggler, at least an associate of smugglers, and all along Solwayside that was no disadvantage to him—in a country where all either dabbled in the illicit traffic, or, at best, looked the other way as the jingling caravans went by.

Briefly, then, his Excellency Lalor Maitland, late Governor of the Province of the Meuse, now a law-abiding subject of King George, was duly elected and sent to Westminster to take his seat as representing the lieges. The excitement calmed down almost at once. The gold coach was seen no more. The preventive men and supervisors of excise were neither up nor down. Galloway felt vaguely defrauded. I think many of those who voted for Lalor imagined that the excisemen and coastguards would at once be recalled, and that henceforward cargoes from the Isle of Man and Rotterdam would be unloaded in broad daylight, instead of by the pale light of the moon, without a single question being asked on behalf of the revenue officers of King George.

After Lalor's disappearance Louis Maitland was heavy and depressed for several days, staying long in his room and returning the shortest answers when spoken to. Suddenly one morning he declared his intention of going to Dumfries, and so on the following Wednesday my grandfather and he drove thither by the coach road while I followed behind on horseback. It was the purpose of Louis Maitland to have speech with the lawyers. So, knowing the temper in which he had been since his uncle's departure, I let him go up alone, but afterwards had speech with the younger Mr. Smart on my own account.

He smiled when I mentioned Sir Louis and his mission.

"He wishes to go up to London to his cousin—he calls him his uncle, Mr. Lalor, your fine new Government member for the county!"

"I judged as much," said I, "but I hope you have not given him any such permission."

"He can take all the permission he wishes after he is twenty-one," said Mr. Smart; "at present he has a good many years before him at Sympson's Academy. There he may occupy himself in turning the old curate's *Three Patriarchs* into Latin. As to his holidays, he can spend them with his sister or stay on in Edinburgh with the Doctor. But London is not a place for a young gentleman of such exalted notions of his own importance—'You bury me at a farmhouse with a family of boors!'—was what he said. Now, that smells Mr. Lalor a mile off. But the lad is not much to blame, and I hope you will not let it go any farther."

"Certainly not," said I, "the boy was only quoting!"

I returned from this interview considerably relieved, but for some days Sir Louis was visibly cast down.

However, I said nothing to Irma, only advising her to devote herself a little more to her brother, at times when the exigencies of Duncan the Second would leave her time and opportunity.

"Why!" she said, with a quick gasp of astonishment, "I never forget Louis—but of course baby needs me sometimes. I can't help that!"

If I had dared, I should have reminded her that baby appeared to need every woman about the house of Heathknowes—to whom may be added my mother from the school-house, Mrs. Thomas Gallaberry (late Anderson), and a great and miscellaneous cloud of witnesses, to all of whom the commonest details of toilet—baby's bath, his swathing and unbandaging, the crinkling of his face and the clenching of his fists, the curious curdled marbling upon his fat arms, even the inbending of his toes, were objects of a cult to which that of the Lama of Thibet was a common and open secret.

Even fathers were excluded as profane on such occasions, and the gasps of feminine delight at each new evidence of genius were the only sounds that might be heard even if you listened at the door, as, I admit, I was often mean enough to do. Yet the manifestations of the object of worship, as overheard by me, appeared sufficiently human and ordinary to be passed over in silence.

I admit, however, that such was not the opinion of any of the regular worshippers at the shrine, and that the person of the opposite sex who was permitted to warm the hero's bath-towel at the fire, became an object of interest and envy to the whole female community. As for my grandmother, I need only say that while Duncan the Second abode within the four walls of Heathknowes, not an ounce of decent edible butter passed out of her dairy. Yet not a man of us complained. We knew better.

There still remained, however, a ceremony to be faced which I could not look forward to with equanimity. It had been agreed upon between us, that, though by the interference of our good friend the Advocate, we had been married in the old private chapel attached to the Deanery, we should defer the christening of Duncan the Second till "the Doctor" could perform the office—there being, of course, but one "Doctor" for all Eden Valley people—Doctor Gillespie, erstwhile Moderator of the Kirk of Scotland.

I had long been under reproach for my slackness in this matter. Inuendoes were mixed with odious comparisons upon Mary Lyon's tongue. If her daughter had only married a Cameronian, the bairn would have been baptized within seven days! Never had she seen an unchristened bairn so long about a house! But for them that sit at ease in an Erastian Zion—she referred to my father, who was not only precentor but also session-clerk, and could by no means be said to sit at ease—she supposed anything was good enough. It was different in her young days. She, at least, had been properly brought up.

Finally, however, I went and put the case to the Doctor. He was ready to come up to Heathknowes for the baptism. After his usual protest that according to rule it ought to be performed in sight of all the congregation, he accepted the good reason that my grandfather and grandmother, being ardent Cameronians, could not in that case be present. The Doctor had, of course, anticipated this objection. For he knew and respected the "kind of people" reared by four generations of "Societies," and often (in private) held them up as ensamples to his own flock.

So to Heathknowes, the house of the Cameronian elder, there came, with all befitting solemnity, Doctor Gillespie, ex-Moderator of the Kirk of Scotland. Stately he stepped up the little loaning, followed by his session, their clerk, my father at their head. At the sight of the Doctor arrayed in gown and bands, his white hair falling on his neck and tied with a black ribbon, the whole family of us instinctively uncovered and stood bareheaded. My grandfather had gone down to the foot of the little avenue to open the gate for the minister. The Doctor smilingly invited him to walk by his side, but William Lyon had gravely shaken his head and said, "I thank you, Doctor, but to-day, if you will grant me the privilege, I will walk with my brethren, the other elders of the Kirk of God."

And so he did, and as they came within sight of the house I took Irma by the hand. For she trembled, and tears rose to her eyes as she saw that simple but dignified procession (like to that which moved out of the vestry on the occasion of the Greater Sacrament) approaching the house. The lads stood silent with bared heads. For once Duncan lay quiet in the arms of Mary Lyon—who that day would yield her charge to none, till she gave him to the mother, when the time should come, according to the Presbyterian rite, to stand up and place the firstborn in his father's arms.

There was only one blank in that gathering. Louis had gone to his own room, pretexting a headache, but really (as he blurted out afterwards) because his Uncle Lalor had said that Presbyterianism was no religion for a gentleman.

However, it was only afterwards that he was missed.

The Doctor was great on such occasions. A surprising soft radiance, almost like a halo, surrounded his smooth snowy locks. A holy calm, exhaling from half a century of spotless life lived in the sight of all men, spoke in every word, moved in every gesture. The elders stood about grave and quiet. The great Bible lay open. The psalm of dedication was sung—of which the overword is, "Lo, children are God's heritage," and the conclusion the verse which no Scot forgets the world over, perhaps because it contains, quite unintentionally, so delightful a revelation of his own national character—

"O happy is the man that hath
His quiver filled with those:
*They unashamed in the gate
Shall speak unto their foes.*"

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE WICKED FLAG

"There's Boyd Connoway has been sitting on my front doorstep," cried my Aunt Jen, "and if I've telled the man once, I've telled him twenty times!"

"But how do ye ken, Janet?" said her mother out of the still-room where she was brewing nettle-beer. "He is not there now!"

"How do I ken—fine that!" snapped Jen. "Do I no see my favourite check pattern on his trousers!" said Jen, which, indeed, being plain to the eye of every beholder, admitted of no denial—except perhaps, owing to point of view, by the unconscious wearer himself. He had sat down on these mystic criss-crossings and whorls dear to the Galloway housewife for her floor ornaments, while the whiting was still wet.

"It's no wonder," Jen pursued vengefully, "they may say what they like. An I were that man's wife, I wad brain him. Here he has been the livelong day. Twa meals has he eaten. Six hours has he hung about malingering. He came to roof the pigstye. He tore off the old thatch, and there it lies, and there will lie for him. If there is frost, Girzie's brood will be stiff by the morning. Then he 'had a look' at my roasting-jack and ... there it is!"

She indicated with an indignant sweep of the hand what she designated "a rickle o' rubbish" as the net proceeds of Boyd's industry.

The artist explained himself between the mouthfuls at his third repast.

"Ye see, Miss Lyon, there's nocht that spoils good work like worry on the mind. The pigs will do fine. I'll put a branch or two over them and a corn-sack over that. If a drap o' rain comes through it will only harden the wee grunties for the trials o' life. Aye" (here Boyd relapsed into philosophy), "life is fu' o' trials, for pigs as weel as men. But men the worst—for as for pigs, their bread is given them and their water is sure. Now as for myself——"

"Yourself," cried Aunt Jen, entering into one of her sudden rages, "if ye were half as much worth to the world as our old sow Girzie, ye wad be salted and hanging up by the heels now! As it is, ye run the country like Crazy, our collie, a burden to yourself and a nuisance to the world at lairge!"

"Eh, Miss Jen, but it's the word ye have, as I was sayin' to Rob McTurk up at the pirn-mill last Tuesday week. 'If only our Miss Jen there had been a man,' says I, 'it's never Lalor Maitland that would have been sent to sit in King George's High House o' Parliament.'"

Again Boyd Connoway took up his burden of testimony.

"Aye, Miss Jen, there's some that's born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. That's me, Miss Jen. Now there's my brother that's a farmer in County Donegal. Niver a market night sober—and *yet* he's not to say altogether content. An' many is the time I say to our Bridget, 'What would you do if I was Brother Jerry of Ballycross, coming home to ye in the box of the gig, and the reins on the horse's neck?'"

"Ye never *had* a horse," says she, and thinks that an answer! Women's heads are born void of logic, and what they fill them with—axing your pardon, Mistress Lyon, ah, if they were all like you—'tis a happier place this world would be!"

"Finish, and let us get the dishes cleared away!" said my grandmother, who did not stand upon fashions of speech, least of all with Boyd Connoway.

Boyd hastened to obey, ladling everything within reach into his mouth as fast as knife and spoon could follow each other.

He concluded, crooning over his eternal ditty, by way of thanksgiving after meat—

"If I was in bed and fast asleep
I wouldn't get up for a score of sheep."

This distich had the gift of always infuriating Aunt Janet.

"You may well say so," she cried, clattering away with an armful of dishes in a way that was a protest in itself; "considering all you are good for when you *do* get up, you might just as well be in bed fast asleep, and——"

"Now there you're wrong, Miss Janet," said Boyd. "It was only last Sunday that I gave up all my evil courses and became one of Israel Kinmont's folk. My heart is changed," he added solemnly; "I gave it to the Lord, and He seen fit to convart me!"

The whole household looked up. Anything bearing on personal religion instantly touched Scots

folk of the humble sort. But Aunt Jen was obdurate. Long experience had rendered her sceptical with regard to Boyd Connoway.

"We'll soon see if you are converted to the Lord," she said. "*He* is a hard worker. There are no idlers on His estates. If it's true, we may get these pigs covered in to-night yet."

"Never trouble your head about the pigs, Miss Janet," said Boyd, "they will surely sleep safe under a roof this night. Strive to fix your mind on higher things, Miss Jen. There's such a thing as makin' a god of this here transient evil world, as I said to Bridget when the potatoes went bad just because I got no time to 'pit' them, having had to play the fiddle at four kirns'^[2] in different parishes during potato-lifting week!"

"Never mind about that," said my grandfather from his seat in the chimney corner, "tell us about your 'conversion'!"

For the word was then a new one in Galloway, and of no good savour either among orthodox Cameronians or pillars of the Kirk as by law established. But Israel Kinmont had been a sailor to far ports. In his youth he had heard Whitefield preach. He had followed Wesley's folk afar off. The career of a humble evangelist attracted him, and when in his latter days he had saved enough to buy the oldest and worst of all luggers that ever sailed the sea, he devoted himself, not to the gainful traffic of smuggling, but to the unremunerative transport of sea-coal and lime from Cockermouth and Workington to the small ports and inlets of the Galloway coast.

No excisemen watching on the cliffs gave more than a single glance at "Israel's Tabernacle," as, without the least irreverence, he had named his boat. But, using the same ports as the smugglers, he was often brought into close relations with them. They asked him for information which was freely given, as from one friend to another. They trusted him, for though often interrogated by the supervisor and riding officers, Israel could develop upon occasion an extraordinary deafness, so that the questions to which he could give a clear answer were never such as to commit any one. In exchange for this the smugglers would go aboard the Tabernacle and allow Israel to preach to them. And woe betide the irreverent on these occasions! Black Rob o' Garlies or Roaring Imrie from Douglas-ha' thought nothing of taking such a one by convenient parts of his clothing and dropping him overboard.

"Aye," said Boyd, encouraged by my grandfather's request, "Israel Kinmont has made a new man of many a hardened sinner!"

"I dare you to say so," cried my grandmother; "only the Lord that is on High can do that."

"But He can make use of instruments," argued Boyd, who had learned his lesson, "and Israel Kinmont is one of them. He has showed me where to get grace."

"Maybe," snapped Jen, that unswerving Calvinist, "seeing is believing. Boyd Connoway *may* have got grace. I put no limit to the Almighty's power. But it takes more than grace to convert a man from laziness!"

Boyd lifted his hand with a gesture so dignified that even from the good-for-nothing it commanded respect.

"'Tis from the Lord, Miss Jen, and it behoves us poor mortals noways to resist. Israel Kinmont never would smuggle, as ye know, and yet he never had any luck till the highest tide of the year brought the 'Old Tabernacle' up, with a cargo of sea-coal in her, half-way between Killantringan Village and the Nitwood.

"'She's settling, Israel,' said his son Jacob, that's counted soft, but can raise the tune at meeting—none like him for that.

"'Even so,' said Israel, 'the will of the Lord be done!'

"'She's settling fast! Both my feet are wet!' said Jacob, holding on to a rope.

"'Amen!' cried Israel, 'if it only were His will that she should come ten yards higher up, she would be on the very roadside. Then I would open a door into the hold of her after the coal is out, and you and I, Jacob, could rig up seats and windows like a proper Tabernacle—fit for Mr. Whitefield himself to preach in! Truly the service of the Lord is joyful. His law doth rejoice the heart.'

"So said Israel, and, just as I am tellin' you, there came a great inward swirling of the tide, a very merracle, and lo! the *Tabernacle* was laid down as by compass alongside the Nitwood road, whence she will never stir till the day of Final Judgment, as the scripture is. And Israel, he cuts the door, and Jacob, he gets out the coals and sells them to the great folk, and the supervisor, he stands by, watching in vain till he was as black as a sweep, for the brandy that was not there. But he petitioned Government that Israel should have a concession of that part of the foreshore—being against all smuggling and maybe thinking to have him as a sort of spiritual exciseman.

"Yes, Mr. Lyon," Boyd went on, gratified by the interest in his tale, "'tis wonderful, when you think on't. Empty from stem to stern she is, with skylights in her deck and windows in her side! Why, there are benches for the men and a pulpit for Israel. As for Jacob, he has nothing but his tuning-fork and a seat with the rest.

"And indeed there's more chance that Israel will put a stop to the Free-trading than all the preventives in the land. He preaches against it, declaring that it makes the young men fit for nothing else, like every other way of making money without working for it."

"Ah, Israel's right there!" came from my grandfather.

"But every light has its shadow, and he's made a failure of it with Dick Wilkes, and may do the like with my wife, Bridget.

"For Bridget, she will be for ever crying at me these days, 'Here, you Tabernacle man, have you split the kindling wood?' Or 'No praise-the-Lord for you, lad, till your day's work is done! Go and mend that spring-cart of the General's that his man has been grumbling about for a month!'

"And sometimes I have to fill my mouth with the hundred and twenty-first psalm to keep from answering improper, and after all, Bridget will only ask if I don't know the tune to that owld penny ballad. 'Tis true enough about the tune" (Boyd confessed), "me having no pitch-pipe, but Bridget has no business to miscall scripture, whether said or sung!

"As to Dick Wilkes, that got his lame leg at the attack on—well, we need not go opening up old scores, but we all know where—has been staying with us, and that maybe made Bridget worse. Aye, that he has. There's no one like Bridget for drawing all the riff-raff of the countryside about her—I know some will say that comes of marrying me. But 'tis the owld gennleman's own falsehood. You'll always find Boyd Connaway in the company of his betters whenever so be he can!

"But Dick Wilkes had our 'ben' room, and there were a little, light, active man that came to see him—not that I know much of him, save from the sound of voices and my wife Bridget on the watch to keep me in the kitchen, and all that.

"But Old Israel would never give up Dick Wilkes. He kept coming and coming to our house, and what he called 'wrestling for Dick's soul.' Sometimes he went away pleased, thinking he had gotten the upper hand. Then the little light man would come again, and there was Dick just as bad as ever. 'Backsliding' was what Israel called it, and a good name, I say, for then the job was all to do over again from the beginning. But it was the Adversary that carried off Dick Wilkes at the long and last."

"Ah!" came a subdued groan from all the kitchen. Boyd gloomily nodded his head.

"Yes," he said, "'tis a great and terrible warning to Bridget, and so I tell her. 'Twas the night of the big meeting at the Tabernacle, when Israel kept it up for six hours, one lot coming and another going—the Isle o' Man fleet being in—that was the night of all nights in the year that Dick Wilkes must choose for to die in. Aught more contrary than that man can't be thought of.

"It happened just so, as I say. About four o'clock we were all of us shut up in the kitchen, and by that we knew (Jerry and I, at least) that Dick Wilkes had company—also that so far as repentance went, old Israel's goose was cooked till he had another turn at his man. And then after six we heard him shouting that he was going to die—which seemed strange to us. For we could hear him tearing at his sea-chest and stamping about his room, which is not what is expected of a dying man.

"But Dick knew better. For when we went down and peeped at the keyhole, he heard us, and called on us all to come our ways in. And—you will never guess in a thousand years—he had routed a flag out of his sea-chest. The 'Wicked Flag' it was,—the pirates' flag—black, with the Death's Head and cross-bones done in white upon it, the same that he had hoisted on seas where no questions were asked, when he commanded the old *Golden Hind*. And wrapping himself in that, he said, 'Tell old Israel that I died *so!*' And we, thinking it was, as one might say, braving the Almighty and his poor old servant, kept silence. And then he shouted, 'Promise, ye white-livered rascals, or I've strength to slit your wizzards yet. Tell him I died under the Black!'

"And Bridget, who was feared herself, said, 'Whist, for God's sake, do not bring a curse on the house!'

"And then he just cursed the house from flooring to roof-tree, and so went to his own place!

"Dead? Well, yes—dead and buried is old Dickie Wilkes. But poor Israel Kinmont is quite brokenhearted. He says that Dick was the first that ever broke away, and that he is not long for this world himself now that he has lost Dick. It was always cut-and-come-again when you were converting Dick.

"But Israel has an explanation, poor old fellow.

"'It was not Grace that missed fire,' he says, 'but me, the unworthy marksman. And for that I shall be smitten like the men who, with unanointed eyes, looked on the ark of God that time it went up the valley from Ekron to Bethshemish, with the cows looking back and lowing for their calves all the way. I were always main sorry for them cows!' old Israel says."

[2] Harvest home merrymakings.

Though Boyd Connoway had not said anything directly threatening the house of Heathknowes or its inmates, his story of his own "conversion" and the death of Dick Wilkes under the Black Flag somehow made us vaguely uneasy. The door of the house was locked at eight. The gates of the yard barricaded as in the old time of the sea raids from the *Golden Hind*.

So strong was the feeling that Irma would gladly have returned before our time to the little White House above the meadow flats, and to the view of the Pentlands turning a solid green butt towards the Archers' Hall of the Guid Toon of Edinburgh.

But it was not so easy to quit Heathknowes. My grandmother held tightly to Duncan the Second. I found myself in good case, after the fatigues of the town, to carry out some work on my own account. This, of course, for the sake of my wife's happiness, I would have given up, but after all Irma's plans went to pieces upon the invincible determination of Sir Louis to remain. He was now a lad of seventeen, but older looking than his age. He had his own room at Heathknowes, his books, his occupations. Indeed we seldom saw him except at meals, and even then often in the middle of dinner he would rise, bow haughtily to the company, and retire without uttering a word. He had learned the lesson from Lalor that plain farm people were no society for such as he. He went as far as he could in the way of insolence, making us pay for the refusal of the lawyers to let him go to London with the member for the county.

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I could see the blush rise crimson to Irma's neck and face after such a performance. But by some mysterious divine law of compensation, no sooner had she Baby in her arms, than she forgot all about the sulky boy, sitting moping among his books in the wood parlour, looking out on the red-boled firs of Marnhoul forest.

Israel Kinmont used to frequent us a good deal about this time. He never preached to us, nor indeed would he talk freely of his "experiences" amongst such Calvinists as my grandfather and grandmother.

"The gold of the kingdom doth not need the refiner's art!" he had said once when this remissness was made a reproach to him. Since the loss of his boat, the *Tabernacle*, he had bought first one donkey and then two with his little savings. These he loaded with salt for Cairn Edward and the farms on the way, and so by a natural transition, took to the trade of itinerant voyager on land instead of on the sea, bringing back a store of such cloths and spices as were in most request among the goodwives of the farm-towns.

He had been so long a sailor man that he could not help it, if a certain flavour of the brine clung to him still. Besides, there were jerseys and great sea-boots to be worn out. Neddy and Teddy, his two fine donkeys, were soon fitted with "steering gear," among the intricacies of which their active heels often got "foul." They "ran aground" with alarming frequency, scraping their pack-saddles against the walls of narrow lanes. Their master knew no peace of mind till, having passed the narrows, he found on some moor or common "plenty o' sea-room," notwithstanding the danger that "plenty o' sea-room" might induce the too artful Teddy to "turn topsails under," or in other words indulge in a roll upon the grass.

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Finally, Neddy and Teddy were "brought to anchor" in some friendly stable, in none oftener than in ours of Heathknowes, where cargo was unloaded and sometimes even the ships themselves "docked" and laid up for repairs. For this merciful Israel was merciful to his beasts, and often went into repairing dock for a saddle gall, which another would never have even noticed.

When the pair were browsing free in the field he would call them "to receive cargo," and hoist the Blue Peter by a sounding, "Neddy, ahoy! Ahoy there, Teddy!" And if, as was likely, they only flourished their heels and refused with scorn to come and be saddled, he uttered his sternest summons, "Ship's company, all hands on deck!" which meant that his son Jacob—starboard watch, must come and help port watch—Israel himself, to capture Teddy and Neddy.

Neddy was generally willing enough, unless when led from the plain course of maritime duty by Teddy. On these occasions Israel used to quote from the "articles" relating to the Mutiny Act, and has even been known to go so far as threaten Teddy with "a round dozen" at the main-mast as soon as he could lay hands on a "rope's end."

The which was all the same to Teddy.

It was beautiful to see the flotilla navigating the level surface of Killantringan moor—level, that is, by comparison. For first there were the little waves of the sheep-tracks, then the gentle rollers of the moss-hags, and, last of all, certain black dangerous Maélstroms from which last year's peats had been dug, in which a moment's folly on the part of Neddy or Teddy might engulf the Armada for ever.

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As they set sail Jacob Kinmont was first and second mate, but in particular, look-out-man. He went ahead, keeping a wary eye for dangers and obstacles, and on the whole the donkeys followed docilely enough in his wake. Israel's post as captain was behind at the tiller-ropes, whence he shouted exact instructions with nautical exactitude, such as "A point to the west, Neddy!" Or, pathetically, "DID I say nor'-nor'-east, Teddy, or didn't I?"

This last had a ring of affection in it, for, in spite of his naughty habits (or because of them) Teddy was distinctly the favourite. Also he had a habit of nuzzling his moist nose into the breast of the old man's reefer coat in search of sweet things, a trick which the more patient and

reliable Neddy never acquired. And if Teddy forgot to come inquiring after the hidden sweets, Israel was quite heart-broken.

At first the boys from the village would follow and perhaps imitate these naval manœuvres—in the hope, never fulfilled, of catching “Ranter Israel” using some nautical language, such as old Pirate Wilkes had made but too familiar to their ears. But they never caught him, for Israel’s “yea” remained “yea” and his “nay” “nay,” even when navigating donkeys over the trackless waste of Killantringan Common. But in revenge, every now and then, Israel would get hold of a village lad and lead him triumphantly to his meeting, whence he would not come forth till, as like as not, “he had gotten the blessin’.”

The fathers of Eden Valley held in utter contempt the theology of “Old Tabernacle Israel,” but the mothers, seeing a troublesome boy forsaking the error of his ways and settling down to be the comfort of his folk—looked more to results, and thanked God for old Israel and his Tabernacle. After a while the fathers also came to be of his opinion. And on one memorable occasion, the great Doctor Gillespie himself went in by the door of Israel’s tar-smelling Tabernacle, and seated himself in all the glory of his black coat and ruffled shirt on the back seat among the riff-raff of the port, just as if he were nobody at all.

At first Israel did not see him, so quietly had he entered. He went on with his prayer that “sinners might be turned from their way, and saints confirmed in their most holy faith.”

But when he had opened his eyes, and beheld the white head and reverend countenance of Doctor Gillespie the human soul within him trembled a little. Nevertheless, commanding himself, he descended the narrow aisle till he came to where the minister was seated. Then with head humbly bent and a voice that shook, he begged that “the Doctor might to-day open up the Word of Life to them.” Which accordingly, with the simplest directness, the Doctor did, using as his pulpit the middle section of a longboat, which had been sawn across and floored for Israel. The Doctor told the story of Peter walking on the waters, and of the hand stretched out to save. And this the Doctor, as Israel said afterwards, “fastened into them with nails.”

“Some of you will believe anything except the Gospel,” was one of these. Yet all he said was the simplest evangel. The Doctor was a Justice of the Peace, but this time he spoke of another peace—that of believing. He had an audience of smugglers, but he never mentioned Cæsar. He only advised them to “Render unto God the things that are God’s.”

And when he finished, after the last solemn words of exhortation, he added very quietly, “I will again preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the Parish Kirk, next Sabbath at noonday.”

And so when the Sabbath came and in the Tabernacle those of Israel’s sowing and gleaning were gathered together, the old Ranter addressed them thus: “All hands on deck to worship with the Doctor! He hath kept his watch with us—let us do the like by him!”

And so the astonishing thing was seen. The great Spence gallery of Eden Valley Parish Kirk was filled with such a mixed assembly as had never been seen there before. Smugglers, privateersmen, the sweepings of ports, home and foreign, some who had blood on their hands—though with the distinction that it had been shed in encounters with excisemen. But the blessing had come upon some of them—others a new spirit had touched, lighted at the fire of an almost apostolic enthusiasm.

It was the proudest moment in Israel Kinmont’s life when he heard the Doctor, in all the panoply of his gown and bands, hold up his hands and ask for a blessing upon “the new shoot of Thy Vine, planted by an aged servant of Thine in this parish. Make it strong for Thyself, that the hills may be covered with the shadow of it, and that, like the goodly cedar, many homeless and wayfaring men under it may rest and find shelter.”

And in the Spence gallery these sea- and wayfaring men nudged each other, not perhaps finding the meaning so clear as they did at the Tabernacle, but convinced, nevertheless, that “He means us—and our old Israel!”

And so in faith, if not wholly in understanding, they listened to the sermon in which the Doctor, all unprepared for such an invasion, inculcated with much learning the doctrine of submission to the civil magistrate with the leading cases of Saint Paul and Saint Augustine illustrated by copious quotations from the original.

They sat with fixed attention, never flinching even when the Doctor, doing his duty, as he said, both as a magistrate and as a Christian man, gave the Free Traders many a word to make their ears sing. They were in his place, and every man had the right to speak as he chose in his own house. But when Israel led them back to the old Tabernacle, with its pleasant smell of tar obscuring the more ancient bilge, and had told them that they were all “a lot of hell-deserving sinners who, if they missed eternal damnation, it would be with their rags badly singed,” they sighed a blissful sigh and felt themselves once more at home, sitting under a man who understood them and their needs.

Nevertheless, when Israel gave out the closing hymn it was one which, as he explained, “prays for the Church of God visible upon the earth, as well in the Parish Kirk as in their own little Tabernacle.” “Now then, men,” he concluded, “let us have it with a will. Put all that you have got between your beards and your shoulder-blades into it. If I see a man hanging in stays, he shall sing it by himself!”

So the Ranters sang till the sound went from the little dissenting Bethel on the shore up to the stately Kirk of the parish cinctured with its double acre of ancient grave-stones—

"I love Thy Kingdom, Lord,
The house of Thine abode:
The Church our blest Redeemer saved
With His own precious blood.

For her my tears shall fall,
For her my prayers ascend:
To her my cares and toils be given
Till toils and cares shall end!"

"*And* three cheers for the Doctor!" shouted swearing Imrie, who had been worked up by the events of the day to such a pitch of excitement that only the sound of his own thunderous voice had power to calm him.

And douce Cameronians coming over Eden Valley hill stood still and wondered at the profanation of the holy day, not knowing. Even sober pillars of the Kirk Erastian going homeward smiled and shook their heads pityingly.

"It was doubtless a good thing," said my father to a fellow elder, a certain McMinn of the Croft, "to see so many of the wild and regardless at the Kirk, but I'm sore mistaken if there's not some of the old Adam left in the best of them yet, to judge by the noise they are making down yonder."

"Except Israel himsel'!" said McMinn of the Croft, "man, dominie, since he converted Jock, my ploughman, he hasna been drunk yince, and I get twice the work oot o' the craitur for the same wage."

Which, being the proof of the pudding, settled the question.

CHAPTER XLI

IN THE WOOD PARLOUR

On the 19th of October the sky overhead was clear as sapphire, but all round the circle of the horizon the mists of autumn blurred the landscape. The hills stood no more in their places. Gone were the Kips, with their waving lines. Of the Cruives, with the heather thick and purple upon them, not a trace. Gone the graceful swirl of the Cooran Hill, which curls over like a wave just feathering to break.

To Irma it had been a heavy and a sorrowful day. She had actually wept, and even gone on her knees to her brother to beg him tell her what strange thing had come between them. He would only answer, "You have chosen your path without consulting me. Now I choose mine."

She charged him with listening to one who had always been an enemy of all who had been good to him ever since he was a little child—of setting himself against those on whose bounty they had lived.

He replied, "If I have lived on their bounty, they know very well that they will not lose by it."

She mentioned Lalor Maitland's name, and told him the history of the early attacks on the house of Marnhoul. Louis answered, "He has explained all that. It was done to save me from these people who were already besetting me, in order to rob me."

When she mentioned all that I had done for him, he put on an air of frigid detachment.

"You are right, no doubt, to stand up for your husband," he said; "but, then, I have not the same reasons. I can judge for myself."

Then she went on to show that there was no motive for the Lyons of Heathknowes showing them any interested kindness. As for me, she had only brought me herself and her love—no money, nor would she ever have any money—I had married her for herself.

"So would Lalor Maitland," he retorted, "and he is a gentleman."

After this Irma discussed no more. She felt it to be useless. Naturally, also, she was hurt to the heart that Louis, once her own little Louis, should compare her husband to Lalor Maitland. Well, for that I do not blame her.

All day long Louis stayed in the Wood Parlour with his books. I was busy with an important article on the "Moors in Spain," suggested by my recent researches into the history of the irrigation of fields and gardens in the south of Europe.

Louis came down to dinner at twelve, or a few minutes after. He seemed somewhat more cheerful than was usual with him, and actually spoke a little to me, asking me lend him my

grandfather's shotgun, to put it in order for him, and that powder and ball might be placed in his chamber. He had seen game-birds feeding quite close, and thought that by opening the window he might manage to shoot some of them.

I did as he asked me before going back to my work. Irma smiled at me, being well pleased. For it seemed to her that Louis's ill-temper was wearing away. Now my grandmother and Aunt Jen were inveterate tea-lovers, which was then not so common a drink in the country as it is now. Irma sometimes took a cup with them for company, and, because it also refreshed me in my labours, I also joined them. But with me it was done chiefly for the sake of the pleasant talk, being mostly my grandmother's reminiscences, and sometimes for a sight of my mother, who would run across of a sunny afternoon for a look at baby.

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That day we sat and talked rather longer than usual. A certain strain seemed to have departed from the house. I think all of us believed that the humour of Louis, execrable as it had been, was the effect of the insinuations of a wicked man, and that after a time he would be restored to us again the simple, pleasant-faced boy he had been in former years.

He did not come down to tea, but then he seldom did so. Indeed, none of the men-folk except myself had taken to the habit, and I (as I say) chiefly for the sake of the talk, which sharpened my wits and refreshed my working vocabulary. But as I passed back to my writing-den I could hear my brother-in-law moving restlessly about his room, and talking to himself, which was a recently-acquired habit of his. However, I took this as a good sign. Anything in the way of occupation was better than his former chill indifference to all that went forward about Heathknowes.

It was, as it chanced, a busy day at the pirn-mill. The labours of the farm being fairly over for the year, the mill had been shut down for hasty repairs, which Alec McQuhirr had come down from Ironmacannie to superintend. He was, so they said, the best mill-wright in the half-dozen counties of the south and west. He had, however, the one fault common to all his tribe, that of dilatoriness. So my grandfather, who had his "pirn" contracts to be shipped for England on certain days, used to call his sons about him, and devote himself and all of them to the service of repairing. Boyd Connoway, also, usually gave us the benefit of his universal genius for advice, and, when he chose, for handiness also.

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After tea some provisions had been carried to the mill by my mother on her way home. "One of the boys"—meaning my uncles—was to bring back the basket.

That night, also, supper was somewhat later than usual. Up in the mill men were still crawling about along the machinery with carefully protected lanterns. Buckets of water stood handy. For a pirn-mill is no place in which to play with fire. The sound of male voices and the thud of wooden mallets did not cease till long after dark. Supper was, therefore, later than usual, and the moon had risen before the sound of their footsteps was heard coming down among the tree-roots in the clearing which they themselves had made. The kitchen, which was also the living-room of Heathknowes, glowed bright, and the supper-table was a-laying. Aunt Jen bustled about. I had laid aside my writing, satisfied with a goodly tale of sheets to my credit. My grandmother was in the milk-house, but every now and then made darts out to the fire on which the precious "het supper" was cooking—roast fowl, bacon, and potatoes—traditional on occasions when the men had been "working late at the mill and had brought home company."

It was a bright and cheerful sight. The high dresser, the kitchen pride of Galloway, was in a state of absolute perfection. Aunt Jen despised men, but she had a way of reproving their congenital untidiness by the shine of her plates and the mirror-like polish of her candlesticks. She had spent a couple of hours over the dresser that afternoon, answering all the taunts of her mother as to her occupation, "It's true, mither, *they* will never ken the difference; but, then, I will!"

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"Go up, Irma, and tell your brother that we are waiting," said my grandmother. But as Irma was busy with Duncan the Second, I offered myself instead. I remember still the long corridor, and I wondered at the moment why no ray of light penetrated through the keyhole of Sir Louis's door. He must be sitting in the dark, and I smiled to myself as I thought how I had been wasting a couple of my grandmother's best candles for an hour. The explanation was that Louis, in fear of being spied upon, had carefully plugged up the keyhole and every crack of the door. But this I only knew later.

I stood a moment in the passage, keeping very still. I could hear his voice. He seemed in some way indignant. But the sound was dulled by the thickness of the walls and the care with which the chinks of the door had been "made up." Then I also heard—what sent the blood chill to my heart—another voice, shorter, harsher, older. For a moment I was struck dumb, and then—I laughed at myself. Of course the lad was simply stage-struck. For some time he had been reading and declaiming Hamlet, Julius Cæsar, and anything he could lay his hands upon, as well as scraps of the Greek tragedies he had learnt at school.

But as I leaned nearer, there pierced sharp as a pang to my heart the certainty that the other voice which I heard was not that of any of the characters of *Julius Cæsar*. A trembling horror of what I had once seen in that very room, and a memory of the great hearty Richard Poole entering there in all his amplitude of vivid life, quickly arrested me.

I rapped and called vehemently, trying the latch and feeling that the door resisted. I could hear a trampling beneath me. Men were on the way to my assistance. At the door I sprang. The bolts were as old as the door, and the nails of the lintel fastening only knocked in after its former rough handling.

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I got one waft of light as the door opened, half from the candle on the table, half from the moonlight falling dim without. I saw something that crouched—manlike indeed, but with bearded face and head held between its shoulders—leap from the window into the darkness. I did not see Louis clearly. His head was lying on the table, and immediately all the circumstances of the former drama came back to me. But this time I wasted no time. Something glittered on the table, hilt towards me—knife or sword, I hardly knew which. I only knew that with it in my hand I was armed. I sprang through the window and gave chase.

Then very loud in my ears I heard the crack of a pistol, but felt no wound. I now think it had not even been fired at me. I pursued with the energy of a young stag. My mornings on the hills with Eben looking for the sheep now stood me in good stead—that is, good or bad according as to whether the man in front of me had another loaded pistol ready or not.

Behind me, but alas, too far to be any help, I could hear the shouting of men. Heathknowes was alarmed. Then came the pounding of feet, but I knew that none of them could run with me, while the thing or man in front proved fresher, and, as I feared at first, fleeter.

But, after all, I was young, and though I panted, and had a burning pain in my side, I held to it till I began to get my second wind. Then I made sure that, barring accidents, I could run him down. What should happen then I did not know. I had a vision, only for a moment but yet very clear and distinct, of Irma in the black gown of a young widow. But even this did not make me slacken in my stride.

Somehow the shine of the steel in my hand gave me courage, as also the crying of the men behind, albeit they did not seem to gain but rather to lose ground. Thirty yards ahead I could see my man running, his head very low, his arms close to his sides, a slender figure with a certain look of deformity. A long beard of some indeterminate colour like hay was blown back over one shoulder. Ever and anon he glanced round as he ran to measure my progress.

Suddenly the root of a tree tripped him and he went headlong. But he was agile too, for before I could be upon him, he was up again, and with something that shone like a long thin dagger in his hand, he threw himself upon me as if to take me by surprise. Now, it is very difficult when running hard to put oneself at once into a proper position of defence. And so, as it happened, I was nearly done. But I had been carrying the sword in my hand almost at arm's length. I was conscious of no shock. Only all suddenly my assailant doubled and lay writhing, his dagger still shining in his hand.

I stopped and kept wide circling about him, fearing a trick. The moon was shining full on the open clearing of the glade where he had fallen. It was the little lawyer—he who had called himself Wringham Pollixfen Poole. Yet somehow he was different. His beard had grown to be of a curious foreign fashion and colour—but that perhaps might be the effect of the moonlight.

He never took his eyes off the shining steel in my hand.

"It is poisoned," he groaned, his hand clapped to his breast, "I am a dead man—poisoned, poisoned!"

And looking more carefully at what I had simply snatched in haste, I saw that I had in my hand the golden-hilted sword of honour which Lalor Maitland had given to the boy Louis to seal their friendship.

But immediately a greater wonder oppressed me, and rendered speechless those who now came panting up—my uncles and Boyd Connoway. The hay-coloured beard and disguises came away, snatched off in the man's death-agony. The shiny brown coat opened to show a spotless ruffled shirt beneath. The wounded man never ceased to exclaim, "It is poisoned! It is poisoned! I am a dead man!" The wig fell off, and as life gave place to the stillness of death, out of the lined and twisted lineaments of the half-deformed lawyer Poole emerged the pale, calm, clear-cut features of Lalor Maitland.

CHAPTER XLII

THE PLACE OF DREAMS

The key of the mystery was brought us by one who seemed the most unlikely person in the world, Boyd Connoway.

"And her to come of decent folk down there by Killibegs," he exclaimed in opening the matter; "no rapparees out of Connemara—but O'Neil's blood to a man, both Bridget and all her kindred before her!"

"What's the matter now?" said the Fiscal, who with much secret satisfaction had come to have

that made plain which had troubled him so sorely before. So Boyd and Jerry brought Bridget Connoway in to the outhouse where the dead man lay.

"'Tis all my fault—my fault," wailed Bridget, "yet 'twas because him that's me husband gave me no help with the arning of money to bring up the childer. So I was tempted and took in this man after the Black Smugglers had tried to burn the great house of Marnhoul.

"Well might I think so, indeed, your honours. For wounded the man was right sore, and I nursed him for the sake of the goold he gave me. Lashin's of goold, and the like had never been seen in our house since before Boyd Connoway there, that now has the face to call himself a converted man, was the head of it."

"What did this man call himself?" the Fiscal demanded.

"Sure, he called himself Wringham Pollixfen Poole, my lord, and it was not for me to be disbelievin' him."

"And after, when he was under strong suspicion of having wilfully made away with Mr. Richard Poole of Dumfries, why did you say nothing?"

"Now, your honour," exclaimed Bridget, holding up her hands, "wad I be telling aught like that to bring worse and worse on the head of any man in trouble? If it had been yourself, now, how wad you have liked that, your honour?"

"Leave me alone, Bridget. Answer what you are asked," said the Fiscal; "when did you find out that this man was not what he pretended to be?"

"Is it the name he gave you mean, sorr?" said Bridget.

"Yes," said the Fiscal, watching her.

"Faith, then, just when he towld it me!" was the unexpected answer. And then, moving a little nearer, she added confidentially in the Fiscal's ear, "Would you have believed yourself, my lord, that a Black Smuggler, newly off the *Golden Hind*, and a shipmate of old Dick Wilkes, that died under the Wicked Flag, would be likely to give his true name and address?"

"Then, by your story, you never knew that the deceased was in truth Mr. Lalor Maitland, a member of his Majesty's present loyal parliament?"

"Faith, as to that, no," said Bridget, "and it's the saints' own pity, for if I had known that in time—it's independent I would have been. No more wash-tubs for Bridget Connoway!"

"For shame on you, Bridget, you that are an O'Neil, and the wife of a Connoway!" cried Boyd indignantly.

"And the less you say of that, the better will the butter lie on your bread!" said Bridget, advancing a step towards him threateningly. "Your lordship, hearken to me—not an honest day's work has that man done from January to December—nay, nor dishonest either, for the matter o' that! 'Tis ashamed of himself he ought to be."

"Well," said the Fiscal, "it is a very good thing for you, Mrs. Connoway, that young Sir Louis is likely to recover after the knock on the head he got from your friend. But the wonder to me is that you did not speak more plainly when there was a former fatal assault in the same place."

"Now, I put it to ye, sorr, what was a poor woman like me to know about the affairs of the great, my lord?" said Bridget. "Now, in my country, two gentlemen sit late at the wine, and maybe there's a little difference of opinion, the cartes, or politics, or a lady—or maybe just a differ for the sake of a differ. And wan gives t'other a skelp on the side of the head, and if the man's skull's sound, where's the harm? 'Tis done every day in Donegal and nobody a bit the worse! For it's O'Neil's country, my lord, and the skulls there are made thicker on purpose—such being the intintion of a merciful providence that created nothing in vain."

"And can you give us no light on why Mr. Lalor Maitland wished harm to Mr. Richard Poole?"

Bridget shook her head slowly.

"Doubtless," she said, "'twas something about property and a lass. For if money's the root of all evil, as the Book says, sure and t'other—(that's the woman) is the trunk and branches, the flowers, and the fruit!"

The mystery of the death of Mr. Richard Poole was never wholly cleared up. If anything was found among the private correspondence of the late member of the firm of Smart, Poole and Smart, certainly the firm did not allow it to transpire. It is practically certain that Bridget told all she knew. But, poring over the mystery afterwards, and putting all things carefully together, I became convinced that, under the name of Wringham Pollixfen Poole, Mr. Richard had mixed himself up in some highly treasonable business, which put his life within the power of the informer and traitor Lalor.

Consequently when the latter, an expert in disguises, found it necessary to take refuge with Bridget Connoway after the failure of the attack on Marnhoul, he could not have chosen a safer name or disguise.

Mr. Richard, he knew, could not betray him. If any trouble befell he would come at once and see him. So, in fact, when Richard Poole arrived, he demanded that, by the influence of his firm, the children should be at once returned to his tutelage. That Lalor dreamed of marrying Irma is evident, and what he meant to do with little Louis is equally clear—for his death would leave him heir to the properties.

But Richard proved unexpectedly stubborn. He refused flatly to have anything to do with Lalor's schemes—whereupon the wild beast in the man broke loose. He struck and escaped. But it was a sudden fit of anger, probably repented of as soon as done, because it rendered unsafe a useful disguise.

In the case of Sir Louis the plot was deeper laid. From the boy's borrowing of the gun, I believe that Louis had made up his mind to escape with his so-called uncle. But some condition or chance word of Lalor's had caused a shadow of suspicion to arise in Louis's mind. He had drawn back at the last moment. Whereupon, exasperated by failure, and possibly shaken by hearing me thundering at the door, Lalor had smitten, just as he had done in the case of Mr. Richard. Happily, however, with less result. The necessary weapon was not to his hand. The poisoned sword, with which he no doubt expected the boy to play till he pricked himself, was lying with the handle turned away from him.

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At any rate he missed his stroke. But it was only by a hair's breadth, and had it not been for his own sword and my fleetness of foot, the false Wringham Pollixfen might for the second time have vanished as completely as before, while if Louis had died, no one would have suspected as his murderer a man so important as his Excellency Lalor Maitland, Member of Parliament for the county, and presently carrying out the commission of the lieges within the precincts of the city of Westminster.

As to Sir Louis, it was many months before we could obtain any account of his experiences from him, and even then he shrank from all reference to that night in the Wood Parlour. Indeed, he grew up to be a silent, rather moody young man, and as soon as he could obtain permission from the lawyers he went abroad, where at the University of Heidelberg he settled himself with his books and fencing foils. All this happened ten years ago, yet he manifested not the least desire to come home. His affairs are safe in the hands of the Dumfries lawyers, while my grandfather, not to all appearance aged by a day, cares on the spot for his more immediate concerns. Sir Louis has, however, made Duncan the Second laird of the farm and lands of Heathknowes, on the condition that during the tenancy of my grandfather and grandmother they are to sit rent free. Irma and I are still in the house above the meadows, and Duncan has just begun to attend Dr. Carson at the High School. We have been able to buy the Little White House, and have made many improvements, including a couple of servants' bedrooms. But we were just as happy when I rose to make the fire in the morning, and Mrs. Pathrick came over early on washing days to "get them clothes out on the line at a respectable hour!"

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My father still teaches his Ovid, and looks to Freddy Esquillant to succeed him. He is now first assistant and has taken a house for Agnes Anne. In a year or two they expect to begin thinking about getting married. But really there is no hurry. They have only been engaged twelve years, and an immediate purpose of marriage would be considered quite indecent haste in Eden Valley. And Aunt Jen ... is still Aunt Jen. No man, she says, has ever proved himself worthy of her, but I myself think that, if there is no infringement of the table of consanguinity on the first page of the Bible after "James, by the Grace of God, King of Great Britain, France, and Ireland," she has an eye on Duncan the Second, when he shall shed the trappings of the school-boy and endue himself with the virility of knee-breeches, cocked hat, and a coat with adult tails.

At least she certainly shows more partiality to him than to any one, and wonders incessantly how he managed to pick up so unworthy and harum-scarum a father.

For the rest, Heathknowes stands where it did, excepting always the Wood Parlour, which *my* grandfather had pulled down. And where it stood the full-rounded corn-stacks almost lean against the blind wall, so that the maids will not pass that way unattended—for fear of Wringham Pollixfen, or poor hot-blooded, turbulent Richard, his victim, or perhaps more exactly the victim of his own unstable will.

And as for Irma, years have not aged her. She has the invincible gift of youth, of lightsome, winsome, buoyant youth. She still has that way of poising herself for flight, like a tit on a thistle, or a plume of dandelion-down, ready to break off and float away on any wind, which I tell her is not respectable in a married woman of her age and standing. But my Lord Advocate does not agree with me. He rests from his labours—not in the grave, thank goodness, but in his house on the bright slopes of Corstorphine.

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Also the Dean sings an "Amen" to his praises of Irma, but neither of the Kirkpatricks has ever deigned to cross our doorstep.

"They were glad to be rid of you!" I tell Irma.

"Dear place!" she answers. And she does not mean either the house at Sciennes or the Kirkpatrick mansion near the Water of Leith. She is thinking of that once open space by the Greyfriars where, to the accompaniment of keen chisel-stroke and dull mallet-thud, once on a day she came to me, more dream-like than my dream, and said, "*I have found it, the Little White House!*"

THE END

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