

The Complete Crockett

The Galloway Raiders

digital edition

Scottish works



LOVES OF
MISS ANNE

S.R.CROCKETT

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

First published in book form by James Clarke & Co, 1904.

This Galloway Raiders digital edition published in 2021 is part of a decade long project (2012-2022) to bring the works of Samuel Rutherford Crockett (1859-1914) together in one place. The Complete Crockett comprises 66 published works, re-edited and re-formatted by volunteer labour to the highest standard.

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INTRODUCTION

The story is full of incident, and rich in sketches of Scottish character; it has no dialect that should be a stumbling-block to any reader, and is written with a racy humour that will win it an easy welcome among all lovers of romance

The Loves of Miss Anne opens with a familiar pastoral feel: A boy herd on the hills. A storm. A girl brings him food and the potential for romance is established. But there is harshness from the beginning. In the childhood meeting of Dan Weir and Miss Anne, there are shades of the relationship between Pip and Estella in *Great Expectations*. The symbolism of the storm is familiar fictional territory but the stark realism of the faithful dogs out on the hill, is both shocking and moving.

Readers of other Crockett novels will be ready to expect the change from pastoral to a more earthy, rural reality. And it comes soon enough. The story is told retrospectively by Clemmy MacTaggart, servant to Miss Anne of the title. She is a voluble, volatile narrator, not always reliable and not always able, it seems, to decide whose story she is really telling. Of course she is telling the story of them all – Anne, Dan and herself. Set in and around Crockett's fictional Whinnyliggate, (Laurieston) following Clemmy's story is at times like listening to gossip in the servants' hall. And it is meant to be that way. It is a commentary about social class,

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delivered from one lower down the social scale.

Sir Tempest Kilpatrick of Grennoch in Galloway and Ravensnuik in the Lothians is the aristocrat of the story. He is also a figure of some fun. He boasts, in his cups, of his own part in Scottish history. Listen to him speak and he has been in numerous historical battles. One takes everything he says with a pinch of salt, aware that his Jacobite leanings make him a figure of some suspicion in Galloway.

Miss Anne is described as having no respect for persons. She lives a light, trivial life to begin with, reckless and heedless of both consequence and emotion. She plays with people but the narrator Clemmy has great affection for her. As the title might suggest, the love affairs come fast and furious. At eighteen Anne is determined not to marry until she is twenty eight (despite her parents' wishes) but that will not stop her from the fun of eloping. She doesn't care who she upsets in the process, but more than once is in danger of being hoist with her own petard. Clemmy and others spend a lot of time compensating for Anne's reckless behaviour.

By contrast, Dan Weir is a much more sober fellow. He is a constant man, one who can be relied upon. He goes to college to better himself, to make himself more worthy of Anne, but we see (as does he eventually) the folly of this course of action. Dan is the kind of man who walks the distance from Edinburgh to Galloway without a second thought; allowing Crockett to give us wonderful description of the journey: *'he crossed the long moorland, flat and infinitely various with greys and browns and drabs,*

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which lies between Moniaive and St Johns Town of Dalry.’ Dan cares deeply for nature and the natural world even while he tries to ‘improve’ himself. It is ironic that he tries to better himself to be worthy of a woman (Anne) who needs to learn to be worthy of him.

The impact on the land of social improvers such as Sir Tempest, is shown in some depth. Clemmy’s father is a woodsman, who, though an elder of the kirk, finds his real religion in nature. Like James Hogg, *The Ettrick Shepherd* (and perhaps like Crockett himself), Don MacTaggart can say of nature; ‘this IS God.’

The devastation caused by reckless landed gentry is shown repeatedly in this novel, perhaps shown most clearly when the forest is felled. The cutting down of trees is an act of vandalism against nature and the natural order. Sir Tempest paints in the latest colours – chocolate and green- and generally has no understanding of the land, the environment, or the people he has power over.

Crockett shows how out of step with nature Sir Tempest and his kind are, while commenting on the relationship between man and nature. It is perhaps fitting that the pond, which is the scene for curling for the people of Whinnyliggate, becomes something more sinister for John Barnaby who has wreaked havoc both on the people and the place he ‘owns.’ For the modern reader the novel offers an interesting perspective on social class at a time just before it was challenged once and for all with *The Great War*. Clearly the ‘old’ ways were already feeling the strain.

The true heroes of the story are Dan Weir and Don MacTaggart. Dan rises in social class but it

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does him no good. Only when he goes back to his natural state is he truly happy and worthy of love. The ridiculous construction of social class is perfectly illustrated at the party where Anne and Clemmy change status. Clearly there are lessons to be learned by all. And the most important lesson to be learned is that of Miss Anne learning how to love. From the reckless child to the grown woman, she goes on a great journey.

This was the fourth novel Crockett wrote for James Clarke & Co and we sense that while writing somewhat to a formula for his publishers, Crockett is not above having fun with his fiction. In *Cinderella*, the minister cannot keep a servant because of the dust accumulated due to the books in his library. In *The Loves of Miss Anne*, this conceit is used to great effect once more in order to put off one of Anne's potential suitors. Crockett shows that he is not above lampooning the 'seriousness' of authors and there are several telling passages in this novel which reveal his thoughts on the matter.

It is worth remembering that Crockett had been a successful writer for some ten years when *The Loves of Miss Anne* was published. As such he had been subject to some public jealousy and criticism (as all successful writers are.) He meets the criticism head on for the first (but not the last time) in this novel, as he throws back criticism of the 'kailyard' school of writing in Chapter 12. Clemmy says: *A Scots poet, whom nowadays the people who write in penny papers would dub of the 'kailyard' or some such name, sang about it and its bonny summer waters nigh onto two hundred years ago, in the days when to the folk south of the Tweed, Scots*

was still a foreign tongue. This is most likely a reference to the poet Allan Ramsay. It suggests Crockett's thoughts and understanding of 'fashion' in literature. Clearly Crockett has little time for those who undervalue such poetry, though he himself ridicules the poets who write romance to order and have an overblown conceit of themselves. He ridicules those for whom writing is a way of social climbing. Using Clemmy as his voice, he makes the ironic comment that *'Girls who have power over other girls are not usually written of in books. Because men write books.'* This is also an interesting observation on social class.

Typesetters do not escape his ridicule either and at times he seems to be ridiculing the whole publishing process – or rather the aspirational nature of many of those engaged in it. We are told that Anne *'loved reading novels,'* and his mouthpiece Clemmy also comments: *'We have met, Anne and I, some authors whose books really sell. But they are not proud about it— not one bit. If you begin to talk about authorship they rather seem to ask to be let off, but instead pride themselves on their golf, or on having 'got away one to leg for six,' whatever these words may mean—something about cricket, I think. I have seen Anne's boys playing that game, generally with some kitchen utensils (borrowed without formalities) and a croquet ball. But the authors, of course mere novelists and men-on-the-press, are proud of such childish things. At least Anne says so, and she knows many of them.'* Once again Crockett has tongue firmly in cheek but makes a point about the world of publishing he found himself in. While the likes of Jim Scudamore

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might quote Milton, neither Crockett nor Clemmy are held in thrall by the world of books, authors and publishing. The suggestion is that neither should we be. It's not a case of the author biting the hand that feeds, more a confirmation that none of this should be taken too seriously.

The racy, almost picaresque narration of Clemmy MacTaggart maintains interest throughout every bit as much as Defoe's *Moll Flanders*. We know she marries a sea captain. We only find out obliquely how. Because Clemmy is determined that she is not a character in her own story. Looking at this stance, we can see Crockett playing with the boundaries between author and narrator. This reminds us that while he may be writing the kind of romantic fiction that is easily consumed by the reader of popular fiction, he was also a skilled craftsman as an author. *The Loves of Miss Anne* confirms that he did not buy into the aspirational nature of authorship and publishing any more than Dan Weir buys into social advancement. He was still an 'ordinary' man for all his success. As such his work can still appeal to those who are not trapped in a world of aspiration but prefer to find their pleasures in a more ordinary view of the world.

In his own judgement Crockett is a 'romancer', nothing more. Certainly he is a born storyteller, and the modern reader has the advantage of being able to enjoy the story as well as the social history which is part of the fabric of the story honestly and humorously told.

Cally Phillips
2021

CHAPTER ONE

A KEYNOTE CHAPTER

It all sprang from this, wandering on by tangled paths and ways devious, till in the end it became a tale. Upon a hillside, a great swelling hillside, high up near the clouds, lay a herd-lad. Little more than a boy he was. He did not know much, but he wanted to know more. He was not very good, but he wanted to be better. He was lonely, but of that he was not aware. On the whole he was content up there on his great hillside. He had a noble sheiling of one room, a fine 'sheep-ree' or fold built of great rough boulders gathered off the moor at some quite prehistoric period. Above all he had his two dogs, Talla and Kilter. Once a week (and twice in the lambing time), they sent him up provisions from the home farm down the mountain, further off than he could see. They came up also to make sure that he was alive. For during the 'lambing' a herd of the hills must stay by his flocks whatever happens. The whole year depends upon that.

So every Wednesday and every Saturday there would come up from below the jingle of pony's accoutrements and Dan— that was the lad's name, laid his ear to the bare mountain side and listened.

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Yes, they were coming — yes—yes, now he would see a friend's face. Any face was a friend's face in the midst of that great echoing solitude. Yes, if it were only Daft Davie, with the feathers stuck in his hair—feathers of nesting birds which he had gathered on his journey over the brown and burnt-up heather, or white goose plumes that he had brought with him from the farmyard below.

Dan did not mind. Indeed if anything he rather preferred Davie. Davie could tell him things—if you kept him in a good humour. Davie liked plovers' eggs, and on Wednesdays and Saturdays Dan had always a hatful of these ready— that is, so long as the season lasted.

One or two other herds there were up on the hills, whom Dan sometimes came across, but the district was a poor one for sheep, save on the property of Sir Tempest Kilpatrick—a great being, unseen and distant as God, whom for the moment Dan Weir served. Moreover, if Dan did meet these neighbour herds, they knew as little of what he wished to know as he did himself.

Besides the boy was a Scot, and though nationally ready to make love upon occasion, he had the national objection to speaking of the matter 'before folk' —even to the extent of asking a question. For, let the truth be told—it was to hear about a girl, a girl who had hardly ever raised her eyes to him, that Dan was so eager for the company of Davie Seggie, the village 'daftie,' or 'natural.'

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Now there is a Daft Davie in every Scottish parish, in every town and village—and never more than one. Somehow they kill each other off, or perhaps are killed by their subjects, like the rival queen in a hive. So twice a week Dan, prone on his breast, his ear to the ground, waited and barked for the ‘daftie.’ Most of all was he anxious on Saturdays, market-day in the great town to which the farm sent its produce. They were always late on Saturdays, and that made the boy more fretful and unsettled.

‘If they were alone all the week,’ said Dan, who had a habit of talking out loud to himself, ‘then they would not forget so readily, I’m thinking!’ And so, hoping for Daft Davie he would gather an extra hatful of eggs.

Dan Weir was a long boy, not yet filled out to his proper strength. He had overshot himself, as it were. His features were rough hewn, as if the sculptor had been called away from his job. He was big in the bone, and even at fifteen he gave promise of surprising strength.

Then when at last with grunt and groan Daft Davie would arrive at the door of the little sheiling, a little more than an outlying corner of the ‘sheep-ree’ rudely roofed over with peat and turf age, the conversation would engage somewhat as follows:

‘Ay, Dan!’

‘Yoursel’, Davie?’

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'Hae ye the eggs?—I hae been thinkin' on them a' the lang road up your weary hill!'

'Ay, yonder they are in the basket— near twa dozen o' them!'

Then would come a pause, while Daft Davie regaled himself realistically on the plovers' eggs, following the original recipe, which, from grandmother to grandmother, has been handed down through the ages.

With Talla on one side and Kilter on the other, sitting up stiff-legged and with their short ears cocked at attention as on an Egyptian monument, Dan the shepherd waited his opportunity. You must not take Daft Davie too soon, or he would sulk and be silent. Nor yet too late, else he might jump on his pony and in a hand-clap be off down the hillside. For time, tide and Daft Davie wait for no man.

But at the proper moment Dan the Herd put in his question:

'Ye will hae plenty o' news doon by, Davie,' he ventured suavely, 'there's nane like you for news!'

The 'natural' wiped the yolk of the last egg (of two dozen) carefully off his smooth beardless chin with a convenient 'docken' leaf. Then he smiled.

'Ay,' he answered, with a quick shrewd look at the boy, 'she's aye doon by Ravensnuik yet. I saw her milkin' a coo in the byre yestreen. The coo kicked her ower—Lord, her milk! A white-handed lassie-bairn like yon try to milk!'

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And the 'natural' threw back his head and laughed, gap-toothed and bleary.

Instinctively Dan's fists doubled and he itched (as he said to himself) 'to punch Davie's head, daft or no daft!'

But Dan had a certain large patience—that is, up to a point, and besides he wanted information.

'Oh, she's aye at the farm?' he said, 'she's bidin' there a lang time!'

'Ow,' said the malicious Davie, irritatingly non-committal, 'that's as may be. But she will be awa' before ye come doon to winter the sheep on the turnips! I heard her say as muckle yestreen!'

A shade passed across the face of Dan the herd-boy.

Of course it did not matter. It could not matter. How should it? He had seen her but once, and—she had only motioned him to come and help her with a can of water from the well. She had not spoken to him even, not so much as to say, 'Thank you'—but—she had smiled. Yes, he much deceived himself if she had not smiled.

Daft Davie broke in upon these meditations.

'Ag Beattie, the dairy-lass, bade me gie you her compliments, and I was to tell you she likit blue ribbons. Ye were to mind that, when ye gaed to Cairn Edward Fair!'

'Humph!' said the contemptuous Dan, proof against the blowzy and remote blandishments of

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Miss Agnes Beattie, byre-lass at the home farm, 'ye can tell Ag frae me that she will want blue ribbons a lang while if she waits till I buy them for her!'

'Ye nicht do waur,' said Daft Davie, with the veiled and keen look, which one sometimes surprises on the countenance of those accounted shallow of wit, 'Aggie is a tidy bit lassie and has the name o' siller. Besides, her faither is an elder! Gin ye were to mak' a bit slip, he's pack wi' the minister and wad get ye aff easy! That's worth giein' a thocht to, surely!'

'Little wad I care if he were the hale session!' said Dan the herd, lightly.

'Aweel,' said Daft Davie, 'then I hae nae ither news to gie ye—sae I will juist bid ye Guide'en!'

'No, no,' cried Dan, alarmed at this, 'what's your hurry, Davie? Sit a while and gie us your crack. It's no that often that we hear a weel-gaun tongue like yours, awa' up here amang the riddlin's o' creation'.

'Aweel then,' said the 'natural,' only half pacified, 'gie me a decent message that I can cairry back to Aggie Beattie. Ceeveelity deserves ceeveelity a' the world ower! Ag is a nice sonsy lass, and mony a dish of curds-and-whey she gies poor Daft Davie oot at the back window. So, by my faith, I'll cairry her nae back-handed compliments frae the like o' you, Dan Weir— that kens nae better than to be thinkin' yoursel' in love wi' a laird's dochter, a daft hempie o' a lass wi' a tousy tangle o' hair fleein'

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about her shooters like spindrift aff the saut water!’

Again Dan controlled himself. It was hard, but there was no escape. No news for four long days, if he let Daft Davie’ escape unpumped.

‘Weel, then,’ he said, smothering his impatience, ‘ye can tell Ag that IF I get to the fair, she shall hae her bunch o’ ribbons.’

‘She bade me tell ye that if ye couldna come yoursel’, ye were to gie the siller to me, and her and me wad buy them thegither.’

‘Ay?’ said Dan, doubtfully, ‘maybe. As to that, we will see! And noo, tell me a’ about Ravensnuik.’

‘About her d’ye mean,’ said the ‘natural,’ cunningly, ‘man, it’s you that’s the ‘daftie’ and no puir Davie! Do ye no ken what she is—?’

‘Oh, Davie, she’s the bonniest lass in a’ the world! That’s a’ I ken!’

‘Ow,’ said the ‘natural,’ ‘Davie’s far frae dootin’ it. And sae is Tinto the biggest hill and has the maist sheep on it. But—oh, man, do ye no see that ye hae as muckle chance o’ gettin’ yin as the ither?’

‘Davie,’ said the herd-lad with his face in his hands, ‘it’s an awesome thing— this love! It has come to me up here, and I hae naebody to tell but the dogs—Talla there and Kilter! I wish I had never gane to Ravensnuik that waefu’ Sabbath day. Oh, I wish I had never seen her! No, no, I winna say that.

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She is bonny—bonny—an' she smiled at me, Davie—ay, she smiled at me! That was aye something, was it no?'

The 'natural' moved a little nearer, sympathetically. After all, he had a good heart. And also, some folk allowed that there was not so much the matter with his head as he 'let on.' He laid his hand on the herd-boy's shoulder:

'Is it sair?' he asked, with interest. 'Is it sairer than bein' hungry? Davie found oot what that is, the time when the miller o' Whinny shut him up in the big auld barn and forgot a' about puir Davie for near on to a week.'

'My heart is like to break!' wailed the herd, the tears of first love fairly dripping between his fingers, and his collies whining because they could not understand.

'It'll no break!' said the 'natural' sagely, 'na, that's juist the plague on't! It never breaks when ye want it to. I mind the fourth day I gaed without meat, I wantit my heart to break, and I thocht it wad. I knockit my head against the wa' and it never hurt a bit. For the hunger hurt far waur. But I took a thocht. I prayed, and for an answer there cam' the message, 'Try your boot-laces!' And sae I chewed at my bootlaces for three days and three nichts. And, though they werena as guid as swine ribs roasted on the pitata pot, they were an undooted comfort, and keepit the life in me bravely!'

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The 'natural' glanced down at the herd-boy's feet. Then he shook his head sadly.

'It's a peety,' he sighed, 'ye wear clogs, and they hae nae laces. But,' he added, brightening up—'Dan, lad, if ye think that it wad do ye ony guid to chew bootlaces, as sure as death, I'll lend ye mine!'

It was true—and as foolish as true.

Dan Weir, the herd-boy, whose father was no more than a cattle-dealer with a little croft of his own, actually had the audacity to fancy himself in love, at the age of fourteen and a half years, with a certain Miss Anne, a girl of fifteen or sixteen, presently for reasons of health, in residence at the Home Farm of Ravensnuik. There was no reason why he should fall in love. The girl was, and he knew it well, his master's daughter; and even the almighty 'factor,' the big man who rode about on the bay horse, wearing across his waistcoat a gold watch-chain thick as a ship's cable, called her 'Miss Anne' and took off his hat before he spoke to her.

But Love knows no respect of persons.

So, because of these things, Dan Weir, this long-legged, helter-skelter colt of a growing boy, groaned at the door of his sheiling with his face in his hands. She had looked at him once—yes, lifted her bold bright eyes to his, and—smiled. That was what had given him the pain. He pressed his hand upon his heart—that is, upon the place where he, Dan Weir, firmly believed his heart to lie. (It was

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really a much more commonplace, but equally useful organ which lay underneath.) The pain was because other people would love Miss Anne—grown men too, who had a better right to love her. He could not bear to think of that.

Yes, Dan Weir, you are right! Others will love her— and many of them. But they too— be it known to you, Dan (for your comfort, good lad), will feel the pain just where you feel it now, and they will think themselves the only Unhappy on the earth. Ay, and some of them will have no whimpering Talk, no honest rough-coated Kilter to nestle and sympathise with cocked ears and abased tails. Besides, some of them will possess more than the fourteen years (and a half), at which you believe your life to be as good as ended.

Fourteen years— these were all the tale of the days of Dan Weir upon the earth. But for all that, he was as big and as manly as most youths of eighteen or even twenty. And only the childish quiver of the under lip, and the colour that mounted and fell, swift as the thoughts that chased each other across his mind, at all betrayed his youth.

On the hillside he kneeled down and prayed that he might win up through the clouds of difficulty, break loose from the chains of ignorance and poverty, and in the end, win this girl who had taken the very heart from his body. He was a Scottish boy. He believed in prayer, like all highland folk. The skies of his mountain-land lowered so close

that he could almost see his petition enter in within the Veil—pushing it with his hand, as it were.

Besides, all things are possible to a Scottish lad of fourteen, with a ragged book of mensuration in one pocket and a well-thumbed Latin grammar in the other.

But—the way was long to Miss Anne, and many men and many things stood between.

Yet on the following Wednesday something happened, which Dan Weir was never to forget.

It was long past Daft Davie's usual time, and there was a storm brewing on the hills. Dan Weir watched it anxiously. His collies Talla and Kilter wandered about restlessly, with short barkings at nothing and vast parade of diligence as to the straying of the lambs from their mother ewes. Their master watched their twitching tails and uneasy ears with apprehension.

Shepherds say that if, before a storm, you lay a knife or an iron-tipped staff upon a rock, and touch it with one finger tip—or, better still, with your tongue, you can feel it tingle. Dan Weir tried this, and the warning which he (or his imagination) took from the result was that a tempest was brewing, the like of which he had never experienced. But the truth probably was that he too was worried and restless.

For one thing he hoped that Daft Davie would come soon. Already the 'natural' was a full hour late.

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And, if he left it much longer, he might not come at all. Then he, Dan the herd, would have to wait other twenty-four hours... for tidings of the girl who, through that bewitching blonde tangle of hair, had smiled at him. He remembered how her eyelashes curled a little upwards and outwards at the ends ('just like the lamp-shade in the parlour at Ravensnuik,' he said to himself). Her face as a whole he could not see. He had tried too hard to recall that—and so had lost it entirely.

Then there ensued a 'strange silence . . . weird, solemn, stifling. Dan the shepherd heard far-off things, things that were quite out of earshot at ordinary times — the bark of a fox over on Maw Moss, a mower sharpening a scythe, he knew not where, somewhere below— and, though the sea was a good twenty miles away, there came plainly to his ear a sound like that of waves breaking heavily on a rocky shore.

On the other hand many things quite near gave no sign of their existence. They seemed blotted out. The waterfall over at Manors grew suddenly dumb. He could see the old raven which perched on Ottershill Crag open his beak, but, though the distance was scarce two gun shots, Dan could not hear him croak. Some electric condition, unknown movements of the air currents or what not, swept the sounds about like straws in the eddies of a whirlpool.

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Ah, there— there— he could hear it at last— distinctly this time. The fall of a shod hoof— therefore the pony — Daft Davie to a certainty. All the lower slopes beneath him were veiled by a thin mist which wove itself into wisps and tangles, thinning out here and thickening again there, swallowing hump and knoll, and throwing up ridges and outliers of whinstone, equally without rhyme or reason.

Silence again! Had he been deceived? No, there— there! It came again—nearer than before, the ring of horseshoe iron on clinkery stone, then a clear whistle— but he had never heard Daft Davie whistle. And lo!— upon the pony's back . . . sitting a moment smiling at his astonishment and then dismounting tranquilly— Miss Anne!

Ah, never a doubt... Miss Anne herself, that drift of golden fleece—each hair distinct and separate, Waving apart from all the others— those proud, smiling, slightly contemptuous lips— the clear, girlish, infinitely sportive eyes— blue they were, even on that grey day. Dan could have sworn to their colour in any court—for the first five minutes. He forgot and grew confused afterwards.

‘Are you or are you not going to help me down with the provisions?’ the girl cried, glancing over her shoulder at him as he stood thunder-struck and speechless, ‘not when I have come up so far to see you? Yes, and bribed Daft Davie to let me too. Such

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fun! You won't help! Why, I thought you were so strong! You ought to be—eating all this!’

Not yet, however, had the boy found his tongue. It was impossible. It must be a dream. He remembered dreaming something like it, even better—the night after he had first seen her. But then he had awaked, and so doubtless he would presently. But he hoped it would not be yet awhile. Nevertheless, dream or no dream, he sprang to help her.

‘A ham!’ she laughed up at him. Then drawing a handkerchief from her pocket, she wiped her fingers daintily, ‘there, take it away yourself! Greasy thing!’ she cried disdainfully.

‘And what is this? . . . McDougal’s Sheep Dip’— (she spelled out the unfamiliar name) ‘you do not eat that, I hope?’

Dan began to stammer an explanation, connected with certain diseases more or less prevalent among his sheep. The girl put her fingers to her ears.

‘Oh, hush,’ she cried, ‘don't tell me horrid things. Help me instead!’

In giving him the bag of oatmeal, she laid her hand on Dan's shoulder, as she helped him to raise it upon his back. Her fingers touched his neck lightly. That surely was no dream. Dan felt himself blushing—and hoped that he was so brown that it would not show. He was some time in coming back, and when he did come, somehow he could not lift

his eyes from the ground. They seemed glued there. He saw at his foot a red stone he had never seen before. It seemed the most important object at that moment in the world. He stirred it with his toe, and a beetle appeared from beneath. He had never seen the beetle either.

‘Look at me!’ cried a voice, breaking his shyness as suddenly as a stone smashes a pane of glass. ‘Look at me, herd-boy! Tell me, am I not worth looking at . . . after coming so far to look at you?’

Dan lifted his eyes and was struck more dumb than ever. The colour triumphed over his face, even to the flanges of his ears. And within her, the heart of the girl triumphed also. She liked men to look at her like that. She meant that they should. She was learning. It was good fun to begin practising on boys. She was not a common girl, this Miss Anne.

She did not know that this particular one had a book of mensuration in one pocket, Ruddiman's Latin Grammar in the other . . . and in his heart a hope— a hope which was stronger than many girlish vanities.

‘Can you not speak? Were you born deaf and dumb? What is your name? Mine is Anne! . . . Now, yours?’

‘Dan!’ said the boy, mastering himself with an effort.

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‘A fair exchange at last—it rhymes with mine! Now, that is something to begin upon. Do you know, I saw you ... at the home farm, the day after I came. Why do you not come there oftener? You like to stay up here, I suppose, lest you should be set to help me to carry water. I know! That is the reason!’

‘No,’ said Dan, calmer now, and his simplicity of statement coming back to him, ‘it is because I cannot leave the lambs. I am the herd, you see. I am older than you would think.’

‘Oh,’ pouted the girl, with a little contemptuous thrust of her lips, ‘you are only a boy, of course—else I should never have come to see you. I wanted to find out how you lived. And where. That was all, and they would not let me, so I gave Daft Davie five shillings to go fishing and let me come instead. And I promised him to deliver all the things in good condition. Have I? Now, I want your receipt.’

She smiled, and turned her face up to him. He had never seen or imagined anything like that—so dear.

‘Do you know,’ she went on, ‘I thought down there you were such a nice boy—and now you are not a bit. You just stand and glower— like this!’

Miss Anne illustrated the intent vacancy of Dan Weir's regard as it was turned upon her. Then, for the first time, they both laughed together.

‘Ah, that is better!’ cried the pretty coquette, catching at his hand. ‘Now that you are nice again, show me where you live. Oh, what a dark little place!’

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And do you really sleep on that pile of heather? And where is the furniture—the fireplace, the fender, the everything?’

Now it was Dan's turn to laugh, and he settled himself to explain happily.

‘I make the fire here between these two stones—oh, I find lots of firewood— a little way down the hill there is a pine wood— birk, too. I kindle it with heather roots. They burn fine. Then there are plenty of peats to keep the fire in when I am on the hill.’

‘But your meals? Do you never eat?’ cried Miss Anne, shaking out the wealth of her hair—catching it close to her head and sprinkling it apparently over the whole sheiling with a bewitching movement of her chin.

‘I cook them over the fire,’ said Dan. ‘Look at the chain and the hook’ (he said ‘cleps’). ‘I hang a pan there, or a pot when I make the porridge.’

‘And your table and your tablecloth?’ she continued, her eyes large with excitement. ‘Where do you dine?’

Dan laughed again. The word was funny, and he was quite forgetting to be shy. It was at least a quarter of a minute since he had blushed.

‘This is my table,’ he said, laying his hand on a big block of stone roughly squared. ‘I put the things on that, and I sit on this little one.’

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He indicated another stone close by, nearer the fireplace. The girl clapped her hands joyously.

‘Oh, this is splendid!’ she said. ‘Better than I thought. I am glad I came. I wish . . .’

She hesitated a moment, and then went on:

‘I wish I could bribe you as I did Daft Davie, and that I could be herd-boy up here on the hill instead of you! I could make such nice daisy chains to put about the lambs' necks!’

‘Well,’ said Dan, who also was learning, ‘you can't be herd, but if you like you can stop and make the daisy chains—that is, if you can find any daisies up here!’

Miss Anne frowned a little, a very little.

‘It was silly of me,’ she said. ‘I will go out now and see the sheep. It will never do not to look at them after coming so far. And the lambs, the darlings!’

It was the first time that ever Dan had heard the word . . . spoken, that is. He had seen it in books, but he had not considered it a proper word.

Somehow now, as Miss Anne said it, it seemed different. Light was breaking in upon Dan Weir from all directions. Never in his life had he had so many new ideas supplied to him in such a short space of time.

‘Take me to the hilltop!’ she cried, gaily, ‘perhaps we will see the sun up there!’

Talla was looking up at his master and whimpering. Kilter was edging the flock nearer to the

fold. A great splash of ice-cold rain fell on Dan Weir's wrist. At any other time he would have heeded the triple warning, but not now. For Miss Anne had again held out her hand and taken his. So like two young lambs gambolling, they ran over the rocks and the heather towards the mountain top.

Then, for the first time in their lives, Talla and Kilter did not follow their master. Instead, they abode by the flock.

Upon the bald stony summit, clear of all things, even as the girl had foretold, there fell upon them for a moment the pale gleam of a watery sun-break. The curious bluish mist rolled unbroken beneath. Even the sheiling and the flock were hidden out of sight. They were alone, standing so, and it was the boy who drew away his hand first. The pain in his heart was too sharp. For, through the present joy he saw the long, long after-loneliness, the bleak emptiness of the hills, the slaty desolation of the skies, which would surely come to him after she was gone. He did not know enough to take the joy of the moment, and bide the afterblast of that weariness which comes whether or no.

'Why did you do that?' demanded the girl, turning upon him the pair of eyes, bluer than ever. 'Oh, I know. It is because of . . . the dairymaid, your sweetheart— she to whom you sent the fairing!'

Then she sang provokingly:

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'He promised to buy me a bunch of brown ribbon, To tie up my bonny blue hair!'

Dan was aghast, but after a moment he found words.

'If you mean Agnes Beattie at Ravensnuik,' he said, 'she is no sweetheart of mine. I never spoke to her but once in my life, and then it was to tell her to let me alone!'

'Poor thing,' said the girl, tauntingly sympathetic. 'Why didn't it communicate with the police? Perhaps after I am gone, you will say the same of me!'

'No,' said Dan Weir, with blank awkwardness, 'I will never say the same of you!'

This herd-lad of the moors had no skill in these dialectic sportings. They merely shut him up within himself.

'And why will you not?' she continued, to try him. For she was a girl who loved to try men—sometimes dangerously, as more than once she was destined to find out.

For the first time her eyes met his squarely, and after a moment's steady stress of conflict were conquered. The long curved lashes drooped and owned it.

'You know!' he said.

And at that very moment, the whole world beneath them, hitherto shrouded in the milky bluish mist, lighted up into flame. Fire circled them—enclosed them. A white jagged bomb, from which

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ran streams of infinite brightness, seemed to burst within a few yards. The girl uttered a sudden cry and clutched Dan's arm. The universe was filled with the astonishing clangour of the thunder, as if the mountains were indeed falling upon one another in anger. He was the stronger now, for in that moment the shepherd did not think of her.

'The lambs!' he muttered, 'the sheep! Come!'

The last word fell like a command, and instinctively the girl obeyed.

As they went the rain descended. Not in drops as in the lower world, but as it falls upon the utmost hills, where the rivers are bred, and in storm-time the streams thunder down, gaining as they go, till ere they reach the valleys they have become mighty torrents.

It 'rained hale water,' as they say vigorously in Scotland. It fell as if the very windows of heaven, shut since the days of Noah, had been set wide open on purpose.

It could hardly be said that they walked or ran down. Rather they waded. Dan led the girl through the solid thresh of the storm as through deep waters. To right and to left of them they could see the little runnels of water growing already great, turning from peaty brown to creamy white. At times a piece of bank would hollow itself out, cave slightly, then fall inwards with a slump, and so be swept away.

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'The flock—the flock,' That was now his heart's refrain.

Yes, thank God! There they were, safe within the fold. And at the door the two dogs—one couchant, his head on his paws. That was Kilter. Beside him, stiffly erect, watchful, more like a carven image than a dog, Talla guarded the entrance, his eyes set, his hair bristling.

Dan went forward, disengaging himself from the girl, now that for her the danger was past.

He called the dogs. They did not answer. He stooped and caught the first—Talla, who sat erect barring the outgate, with white eyes turned on the flock.

They were still and stiff—both of them stricken by the lightning. But first they had brought in the ewes and the lambs— when the shepherd himself had deserted them, brought them where they would be safe from the storm, from the torrents that seamed the mountains every way and from the terror that would have scattered them hither and thither over the waste.

'Oh, my dogs! my dogs!' cried Dan Weir, the shepherd unfaithful, flinging himself upon the bodies of the two faithful ones who had stood their watch and died for it— 'my dogs— my dogs! Oh, that it had been me!'

'I am sorry! It was my fault!' said the girl, touched to the heart.

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He shook her off roughly, because he had the deeper self-reproach.

'I ken that,' he said, 'but my fault was the worst. It was me that should have bidden here!'

'Can I do anything?' she said, contritely, putting back her hand on his neck. She never thought it would come to this.

'Ay,' he said bitterly, 'ye can gang awa' back where ye cam' frae. That's the best ye can do.'

For his heart, in violent revulsion against his own weakness, burned within him and would not be appeased.

Without a word the girl walked to the place where the pony had been tethered. It had slipped its cord and disappeared. But she did not stop or ask a question. Instead she took the track of white stones which the little trotting feet of the sheep had marked so clearly down the mountain. Now it was streaming with water, ankle-deep. Already, of course. Miss Anne was wet to the skin, but she was not conscious of it—or, at least she did not care. Rather, she was glad, viciously glad. Never had she been spoken to like that before—and by a herd-boy! Besides it was none of her fault if the dogs were dead. She would never speak to such a lout again. It served her right. Her governess, Miss Euphemia, had often told her she was too free with the vulgar. They took liberties. Of which this was a proof. A herd-boy, indeed!

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Nevertheless, surging up through all her indignation there was a strange consciousness that somehow—somehow— she liked it. Yes, all of it—the storm, the violent emotion, the fear, the thunder-burst, the isolation, the momentary protection of a strong rough-clad right arm —ay, even the angry words which had dismissed her. She liked them all. They flavoured better, somehow, than all the flatterings and smooth speeches that had ever been made to her. Even so, the while her feet were stumbling on down the wet path, the heart of Miss Anne surprised its owner by affirming.

The flock lay about, all in safety but dazed with the sudden turmoil. Hardly a lamb bleated for its mother. Scarce a ewe called her suckling. The rain continued to fall from heaven with steady fierceness. The great drops, large as shillings, rebounded, making a hazy-spume a foot above the ground. All the rocks and the stones of the 'ree' walls glistened white— whiter than the blue-black sky or the whirling thunder-mist that swept along in tags and tufts of vapour.

Easily enough Dan found the place where the bolt had fallen. It had split a great 'travelled stone,' or boulder of granite, casting the fragments every way. Then the lightning had run along the ground among the heather, for all the world like the roots of a tree, burrowing and burning, shattering the more solid stones in its course, and throwing out the others to a distance. One of these scorched tracks

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had entered the door of the sheepfold, passing beneath where Kilter had stationed himself to keep the old snow-breaking ewes in check— the veterans of many winters whose lead the flock always blindly follows. Kilter lay more quietly, as if asleep, not a hair singed, only a little black spot burnt upon his nose. There was no doubt about Kilter.

So Dan, the unfaithful shepherd, took Talla in his arms and carried him within the hut. He poured down the beast's throat a gill of whiskey from the little canteen kept for emergencies in the stone cupboard. It seemed as if the dog's heart had not wholly stopped beating. Again his master carried him out into the steady thresh of the rain. That, if anything, would recover him.

As for Dan Weir, he sat and mourned over these two— the comrades that had been so much wiser and more faithful than he.

'Oh, my dogs—!' he murmured over and over to himself.

The thunder growled gradually farther and farther away. The bluish glimmer faded out of the air. The lightning came less frequently. The ewes began to rise and shake themselves, bleating questioningly, as they did when they wanted to be let out of the 'ree' in the mornings. As the thunder sank into silence Dan could hear, nearer and more powerful, the roar of the many waters tearing the sides of the mountain into gullies and ravines.

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Beneath him the clouds sank away, trailing themselves to this side and that in long banks of woolly vapour. A glint of sunshine, sole wandering in the void of whirling mist, lighted the dismal scene. And it fell on the drooping and dragged figure of Miss Anne, who, like a nymph of the waters, rose suddenly and unexpectedly out of the gloom beneath. It made her wet hair more golden than ever, and the little tight curls, water-crisped into hopeless rings and tangles, glinted redly in the light of evening.

Dan hardly took any notice of her return. He was moving Talla's forelegs, this way and that across his chest, and pulling his tongue out and in with a rhythmic motion as the veterinary surgeon at Cairn Edward had taught him. The girl stood beside him, looking down. He caught her shadow between him and the light. He motioned her with his hand as if she had never gone away.

'Take his head in your lap,' he commanded. The girl obeyed silently. Soaked, miserable as she was, there was something about this experience such as had never come into Miss Anne's life before.

Presently Talla emitted a feeble bark and opened his eyes. Then he staggered to his feet, looked once at the flock of ewes and lambs, and—collapsed sideways.

'He is saved—saved!' cried his master, 'and ... I did not deserve it.'

So he carried him, as he said, 'in-bye.'

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‘And you?’ queried Dan Weir, as if he had just found time to attend to the girl's less important case, ‘what are you come back for?’

It was not a very gracious reception, but Miss Anne answered.

‘The pony has run away. I could not find him. The waters are too deep. I could not cross, so ... I had to come back. I am very wet!’

Miss Anne spoke quite humbly, and as she did so she shivered a little. Involuntarily her teeth chattered. By that action she became again all Dan Weir's concern.

‘Come in-bye, too,’ he said, curtly.

‘With the dog?’ she asked, giving him a little glance.

‘Ay,’ said Dan, simply. He did not understand sarcasm. ‘I will make a fire. It will warm ye baith!’

He turned up the canteen and shook it close to his ear.

‘Ye had better drink the rest,’ he said, pouring out a glass, and forcing it on the girl. ‘No, no, it may be the saving of your life. It saved Talla's!’

‘Oh, then,’ said Miss Anne, ‘I will take what Talla has left.’

And she did with a wry face, but not ungratefully.

In a trice a fire was crackling on the hearth. Then Dan scratched his head. What was to come next?

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'Ye will hae to bide here the nicht,' he said slowly, and, as it were distastefully, 'the waters will be oot, and not the very strongest man on the hills could win to Ravensnuik this nicht. I warrant ye Talla Water is thirty feet frae bank to bank, and running red!'

The girl smiled a little.

'I am wet,' she said, mournfully, 'if only I could dry my clothes.'

Then it was that Dan proved himself a man of expedient— better still, a man of tact.

'I hae the lambs and the ewes to attend to,' he said, 'there is plenty o' peat and fir-tree knots in the corner yonder. Ye will find bread and cheese on the shelf—ewes' milk there in the can. My father's big cloak is hanging on the nail ahint the door. I will leave ye to do the best ye can. If onything be wanted, ye hae only to gie me a cry! I'll be oot-bye—no far away!'

And wrapping his checked plaid tight about him, Dan the shepherd went out. He would have closed the door upon the dog. Talla had been lying, panting in the warm firelight. But as soon as his master moved, Talla, feeble and tottering, lowered his nose and whined after him. So Dan opened the door a little and the dog came out as if nothing had happened. It was now clear.

The light was that of late evening. The air hardly more than cool. A gentle fanning breeze came from the north, and before it the clouds were rapidly

being carried away, while only a distant reverberation upon the hills told of the storm that had passed. But on every side the 'ree' was pent in by rushing waters. Dan Weir could see them flinging themselves down from the heights in spray-clouds, jerking white jets high into the gloaming, and filling all the air with a slow tremulous pulsing roar.

Dead Kilter still guarded the opening, head couched on his paws. One or two of the bolder ewes, eager for the drenched grasses without, mindful of the sweet eating of the refreshed patches hidden among the heather, and the yet sweeter short croppage of the path edges, sniffed doubtfully at him. But none had dared to break through that silent guard-line.

Taking a pick and shovel, and leaving Talla in charge of the flock on the nearest knoll, Dan took his dead friend in his arms and disappeared in the direction of the wood. When he came back, the wind and the exercise had almost dried his clothes. He was warm, and before evening fell the wind had made every stitch upon him as dry as bone.

The darkness came on but slowly and as it were with reluctance. The nights are not long in May, up there on the hills. Dan brought some part of his ewes within— those of them at least that were likely to need attention, together with the motherless lambs he was 'settling' upon other parents.

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Then he went back to the stone seat outside the bothy, and, drawing his plaid about him, he sheltered himself beneath a great overhanging boulder. He could see that the fire was still maintained in the hut behind him. But he heard no sound from within.

Slowly and slowly his heart warmed to the wondrous truth.

The girl he had dreamed about— the girl with the smile was there— near him, in his hut. Almost he had forgotten her, in the shame that had come upon him because he had deserted his flock. But now again his heart warmed. No one could take this away from him. She had clung to him, for a moment, yes— though he might never see her again. It was indeed little likely that ever he would. But at least for one night he had kept watch and ward at her door.

A light hand fell on his shoulder. Miss Anne stood beside him— the light from the opened door lying like an ingot of silver across the drenched backs of the ewes in the fold.

‘I could not sleep,’ she said, ‘it is stifling in there. But I have got my clothes dried, so I should not complain. Would it disturb you if I were to sit down beside you for a while?’

And without even waiting for an answer, she sat down on the stone seat, with her back against the warm wall of the sheiling.

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'You will be cold,' he said; 'I will bring you the big cloak my father sent me for the night work with the lambs.'

'No—no,' she protested, 'do not go!' But even as she spoke he was gone.

'My father is a cattle-drover,' he explained, when he returned, 'and this was made for him. I have never worn it.'

He thought somehow that this would commend it to her, but she was subtler far than he.

'Oh, but I wanted you to have worn it,' she said, 'I wanted to think about it all afterwards! You are not angry with me any more? Well then, give me your plaid instead.'

But as the fringes and the lower folds of Dan's checked plaid were still damp, this was out of the question.

'See,' she said, gleefully, 'I will settle it. I am good at arranging things. Stand up!'

Rapidly she adjusted the great frieze cloak, of Irish shape and size, making of it a warm little nest by the door of the sheiling.

'Now,' she said, taking the command, 'you can see all your flock from here. Sit down! So,' she added, flitting like a bird under one of the big wings of the cloak and nestling in beside him, 'it can shelter us both like that, and we can wait for the morning. Oh, I do hope it will be a long time.'

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Dan felt his heart beat thickly. And small wonder. He could feel a soft shoulder against his. It was warm, and a stray lock, wind-stirred, flicked his cheek ever so lightly. These things troubled him, and in the still of night the glamour fell.

‘Now tell me all of your life,’ she said, to break the silence, ‘do you really stay here all the winter? That must be dreary indeed!’

‘Oh, no,’ said Dan, happy to have found a subject, ‘in a few months I shall be taking the sheep down from the hills, and in the winter, if I can save enough money, I shall perhaps go to college— to Edinburgh!’

‘To college? To Edinburgh?’ said the girl, with a sudden check. And it seemed to Dan that she moved instinctively a little farther away from him. He could not understand why. It seemed to him the very finest thing in the world to go to the Edinburgh college.

Really— it was because the idea of college seemed to bring the shepherd lad more into Miss Anne's world. She did not want that, somehow. It might frighten her if she found him there. She did not want to be frightened. She wanted experience, and to know just how to wind men round her fingers. And she was not at all sure that she could do it, with this absurdly direct herd-lad, who talked so glibly of going to college and took his dinner off a boulder without a table-cloth.

‘Tell me about your people,’ she said, abruptly.

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And he told her of his father, the old man, called dour and fierce, the mighty man of his hands, but tender at the heart as a child. He spoke of their croft, and of how he would not be dependent on his father, even for his education. He told her all about his studies, and it was about this time that he first became conscious of a light weight upon his shoulder, and a low steady breathing that stirred a curl of golden hair (not his own) just underneath his ear. It tickled, rather, but was . . . well, bearable.

The girl had declared herself unable to sleep within the hut, with the fire-light leaping and flickering. The close air of the confined space at night had stifled her. But out here in the warm stillness of the early summer night she slept peacefully, her head on Dan's shoulder, and his father's great frieze cloak about her. He put out his hand gently and drew it closer, till she was fairly hidden in it, all but the upturned face and the head of gold that glimmered so palely. So he sat, wakeful and happy until the dawning.

Twenty times was he sore tempted to kiss the lips that were upturned, parted a little, so close to his, their soft breathing coming and going on his cheek. But he did not— no, he did not.

'I am no thief!' he said, grimly. Yet, so strange a thing is conscience— years after— ay, year after year, he regretted that he had not kissed her then. He used to lie awake and wish that he had not let

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the golden opportunity slip by for ever. Nevertheless, had it been given back to him, at any moment, he would only have done the same. Such was Dan Weir.

Perhaps it was to make up for this sacrifice of self-restraint that the little wandering curl aforementioned came, and, of its own accord, kissed the herd-boy's lips.

Of course in the morning they came and found her, the factor leading them on his bay horse, but they could not take away the memory of that night.

It made Dan Weir a man. But as for Miss Anne, with whom we have chiefly to do, she had (as we shall see) many byeways to travel, many blind alleys to explore, much wilfulness to be rid of, and many foolishnesses to repent of, before she was again to meet that herd-lad with the rough-hewn unfinished face and the straight word which came to her like a command— at once strong, and harsh, and salt— like rain in the face as one goes down to the sea. And yet withal, strangely sweet also.

CHAPTER TWO

HOW I, CLEMMY MAC TAGGART, WENT TO GRENNOCH CASTLE

Now I wrote out the first meeting of Miss Anne and Dan Weir because I came upon a kind of draft of it the other day in the Grennoch Estate office, forgotten among old tags of legal tape, ends of string, abstracts of accounts, and gay cockerel feathers for the busking of the late factor's fish-hooks. So I may as well go on with the story now I have begun. But if anyone supposes it is all about Dan Weir and how he became a great man, that reader will be disappointed. First, last, and all the time, I am going to write about Miss Anne— just Miss Anne— my Miss Anne.

As for the herd-boy up at the sheiling, he was just a herd-boy for long and long afterward. True, he had hope in his heart and a Latin grammar in his pocket. True also, he had college to go to— tasks and trials, pitfalls and pleasures, many and many, before he came again into the life of my Miss Anne. He did not forget, however—nor, I think, did Miss Anne, at least, not altogether.

So let Dan Weir take his road. That is a story for a man to tell. For me, I am just Miss Anne's

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Clemmy— playmate first, then (what shall I say?) accomplice in villainy; last of all companion, and, though she deigns to call me also friend, her very faithful servant always.

Now as this is no short or plain tale, but one with infinite windings and strange shifts of fortune, I had better begin by telling all, about everything and everybody; and first, concerning the little village of Whinnyliggate, close to which both Miss Anne and I were born.

It has been reported that a village is dull. Yet in three months Jock Milman has thrice been arrested for poaching and as often let off with a caution— the Laird himself on one occasion appearing as his advocate and proffering bail. Secondly, Meg Boyle downed the Sheriff's officer in fair combat on the bridge, and, after putting sticking-plaster on all his wounds, the two went amicably off to Kirkcudbright, where the case is still being arbitrated upon by the higher powers. So thoroughly is this being attended to, that Meg has not yet reappeared in Whinnyliggate. Then there was a wonderful flood, when pails and porridge pots went sailing down the gutter to the Whinny Water as common as cabbage stalks, and when of Marion Wilie, being wet to the middle saving the pig, it was found out that . . . (marks of modesty here) that she wore ordinarily a pair of her husband's trousers— a fact which is calculated to be remembered in Whinnyliggate so

long as either Marion or her man are in want of leg-coverings.

And as for a sense of humour, I wonder to hear city folk talking. I am a woman myself, and so have a sense of humour of a kind—though it does not consist in sitting down on my husband the Captain's best Sabbath hat in the kirk after the opening prayer, which is his notion of the humorous. Humour is not expected of women, yet there are many in Whinnyliggate, both maids and married, who have it. Ay, and think nothing about it, either.

But even considering humour in its more popular and masculine forms, did not the same Jock Milman, having at once the smallest house and the largest family in the village, threaten to kick any of his offspring out into the black night if, upon any provocation whatsoever, they happened to cry?

'I'll learn ye to greet i' my hoose, ye thankless messans,' said Jock.

And, sure enough, in process of time he learned them.

Humour is just as the folk have it or want it. For instance, it would be a silly person that would expect an appreciation of humour from Betty Walker, who runs into her front garden door every time she coughs, for fear that the whole street should not hear her. And when the minister goes by, faith, she is like to tear herself to pieces. There is

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humour in that, if you like. But you could not expect Betty Walker to see it.

Then there's the Registrar, too, a pompous body. He is getting so fat he cannot see the polish on his boot uppers unless he sits in one chair and sticks the heels of them on the back of another. But for the life of you, ye durst not say, 'Ye are getting stout, Maister Docquetter,' or even, 'Certes, but ye are brave and lusty!' The whilk would be the truth. But instead you are obliged to say, 'I'm feared ye canna' be eatin' weel, Maister Docquetter!' Or, 'Ye are fair dwinin' awa', Registrar ! Ye should see a doctor about it!'

For if you did not, there was never a saying but the ill-set body might fill ye into his books as 'defunct,' and if he did, how were ye to prove it on him? I have heard this argued, and Simon Watson, the joiner at Lochfoot, as knowledgable a man as ever walked in shoe-leather, upheld that if a man was once entered on the books of the Registrar of his parish as deceased, he was dead in the eye of the law—ay, and his wife was a widow. There were several that objected to this, but Simon dared them to try it! And at that, certes, they sung very small. They were plainly feared they might be clapped within the compass of four deal boards and rattled off to the kirkyard, willy-nilly!

As far as I am myself concerned there is no great reason why I should write a book. I am just an old woman that has kepted her eyes fairly wide

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open, on her passage through this world. And having been long with Miss Anne (though now with a comfortable pension) my mistress said to me the other day, after I had done talking, 'Clementina, why don't you write all that down. It would make a book,' says she.

'But, 'deed,' answered I, 'that wad be a bonny-like thing. For, to tell the Guid's truth, it's maistly about yoursel', Miss Anne!'

And at that she laughed, and said that if the names were changed, ever so little, she did not think that her husband would mind— at least not much.

'You see he likes to hearken to your stories of Lang Syne,' she said, 'he says they make him young again. He often comes over to the Captain's just to hear you call me 'Miss Anne!'

This in its way was a kind of permission, and indeed I was far from vexed at it. For the Captain (that's my man) not stirring far away, and having told me all his adventures so often that I remember the very names of the foreign places he has forgotten, the writing of the book is something to do on sleepy summer afternoons at Whinnyliggate, when even the clang -clang of Robin Forgan's hammer in the smiddy puts you to sleep in spite of yourself, and in the long forenights when the winds from the west whoo in the keyholes and cry ill names at you down the wide throat of the kitchen lum.

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But this will never do. I have not yet told who I am. Though indeed for that matter everyone in these parts knows me well enough, yet since all who read the book may not have these advantages, I may say at once that I am Clementina MacTaggart, or Geddes (having married a merchant sea-captain of that name). I am not so old that I have forgotten what it is to be young, and not so young that the Underside of mortal things is hid from me. And the reason that I am writing this history of the Loves of Miss Anne is that I, more than anyone else (ay, even Anne herself), observed with appreciation the beginning and the end of these things. These were brave days, and I am the one to tell about them. There was a time when it hurt to think of them, but not now. For with the Captain, I misdoubt me but that my heart has grown fat and comfortable like a stalled ox.

I was her companion more than serving-lass—her maid, as they say in these days. Indeed I would have fetched any one a driving clout on the ear who had dared to call me even a princess's maid.

As to Anne herself, she permitted me to call her by her first name between ourselves—the two of us being of an age, and almost of a humour—in so far, that is, as the daughter of a wood-forester and the heiress of a laird can be of one humour. Not that Miss Anne was a great heiress then, for as the times go we have not come to that of it yet.

But in this at least we were of one mind. We were resolved to hold the lads at arms' length. We

would have nothing whatever to do with them— that is, till the time was ripe. And to my sorrow it ripened sooner than we intended, which is why I can tell these things with some birr and without any black and odious solemnity, as if one were talking to the minister upon a day of intimated visitation, with the big family Bible laid out before him.

I mind—and who that was alive at the time when he walked the earth does not?—Sir Tempest Kilpatrick, and how he came to be called that curious name. It seems that his father, or his grandfather—I mind not which—was taken a prisoner in the old wars, and held to ransom in the house of Sir Roger Tempest, an Englishman. And whether it was some laddie's ploy with one of the daughters of the house (and nothing is more likely, me knowing the Kilpatricks as I do) or for some other reason, but ever since this young Kilpatrick came back from England, when the ransom had been scraped together belike— the eldest son of the house has always been a Tempest and the second— if his lady served him with suchlike—a Roger.

No, this old Kilpatrick did not wed the young Mistress Tempest, she being (so they say) already promised to another man. But neither did he lose her or her folk out of his mind. And indeed I have remarked this more than once— that when one of these young English lasses makes up to a Scots lad in his youth, he is not apt to forget it afterwards.

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And what the reason of this is, it would scarce beseem me to say. Perhaps it is that these southland lasses lend their cheeks to the caress where one born north of the Tweed would up-head and spit like an angry cat. Both sorts have their points, but I deny not that at the first and for a young lad, there is something wondrous taking about the English way of it.

But not of such was my Miss Anne.

Sir Tempest himself, as I knew him, was a littleish man, with a mouth as firm as if cut with a razor and then sewed up again. Everything he said came out with a pop like a pistol going off. He had wide lands in many counties which he looked after himself, and though such a little man of his body, he could climb a dyke or race a roaring breadth of muir-burn driven by the wind with any herd or hillman of them all. White close whiskers, a head covered with a kind of stubby oose (or fuzz) as if he had forgotten to take off the soap when he last shaved himself— with the slight addition of tight riding breeches and a short shell jacket of military cut, there you have my master Sir Tempest Kilpatrick of Grennoch, in Galloway and Ravensnuik in the Lothians.

He had a son, who was named Tempest also, according to the family tradition. But as his father was sufficient of the name to be loose at once upon the countryside, the boy went decently and reasonably by the name of John— this being his

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second and more Christian appellative, as the minister explained to my mother, after he had taken him to task for throwing a handful of dirt or glaur at his best clerical hat one day when he came visiting.

'The name Tempest has something noble about it, as belonging to a great family and, in especial, to my most honourable pawtron,' said Mr. Physgill McMachar, blowing his nose as if he would also blow a hole in the handkerchief, 'but it does not do to wear it on every mannerless young rascal that can throw a handful of mud at my best beaver! Yet what can I do? Me he heeds not, and I do not wish him skinned alive through my informations, which is what would happen if I informed his father upon him!'

'Tell him that you will tell!' counselled my mother, shrewdly. And so for a time the minister had peace, and a clean hat.

The whole given name of the son and heir was Tempest John Barnaby Kilpatrick—which was surely enough, when you come to think of it, for any baddish young fellow going to the devil. For me, I have always believed in good honest single names like Simon, Samuel, Ebenezer, and so forth. These give a lad a chance in the world and keep him out of bad company. Besides, when the sermon is dull in the kirk, he can always look them up in the back part of his Bible and find out what they mean—

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which for the most part is something improving, more than ever his parents thought about.

But John Barnaby had none of these advantages. To begin with he was not really ill-set or even ill-mannered, as the minister affirmed. Only he had gotten an ill name in his unconscious cradle. And a crying shame it was, too, thus to take an advantage of a babe. Nay, even for myself (though, by the intervention of a kind Providence, I have been preserved from the grosser forms of ill-doing, or at least from the consequences thereof) I cannot but think that I have suffered sorely from being called by such a daftlike name as Clementina. The which was all my father's fault, having a great-aunt of that name, from whom he had expectations. But she left him only a brass berry-pan with a hole in it. And my mother, who wanted me called after herself, said that it was a Judgment. If that, the sins of the fathers were indeed upon the children.

Now this hole had been stopped with solder or something, and neatly painted over. For that was the kind of woman my great-grand-aunt was—deceitful, even in death, through not having been bred up God-fearing. And the first time the pan went in the fire after we got it, with a full cargo of apple jelly, the bottom fell into the conflagration and all was destroyed. My mother said, when she was giving it to my father about his relative, that she would not have cared but for the sugar (which had not yet been paid for, because we settled our accounts at

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Steven the grocer's regularly on Saturday night). And my mother said that it seemed to her an awfu' way to begin the blessed Sabbath, to pay for twelve pounds of sugar 'that had gone bleezin' up the lum.' And as a matter of fact my mother was never so broadened on religion after this backset, though a good-living woman enough all her days. But she felt somehow that Providence had a pick at her.

'For,' said she, 'if itherwise, the bottom wad hae fa'en oot o' the berry-pan before the sugar was pitten in.

And the Lord forgive me, at this time of the day, for saying a word, seemingly against the good kind mother who has been in her resting-grave these thirty year.

Well do I mind the day when there came to our cottage door a rap as of a lady's knuckles, little louder than the pecking of a robin on the roof of the porch. By the way, my father was the first wood-forester in the county to put a porch to his house, and my mother trained red flowers over it.

'It's the Leddy hersel'—oh, puir thing!' said my mother, who compassionated her mistress because she did not know how to manage her husband. My mother thought, and I am not sure but what I agree with her, that all men can be managed—that is, if the woman immediately concerned can only hit upon the way. However that may be, the Lady Kilpatrick never found that out all the days of her.

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Indeed it is difficult to believe that any woman born of woman, could have managed such a little gunpowder spunk as Sir Tempest, who was for ever ready to jump down your throat as soon as you opened your mouth, as the saying is.

At any rate my Lady Kilpatrick moved about the estate like a shadow flitting across the grass. She walked, as it had been, on egg-shells. She spoke in whispers so delicate that they would not have started a wild fawn, which had never seen man.

And when my mother went to our cottage door, pretending that she had not heard, there before her eyes stood the Lady Kilpatrick.

'Come your ways ben!' said my mother, wondering what she was seeking.

'It's about your little Clementina!' said the lady, twittering like a year-old sparrow on the hedge in a December frost.

'And what about my Clementina— what has the young lass been doin'?' my mother demanded, all her feathers stiffening. For, to do her justice, she was always ready to do battle for her brood.

'Nothing—oh, nothing!' said the lady, hastily, 'she is indeed a by-ordinar good bairn, from all that I hear!'

'That's as may be!' returned my mother drily, 'and sae ye were wantin' my wee Teena juist to tell her that!'

'No, no,' said the lady, hasting on, 'the fact is, my daughter Anne needs a companion—or at least

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Sir Tempest thinks so. And— and—I thought of your daughter.’

‘She has her education to get!’ quoth my mother.

‘I had also thought of that,’ said the Lady Kilpatrick, ‘what is to hinder her to be educated along with my daughter—at least so long as Anne remains at Grennoch?’

My mother and the lady had not got further than that, when at that very moment they heard the crisp crunch-crunch of boot-heels on the little strip of gravel my father had brought up in a hand-cart from the waterside. Now, there were no boot-heels in the world so determined as those of Sir Tempest. He walked as if he would dig each single sole-plate down into the bed-rock.

‘Ethelberta,’ he called out, sharply (for that was my Lady's name), ‘is not the matter settled yet? When and on what terms is the girl coming? Does the woman understand that such is my desire?’

With that my mother, who in the cause of her bairns, would not have been afraid of the King himself, went to the door and confronted the Laird. She had all her life a rosy sonsy face, and wore her arms naturally akimbo, especially after washing day.

‘Good-day to you, sir!’ she said, ‘your Leddy tells me that ye want my bit lass to be a companion to yours.’

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'Tut-tut,' said the Laird, irritably, 'I expected that all would have been settled. For what else did I, send her Ladyship on ahead, but that I might not be detained with trivialities? Answer me that.'

'Sir Tempest,' said my mother, 'my man is your wood-forester, and deserves his wages, as weel ye ken! But him and me do not keep a rabbit warren for you to pick your pets oot o'— when ye want a pair.'

'Mistress MacTaggart!' cried the Laird, as soon as he caught the sense of what she said, 'I think you forget to whom you are speaking!'

'Forget here— forget there!' quoth my mother, 'ye dinna get awa' my wee Teena before I ken mair about it.'

Sir Tempest looked across at his wife.

'There are the Milmans in the village who would give us a child for the asking, and never trouble more about the matter!' he said. But at this his wife shook her head, meaning that they were ill brought up.

'Ay, gang your ways to the Milmans,' said my mother, 'your bonny young bairn will learn mair mischief in a twalmonth frae a Milman than she will forget a' her life!'

'Then what might your terms be, my good woman?' inquired Sir Tempest, whom I was astonished to see had grown quite amicable all of a sudden.

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‘That she shall be allowed to come hame and see her mither when she likes— that she bides in this house frae Saturday to Monday, and that no difference is made between my lass and yours at bed, table, or lear!’

It was an example of my mother's dictum that the true way to lead a Tempest is by the nose. For the Baronet instantly gave way on all points, and the very next day I, Clementina MacTaggart, found myself installed at Grennoch Castle, where it looks down so proudly from its bosky brae-face upon the village of Whinnyliggate.

CHAPTER THREE

CONCERNING MISS ANNE AND ME

And then who so happy as Miss Anne and myself! The day was too short for us, and even Miss Euphemia Dixon, our daily governess, could not drag the blessed sense of what was to come, out of our lives. Nouns neuter, and verbs transitive and intransitive went in at one ear and out at the other. We lived for the long rambles through the woods, where I taught her how it is that the squirrels keep out of sight, till she could evade my father and his men as easily as I. As for Sir Tempest he made as much noise as a wood-lorry with a swagging team of tracers, and, in the silence of the woods, you could hear his snorting fussiness a good mile away— that is, with a soft following wind.

I am an old woman now and Miss Anne— but that waits the telling. At any rate neither one nor the other of us has forgotten the long rush through the spring grass barefoot, the plowtering in the lukewarm reedy water by the ford, the hiding as my Lady's carriage passed by, the shiver that went through us when Sir Tempest, sitting high on his grey nag, looked straight in our direction, shading the sun from his eyes with his hand. Sooner than be

caught by him, I think we would both have gone to the Bad Place straight.

Ah me, it was good—and better than good. No boy or breeched thing of any sort came near us in these days. We did not want them, being sufficient to ourselves. It is a doubtful Providence which changes this between sixteen and twenty. They say that in some worlds men and women keep apart, and sprout off like the plant called cactus, the spiky thing that Sandy Ireland (one of Miss Anne's young men in the old days) brought her out of Mexico. And in some ways this would save a lot of trouble. But of this an old woman is no fair judge, and indeed in my day I have had no reason to complain. At any rate things are as they are, and men and women as we find them must just be made the best of.

That is, at least, till we are asked to make a new world according to our own plans, of which I for one see small prospect. The old is better.

Now, like most villages the world over, our village was essentially a simple-minded place, neither very good nor very bad. There was in it no embarrassing superabundance of archangels. But the place was not wholly inhabited by devils either—as it has become the fashion to picture Scotland in these days. Rather a sort of betwixt and between, like the rest of the earth. Indeed about that time Miss Anne and I were but ill fitted for heaven, and we were too young to deserve the other place. We did

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no more than what nine out of ten sprightly girls would have done with our opportunities. But you see Miss Anne, being what she was, the only daughter of Sir Tempest, and me her companion and the child of a poor head-forester, the news of some of our pranks travelled farther than we liked.

For instance, there was that one when she and I got ourselves up on the roof of John Gaw's house (he was the village slater and chimney-sweep), and thought it was a fine joke to put sod over the lum. So that, as they had all gone to bed and John had arranged a keeping coal to burn all night— his duties causing him to rise early in the morning—it was a Guides mercy that we did not smoor that whole houseful of people, and send them to their long last account with no better preparation than a glass apiece of tippenny ale, mulled with brown sugar, as the slater and his wife liked it every night.

But to do us justice the most part of our time was taken up with keeping out of Sir Tempest's way, and getting enough of our lessons done to make a decent daily appearance before Miss Euphemia Dixon. It was I who was mostly in disgrace there. This I frankly allow. For Miss Euphemia was a great respecter of persons, and what would have been matter for a smile and an indulgent pat on the head in Anne, meant a solid birching for me. Not that that mattered, specially in the winter season, when we never could get warm enough. For to be plain Miss Euphemia was no hand at the business. She had

muscles like so much chewed string. She should have taken a lesson or two in the art from my mother, whose left hand was a stinger, when she got the swing and range. After threescore year I declare I can feel it yet. She lies in Whinnyliggate kirkyard, decent woman, and the Lord have mercy on her soul! Nobly she did her duty by those whom He had committed to her charge. And sometimes, as we thought, a little bit over! But doubtless it was for our good, and at the time it made me consider Miss Euphemia Dixon's castigations (as she called them) as of no more account than so many rat-tail tappings as they run across the bed.

So this good time went by all too quickly, till there came into our heads, Miss Anne's and mine (strangely enough about the same time), a new thing.

It struck me that Miss Anne was beginning to dress herself nicely of a Sunday, and to cast her eyes on the floor instead of looking boldly about the kirk, to see at whom she could spirt a slippery orange pip. For from the front of the gallery and out of the depths of a high-backed pew suchlike may be done with great success. Moreover she hid her face in her hands all through the opening prayer, instead of looking through her fingers at the lads, or putting out her tongue, as was her custom. I asked her if she felt a pain anywhere, but she said no. It was nothing. Only— the kirk was not the place to play

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Tom-fool in, and whatever else he might be, we should ever remember that Mr. Physgill McMachar was an ordained minister.

I stared at Anne open-mouthed when she said this. It sounded just like Miss Euphemia. At the time I had no idea that she had grown up.

But she said no more till we were both on the way home. Anne and I walked through the grounds every day when it was fair enough (or whether or not if we could make a bolt for it), to get out of Sir Tempest's way, who always drove home with my Lady rain or shine, summer and winter, in the great black-covered coach, that smelled of varnish enough to make you faint.

So this day, when we were out and safe under the scent of the lilacs, Anne took my hand and we went on right pleasantly through the green lanes where never anybody was.

'I think you are going to be very pretty, Tina!' she said, suddenly, smiling coaxingly at me.

'Goodness gracious, what have I done!' said I, taking out my kerchief, wetting it with my tongue, and then rubbing both sides of my nose, and especially the end of it. For I thought, of course, she was making fun of me, and that I had a great smut which she would not tell me about.

'No, death and double death,' she said, 'I mean it. You are going to be a very bonny lass!'

'Hum, that's neither here nor there,' said I, 'what is there for dinner.'

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For though the Laird and his wife supped alone in the dining chamber, we had the same as they had in our own room, so Anne and I took it day about to run down and tease the cook to tell us what had been ordered. Sometimes too if we spoke her fair she would give us apple fritters extra or jam rolls, or even suet pudding all out of her own head—also without troubling to send any of it in to Sir Tempest— who being a pillar of subscription lists all over the country was, of course, something of a skinflint at home. So much so that both kitchen and pantry went in fear of him. As for my Lady, she mattered little, any way you took her.

But Anne could not tell me what was for dinner. She had never thought of asking, she said. She had heard say that girls should be slim and fairy-like. And if they could manage it, it was also better to be lily-pale. She thought she could do both.

‘Then you’ll have to stay indoors for that,’ said I, spitefully. ‘Also you must stop hunting rabbits and climbing trees, and such things. You’ll have to curl yourself up on sunshiny days, and suck sweets, and read a book like Miss Euphemia!—But what’s the meaning of all this nonsense?’

‘Oh, nothing,’ she said, ‘it was just a thought that came into my head. ‘

We were silent after that for quite a while.

At last she spoke to the purpose, though I did not know it at the time.

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'There was a young man in the kirk today!' she said.

'I saw him!' I answered, though there had been many young men.

And, strangely enough, and without the least reason in the world, we kissed each other. At least, I knew somehow that Miss Anne wanted some one to kiss her. So I did.

We slept in the same room, and often, on chilly nights, in the same bed. I think it was about this time that we told each other how much I loved Anne and Anne loved me. We were never to care for any other, but be just the same to each other all the days of our several lives, and never, never let anyone come between us. This seemed most solemn and irrevocable, at the time.

I think Anne always looked prettiest in her night-gear. And once looking down at me from the window in the June dawn, all frilly and white about, when she threw me a rose, I caught it, and for the first time in my life wished that I had been a man. Anne was of a skin fine as a blush rose leaf with the dew on it, her cheeks showing her thought before the word came, with sweet blue eyes that were only sapphire at noon, and when the sun shone in her face, but at other times dark as indigo. She had hair that had been cut and had grown in crisp and wavy and short about her brow, 'tirly-wirly' we called it, and its colour was mostly that of the ripe ruddy parts of wheat. Men always turned to look after her.

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On the street it was so, great gentlemen and coal carters alike. And in the fields, just the same. The mowers stopped in mid-swathe to the danger of their own ankles, and the ditchers gaped with a full shovel, the wet dripping on their moleskins. Thus was it ever with my Miss Anne.

As for me I was a dark-skinned slip with a towse of dusky hair that was only pretty when I looked at the sun through it, and an impudent mouth, which must be for ever saying things I ought to have been sorry for— but seldom was! Few turned to look at me. But, I may say it here, for it will be apparent afterwards, those few had a way of returning to look more than once. This is not set down, God knows, with any pridefulness. There is nothing of that in this tired old heart. But, though the Captain makes me a good husband and a true, I must write matters down as they happened if there is to be any use in the book at all. Moreover, it will not see the light in his lifetime, at any rate. That I have arranged for.

And now as to the young man we saw in the church, who, though he knew it not, was the cause of our kissing the one the other without any reason. His name, we heard say (as girls always hear these things), was Alain Gairlies, and he was a painter who came to the place with canvases and colours, but never made any wages that the people could hear of, though he owed no money either.

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First of all he had lodged with the Misses Gilruth, two old maids whose uncle had been the village doctor, and who on that account were accounted of the elite of Whinnyliggate—which indeed they were. But after that he had made up to my father in some of his travels through the woods, and being summoned to give an account of himself, the young painter lad did so with such effect that my mother took him in as a lodger. He had my old room, up in the gable-end, within reach of the apple-tree—from which many a time I had swung myself down and nobody been any the wiser. This I think he used also for the same purpose.

Now even at this time Alain Gairlies was the man best to look upon that I had ever seen. The village lads were louts beside him. They hung about the bridges, dawdling and spitting. On tackety boots they clumped in batches into the public-houses. When they were spoken to by a girl a little beyond their position, they had to nudge each other half a dozen times before a response came. Little wonder was it that Alain Gairlies was a marvel to half the maids of the country-side, and that there were men who had sworn to break his head if ever they should come up with him in a lonely place.

It was I who met him first face to face. I had been at my mother's. I went there, as I have said, every Saturday and abode till the Monday. At least that had been the first arrangement. But since Miss Anne and I had grown so close in one another's

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intimacy, it was but seldom that I spent my Sunday in the little cottage at the wood corner.

But now Anne had said, 'Go, Tina. See him, and bring back word. I want to know what he is like!'

I looked at her cunningly, but she answered, without colouring, 'No, not at all for that reason!'

Though I had stated none.

With that I had perforce to be content. Nevertheless, in my little cot-bed—so different from the giant four poster on stilts which I shared with Anne— my sister Bess lying beside me, I remained long awake and thought of Anne, doubtless awake also, and wondering how I had prospered in my acquaintance with our marvel among men.

As a matter of fact I had not seen him at all. Nor did I till the next day— which was the Sabbath, when I found him whistling and cutting sticks at the hag-clog. This he was doing for my mother. My father, who was strict as to all religious observances, was rebuking him.

'Sir,' he said, 'being English by upbringing you will not know, but it is the Sabbath day, and no fitting time, therefore, either to whistle, or to be snapping sticks over your knee!'

Alain laughed in a way that, curiously enough, disarmed my father.

'If I were one of your foresters, you would not catch me at this job, I would not so much as lift an

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axe,' he said, 'but I do not think that the Almighty will be any the worse of the breaking of two-three sticks of kindling-wood for the goodwife's fire. Besides' (here he laughed) 'you are an elder and know the verse that says that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath!'

'Methinks, young man,' said my father grimly, 'ye are better at the giving out of the text than at making the application!'

That was the way he had of speaking, but when I came out he stopped and Alain took off his cap. Upon this my father looked quite different. The youth's cap was blue and of fine cloth. He looked at me just once, and let the axe-butt drop on the great block of wood.

'This is my daughter Clementina!' said my father rather sourly, as I thought. 'Here, lass, run in and help your mother with the porridge pot. Haste ye fast!'

But I was in no hurry, and I did not mind for father. He had never hurried me yet, but on the contrary always let me have my own way— that is, when mother was not there.

'Indeed,' I answered, 'it is as much as my ears are worth (or yours either, dad) to get between my mother and the porridge pot. She thinks it is somewhere mentioned in the Scriptures that nobody but Janet MacTaggart can cook anything worth eating. Only she has never been able to find the exact place!'

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Alain the painter stood with his cap in his hand looking at me while I was speaking. And for the first time in my life I was conscious of a regard quite different from that of the village lads, or indeed of any one who had ever looked at me. I wanted to run away, and I am sure that I flushed to the temples. It was strange. Now a rude look such as one may get at a tavern door or from a group of roisterers, I can brush that off like a swirl of snow fallen on one's shoulder. It does not regard me. But though Alain Gairlies looked very gently and civilly, there was such a grappling memorableness about it, that made me wish myself well back in the quiet of Anne's chamber.

But that was only till I had broke the ice. He seemed to think it strange that he had not seen me before at my father's cottage, yet he knew not well how to ask the question, but edged and hedged about it and about. Also, he told me afterwards, there was another thing which puzzled him. My sister Bess was a good lass, and pretty withal, most biddable and in all ways an infinitely better daughter than I, but ordinarily she had not a word to throw at gentle or simple. While as to me, though in position I have been little better than a servant all my life, it has chanced that I have always been in the company of gentlefolks, and especially in that of my Miss Anne, who is the most gracious of innocent mischief-loving souls. So, I suppose, the word comes

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to me differently. It could not have been for any beauty that Alain looked so long at me on that first day. For I declare on my sacred word, and the minister's gown and bands, that my sister Bess was ever ten times prettier, having a complexion like red currant jelly smothered in cream, teeth like the milk for whiteness, and the shyest down-drooping eyes, which, however, she never knew how to use. If Alain Gairlies had any thought of love-making in coming to my father's house, he would surely have set his mind on Bess.

But instead he stood looking me up and down—as if he never could look his fill. Yet nowadays insolently, rather like one surprised out of his manners.

'It is strange,' he said at length, 'that I have been here listening to the blackbirds this whole long week, and have not set eyes upon this the prettiest of them all!'

'I am neither blackbird nor crow,' said I, saucily, 'no, nor yet a cuckoo either. But for all that, I know well enough where to hide when the hawk is in the sky!'

'Tina,' said my father, speaking severely from the doorway, 'such discourse tendeth not to edification. Go within and get you ready for the kirk. It is the sacred Lord's Day morning!'

As if I had forgotten.

I could see Alain lift his axe uncertainly as I went indoors, and it came to me that he would cut

few more sticks that morning for my mother. Presently, however, he followed with the fagots he had already cut, but as I had gone to Bess's little chamber at the back (of course watching him all the while through the keyhole) he looked about him awhile, set his bonnet on his head, stamped with his foot, and went out to pace to and fro in front of the house as if he had been vexed about something.

Then in a little came breakfast time, and my mother called us all in to partake of it. But Alain was served by himself in the little ben-room or parlour. From which I saw plainly that my father had been talking to my mother. During the meal the rest of us made as much din as was permitted to be on Sabbath mornings, in spite of all that the elders of the house could do. I judge that it must have been lonely in the ben-room, for Master Alain had several wants, and made many occasions to call into the kitchen for salt and sugar and mustard as the case might be, till the patience of my mother was fairly worn out.

'Gin ye want onything mair,' she cried to him, 'ye can e'en come but and get it!'

Then when it came round to eleven o'clock, which is kirktime in the cottage at the wood corner, lo! there at the turn of the road was my gentleman walking up and down in his best black coat and with a Sabbath smile on his face. Bess was teasing him, but that I think he minded not greatly.

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'Ye hae changed your mind quick,' I heard her say, for as yet I was hid behind the wall where the ivy grows thickest, 'I ken weel what for ye changed your mind.'

'Do you so, Bess?' he said moderately, 'then I will give you fourpence to buy a Bath bun if you will keep it to yourself'

'Fourpence! Bath bun! Me!' cried the scandalised Bess. 'I declare I will cry it out to the folk gathered in the kirkyard. It's because my sister Tina has come hame, and ye think she will tak' ye to the kirk tied to her tails, and maybe introduce ye to Miss Anne!'

'Introduce,' says he, pretending ignorance, 'what's that? And who may Miss Anne be, if it's a fair question?'

'It is not a fair question,' said Bess, 'for neither you nor any hereaway can have anything to do with Miss Anne. She is trysted to marry a Lord!'

'I hope she will do better!' said the painter lad, quietly, patting Bess on the head, which made her angrier than if he had kissed her. Bess hated to be belittled, especially before me, for I had just come into sight.

So it came about that I had to go to the kirk elbow to elbow with our non-such. I wished with all my might that I could get out of it. I waited for Bess, but she had too much mischief in her to spoil the effect of our entrance together into the kirk-yard. She knew that it would make the good folk of

Whinnyliggate crane their necks like ducks after a drink. And my father dared not go faster than my mother, who was short in the puff, and wanted all the hills levelled down on the kirk-road. She could not think what road-men were kept for. To her they never seemed to do their duty, often as she spoke to them about it. The roads got steeper and steeper as the years went by.

I do not remember much what we talked about. Alain had a low quiet voice, and without doubt he was bent on making himself as pleasant as he could. But I simply could not listen. All my mind was on the bodies clocking together in the kirk-yard and waiting for us. I seemed to see the nudging and to hear the whispering. I was on the point of saying, 'Oh, do go away—I will not go a step further with you!'

When, believe it who will, by the little green gate which leads out of the path through the Grennoch shrubberies there stepped—who but Miss Anne—yes, my own Miss Anne! Hardly could I believe my eyes. And she was nearly as pretty as when she threw me the rose down from the window, so fresh and June-like and smiling.

She always looked her best in lavender and sprigged lilac, whether silk or plain prints. And this day it seemed she must herself have looked out every becoming thing in her wardrobe. Indeed she had done so. For I remembered afterwards that

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when I asked her on the Saturday forenoon what I would put out to air for the Sabbath day and the kirk, she answered, 'Oh, what does it matter— any old thing at all!'

But to all appearance she had changed her mind—oh, yes, she had very certainly changed her mind. But she was calm. She looked at us two as if she saw us miles away, through the small end of a spyglass, like flies walking on the ceiling. Then she gave a little upward nod for me to come to her.

'Clementina,' she said, 'I am glad to see you. I just can't get that last button in. '

She held up her gloved hand simply and naturally, and just as if she did not know that I knew, and that she knew that I knew, that she could put it in herself any other day in the week as easy as eating an egg. But that is where blood tells. So as I fumbled in fastening the button, Miss Anne looked across me, and said in a calm voice (as if it had been kept for a long time in Sir Tempest's ice-house), 'So is this your brother, Clementina? Perhaps he can do it, being bare-handed. You are strangely awkward today!'

And that very moment, when Alain was buttoning the glove and she was looking at him and he at her, the big black Grennoch carriage lumbered by, and there was Sir Tempest looking out of the window with a face on him like a turkey-cock. I think he could have eaten us all without salt—there on the place where we stood. And as for me I wanted

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to vanish away and never be seen any more at all in the precincts of the parish.

But Miss Anne never winced a hair, nor changed colour.

She only bowed smilingly to her father and nodded to her mother as the coach whirled past, kissing her disengaged hand twice as the angry baronet shook his fist back at her.

Only those who know nothing about the matter will tell me that there is nothing in blood. There is. I have seen and know.

CHAPTER FOUR

DAN WEIR'S GARDEN OF TEMPTING

I said I would not, but being a woman, of course, I have changed my mind. I am going to try. Perhaps when I said that I would let Dan Weir's life-story alone, all unconsciously I laid a wager with myself. At any rate, I can always fall back on the stories to which I listened in the old forester's lodge at Grennoch, stories that told me more of the youth of Dan Weir than anyone could know except himself.

What came of the herd of the sheiling when he was left behind with Talla, his faithful collie, on the hillside? This happened. Dan Weir felt the whole sky suddenly emptied of sunlight. As he went about his work in a dull lifeless round, he heard the curlews mocking him. 'Miss Anne, Miss Anne,' they called, 'ye hae lost her— Miss Anne, Miss Anne!' And so they kept up the wearisome jangle, till Dan bent down and stoned them away into the sky. But yonder was the burn she had walked beside. Through that hill-gap he had seen her come up like a vision. Away to the east, where the sunshine lay on the oats, she abode still—forgetting all about him.

Then one Saturday he heard the news that Sir Tempest had taken his daughter home again to his

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chief estate of Grennoch in Galloway, and instantly Dan became wondrously interested in that ancient province. One of the neighbouring herds— he lived only four miles off over the untracked heather— came from Galloway. Dan almost lived in that sheiling till he had pumped him dry.

Not that he gathered much comfort on these visitations.

‘What are ye sae keen to ken a’ about the Castle o’ Grennoch for?’ said his friend, David McWhattie, a native of the parish of Kells. ‘Are ye thinking o’ shifting your service? For me, I wad advise ye to bide where ye are. Gallowa’s a far cry and a hungry soil. Tak’ my advice, laddie, and stick to your faither’s bullocks and the kindly bit crafts o’ Venturefair.’

‘Never,’ cried Dan Weir, bringing down his clenched fist on the table till the porridge platters rattled, ‘never —I will never be a drover in this world! I am for the college!’

‘Ay?’ said David McWhattie, without surprise, and with the habitual respect of the Scot for the desire of learning in youth, ‘say ye sae? The college! Weel, Guid gie ye strength to arrive, and your faither length o’ purse to pay your fees!’

‘Never a saxpense of siller will I tak’ frae my father,’ said Dan Weir, holding up his chin, ‘either for fees or feeding!’

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'Weel, Dan,' said Herd McWhattie, 'there's nae service in sittin' glowerin' at me as your faither does when he is takin' his coat off for the fechtin'. But, certes, if I had had a faither like yours— up to his elbows in the makkin' o' yellow siller—I wad gang through the college wi' baith credit and comfort. I wad eat beef every day to my dinner, and hae something warm ilka nicht to help the study in! Nae 'pitatas and point' for me!'

It was the autumn of the year before Dan managed to rid himself of his charge up at the sheiling. Then he betook himself down to his father's house at Venturefair. The old man was from home— away at some of his frequent cattle trysts. The house smelt lonely. It echoed eerily, and to Dan, as he went restlessly about with his books, the world also seemed lonely and empty—far more so than up at the sheiling among the friendly sheep.

'If I could only see her once,' he said, 'only once, I could go to college with a happier heart.'

The great idea came upon him suddenly as he sat on a stone over by the place called King's Edge. The moors stretched brown beneath him. His father's fenced crofts and trim outhouses lay at his feet. He could always remember the spot after, and how it looked that clear brisk October morning.

'I will go and see her!' he said, aloud; 'no one shall know of it!'

He started with long strides down to the house, as it were, spurning the heather from between his

feet. Dan went straight to the larder. There he filled his pockets with barley bread, with honest wheaten scones, and, snatching up his shepherd's crook and plaid, he set out south-westward, his long easy lope conquering one by one the hundred or so miles between him and Galloway. Day waned. Twilight came. Dan Weir was still marching unhurriedly. So he went all through the night, lighted by a full moon which shone through fleecy clouds at intervals. He struck the ridge between Clyde and Nith just as the day broke. Then, turning aside near the high village of Wanlockhead, he found a little miners' shelter cowering like a rabbit-hutch on the brown face of the moor. Dan wrapped himself in his plaid with the skill of long habit, keeping the last fold to cover his head. Then, with his staff ready to his hand and a bundle of dried bracken for a pillow, he was instantly asleep.

Awaking while the day was still young, he broke his fast on the barley bread, washed down with water from the first brook upon the way. He crossed the long moorland, flat and infinitely various with greys and browns and drabs, which lies between Moniaive and St. John's Town of Dalry, and in the quiet glow of the afternoon he set his face down the Ken valley towards Grennoch.

Shepherds halloed to him from the hills half fraternally, seeing his attire, and partly to know where he was going. The pattern of his plaid

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betrayed him as an outlander, and Galloway does not like 'incomers.'

'From Ravensnuik in the Lothians to Grennoch!' replied Dan Weir, lifting up his voice to carry across the roar of burns and up among the stones of the hillside.

'Aich ay, d'ye tell me sae? Noo, man!'— the questioner was revolving the answer— 'oh, then ye'll be yin of Sir Tempest's East-country herds. What are ye doing here?—Come to take some winter sheep to eat up his fat Lowden turnips, I'se warrant!'

'That I do not ken till I get to Grennoch,' cried Dan with diplomacy.

'Ow ay,' the Galwegian would reply, 'I ken. Ye juist gat the order to come, and ye wad get your orders at Grennoch Castle. That's Sir Tempest's way. What wages might ye be getting ower in the East country, na?'

Having answered, Dan strode on, leaving his inquisitor stock-still on the hillside looking after him, motionless as one of the grey granite blocks in the midst of which he was standing.

'Ay,' said Dan Weir, over and over to himself, 'ay, Dan, the word is a true word—ye gat the order to come!'

And all the long way he never once thought of his Latin grammar in his pocket, because of the vision that fled before his eyes, of the sunny head which had once on a time rested in the hollow of his father's frieze coat.

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The robins, perched on sprigs of bramble or perking on slanted paling-stob, sang their snatches of song, the first after the midsummer silence, to the misty autumn landscape and the still reaches of river and loch. But Dan hastened on, smiling as he went, his eyes glorious with hope.

'The road to Grennoch? Whaur cam' ye frae that ye dinna ken ye are standing on the Laird's ain grund at this minute?'

The voice out of the wood came in reply to a question. He who spoke carried a bill-hook over his shoulder, a man grim, grey, and of military erectness. But Dan, close now to his goal, was on his guard. He was only a herd passing through, he said, on the way from one job to another. And the Man-with-the-Bill-hook, watching him from under bushy eyebrows, thought no worse of him for his reticence.

'Ye are but a laddie— ye are far frae hame,' he said, after a pause.

'I hae done a man's work for full two years!' said Dan, with a squaring of his shoulders. The Man-with-the-Bill-hook noted the action, and kindness overwhelmed suspicion.

'Are ye seeking work,' he asked abruptly.

Dan Weir stood stricken, without answer—a great temptation rising suddenly up within him. It pushed the colour to his cheeks, and the Man-with-

the-Bill-hook thought he was debating the question of acceptance.

'I am in charge of these woods,' he went on, kindly, to help the lad to a decision; 'I can give you work in them if you like.'

Dan was still silent—the temptation now thundering in his ears like a river in spate. To be all the time within reach of her, to see her day by day, perhaps to speak with her—ah, what would that not mean to him!

But, then—the college, the career which he had planned to make for himself—education, learning, the getting of wisdom—these sacrest things to a Scottish lad—must he give up all these? He could not answer. The future hope warred with the present desire, and for the moment neither was strong enough to overcome the other.

'Take your time, laddie,' said the man kindly, shifting his bill-hook from 'slope-arms' to 'carry-arms,' as a signal of departure. 'Gang up to the bothy yonder and say Donald MacTaggart bade ye. They will gie ye a bed there, and come and tell me your answer in the morning.'

Dan Weir turned away without salutation, but the Man-with-the-Bill-hook, being wise, understood.

'He's in trouble,' he meditated, gravely rubbing his chin with his forefinger, 'and yet, I dinna think it's a lass, either!'

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For that is the usual cause in Galloway of lads going off a-wandering through unfriendly lands in search of work.

Nevertheless it was indeed a lass who was the cause of Dan Weir's lack of resolution, though the attendant circumstances were somewhat unusual.

Instead of seeking the foresters' bothy at once, Dan went roving across the woodlands, by paths dappled with the last level rays of a ruddy sunset. He could see the supper-smoke of his future comrades rising into the windless chill of evening from among the green tops of the pines—always a cheerful sight the world over. But in that hour Dan Weir shunned men. He was at odds with his own soul.

What was he to do? What answer to give the morrow's morn? At times this seemed what his father would have called the finger-post of Providence. He had come away these hundred miles upon an impulse. To see Miss Anne—once only—and go! That had been his desire, his fullest intention. He would not even speak to her—so he had covenanted with himself upon the way. But now, without any asking on his part, with no hint of mortal man to direct his path, he had come direct to the head forester of her father's woods, and from him had received the offer of a situation.

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Might not God mean him to win to his goal this way? Could he not study and improve himself there— among the trees, near her?

Almost he was persuaded—almost he had argued himself into it, thus walking and fighting it out alone, when quite suddenly he was aware of a dark massive wall before him, ivy-covered, with high solemn tree-tops behind it cutting black against the rose and pearl of the sunset.

In the wall a gate stood open—a door rather, of solid oak, nail-studded, topped with iron spikes.

Dan entered, dreaming on his pleasant dream. Paths forked this way and that, and he followed the widest without taking much notice as to the direction of his going.

Fresh-fallen leaves carpeted the ground, lying thick along the borders. His foot here and there spurned a chance apple. Dan Weir looked about him. He was in an extensive orchard, and he turned instinctively lest he should be taken for a thief. But the sound of voices arrested first his footsteps, and, anon, with one great leap, his very heart seemed to stop within him. Then it went on again with quick, light beatings, which took the breath from his body.

Yet his feet moved in spite of him in the direction of the voice. Two people were coming along the path towards him, their faces turned upon each other, and the sunset, or some inner glow, upon both.

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Miss Anne—yes, it was Miss Anne— his Miss Anne! But her hand rested on a young man's arm, and she was looking up into his eyes, smiling the while. Dan stood still, and as they passed the girl's eyes swept him once as if he had been a stone. But not a gleam betrayed recognition, and the next moment he could hear them going on again, laughing and talking, as before, into the shadows beneath the laden apple-trees.

Dan did not argue. He did not comfort himself with any thought that in the uncertain light, under the dark of trees, a hundred miles and more from the Sheiling of the Storm, it was impossible for Miss Anne to connect Dan Weir the Lothian herd-boy, with a dim figure seen in the depths of the old orchard of Grennoch. This time Dan made no excuses. He took his answer as complete and final. So instead of going to the forester's bothy, he went immediately in search of Donald MacTaggart's cottage. It was easy to be found, nestling in a clump of trees within a stone's throw of the great avenue down which he had passed.

Donald, without his bill-hook for once, faced him as he came forward, his elbow on his own gatepost. He was reviewing the events of the day. His eyes had marked Dan's tall young figure from the furthest turn of the avenue, but his lips spoke no word till the lad stood before him within arm's length.

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'Weel?' he said, without the least twitch of an eyelid.

Dan wrung his hands with a quick hopeless movement, quite instinctive.

'I canna tak' your wark,' he said. 'I canna bide till the morning. But I couldna gang without tellin' you. Ye were kind to me.'

The light in Donald MacTaggart's eyes lost its friendly gleam.

'What ill have ye been doing that ye dare not bide to do honest work?' he demanded, with a slow still emphasis, which reached no ears but those of the boy.

'No ill hae I done,' said Dan Weir, 'little ye ken— oh, man!'

But the Man without the Bill-book knew more than he thought. He had the diviner's way, seeing deep into men's hearts and things hidden.

'It is a lass,' he said quietly— very quietly.

'It's no a lass!' Dan broke out fiercely, answering the tone more than the words of the chief forester.

The wise man waited, his chin on his palm. He knew the boy would speak out now.

'It's no what ye think,' he stammered. 'I want to gang to college, to win the learning.'

'Ah!' said Donald the Seer, advancing to shake the boy's hand. To his surprise Dan Weir drew back.

'But,' he added, hesitating a moment on the edge of seeming deceit, 'it's for the sake o' a lass!'

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And at that confession the Man-of-the-Bill-hook clasped Dan Weir's hand in a grip three times as firm as he had meant to give it. For he, too, was wondrous human. He was my father, and there was no one like him. That is how I know all these things. Witness my hand, Clementina MacTaggart.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCERNING SLOE-THORN AND A LITTLE
GOOSEBERRY

Of course a girl so pretty as my Miss Anne could not escape having other suitors, especially as all over the country side Sir Tempest had the name of being a skinflint. And skinflints are always rich, as is well known. Besides her own money, which her father could not touch, there was this also that his son John Barnaby was no favourite and a waster as well.

Now there were many young men in our part of the world who belonged to county families, or thought they did. But of course, there were none of so old a standing as Sir Tempest, who had been Sheriff for many hundred years, or at least his family had. Sometimes, however (so they said), Sir Tempest used to forget this, and I believe that after his second tumbler he would even assert that he had been hereditary justicer of the county in his own person since the reign of Robert the Bruce. I think he had even been killed at Bannockburn—on two several occasions, once with the aforesaid Robert and a second time at a place called Sauchieburn, at a battle which does not appear to have been so glorious. Besides, he had shielded the

King on Flodden's stricken field till he was pierced with forty arrows—the very arrows, a little draggled and more than a little dusty were still extant in the armoury off the hall to prove it. He had been a Lord of the Congregation and, besides making a great deal of money, had reproved John Knox for rudeness to the Queen. This might well be, for there was no better judge of rudeness in other people than Sir Tempest Kilpatrick. He had fought for the Stuarts from Marston Moor to Culloden— and since that, if he had not done anything noble, it was because there had been nothing noble to do.

And as Sir Tempest believed all this of himself, it is little wonder that there were few among the county gentry whom he thought worthy to aspire to his only daughter's hand. I have heard his wife and himself hard at it many a time, arranging about Miss Anne, a trouble they might have spared themselves. My Lady had a quiet peepy voice that carried farther than she was aware of, and as for Sir Tempest, he was ready to blow the roof off at the first sucking whisper of contradiction.

'Well, my dear, there is young Aitchison of the Fur-bar,' my Lady Kilpatrick would say, taking up the thread, 'he has a good estate. Tempest darling! That much you cannot deny!'

'Don't darling' me!' he would retort, 'have I not told you so a thousand times! Why, any of the servants might hear you! And your young Aitchison,

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indeed! His grandfather sold salt in the Saltmarket—or flat fish and cockles in the Fishmarket, and his mother took out her own ash-bucket every night and morning! I tell you, they are but Glasgow bodies—every mother's son of them. I wonder what you are thinking of, Ethelberta, to even an Aitchison to the daughter of a Tempest Kilpatrick, fifteen times sheriff of the county!

‘But I was far from evening then, dear,’ the lady would reply, ‘only—you see for yourself—we go nowhere. You never will go to London, and the time is getting on. Anne must marry somebody. You would not want her to be an old maid, I suppose!’

‘Better—far better,’ shouted Sir Tempest, ‘that she should be an old maid bearing the name of Anne Kilpatrick than the wife of the son of a Glasgow fishmonger!’

‘And then the expense,’ murmured his wife, softly, who knew his weak points, ‘think of that, dear. And besides, young Aitchison being so rich, his father would not haggle about a dowry.’

‘Umm-mm!’ said Sir Tempest, sobering slowly, ‘there may be something in that—in a general way, that is. But dowry or no dowry I could not stomach the fishmonger. And at any rate—she is but a child. There is plenty of time to think of these things. Anne is very well as she is. And Clementina MacTaggart will keep her right, a sober, douce lass and well aware that her father's position as my forester depends upon her good behaviour with Anne.’

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The point of view had not previously struck me—as Miss Euphemia was in the habit of saying when Anne asked for a holiday because it was Shrove Tuesday.

‘Well, then, there is Harry Glenfield of Newton,’ my Lady went on, ‘surely there is nothing to object to him. A clever fellow, handsome, and such a good rider!’

‘Bad blood— shocking bad blood!’ said Sir Tempest emphatically, ‘four hundred public houses to their name in Yorkshire alone, and two generations of whiskey-tasting and sanctimony—brimstone in one hand and a golden harp in the other! Humph! The combination does not take me, my Lady!’

The baronet's wife shrugged her shoulders.

‘But there is nothing really against the young man, and he seems to be so fond of Anne. He has ridden over four times lately, and the last time his mother sent a hymnbook, bound in limp purple morocco!’

Curiously enough, for some reason, this seemed to infuriate the baronet.

‘Out of the window with it— this moment—out of the window, madam! Nothing wrong with the young man —no— not now perhaps! But wait. Lady Kilpatrick, wait till the bairns begin to swarm. Such people all have them by scores, and a fresh taint comes with each one of them! Now, I am a mild man

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and noways violent, but before that young Glenfield of yours takes my Anne, I'll break his neck over the window sill— ay, and hers too, if need be!

'Oh, Tempest!' was all his wife could find to reply.

The old gentleman had a certain decision of opinion— especially in utterance.

'Well then, there is Frank Fairweather of Millfore,' the lady continued, 'he has been wild, I know, but he has long done sowing his wild oats. Besides he is to stand for the county, they say, as soon as old Earsman goes, and he is doing well on the Road Trustees and the Poor's Board and all these things!'

'Ay,' said Sir Tempest, with a slow chill fierceness, quite different from the way he had spoken hitherto— with more of hate in it, 'you know, my Lady, that I do not set up for a saint. Nowadays men wear top hats and no aureoles. But I tell you this, my Lady Kilpatrick— if Frank Fairweather comes near the Grennoch sniffing after my daughter, I'll blow a hole in his skin as sure as his name is what it is. Wild oats, indeed! I know your Frank Fairweather sort of wild oats. He has sown them, has he? Yes, and he is lying off on the quiet till he can get enough money with some honest man's daughter, to sow a second crop and a third after that. Well, it shall not be at my expense—nor shall he break my Anne's heart in the process. Wild oats, indeed! I'll wild oats him!'

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And the little fiery man stamped his way up and down like a horse loose in a strange stable. I declare there were times when I could have kissed Sir Tempest. Even the whirlwind had its points, as he would have said himself.

‘Well, Tempest,’ his wife would venture presently, ‘what fault can even you find with Johnny McAndrew down by the Nine Mile Bar. He is a good lad, and the tears come in his mother’s eyes whenever she speaks of him. I have seen them. He was head of his class at college, they say, and has certificates on sheepskin. His mother brought them for me to see—!’

‘Bah, sheepskin!’ cried the small fiery devil’s advocate, ‘Johnny—Johnny McAndrew and his mother—which is the sheep and which the lamb? On my soul, the mother is the better man of the two, even with the tears in her eyes from Monday moaning till Saturday night. I wouldn’t use Johnny McAndrew as a bass at the Grennoch front door to wipe my feet on when the roads are muddy. Let me hear no more of Johnny McAndrew. When I think it is time for Anne to be wedded, I will give the matter my personal attention. Till then, I will thank you to attend to your still-room and your jelly-pans, my Lady Kilpatrick.’

Which, on the whole, was perhaps as good advice as the Baronet could have given his wife. But there were certain elements of the problem which Sir

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Tempest did not take sufficiently into consideration, and concerning which I could have instructed him.

And these, to be plain, were Miss Anne's own ideas on the subject.

For you see, the young woman had views—not, to do her justice, so much upon matrimony as about love-making.

These had come upon her quite recently and it was only to me that Miss Anne had confided them. And indeed, to whom could she speak safely, if not to her accomplice. I think that these ideas dated from the day when she saw Alain the painter in the kirk-loft devouring us with his eyes. But of course, Anne could not be expected to acknowledge that. But then, betwixt women, these things do not need to be said. It is only stupid men who must be explicit with each other.

These then are the views of Miss Anne upon love and marriage, delivered at the age of eighteen, and after the buttoning of the glove.

'No, Clem,' she confided to me, crossing one foot over her knee and caressing the instep, as was her custom— Anne had some fashions like a boy— 'no, my father is right. I shall not marry any of these— louts. And, more than that, I shall not marry any one at all— that is, till I am ready. Obedient to my father? Oh, yes, certainly! Most certainly! But then you see, I can always get round my father when the time comes.

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‘Oh, I can do it!—I ‘rule the Tempest and control the storm!’ Dad thinks himself a very Buddha of wisdom, the wrath of the Achilles concentrated into a tabloid and packed for exportation. But, if he were Jupiter spouting lightning and thunders, he would not make me marry when I don't want to— no, nor you either. You are prettier than I, ever so much, and if we could change places for a day or two, you would see. Perhaps we may—who knows?’ Marry, no, Clem! Not when I am only eighteen. I mean to be ten years a girl, at least. At this age what do I know? What do you know? Why only just what the books tell us! And how do we know whether they speak the truth or not? Well, for myself—I mean to find out!

‘Slowly — Slowly —oh yes, and without much breaking of hearts, not more, that is, than is necessary. And you shall help. Yes, you will! It will be easy. You and I think alike. We have been brought up together. Together we have endured Miss Euphemia. For over fifteen hundred days we have seen the corkscrew curls shaking at us. This patient suffering has added to our happiness—and hers. We have been locked up in the same cupboard. We have stolen the same jam, and shared the loot like good men and true. We have been whipped when found out, and except that you are brown as a berry and I — blue-white like curds and whey— we might pass

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for one another, as far as shape and figure go. You speak as well as I do. You are my dear companion!’

‘I am your father's servant,’ I said, ‘or at least your mother's. And, except that I love you, like a sister. Miss Anne, I will be yours as long as you want me.’

And at this point I began to cry. Whereat Miss Anne clasped me about the neck, kissed me over and over, and forthwith proceeded to cry too. That is the way girls do when they are happy.

‘We shall be friends,’ she said, ‘not servant and mistress—all our lives!’

I shook my head, for I knew (or thought I knew) how vain that thought was.

‘Miss Anne—my Miss Anne,’ I cried, ‘I am the daughter of your father's wood-forester, and I have been brought up along with you. You will have to keep me now—for you have spoiled me for everything else, by your kindness. I could not go back to the old life, if I wanted to. So you must just let me stay with you. But all the same I am, and ever shall be, your faithful servant.’

‘Oh,’ said Miss Anne, wiping her eyes, ‘don't say that again—we won't talk of it. I know you are sure to marry. I read it on the cards. Certes, if I were a man, I would marry you—even if the sky fell down and you could catch Sir Tempests all over the potato patch!’

‘You talk nonsense. Miss Anne,’ said I, ‘it is you that everyone looks at. But I shall help you as

much as ever you like— with your young men, I mean!’

‘Do help me to play with them—do, Clem!’ she coaxed. ‘You see I do not want to be married any more than do you— but we are pretty. Yes, and we are both nice. Why should men have all the fun? In books they have, you know.’ And she broke into song:

‘He gave his bridle reins a shake, All on the Irish shore, With adieu, my love — adieu, my love. Adieu for evermore!’

Miss Anne broke off short.

‘I’ll show them!’ she said, with a certain look of her father about the mouth. And standing up, she kissed her hand circuitously to a whole round world of heartbroken suitors.

But I have forgotten to tell how Miss Anne defied her father in the matter of the buttoning of the glove. In all this conversation about marriage and love-making there had been no mention of the young painter. But he was there all the same—in the heart of Miss Anne, set in a frame of fierce virginity, enrayed and aureoled by the fulminations of Sir Tempest, and present was a too agreeable danger, in the background of that hypothetical array of suitors which Lady Kilpatrick had trotted out one by one for her husband to demolish and for Anne to be disgusted with.

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Still this matter of the kirk-going and the glove-buttoning was an important one— though for a reason that will appear later, not perhaps so important at that date as Miss Anne was inclined to think.

But as to Anne and her father. He was so angry that he could hardly sit decently still through the sermon, and when the congregation rose to the prayer, as was the ancient custom in Mr. Physgill McMachar's kirk, the Baronet bounced up so quickly that he sent a whole row of psalm and hymn books kiting down into the area. One of the solidest took Robby McFeat on the head with its brass corners, and it was all his mother, a respectable widow woman, could do to keep him from buzzing it back at the Baronet. He could not be persuaded that Sir Tempest had not done it on purpose, because once he had caught him trespassing in his pheasant covers. Boys are curious things. As if Sir Tempest, having licked the life half out of him with his Malacca cane when he got him, had not then promptly forgotten all about it. But Robby McFeat did not believe this, and the brass comers of a quarto Bagster hurt confoundedly, as he averred with some truth and justice.

At any rate, in his great family pew the Baronet bounced up and down like a jack-in-the-box and glared at his daughter till his wife trembled so that she could hardly hold her scent-bottle. Lady Kilpatrick even began to try to remember whether or

not the pistol was loaded on the top of the plate chest, and was relieved to remember that she herself had dipped that weapon in water, case and all, once on a time when the Baronet was away, and the silver had been put into her room for safety. For Lady Kilpatrick preferred having burglars to loaded pistols any day in her bedroom.

As for Anne— well, Anne was Anne—never more calm than when others were tempestuous. I think this was the way that she had acquired more influence over her father than all the rest of the world put together. She wanted me to sit close beside her in church, when I did not sit with my own folk. But I always managed to draw my chair a little behind, because I am old-fashioned enough to believe that I owed that much to my position at Grennoch and I wore my own hats and dresses—never any of Miss Anne's cast-off things, which went to the kitchen. But on the other hand Anne would often sit up half the night with the window of her room blocked so that the light would not shine outside, helping me to make up my plain things prettily, and according to her city models. And very good taste she had too, though I could sew better. Only girls know how good this was of her.

What she said to her father this Sunday about the buttoning on of the glove and our acquaintance with the young painter I never knew— that is, not word for word of the truth. Anne went home in the

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carriage and took a walk with her father in the afternoon. She explained things, doubtless. Anne was ever a don at explanations.

At any rate her father appeared satisfied, which is more than I should have been if I had stood in his shoes. However, I asked her if she had promised never to see the young man again, and her answer was of the very essence of Miss Anne.

'My father is going down to the cottage to see him,' she said, 'and if he comes of good people, and has his family tree sprouting out of his waistcoat pocket, he is going to ask him up to dinner! If he does—why, I give him to you to play with, Clem! I shall not care for him anymore!'

Then I answered her, perhaps more sharply than I ought. But between ourselves Miss Anne allowed and even encouraged such familiarities.

'I am nowise so given to wearing your cast-offs, Miss Anne—that I know of!'

'Hoity toity,' cries she; 'one must have before she can give. The painter lad is well enough, but he appears to be quite able to take care of himself—even with two such fine young women as you and I loose on the countryside.'

'And that is perhaps as well for him,' said I, 'but of that I am none so sure!'

'What,' cried Miss Anne, in pretended astonishment, 'have you been trying your hand already? For shame, Tina! I thought you came to

church rather late. You kept me waiting quite a while by the green gate!

'As you do yourself, so you dread your neighbours!' retorted I, using an old bye-word of the countryside.

Three days after Anne said to me with that light in her eye which boded no good to somebody, 'Clem, when you go over to your mother's, and see that painter of yours, tell him that there is a lovely subject down by the Old Orchard—the one which my father and the Drumglass farmer folk had the law-plea about. Just now it is all one blaze of apple, and pear, and hawthorn, and sloe-thorn.'

'Yes,' said I bitterly, 'and gooseberry. Am I to come, too? I am getting used to that!'

For it is a vain thing to tell a country girl that the sloe and the hawthorn are in bloom at the one time—at least not in a year when everything has come out with the first warm burst of spring.

'No,' she said, without manifesting the least contrition, 'but all the same, tell him—and we shall see.'

So on the Saturday night I went to my mother's, where Bess did not seem quite so glad to see me as usual, and as to my father he was positively bearish in his greeting. However, as I knew the reason, this did not prey on my mind very much.

'Where is the painter?' I asked of my mother, who cared about nothing so long as her hens were

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good brooders and the butter appeared in the churn by the first intention.

‘Oh, he is down in the back pastures, making what he caa's a pictur' oot o' some auld scrunts o' thorns, that your father should hae haggit doon lang syne— gin he had been worth his saut!’

‘My father looks as if he could hag down more than the auld thorns this day,’ I said, ‘what has come over him?’

‘Hoots,’ said my mother ‘it's juist a man's ways. Wha can keep track o' them? No the angels in heeven. For me, I never heed his megrims, except when he canna tak' his meal o' meat! And faith, temper or no temper, I see little difference in that!’

Thus instructed by my mother, I went down past the barn-end, in the lavender light—it was the heart of the longest days and the colour of the sky was like Miss Anne's favourite dress. In those years we wore broad scoop hats of soft straw, and we tied them with a wide ribbon under the chin, which looked pretty and innocent, just as Miss Anne and I wanted to look. I chose pale blue, because I was brown of skin with black hair, and few dark girls know how becoming pale blue is to them—that is, if they have any colour in their cheeks. They think sky blue is a colour for fair girls with blonde ringlets—which is all the better for the others who are wiser.

And— well, I slung my basket hat over my arm and went forward through the avenues of the trees, humming to myself. I was not a bit put about. You

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see I am not shy by nature, and besides—I had spent some time with Miss Anne. More than that, I knew that I had something to say. I carried Miss Anne's message— though I had her strict injunction not to let him know that the message came from her.

Alain turned as he heard my feet come crackling through the parched brake. I was tall and well made, though slim, and had the right number of stones and pounds to my weight. So the flowers did not quite raise their light heads and look after me when I trod on them, as the poets whom Miss Euphemia read to us said they ought to have done. I think Alain could see me better than I could see him, for the light was full in my face. Anyway he dropped his brushes and let them lie, and a curiously shaped board that was in his left hand would have fallen too if it had not been fastened about his thumb— with wire, I thought.

‘Ah,’ he said, his voice very low, ‘she has come!’

‘No,’ said I, laughing heartily, ‘she has not come— only her companion.’(I was going to say ‘servant,’ but something stopped me.) He kept on looking so in my face, and it seemed that he saw there some reflection of my mistress. For if ever there was admiration and almost adoration (may I be forgiven for using the word) set on any man's face, it was on the face of Alain Gairlies that night.

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Almost, but not quite, it seemed a disrespect to my mistress.

Also something made me nervous. I cannot tell what it was. At any rate I hastened to give my message and be gone.

'No,' I said, looking at him, 'there are no more gloves to be buttoned—see, I wear the same kind as my mother!'

And I held up a bare hand, brown as a berry. For indeed my fingers have never been happy when by Miss Anne's persuasion I shut them up in leathern cases. I never use gloves of any sort, save and except at the bee-taking, when the Captain, a hero in his way, will have nothing to do with the honey—except, that is, to eat it.

But in that long-ago evening and through that pasture grass which the plough has so long turned over, Alain the painter came forward to meet me. He took the hand which I held up, and before I could draw it away or think what he was going to do, he had stooped and kissed it. That was the manner of man Alain Gairlies was at that time. Before you ever suspected that a thought was in his mind, he had done the thing—and then, as like as not, try as you would, you could not be angry with him.

'It is a beautiful hand,' he said, 'and my heart has been thinking of it all the week!'

'You mean you were thinking of my mistress' glove button,' said I, 'and be good enough, whatever you happen to mean, to let go my hand!'

He let it drop with a kind of puzzled air, and a sort of contrition which might have been amusing—that is, if I had not been so angry with him for his presumption. You see Anne and I were two young girls who lived our lives apart, and at the time we were not accustomed to such very rapid young men, who took their chance of our being angry on the briefest acquaintance, or indeed on no acquaintance at all. We learned better afterwards, however, both of us. Also how to deal with these forward and self-assured youths. But at the moment the thing was new to me.

Then Alain picked up his brushes one by one. I stood looking at the picture he had been painting. It represented three thorn trees against a sky of red and orange, the shadows all deep blue with smoky wreathings of peat smoke from our cottage chimney hanging about, chance-driven in the still air. I thought it was all marvellously beautiful. To my eyes it looked much better than the best of the old daubs which Sir Tempest called portraits of his ancestors at Grennoch. And it smelled fresher, too. Indeed I have always been partial to the smell of newly painted pictures, ever since that summer night when I took my way down to the thorn trees in the back pasture. And when the Captain and I take our trip to the city in the spring, we always spend a shilling apiece on the painters' galleries—not the old free ones, but the new, with the smell of the varnish

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fresh in them. But we never buy a catalogue, for that is wastery, and the smell can be enjoyed as well without it.

But I have never told the Captain why. And indeed this is the first time I have ever confessed as much even to myself.

Now there was not one of the young men of the village (and there were some well-looking lads among them) who would have dared to ask Clem McTaggart to let him see her home. My companionship with Miss Anne had spoiled me for that. Now when I am old, I see that it was a dangerous thing for a girl, because it lifted her out of one rank, without setting her down in another. However, my temper and Miss Anne, between them, kept me right.

But this curious young man made no difficulty about falling into step with me at once. It seemed as if he had a right.

‘Why,’ I said, ‘you are leaving your painting things behind you. And the dew—will it not spoil your pretty picture?’

He laughed and tossed his head carelessly. I thought he looked very handsome when he did that. Then he took a long thin knife which he had held in his hand, and deliberately drew it across the sky I had thought so beautiful, smearing the tender blues and purples, and the soft pinky clouds all into one great spurting shell-coloured streak. I sprang to save the picture, but of course it was too late.

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‘Oh, why did you do that?’ I cried, indignantly. ‘You might have given it to me!’

Somehow it deemed a waste, and as my mother's daughter I have ever been against that.

His face clouded over, and then as quickly brightened again.

‘Ah,’ he said swiftly and eagerly, ‘would you care? Would you let me? If you would, how gladly would I paint you something more worthy! What I do has little value at the best. And I can easily do another. But if you cared—?’

‘But why did you destroy the picture? It was beautiful!’

You understand I had never seen anything like it before.

‘You would be angry if I told you,’ he said, softly.

‘Tell me and see!’

‘Well, I will,’ he said, looking me straight in the eyes. ‘It was because I had seen tonight the loveliest thing I ever saw in my life, and that made all the rest seem common and unclean!’

‘And what was that?’ I asked him. ‘For I did not know young men yet— least of all this young man before me.’

‘You—’ he said, ‘you, dear Clementina when you came towards me with the light of the sunset on your face!’

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I was young. I had never heard any one speak in this fashion before. Nevertheless, I struggled gallantly to be faithful to Miss Anne. I think if he had not been so handsome, or the least trifle less confident, I might have answered him differently. But somehow it seemed to me that he must have said the same thing to scores of other girls before, to be able to get it so briskly off his tongue.

‘Goodnight,’ I answered, sharply. ‘If you want to see a picture worth painting, go down tomorrow to the Old Orchard by the fords of the Black Water!’

With that I took myself off like a deer, and he stood looking after me without ever saying, ‘Thank you!’

CHAPTER SIX

A LOVING ESAU AND AN UNCONSCIOUS
JACOB

It was Anne and not I who went down to the Old Orchard next day, but when she came back she told me all about it. So much I will say for Anne: she had no concealments—even at her worst, at least none from me.

Perhaps it may happen that you have never been there, and so do not know the Drumglass Old Orchard. But Anne and I did. For we had played there all our lives, at least all the years we had spent together. And the rest does not count in the story. When Anne and I came together we both began to live. As I said before, there was a great law-plea about the Orchard between Sir Tempest and the tenant of the farm, whose name was McDougal. And I think the lawyers got so much out of it that the place itself was no good to anybody for years and years. At least the people of the farm did not seem to fancy the flavour of the jelly that came off the ancient crab-apples and woody pear-trees, the damsons with only one or two plums on each branch, the scrumpy gooseberry bushes with the leaves falling off early, and those that were left all

spotted with blight and pierced in semicircles by leaf-cutting wasps. As for Sir Tempest, he had gone to law at first just for cantankerousness, caring not a doit about the Orchard one way or the other, and the tenant of Drumglass, because he was not going to be dictated to by Sir Tempest.

At all events, from being let alone so much you could not, if you had tried, have made so perfect a place for two girls to lounge in, to laze in, and read silly novels in, or to go to sleep in on drowsy afternoons. Besides in addition—for all that came after. It was useful for other things, I mean.

Anne loved the reading of novels, which she coaxed her father to procure for her from Edinburgh, or got from the young men who came about the house, who borrowed them from their sisters. Though to do her justice, Anne never cared for these young girls nor ever pretended to, or wished for any woman about the house except myself. Me she usually quarrelled with three times a day, once between each meal. But always she had made it up by the time we went in to sit down at table. For the Doctor (Mr. McArthur of Cairn Edward) had told her once that it is one of the worst things which any one can do to eat with a ruffled temper. So, on that account, Anne and I always made it up—and also because the Scripture says it is wrong to be angry and it makes the face red and spotty. Not that it made much difference to my

digestion, so far, that is, as I could see. But perhaps gentlefolks' stomachs are different.

At any rate, in the Orchard I used to love to lie all through the warm spring weather, with the sunlight sifting through the green sappy leaves and the wholesome blossoms of white and pink blowing overhead. There were walls all about, and it seemed warmer there than elsewhere, especially on the easterly side— where for some reason the grass was fine and turfy, and a dry sandy soil on the slope kept one from taking cold when sitting down. Not that we thought of that very much.

Here I have lain the day by the length, under an apple-tree on which there was a thrush's nest. The mother bird had grown so tame she would let me stroke her pretty marled head, but the he bird, after the manner of his sex, pecked and skirled his loudest if I went too near when he happened to be on guard— though really he had nothing to do with the matter. There by the thrush's nest I loved to lie and wink half-asleep at the sky. Also to watch the birds. Once I saw the mother bird feed her young more than two hundred times in the day—selfish yellow gorbs that were all beak and belly. I wonder what my mother would have said to the preparing and serving of two hundred meals in a day. It is true that slugs and snails do not require a great amount of cookery, nor many fine recipes—at least when served to young mavis.

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But that is enough about birds. For I know by myself, in reading story-books, people very soon get tired of page after page about birds and scenery, and in fact of anything but the story itself. So I will go on to the time when Miss Anne went down to the Old Orchard by the Black Water. I think I said that she went by herself.

It might have been hard for some maids to let Miss Anne go, but not for me. I loved Anne so much that I could not possibly have grudged her anything— no, not the very dearest. No, nor ever did.

Alongside of her I was but a spiky thorn bush that bore sour sloes. A few liked me, but mostly my quick temper set folks' teeth on edge. Now my Anne was a lily among the daughters, as the Bible says in the part girls read in church between the leaves when the sermon is over long—as indeed it often is in Scotland.

So I let Miss Anne go willingly, with love and blessings upon her. She sang as she went. I can hear her singing yet— lar la-tra-la-la — a song without words, like the song of the young rejoicing earth. The winter was past. The rain was over and gone. The flowers were under Anne's feet for her to tread upon, over her head was the promise of fruitage. She was going forth to meet the first young man—one in himself worthy of her. That she went without serious intent mattered nothing. Anne was of the joyous ones of the earth, and— well—even as I

knew that the days of sadness would come soon enough, and that they would be very many, I had not the wish to deprive Miss Anne of one single hour of gladness.

As for a man's heart—in ninety-nine cases out of the hundred that can take care of itself, and every right-minded girl must just chance the hundredth.

Of course, I knew that if Alain had been left to me—well, I would not have made a game and a plaything of him. But then, you see, I had seen him in the dusk of the back pastures, with the flush of the evening about us making all things mysterious. And to a girl that is different. But I had been reared from my cradle to consider Miss Anne, and all my life I have done first—ay, and last too, that which I judged to be for her happiness. In this I may not always have judged wisely, but nevertheless I have done my best.

He was in the Orchard and had his easel set up when Miss Anne got there. He had settled himself in the easternmost corner, near where the house-place of the mavis had been. But now the brood was flown, and the nest empty and bare. It was the openest place and he got the best picture of the trees, I suppose. Besides which, the wall he looked at was covered all over with ivy and climbing plants, so that you could not see it unless you took a rake and hauled away the tendrils and shoots.

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Now Miss Anne is a witch. Of that there is not the smallest doubt. I have not written so far in my tale without giving the reader an inkling of that. At bottom indeed she was as good and loving and kind a girl as ever lived, but at that time she did not believe that any young men had a heart to be broken. They had only, she averred, little wizened things like potatoes kept too long in the sun, or like bits of gum-elastic which they make kick-balls of. Anyway not hearts like ours— not that ours were anything to boast of either.

So, though she knew a travelled road into the Old Orchard, as easy as stepping up the main staircase of her own House of Grennoch, what did Miss Anne do but make her way round the square of the wall till she was nearly opposite to the place where Alain Gairlies had pitched his easel. Here the wall was six or seven feet high, but as I have said, it was all clambered over with ivy, and the trees had driven their roots through and through it, splitting and rifting it from lintel to foundation. The creepers too had sent their feelers in under the coping tiles and heaved them up. Even the toadstools had been at work, crumbling it. In quite a number of places it had begun to sink in upon itself like a bairn's castle on the seashore, where it is washed by the waves. Still, the defences of Drumglass Old Orchard were certainly not the less dangerous on that account.

On one of these places Anne mounted perilously— in fact, as perilously as possible. She

knew well enough what would happen, but clambered on. When she was once on top, she dislodged a great stone which went rolling down on the inside, and then she felt it was time to scream.

It was not a great scream nor a loud scream, but it indicated fear. And there, patent to any observing eye, was Miss Anne perched up on the crazy stones with the mortar underneath all crumbling and rotten, and the whole wall swaying inward, now held together by the ivy.

Now Alain Gairlies, who was painting a picture which (I doubt it not) he meant at the time to give me, ran quickly at the cry. Perhaps he thought— but now it does not matter what he thought. And in his sitting-room the Captain is awaking and wondering when he will get his cup of afternoon tea.

But at any rate when Miss Anne screamed, Alain ran; and I think— nay, I know that he was greatly surprised. For it was not Miss Anne he had expected to see, and especially kneeling on the top of a wall with the very stones breaking away from beneath her.

‘Can you hold me?’ she cried, in real terror. ‘Oh, I am falling.’

Without a word he held up his arms, and Anne leaped into them. I have heard her say that though she began clambering up in fun, she was quite afraid at the last— so that she acted the better, and

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was really very glad and thankful when he caught her and clasped her tight to him.

Then to make it more real she must needs cry a little, because it had all been different from what she had expected. And that settled the matter—so far, that is, as Mr. Alain was concerned. It made no great difference to Miss Anne.

They did not think of me at all, either of them—and there was no reason why they should. For after all, what was I but a servant and a wood-forester's daughter. But there are some things hard which are not meant to be unkind. And—I had seen him first, and he had said what he did say to me in the gloaming down by the back pastures, which I at least cannot forget. Also, he had promised to paint me a picture, but I never heard more of it from that day to this.

And at any rate, it matters little enough now. For there is the Captain moving his feet and pushing the chairs about to show that he is ready for his tea. And I never think of these foolish old things, except when, as now, something out of the common calls them up. Well the Captain must just wait till I have dabbed my eyes. Indeed I think that I had better wash my face all over again. For I am getting an old woman and seldom do myself up more than once in the day, or indeed look in the glass, even to see if my hair is right—as I used to do every hour in the days when I was young, and there were such things as shadowy back pastures and young men in them who

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said what they did not mean—or at least forgot about, the first time a prettier girl fell into their arms.

Not that I blame Miss Anne. Let no one think that even for a moment. I do not, and never did. I let her have always what she wanted. If she had wanted the Captain, she could have had him—and welcome. But she did not—that coming long after her day.

This is Anne's story of the Orchard, told with her arms about me.

'You do not mind, dear? No, of course not. Yes, he is nice—quite nice. At first he was shy, but almost any one would have been that, with a young woman tumbling over a wall upon his head, boots and spurs and all as the song says. The easel came to the ground when he caught me, and the picture fell on its face and was spoilt. Buttered bread, you know! No, he never went on with the picture any more. I don't think he cared about it after—Forgot, I daresay. Give it to me?—Oh, I did not want his old picture. Why should I? My father would buy me fifty better. Besides, between ourselves, though he is ever so handsome, I do not think he paints very well!'

At this I sighed. For I did. Perhaps I knew no better, but at least I was happy in thinking so. And the picture of the Old Orchard with the hawthorn all out would have been so much to me. Ay—even now I will own that I would have liked to have it hanging up right opposite me, where my eyes rest when I

look up from writing. I hope that I am a God-fearing woman, but I would have told the Captain that it was an heirloom. That is, if he had ever asked, which is not likely.

'Did he kiss you, Anne?'

She smiled and dimpled, waiting and keeping silent to tease me, as was her monkey way. She thought I was only curious.

'Clem—Clem!' she exclaimed, in Miss Euphemia's tone of remonstrance, 'how often have I told you to restrain your impatience. Besides, do you think that I, Miss Anne Mclan Conynghame Kilpatrick, sole and only daughter of Sir Tempest of Grennoch, would let myself be kissed— and by a young scapegrace of a painter— by accident, as it were? No, indeed, have you forgotten the motto of my house? When I set out to be kissed— SHALL MAK' SICCAR, as my ancestor did in the kirk at Dumfries when he went back to settle the Red Comyn.'

The which was very well but did not add anything to my knowledge.

'Tell me, Anne.'

She fluttered awhile about me, this way and that, teasing me, full of sweet short delicious laughs, and touchings of the hands— putting them over my eyes and snatching them away, as if she had something tremendous to reveal. Then her fingers went into my ears and she pretended to

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whisper great secrets that I could not hear. You never saw such a dangerous girl.

'Did he kiss you? Anne, tell me!'

'You poor thing, I will tell you. Then NO?'

'There is something behind that, I am sure.'

'Oh, yes, indeed! A lot—such a lot! I saw it was coming. I knew. How, I cannot tell. But oh, I am going to find out so much more. Even now I begin to know what men will do without being told. And I will tell you, I promise that, and then you will know too. It is what every girl should be taught, and not as an extra either. It ought to be part of the course.

'Yes—every girl ought to know these things. Though I don't believe mother ever guesses, and I am sure that poor old Miss Euphemia never learned the alphabet even. But you and I are young and—oh, how we will tease the men if we only stick together—thick as thieves! - how we will play with them, and wind them like a wisp of tating cotton about our fingers—the poor, poor things that they are. Why they can't do the least thing without one seeing it a hundred miles off!'

Well, it might be so with Miss Anne—she was certainly different. But for me, I thought that Alain did everything so quickly, and that he was different from the other young men I knew, just because of that. But perhaps that was only so with me. Of course he would be as awkward with Anne as Rob Affleck or one of the village lads with me. Yes, that

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was it, of course. I had not thought about it before. Anne is so different. There is no one like Anne.

‘Then he did not kiss you, Anne?’

‘No, of course not. What are you thinking about, Clem? Did he kiss you down in the old scrunts of thorn when you took him my message? Well, he did kiss your hand and you never told me. Ah, ha— my brother Tempest Barnaby—that’s John, you know, saw you. Oh, you sly minx, and you never told me— no, not a word, and yet you keep up the sulks because I won’t tell you!’

At this I was a little flabbergasted. But after a moment I was not greatly surprised. I might have known. That abominable boy would never let me alone. I had given him a box on the ear the last time he was home from school, that had sent him sprawling among the slippery stuff upon which they lay the bracken and bent when the cows are bedded down. But the cows were not bedded down then. So he went straight to his mother, and she to Sir Tempest. But the fiery little Baronet, having perhaps talked it over with Anne, and having at any rate, no sympathy for philandering, added to my box on the ear something on his own account, and so packed Master Tempest John Barnaby back again to school or college (I don’t know which) with his holidays not more than half finished. For which, very naturally, he owed me a grudge.

‘Did you box Alain’s ears, Anne, as I did John’s?’ I asked a little spitefully.

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'There was no such need,' she answered, 'anything more sensible and restrained than the behaviour of young painters in orchards I declare I have never seen, even at a county dinner with Sir Tempest in the chair! Indeed, it was a moral lesson for all!'

But all the same I did not quite believe it. Anne was keeping back something even from me. But I was resolved that I would have it out of her. I knew that she could not go to sleep without telling me, if I only sulked—and kept it up long enough.

All this sounds incredibly silly for an old woman to be writing. But then, let it be borne in mind that neither the one nor the other of us was old at that time. We were barely eighteen, but we thought that we understood a great deal—especially Anne. Sometimes in daffing, I was wont to call her Grandmother Anne. She put on such airs of wisdom. Whole colleges could not have known less—nor appeared to know more. But since I have aged somewhat, even to the eye, I have grown to know that it is always the young who are the wisest. I never expect, even in the land beyond Jordan's flood, to know as much as I thought I knew at one-and-twenty. And boys of that age are worse.

So I did 'keep it up' against Anne, as we (in common with the rest of the human race) called it at that time—kept it up till bedtime.

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And then Anne, who had begun and checked many attempts at making up, came to me without even stopping to put on her sacred bedroom slippers (which her mother, the Lady Kilpatrick, made me promise to be very particular about, even more particular than that Anne should remember her prayers). Then she clasped me round the neck, saying, 'Clem dear, I won't tease you any more. It was foolish. It was very foolish, I know, but he came very near kissing me. Yes, this first time. And I wanted to know what it felt like—and I almost let him. Only (it is really too silly) Drumglass's old brown cow mooed at us just over the wall, just at the moment so I laughed and ran home as fast as ever I could! But I am rather sorry now. For my father says that one ought always to be learning!'

'Good-night!' I said, I fear a little coldly; 'if you began like that, there is no fear but that you will have lots of other opportunities for future study!'

And with that I turned over and pretended to go to sleep.

But in spite of my bravery I lay awake instead and listened to Anne's quiet breathing. Bless you, she was not in the least disturbed! And that was as it ought to have been, of course. But God forgive me for cherishing the least hard thought in my heart of my own dear, loving, but not particularly serious-minded. Miss Anne- The best was always for her, of course.

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Finally as I could not sleep, I got up, and, having lit a candle, I tried to find the place in the Bible about the one ewe lamb. But it must have hidden itself away somewhere. For I searched all the Gospels and the Epistles of Paul and found, I think, everything else about sheep that any one would ever want. But not that. Then I betook me back to bed, blew out the candle, and so finally cried myself to sleep!

CHAPTER SEVEN

WHICH CONCERNS THE MAN-WITH-THE-BILL-HOOK

In all this I have written down little concerning the village. For though I was born in it, dwelt near it, and now for many years have had it again at my gates, I am not strictly of it. Yet I have just been far enough away from it to appreciate its humours, its quaint continual changes, its quainter changelessness, and in a word the eternity of its daily routine. Cities are only villages grown up. Towns are villages with conceit superadded. When Cain got tired of Nod and came slinking back with his bride— the girl who went after him in spite of everything, he found Adam his father and Shem his brother looking out over the gate. And after they three had parleyed a little and they had promised not to kill him when he was asleep, Adam and Shem gave him a patch up on the hillside where few things grew, and the end house of the village.

That was the beginning, and all villages ever since have been like that. They stone out their prodigals, sometimes with blood on their hands, always with a woman in the background. But when they come back with a little money and want to

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settle, nobody says anything about the little affair; and the prodigal gets the patch of ground that appertained to his parent (died heartbroken) and the house where nobody else will live. What if he does have that awkward mark on his brow? In a little folk will forget about it, and if anybody asks any awkward question, he will be told that it is a birth-mark. By-and-by it all blows over, unless he wants to marry again. After all, is he not So-and-so's son, and his father set those apple-trees before he was born?

Of such was Whinnyliggate. The village itself strolled down a whinny knowe in a meandering fashion, and whenever the gardens stopped, the broom and the gorse would be looking at you over the dyke. The commonest birds were of the same scheme of colour— mostly grey and brown and yellow—the yellow-yoit, the whinchat and the stonechat. Only at Whinnyliggate the whinchat lived on the moors among the stones and the stone-chat close to the houses among the whins. Perhaps Adam was new at the business when he named them, as we are told in Genesis. The Captain always did say that he made a poor job of it.

To this day there is a 'lane' which cuts the village in two about the middle. Now in Galloway this is not a woodland walk, but a slow, sleepy, peaty stream, and it was dammed just below the bridge permanently by a weir—as well as frequently

elsewhere by unwary fishermen who attempt to catch trout in its murky pools. The Captain often does so himself when he comes home with an empty basket.

Curiously enough there is a solid difference in character between the inhabitants of the two principalities. Above-Bridge and Below-Bridge could not be said to have no dealings the one with the other, but it is certainly true that they had as few as possible.

Above-Bridge folk are generally haughtier, more quarrelsome, louder in argument, hungrier, yet with less to appease that hunger. They carry their noses more in the air, owing possibly to the superior elevation of their cottage feus upon the crest of the brae. The shop where they sell cravats and imitation linen collars has always been Above-Bridge.

Below-Bridge, on the other hand, is universally kindlier, sweeter, humaner, more humoursome in its outlook upon the world. It wears a portlier belly, and, with more of the good things of this life, makes less pretence of gentility. It was apt to laugh in its sleeve at Above-Bridge. The blacksmith's shop, with its perennial clink-a-clank of heartsome labour, tolling the hours in the sweat of somebody's brow, is, of course, Below-Bridge. There in the forenights a jovial crowd of ploughmen and orra (odd) men forgather. In my time the prettiest girls all belonged to this part of the country.

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Though with small claims to beauty, and our lodge being a considerable distance off through the woods, I myself was always at heart Below-Bridge.

I do not think that either my mother or my father mixed much with the village bodies— though this was by no means from any feeling of contempt. They were mostly rather afraid of the wood-forester. A tall gaunt man with lanthorn jaws, and black eyebrows of the shape of a wide-mouthed V turned upside down, a great and creditable professor of religion, he had little sympathy for the minor delinquencies of a village. He hardly thought the minister did his duty by other denominations as he ought. He wished he himself could only catch them poaching.

‘It is written, ‘Thou shalt not!’ was a favourite word of his, and he was apt to add certain terrible words of his own: ‘Since I cannot compel thee to amend thy ways, I deliver thee to thy Maker?’

This style of address, though eminently Biblical, did not tend to make a man popular in Whinnyliggate, which was rather a jovial village. But at the same time there was no one who was more resorted to at times of suffering, and specially in bereavement, than my father. Then indeed every one owned that Don MacTaggart had the word. So much so that when he had a widow woman, or maybe a poor lass, left forsaken, and desolate, before him as the head of the session, it was wonderful how that

imperious voice would grow soft and tender, and the harsh bold eagle-look die down out of the piercing black eyes. Well do I mind when Leeb Boyle (that never was any credit to anybody, least of all to herself) came back to Whinnyliggate with another tow-headed youngster squealing in her arms, my father drew her forth from a crowd of jeering villagers assembled at the door of the Grennoch Arms, and sent her on her way with his Master's word, 'Neither do I condemn thee—go and sin no more!'

For this any other man, except perhaps the minister, would have been held suspect. But no man dared point a finger at 'Auld MacTaggart-of-the-Bill-hook.'

He always carried this weapon, except on Sabbaths, and I have seen him fumbling for it even at a funeral. I think some of Leeb's tormentors at the door of the Grennoch Arms that night were very fortunate to get off without a hag or two that would have marked them for life.

But to me my father showed nothing of this—nothing, that is, or almost nothing. Yet I always knew that there were depths below his cold indifferent exterior, not only of stern severity (as the rest of the world thought), but of tenderness and self-sacrifice such as even my own mother had hardly fathomed during all the years they had lived together.

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Don MacTaggart was the only man on his properties whom Sir Tempest could in nowise make afraid. It was not given to him.

'If ye hae aught to find fault wi' about my work on your estate, Sir Tempest, out with it as man speaks to man. But an unceeyil word will I tak' frae noan!'

But his master knew that Donald MacTaggart served faithfully, and once when Sir Tempest had need of money and called on my father to mark the worth of a thousand pounds of trees the forester cried out, 'I canna! Oh, I canna! It wad break my heart to see them comin' doon! And to ken that it was me that had condemned them to dee!'

But when Sir Tempest took council with another, even the Cairn Edward wood-merchant, and when the two went to and fro with a pot of red paint among my father's choicest growths, it is said that the old man wept aloud.

'Rayther than that should happen,' he declared, breaking in upon them, 'I will e'en mark them mysel'. But send that man awa' or I will no be responsible for the bill-hook in my richt hand!'

The man was sent away, and when he came back my father had marked (as the wood-merchant said) 'a lot of rubble hardly worth burnin', though guid eneuch doubtless for pit props.'

Furthermore, in order to save his beloved friends— oak, ash and beech— every man o' them

six-foot diameter, sir, if he is an inch — my father went to Ayrshire (then a foreign country) at his own proper charges to learn the needs of the poor coal-pit folk, and the true and paying way of ‘barking’ trees for the tan-pit. Then, when he came back he showed Sir Tempest by calculations in black and white that if he would leave the whole matter in his hands, he, Don MacTaggart, would ensure him a steady and increasing income from his woods. The which, needless to say, Sir Tempest gladly acceded to. While so complete did the tyranny of my father over the Grennoch woods become, that the nominal master thereof in his later years hardly dared to step aside from the path to cut himself a walking-stick, without asking permission of his chief forester!

It was curious to see my father stalking through the village, his face like a wall, his eye blank, the controlling mind occupied far away. More than half-mechanically he would respond to the salutations of the minister and of Hutchie, dominie and doctor, who were his only close companions. Even they could not be called cronies. But in the main he went like Jonah through Nineveh, and as he passed the border-line between Above-Bridge and Below-Bridge, I always expected to hear him lift up his voice and cry aloud, ‘Yet forty days, and Nineveh, that great city, shall be destroyed!’

But he never did. Chiefly, I think, because he held Whinnyliggate such a feckless place, that the inhabitants would never do anything in the pride

and strength of lust, worthy of calling down upon their heads the fire of the Lord. He himself was quite capable of defying the Almighty to His face. That he had not done so, but had set his feet upon the narrower way, Donald MacTaggart put down solely to 'Election.' 'Not he had done it, but Another.' Of that he was sure. Not by his own strength, nor wisdom, nor cunning, had he missed hell-fire. Better men than he would yet writhe with Divels and cry out about their burning tongues. It was entirely of the Lord's mercy that he, old Don MacTaggart, was not consumed. So thought my father, and with his sterling honesty and unflinching integrity of purpose, the strange old-world theology worked itself out as well as another—far better indeed than any slip-slop of the modern universal benevolence sort.

This was my father in the village street, or as we saw him once a week, wrapped in his crunclèd black suit in honour of the holy Sabbath day. High, still, severe, sparing and grim of word, of an eye that seemed to apprehend little and to sympathise with less—that was my Seventh-day father. But in the woods, if you did not carve your name on his young trees (the unpardonable sin was to cut a band round one of them) a child of five might have gambolled with him unreprieved. God and he walked the woods together, and as in the earlier Eden, neither hid his face from the other.

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In the woods my father talked all the time to himself in quick runs of soliloquy, thus: 'He will no do, this yin! He's no drivin' his roots far eneuch under! The first big wind frae the west, a pickle snaw on his airms, and he'll be whammelt—ay, sirs, whammelt! I'm speakin'. Even though he's whisperin' in pride of leaves and spreadin' himself like a green bay-tree!'

Perhaps it was of a fine young fir he was thus delivering himself, shaped like a graceful pyramid. But sure enough the wind came, and the snow, and together they beat upon that fir, and the place that knew it once now knows it no more for ever. It underwent the whirring saw years before its time, even as my father had said.

Or it might be:

'Ay, she's bonny—oh, fell bonny! But consider weel the dreep o' the rain—the wet, cauld, cankered heart o' her, fu' o' rottenness. Nocht worth for a' the fine feathers about her croon!'

It was an old beech this time of which my father spoke, and when the wood-merchant, who had given a price for so noble-looking a tree, came to slice his bargain up into planks, he blasphemed. But my father, ever ready at such a time, reproved him, saying, 'Thus saith the Lord, Swear not at all! But ye will aiblins listen to Don MacTaggart the next time. Did I not stand by at your very elbow and warn ye? 'A man is like a tree,' says I, 'and the heart o'

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man is deceitfu' abune everything and desperately rotten!' Man, I could smell yon yin a mile aff!'

He had a belt of pine which he used to visit often. They were high favourites, and many a Sabbath afternoon he would sit there with his book 'The Four-fold State,' by Thomas Boston, late minister of Ettrick. He never seemed to get on very fast with his reading. Indeed to my knowledge, he never finished his author through to the last leaf till the day of his death. But he sat there taking in the eternities for all that—the warmth of the sun, the caller grip of the air which made it a pleasure only to breathe, the scent of the pines, the pleasant stir arid scuffle of the young rabbits in and out of their holes down on the wood-edges, the singing of the blackbirds, mellow as so many heavenly lutes, the clean-cut repeated bursts of the mavises, the robins making melody deeper in the coppice, the tits shrilling their silver saws as they grated the pine cones high above his head.

One day I sat beside him and he listened a long time, saying nothing. I also waited silent. At last he closed the book writ by good Thomas of Ettrick, took off his broad blue bonnet, and said with a fine large wave of his hand that I can never forget, 'This IS God.'

And though the Captain and I go twice a Sabbath to the kirk (because it is the custom and the minister says we are not to neglect the

assembling of ourselves together), yet I never expect in this life to be so near the city 'wherein is no Temple' as I was that day under the Grennoch pines when my father laid aside his blue bonnet because he felt that surely God was in that place.

Yet I must in nowise give a wrong impression of my father. He was no saint—or at least if he was, he was purely an Old Testament one. By race he came of the Covenant stock who in their day had killed the Malignant, giving no quarters. I am sure that he would have burned Servetus with his own hands if he had thought, as Calvin did, that his life did disservice to the commonweal. The Whinnyliggate poachers knew well that he would have fought for his master's pheasants with his bill-hook, and bound the wounds of the survivors (if any) while he developed in their failing ears his favourite doctrine of 'Election.' Privately, I suspect now he was at daggers drawn with much popular theology, especially of the illiterate sort.

I shall never forget going with him to listen to a certain popular evangelist from a neighbouring town, an unlearned though doubtless earnest man, originally a journeyman grocer, who had come to hold meetings in the schoolhouse for a week or so, with a collection 'to defray expenses' at the close of each. The young man's favourite theme was the Dying Thief. For myself I thought it very interesting, but my father listened with a stern severity of countenance, born of solitude and the Old

Testament, to the frantic and universal appeals of the preacher. His anecdotes specially infuriated him.

‘And now,’ the preacher perorated, ‘I say unto you, even as Jesus said— Believe—only believe—and today shalt thou be with me in paradise. Believe—only believe!’

Then at the word, tall as one of his own pines, so fierce and stern of face that a thrill of delicious apprehension ran through the audience, uprose my father. He pointed a finger at the preacher, a young man of little stature, but in his own eyes of a consuming consequence.

‘Ay,’ he cried, ‘He had a right to say that, but have you? He had been beaten with stripes. He had been led captive. He had heard the cry, ‘Crucify him, crucify him!’ He had had the nails driven deep into His feet and (I shall never forget the thrill which rang through the audience as my father opened his arms suddenly wide, and his voice broke into a sob) the nails through the palms of His hands! They had given Him vinegar to drink—ah, bitter, bitter, bitter! He could say that! (Here he had to wait a long moment to command himself— the audience also.) But not you, man! Not you! Gang back to your counter, man, and sell butter— till such time as the Lord hath wrestled sorely with your soul, till you have eaten of the apples of this world's Sodom, till you have counted one by one the forty days in the wilderness, till you have tasted— have tasted the

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fellowship of His suffering! Salvation, my man, is not sugar-candy! But the cross set up, the tree of shame, the bowed head, the exceeding bitter cry! Gang hame, laddie, gang hame, and pray the Lord to hae mercy on your puir feckless soul!’

This ended the first and only series of rousing addresses advertised to be delivered in Whinnyliggate schoolhouse by the grocer's apprentice from Cairn Edward.

So, after this, when the Man-with-the-Bill-hook passed through the village, tall and gaunt, judge ye if there fell not a sudden quiet 'twixt the Grennoch Arms at the head of the village and the Dolphin Inn at the brae-foot. For who could say whether or no Don MacTaggart might not be moved to testify once more—with his tongue certainly, and perhaps also with his bill-hook—that terrible weapon with which he was wont to set in order the forest growths of his master. Rough Rob of Creochs who on market days went home guiding his beast at a gallop with a broken whip-lash and the reins trailing, stopped shouting curses in at the door of the smiddy, and daring Andrew the strong smith to come out and fight him. Rough Rob had been turned out both at the Grennoch Arms and the Dolphin, and was now going about like a roaring lion seeking whom he might devour. There was not a man in the village whom he could not fight, so he said, and in our peace-loving village most were content to take him at his word—all Below-Bridge, at any rate.

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But when Auld MacTaggart came in with his bill-hook over his shoulder at one end of the village. Rough Rob suddenly had business which led him out upon the road at the other. He called back no names, either, and hastened in his going.

For Rough Rob remembered one night when he had come to the cottage at the corner of the wood, ostensibly to call upon my sister Bess, who scorned his acquaintance. He had seen my father instead, and, as he had filled himself with Dutch courage at the Grennoch Arms at the head of the brae, his tongue spoke neither wisely nor well.

‘I warn ye,’ answered my father, without heat, ‘that my lasses will have nothing to say to you, nor to any like unto you. Hearken ye to that, Rob Mitchell, lest a worse thing befall you, betwixt here and the Creochs!’

Then what exactly Rob answered will never be known till the books are opened. For my father will not tell, and as for Rob, he was not in a position to remember. For a fist at the end of a brawny arm, all tough wiredrawn muscle and solid bone, met him squarely in the eye.

When he came to himself he asked of my father what had happened. Rob thought a chimney-can had fallen on his head.

‘It was the hand of Providence!’ said my father, solemnly.

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And so Rough Rob of the Creochs farm goes through life with a wholesome awe of Providence. 'It kicks waur nor a young horse! Keep oot o' the road o' yon awesome hand of Providence,' he says la likely offenders, 'it's nane canny!'

CHAPTER EIGHT

BEING TAKEN UP WITH THE ELOPING OF
MISS ANNE

And that makes five of us, so far, prominent in this history. The others come in later— clouds and droves of them. But just now here are Miss Anne and her father, Sir Tempest—myself, Clemmy MacTaggart—and my old father, Don of the Billhook, besides, of course, Alain. That makes just five. Of course, one may count in Miss Anne's mother, Lady Kilpatrick, smooth to the eye, but as irritating and as tiresome as a gown of shot silk— my own mother, douce, pleasant, rotund, untroubled with the eternities, but much cumbered with serving and the care of many bairns. Then there is also Miss Euphemia, long deposed from her office of governess, but pensioned, and driven to good works and the manufacture of the most wonderful crazy quilts—for which, to her credit be it said, she shows a remarkable aptitude—as I should have supposed. There is also the Captain, but he does not come much into the story as a story, save in so far as that I have often to leave a paragraph half written to get him his tea. Yet, such is the ingratitude of man, that he persists in declaring that since I began my scribbling he gets nothing but what he calls 'tea-leaf soup'(from the tea masking so long) and says it

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reminds him of old times on his brig Enterprise in the South American trade when they used to throw out the leaves for the sole reason that there was no room left for any water in the bottle.

But the fact is that we get on extremely well, and the tea is very good, if sometimes a trifle overdrawn. The Captain is a little jealous that I will not let him see what I am writing. At least I hope so. I have done my best to make him think that it is about the sweethearts I used to have before I met him, and one day he even tried to retaliate by talking over the garden hedge for half an hour with our neighbour's eldest daughter (who bores him dreadfully) just to be quits with me. But I only smiled at him when he came in, so that he knew he had quite lost his trouble, and he has not tried it since.

But to the tale. I have drawn partly a portrait of Alain Gairlies, and, at full length, that of my father. Now those who have read both may ask, and with some reason, how did two such very different people, living in one house as they did, draw together and become friendly?

Well, I think it was chiefly because my father, deep under his grim humours, had a very real love and sympathy for youth— ay, and even for the weaknesses and faults of youth. And indeed Alain gave him plenty of opportunity for this last.

There was a time, however, when this threatened to come to an end. My father was not

blind to the influence that a handsome-appearing young man may have over the fate of a young maid—ay, or for that matter several young maids. And I think, after he had gone with me to the kirk that first time, Alain came mightily near getting his fee and his leave from the forester's cottage. Nevertheless he saved himself. And how he did so, is a curious thing, and perhaps, in a way, not very complimentary to me and Bess.

He made a confidant of my father in the matter of Miss Anne, which was, on the whole, the least likely thing in the world to happen. But Alain was right. In spite of Miss Anne's saying he was stupid, in some things Alain had a woman's intuition. And in nothing was he more right than in the confidant he chose. But of course alongside of Miss Anne any one would appear to be stupid.

For, as I now see, my father. Old Testament saint as he was, the John Knox of a lighter time and a country village, had a very genuine and perfectly disinterested admiration for my young mistress. I will not go so far as to say that in his eyes Miss Anne could do no wrong. But this I will say, that he would not admit she could do any, ay—and would argue, and quote chapter and verse too in defence of her wickedest and most shameless delinquencies.

I think if she had wanted three or four sweethearts at once, my father would have learned Hebrew in order to prove that, though unusual

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among the Chosen People, 'trigamy'(on the woman's side) was not absolutely forbidden. For Don MacTaggart loved a longish or an unusual word, which he used like a kind of intellectual dumbbell, not so much to hit anyone with, but to give weight and swing to his argumentation.

Now in the abstract it is wrong to run away with any good man's innocent daughter. But if you had heard Miss Anne talk upon the subject you would have thought that to be run away with was a first principle of morals— like the Lord's prayer and the Chief End of Man and the First Commandment. Life, it seemed, was not complete, or even very respectable without it. Eloping enlarged the ideas, and in fact, Miss Anne was absolutely compelled for her own credit to run away with Alain Gairlies.

'But do you love him?' I asked, a little anxiously. For in a manner I was responsible.

'Love him,' she cried, with indignation, 'what has that got to do with it? You do not suppose I am going to marry him, silly Clem?'

I had not supposed anything else and indeed declined to suppose anything else even then.

'Oh, no,' said Miss Anne, 'marriage is really quite out of the question for years, long years— love or no love. I am fond of him. Yes—really I think I like him as well as I do raspberry jam. But not strawberry—at least not as your mother makes it. But all the same I mean to run away. It is in all the books. Every girl of spirit who respects herself does

it before she is twenty. We will go in a carriage—a coach-and four in the proper, old, ancient way. And I shall cover my face with a veil at the stopping-places and flop down on the chairs for him to comfort me when the waiter comes in. Then he will give him a guinea to go out and leave us and I will get up and—dare him to touch me! Oh, it will be fun!’

I represented it to her that in these days there were trains which went much faster than any coach, and that if she eloped with Alain Gairlies in a posting carriage and four (I doubted if she could find one in our part of the country) Sir Tempest would certainly be waiting to open the door and let down the steps when they got to the first stopping place!

‘Oh,’ she said, somewhat backset at the picture I drew,

‘I should not like that. No, that would not do at all. You must help me. You see it is all arranged. I told him today.’

‘But,’ said I, desperately, knowing well I should succumb, ‘it is wicked—especially if you do not love him. And it will give you a sad reputation. No one will come near you!’

‘Oh, yes, they will,’ she cried, ‘trust me for that. Yes, far more than ever, just to see what I am like! And when they see me once—well, they won’t run away.’

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'You are a vain piece,' I said, 'and I will have nothing to do with any plot to play with an honest man's feelings.'

You see I had not forgotten the scene down by the Back Pastures. Neither, it now appeared, had Miss Anne.

'Oh, do not trouble yourself,' she answered, with much philosophy, 'Master Alain's feelings can very well be left to take care of themselves. He is handsome and like a god in a picture. He talks divinely about love, too, and looks sweet enough when he is doing it to melt in tea. You should just hear him. But he will not break his heart. Did you ever get the picture he promised you? No? I thought not. Well, you let me alone. Or, no—you can't, for I shall want you to help. All the rest is complete. But it will not be at all a proper offgoing without you—pet dog, companion, confidante, all stage-managed by old servant—almost a friend of the house. For your father is going to help.'

If she had said the Angel Gabriel, I would not have been much more astonished.

'Nonsense, Anne,' I cried, 'my father would as soon—as soon...'

I really had not a comparison to express the degree of impossibility which her words called up in my mind.

'You think so. Mistress Clementina MacTaggart,' said Miss Anne, roguishly, 'but that, you see, is all you know. Ask your father yourself, if

you do not believe me, your best friend, who have just been confiding the secrets of my heart to you!’

‘Ask my father?’ said I. ‘That will I not. He would make my head ring against the door-cheek!’

‘All the same,’ said Miss Anne, with gentle suavity, ‘he will help when the time comes. Indeed, he will drive the conveyance! I refer to the bridal car—only when it comes to the bridal part there won’t be any bride!’

I looked my amazement at the madcap girl.

‘Skipped! Decamped! Non est! Into thin air! To be continued in our next!’ she cried, making rapid gestures with her hands as she perked up and down on tiptoe, for all the world like a butterfly about to take wing. Then with an air of hypocritical sadness on her face she added, ‘I am truly sorry for Master Alain, but he suffers in a good cause, and after all he is too happy. He takes everything too much for granted. Art’s wings must sprout from the soil of sorrow—or words to that effect. All the poets say so. And then, after it is all over, he can go about with a broken heart, looking so interesting and mournful. He will be perfectly ravishing. And then besides he can illustrate all the old Scottish ballads so splendidly, and put his sufferings into every one of them— *Oh, waly, waly, up the bank. And waly, waly doon the brae,*’ By the way, have you any idea what waly’ means? For I haven’t!’

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‘Anne, you have no heart at all!’ I cried, shaking her.

‘Oh, you mistake,’ she said, jumping free, ‘I am only trying to do my duty to a youth. Without guile. Art is long, you know, and time is fleeting. This has been remarked before. And if he doesn’t begin to get some experiences now, the lad will go on painting pretty old orchards with the sun setting purple-and-gold behind them all his life—like that other man—you know who I mean—the man who always has the water in his cart tracks, as if he painted in a mackintosh! Perhaps he does!’

Three whole days I held out. That is a lifetime for anyone to resist Miss Anne. For myself I believe that if she had told Alain Gairlies the whole plot prepared against his peace, and coaxed him only a little, he would have consented to go through with it all the same. And my own father is a proof of this. Not that she had told him the whole truth—in fact, very far otherwise, as we shall see.

As I told you before, our Miss Anne was a plain witch, the kind that were legislated against in the Bible, and burned by scores upon the Hill of Doom. And this was the way she put things to my father:

‘No one has a right to control the life of another—you agree? Well now, as you know, there are many young men come about the House of Grennoch—not so much bad as wild, unhallowed, uncovenanted youths, without the law and with no adequate knowledge of the Shorter Catechism!’

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My father nodded. In his capacity as head forester, he was occasionally drafted in to serve as assistant keeper on a big shooting day. Then Don MacTaggart had both heard and seen. Miss Anne spoke truly. He could vouch for that. The youths mentioned were certainly very far indeed from grace. Their conversation on the moor was absolutely uncovenanted. It was not seasoned with salt—at least not with the proper kind. Upon more than one occasion Don had been faithful with them, and had told them so, for he had no fear of man. So far. Miss Anne was certainly well within the truth.

But when she went on to speak of the high perfections of that zealous plant of grace, Mr. Alain Gairlies, my father grew a little restive.

‘It may be,’ he said, nodding his head gravely, ‘it may well be. God forbid that I should set bounds or limits to the grace o’ the Almichty! But I am bound to remark that the young man of whom you speak showed forth few of these gifts and graces during the days, few and evil, which he shared with me in the tent of my wilderness journeyings!’

‘What more natural,’ said Miss Anne, ‘than that the young man should be backward before so old and experienced a believer?’

But my father was not to be flattered in that way. For once Miss Anne was on a wrong tack.

‘Naw,’ he said, employing his solemnest accent of negation, ‘naw—I am but a puir sinfu’ worm— a

worm and no man. I judge no son or daughter of Adam, being too well aware of mine own shortcomings. But this Alain, called Gairlies— to be plain with you, young leddy, he seemed to me more eager to spend an hour wi' the lasses than to search the Scriptures, which are the only guides of faith and practice, as our most savoury and experienced divines have so well remarked!

Then there came that inevitable twinkle over the face of Miss Anne which I knew so well.

'And who is to blame him for that?' she cried, laying her hand on the old man's arm, and visibly to my clearer woman's eyes casting the glamour over him, 'who is to blame him or who should be ready with the first stone when even an elder of the kirk would rather slip round the back way to the dairy, to talk an hour with me, than to go up the gravel walk to the gun-room to cast up his accounts with Sir Tempest Kilpatrick as duty requires that he should?'

My father flushed his ruddiest out-of-door crimson, putting his hand to his head as if he had been shot or taken suddenly at unawares among a crowd of enemies.

'God forgie me,' he said, 'but it is true, ower true! Sir Tempest is awaiting me in his study even now. I will go. After that, who am I that I should judge those with the young heart rebellious within the young breast, in whose wrists the pulses of eighteen years are beating fast and strong, when

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even this my chill and sluggish tide flows so readily the wrong way?’

And that night, before he went to his bed, I could hear him at the prayer for guidance ‘in the matter of the young lass that was like to be so far left to hersel!’ And also for himself, poor Don MacTaggart—for these three-score-years-and-ten an unworthy servant of the Lord, whose feet even yet went not of their own accord in the narrow way.

I think he meant to clear his conscience by telling my mother all about it. For I heard his voice going late and long in their little bedroom. But I only heard my mother's final answer, which was quite definite and practical, though I doubt if it satisfied my father's scruples.

‘I hae the butter to kirn (churn) the morn's mornin', Donald,’ she said, ‘and if ye let me gang peaceably to sleep and stop yatterin', I'll be the better pleased, and maybe the Lord will be none the worse served. If ye had as mony calves on your mind as me, and the big hoose to keep supplied wi' butter forbye, ye wad hae room for fewer whigmaleeries under your bonnet!’

Though they agreed well together, my mother could not be said to sympathise with her husband's high scruples of conscience. She was governed by a lower but a very intelligible law. Yet she it was who held the house together, and sent the pair to their resting graves in a good old age— unashamed, owing

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no man anything, and with a good pickle money lying snug in the Cairn Edward bank. Such also have their heart-gods— though they be of the household and the hearthstone, homely porridge-pot divinities. And at the Day's ending this sort of religion may be found to have kept a good deal of high divinity from kicking the beam of life. Perhaps—I do not know! But this I do know, that my father and my mother, being carded each through the other, made the perfect religious soul. Certainly they were both good, although in ways how different!

When I awaked on the morning of the elopement, where my cheek had lain the pillow was sopping wet. I suppose I had been dreaming bad dreams. I cannot think of any other reason. Anne did not care—any more than she had been used to care, if in playing with the poor one wooden dolly which my father had made me with his whittle, it chanced to break. What did it matter? She would give me another. Had she not a hundred? One dolly was as good as another. And, to do Anne justice, she always kept her word. In nothing was she ungenerous or selfish—only thoughtless, and never could be brought to understand that what had no value for her might be very precious in the eyes of another.

So this morning of all mornings Anne came dancing in, her eyes flashing sea-dark almost like the depths of the sky the night I went down to— but I must not think of that again, especially not now.

And my heart cried out, just as if I had been one of her lovers— Anne— my sweet Anne! Yet I suppose I had as much reason as any of them to be angry with— with her thoughtlessness, I mean. Yet I never was angry with Anne. But went on loving her, and do love her to this day— the first of those whom God has sent into my life upon the earth.

Nevertheless there has always been to me a great wae about all the events of this day, and even now I find it difficult to write them down connectedly. Anne was so joyous, so lovely, so like a blush rose, with a sparkle in her eye the purport of which I doubted not. Alain and my father of course interpreted it in one way. But I, because I knew, in quite another. Mischief, sheer impish mischief, danced sarabands in that uncontrollable twinkle. Yet though she hurt even me, it did not seem to me any more wicked than if a pet bird had bitten my finger through the bars of the cage. There are more girls like that than one thinks— I mean who have power over other girls. They are not written about in books very often, because the people who write books either do not know, or will not speak the truth. Besides which most of them are men.

In the late afternoon was the time set. Sir Tempest would be away at St. Cuthbertstown on county business. My Lady would be asleep and snoring as was her custom. Anne and I often did not come back till dinner-time, and even then we made

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a scurry for it. Once indeed we were full half-an-hour late, and Sir Tempest's soup went cold—so that he flung the tureen out on the gravel walk and came near to throwing the butler after it. But in five minutes after our entrance Anne had wheedled him so that he said it did not matter. Then she wheedled him for other five and he begged Jenkins' pardon, saying he was sorry if he had used any unbecoming language.

At which Jenkins turned away his head and a tear stood in his eye to see his master, Sir Tempest Kilpatrick, Bart, of Grennoch and Ravensnuik, brought so low.

The carriage came from the Cairn Edward Hotel. It had belonged to the ancient mistress of a neighbouring castle, and when she had died the Ayres of the town hotel bought it for an old song, there being no opposition. It had stood ever since in a leaking coach-house, and was altogether in a rickety condition. But there was a tradition that old Lady Bombie, who was an heiress, had made a Gretna Green match in that very vehicle a hundred years ago or thereby. So as soon as she heard of this Anne would elope in no other—no, not if fifty Alains had gone down on their knees and knocked their heads simultaneously on the ground, as I have seen the Chinese do in pictures.

My father was to drive this lumbering vehicle over from Cairn Edward, and the youngest Ayre, who was a fine romantic-looking young man and

(they said) loved hopelessly the youngest daughter of a county family, had promised to keep everything secret on that side— a, promise which I am bound to say was most faithfully kept—indeed a good deal more faithfully than some other promises made nearer home!

The trysting-place was the Bridge of Barammon, a wild moorland spot, which most people hurried past because once upon a time there had been a cruel murder there. Two roads met at the Bridge, and the carriage could take refuge along the one that was sheltered by trees— if, as was most unlikely, any interruption was threatened.

I had insisted on Miss Anne's preparing her boxes for conveyance to the spot, if she really meant to elope. But she had retorted that according to the best authorities Lord Bombie had run away with Lady Bombie 'in her sark.' This I could not help regarding as both a most improper and a most uncomfortable proceeding— that is, considering the time of year, which was the week before Christmas.

But Anne pointed out that this was just a manner of speaking. She most certainly did not mean to go 'in her sark!' But instead in a complete rig-out of white, which also included a sealskin jacket 'to put over her knees,' and four pocket-handkerchiefs, each with a different scent upon it. Furthermore Anne remarked that it was not by any means the week before Christmas. But on the

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contrary, the week with the longest day of all the year, right in the middle of it. And, lastly, that (so far as she was personally concerned) she meant to be back and soundly asleep in her own bed by ten o'clock that very night. What Anne wanted was the effect without any of the inconveniences of a Gretna Green elopement. Yet I knew there would be trouble. You may drill your men in such cases, and be as sure of them as possible—yet know just as little of how they will take it as Miss Anne did that day.

Now, though, of course, I could not betray her, she being my own Anne, and I—well, she could have walked over me if she had liked—walked in clogs too. Still I did not think the plot was fair to anyone concerned, and so I resolved (so far as I could without betraying Anne) to straighten out things so that Alain should not get too great a shock, and that my father should keep his place at the Grennoch after we got back.

It was, to my credit be it said, my father that I thought of first. And in this I am different from the feck of sons and daughters. Praise heaven I myself have none of either! As far as I have seen, they are an ungrateful crew, and by the time they are thirteen or fourteen you have got all the good out of them you ever will get—except, as it were, parochial relief and a begrudged stool by the firestone. But then again I may be wrong in my thought. As I say, I know very little about children—to have them of one's own, I mean. I understand all that I want to

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understand about other people's. And thank you kindly.

Well, I came upon my father at twelve o'clock of the day, within a hundred yards of the saw-mill. He was walking with his hands behind his back and his under lip shoved very far out, deep in thought. With my father, you never could tell whether he was thinking about how many planks of inch and quarter could be gotten out of a particular tree, or about the charming naughtiness of his favourite Miss Anne, or about the unreasonablenesses of the minister in their last spirit-searching controversy concerning the position and functions of the Holy Spirit in the Trinity. Old Don MacTaggart looked just the same, whatever he was thinking about. This time it wasn't the Trinity, but something far more bothersome to most men in our parts. It was Miss Anne.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCERNS THE FLITTING OF THE BUTTERFLY

The afternoon was of a more than ordinary stillness. Slumbery clouds drifted solid and white as curded milk about the tops of the hills, with a sort of hinter-light of lurid purple behind them. An under-carry of grey woolly spindrift of a slaty colour flung itself noiselessly in the opposite direction a little above the tree-tops. These things meant thunder as plain as anyone could write the word. But Anne never once glanced up at the heavens. In her undignified language, which yet gives the idea as perfectly as any other form of words she had other fish to fry!

When I told my father that I did not think Anne meant to carry out things seriously, he replied gravely, 'I have been impressed, on the contrary, with Miss Anne's clear perception of her wants, and the remarkable power she has of getting them fulfilled!'

This was true enough. But then Anne's wants were not always such as she cared to avow, especially to my father. As with the thunderstorm that was brewing so uncannily in the air above us, there was always in Anne's mind 'under-carry' and

'over-carry'— a shifting world of whim of design, of purpose, veiled and unveiled. And yet those who only looked into Miss Anne's clear and guileless eyes were apt to think her the most single-minded young person in the world. Which was all right, so long as you were not made to smart by the other half of the 'carry'— to you unknown.

So, as I almost expected, my father would listen to nothing against Miss Anne. He had passed his word. He knew the pig-headedness of his master where his family pride was concerned, and was little accustomed to troubling himself about the matter. Don MacTaggart believed, with the dogmatism of forty years' service, that neither Sir Tempest nor the estate could exist a week without him. He had, consciously, the highest interests of his master's daughter at heart. He had seen whole universes of trouble come from making young people wed each other against their wills. (I hoped he would remember this when my time came, but I did not say so.) In short, Donald MacTaggart, head-forester, had made up his mind, and as usual he had a text to clench it with, as with a nail in a sure place. This was the text: *'And rejoice thou with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind and the pleasant roe . . . and be thou ravished always with her love!'*

'So it has happened to me,' he said, 'and so, if the Lord be gracious, it shall be with you, Clementina! Like mysel', your mother has her faults

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and grievous faults they are (I discharge you from ever mentioning a word of this to her). But still she is to me, even now when I am nearing the three score and ten years, as the loving hind and the pleasant roe!’

I know not what my mother would have felt had she heard him— probably she would not have been a woman if she had not been secretly pleased, the words coming of their own accord from a man so little given to sentiment. But I know well what she would have answered. It would have been something like this— Hind here and roe there, Donald MacTaggart! Thae are braw words, but they will not boil the parritch pot the morn's mornin'! Gang oot bye and cut some firewood at the hag-clog, and see that it is some dryer than what ye fetched me the last time!’

It is thus that the noblest bursts of sentiments are cut short, like my mother's kindling wood, by a lack of sympathy in the family circle.

There was nothing further, therefore, to be done with my father. As usual Anne had cast a glamour over him. As soon as you mentioned Anne, you got no more sensible answers out of him till you changed the subject. And, save for his grey hairs and his seventy years, I do not blame him. Neither, to be just, did my mother, who only smiled, and mentioned the proverb which concerns itself with the degree of folly among the aged.

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Baffled with my father, it was possible I might fare better with the painter. As an offset to Anne I found Mr. Alain Gairlies up to the ears in preparations. He had packed all his pictures, all his materials, all his canvases. He had been cleaning his clothes with turpentine, I could smell his working suit a quarter of a mile before I got to the cottage at the wood-corner.

When I went in my mother was up in his room with him helping him to choose a becoming tie. She thought he was going off to the wedding of a friend. That friend was an exceedingly near relative, and, if he had but known it, had small chance of waking to find himself a married man on the morrow's morn.

It was difficult getting a word with Alain alone. He was so absorbed in his preparations that he had hardly a word for me— that is, after he had once asked if I was the bearer of a message from Miss Anne. Alain was like a man walking in a dream. It struck me for the first time, after thus seeing my father and Alain, what fools men make of themselves about women. High character, good education, breeding, wit, dignity, may all go hang, if a lass smiles at them in a particular way, and they like the fashion of her countenance (it need not be a very pretty one). Down they get them on their marrow bones, gentle and simple, young and old, just as if it were some kind of compulsory drill!

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This is the general principle, but the reflection is made on account of Anne. Though really Anne was an exception if ever there was one. For her own sex could no more resist her than the men. That is, when she chose to be coaxing—which was by no means always.

Well, at long and last I got my chance of Alain.

‘Are you sure of her?’ I asked him; ‘she has given you her definite promise?’

He looked up, balanced between puzzlement and a contemptuous smile. The puzzlement was about the folding of a pair of trousers, which were his best. He wanted them to make a nest for a little blow-through spraying machine which I had seen him use for fixing rough chalk drawings. He did not want to spoil the clothes, but— he could not think of breaking the ‘sprayer.’ That would be too painful. It would even spoil his honeymoon. He had used it for many years and, except at Lichtertier, Barbe, and Company's, where could he get another half so good?

The accompanying smile was at the foolishness of my question. Did I think that I could make him doubt Anne? Ah, these women, he was doubtless thinking— they have always their knives into one another! And doubtless, at this point he had some very complacent cogitations. Perhaps he even suspected that— well— that I wanted him for myself.

After which I was determined. With suddenness astonishing even to myself my mind was made up. He could drift on the rocks in his own way. I would do what I could for my father, because he was my father. But that smile settled Master Alain Gairlies. I would give all I possessed to separate Miss Anne and himself. He should not have smiled like that.

Even now, sometimes, when helping Katie, my servant lass, to put clean slips on the pillows (the Captain is very particular), I remember about that smile, and—tremble with anger. There are some things a woman never forgets—and only pretends even to forgive. At least she is always saving up the spite just one day more!

‘Oh, yes, I will forgive him!’ she says, ‘I am a believing woman (or try to be) and it is so commanded. I will forgive him. Yes, but I will wait a little while yet—till tomorrow at any rate. And in the meantime it may be all finished. His sin may have found him out! And I shall be so sorry.’

We were to meet at the Cross-roads of Barammon. Miss Anne was all in white like a bride, but without showiness, just little sprays and puffs of lace at the neck and sleeves of a white dress. And on her lips was a smile of ravishing content, when, in the deep silence of the afternoon, she saw the great coach that had borne away my Lady Bombie. I carried the sealskin cloak to go over her knees. She

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smelled just of freshness and bleaching greens and sprigs of lavender. She was so sweet that she made even my head turn to look at her.

Alain stood beside the coach door with the handle in his fingers, and, I daresay, his heart was beating rarely. Mine would at any rate if I had been in his place. And I will do him the honour to suppose that his did also. Yet the little minx was playing with us all, and we knew it and let her— all except old Don MacTaggart, that is.

My father was on the box with a face that might have been carved in stone. He knew that his forty years' service was in play. But he believed also that Sir Tempest and Grennoch could not do without him, and besides, above all, he trusted in the star of Miss Anne. She had bewitched him, and when the time came she would doubtless make even Sir Tempest see the matter in its proper light. And at any rate at present my old Calvinist father had no mind of his own where Miss Anne was concerned. And, do you know, being a woman, I like him all the better for a weakness of this kind.

Anne went dancing down the path, looking sometimes at her white kid shoes and wondering, I daresay, if the laces would stay white. They are always the first thing to go, those and the toes. Alain kept his hat in his hand, and in the other the old-fashioned latch of the door.

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He let go both quite suddenly, and would have clasped Miss Anne in his arms. But at the brusque movement she gave a little scream.

'Oh no, you will crumple me all— and besides I am carrying too many things! Kiss Clem instead! There! That won't hurt!'

Alain stood checked and bemazed, while Anne, leaping safe within the cavernous well of the ancient coach, laughed merrily back

'Kiss her, sir, and be quick,' she cried out to him. 'Many a one would be glad of the chance. Perhaps it may be your last!'

I saw he was going to do it and let fall the little bag I was holding, just as Alain's arms, cheated of his proper mistress, came about me. I looked up, and felt myself saved.

'Father!' I cried in my distress.

But the stony face of Don MacTaggart never altered. He continued to regard with interest the ears of the Messrs. Ayres' post-horses.

'Tut, lassie,' he said in a low tone, 'is this a time to stand upon freets? Do as your mistress bids you, even as I am doing!'

'Kiss her, Alain, and be quick,' laughed the sprite inside, 'it is the first thing I have ever asked of you.'

And slowly and reluctantly (I will say that for him) the painter kissed me. On the mouth it was,

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and considering all the circumstances, a very excellent, conscientious piece of work.

How I got into that coach I never knew. But at any rate no sooner was I in my place than I broke into a perfect babyish torrent of tears, crying out that it was too hard— too hard. That Alain was a monster, and even my dear Miss Anne no better than she should be. God forgive me, but I did it. And Anne took me in her arms, at one and the same time teasing and comforting me.

Above on the seat my father drove on and on through the wildest parts of the country, and as we went the storm broke. It did not come gradually as it usually does in our valleys, rolling up from afar with grumblings and threatenings, but suddenly, like the clapping of hands. Darker and darker the clouds closed about us as I lay sobbing and sobbing, while Anne, her gay laughter gradually hushed, tried in vain to stop me. Opposite, upon the uncomfortable sagging seat, among the protruding Bombie horsehair, sat Alain Gairlies, looking very many different kinds of a fool. There are occasions when there is nothing for a man to do but to gnaw at his moustache and look a fool. And on this occasion Alain certainly acted that most manly part.

Now the strangeness of the situation was that none of us knew in the least what we were going to do. Alain was running away with the daughter of a great landowner— a gallant performance, but he had either trusted the details to Anne, or blindly

executed what she had told him to perform. He had informed himself as to the ease with which a pair can be married in Scotland after a sojourn of three weeks, and in this case both he and Anne had their feet upon their native heath. But as for the ways and means— they were Anne's. Anne knew. She it was who had ordered the coach. She had, he presumed, arranged about the minister. Alain himself was accustomed to set off on a journey with no more than a tooth brush in his breast-pocket and a piece of soap in a tobacco box. Therefore it was that he saw nothing out of the way in eloping with Miss Anne with a similar outfit— in fact, as he saw things, one piece of soap would do and Anne would doubtless bring her own tooth brush.

As for Anne, at the first great leap of livid flame and the astounding thunder crash which followed, she jumped to her feet, being ever kind-hearted, crying out, 'Oh, your father— your father! He will be killed out there! Tell him to come inside!'

Something touched me then! I am glad to think that in supreme moments I do not altogether lose my sense of humour. I think it may make even death easier. I had been sobbing my very heart out, but when Anne said, 'Bid your father to come inside—he will get wet.' I had the presence of mind to gasp out, 'Yes, and tell him to bring the horses inside as well! They will get wet, too!'

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No great things of a jest, maybe. In itself, perhaps, nothing at all! But considering that my heart was broken, or that for the moment I thought so, I have a certain weak-minded pleasure in looking back on the saying.

We had come to a place on the moor where the heathery heads of half-a-dozen plateaux look down on the old military road, which pierces the wilds for seventy-five miles in a meandering line. The storm had burst upon this high exposed place with a kind of compensatory fury.

'I'll show you,' it seemed to say, 'what it means to have had a long afternoon's warning, and then after all venture up here to beard me in my very stronghold with your carriages and horses! Why could you not have stayed at home on such a day!'

And that was indeed the very question which Miss Anne was asking— first of herself, then of me, and lastly of Providence and the elements in general.

Last of all Miss Anne bethought herself again of my father sitting like carven granite on the box, the lightning colouring him lilac and green and pale blue alternately— like those coloured fires they burned in front of Grennoch Great House when Tempest John Barnaby came of age, the time when one of the underkeepers blew off two of his fingers in his enthusiasm.

Well, my father was like that— not, of course, like the underkeeper. And I can tell you, not being

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Miss Anne, even I was afraid of him. But she was not, calling on him to stop as bold as a brass fender.

‘I want to go home, Don,’ she said. ‘This is awful!’

Now she did not know my father and was little prepared for his answer.

‘Whoso putteth his hand to the plough and turneth back—’ he quoted, and drove on through the increasing storm. Flash after blinding flash. Blare after ear-splitting blare— all the trumpets of the sky sounding the fanfare at once. Never did I hear such a clamour as the hills sent back. One moment we saw about us as it were all the landscape of heather and bent standing out in a blaze of crystal, every blade and raindrop and duck-weedy pool edged with blinding light. The next everything was purple black like the inside of a coffin, and oh, the difficulty of breathing! In the crackling leather belly of that old coach it was a regular inferno of airless-ness and oppression. It was very well for Anne, who had her head out most of the time, seeking to persuade my father, crying that she never meant to elope, that she wanted to be driven quietly home again—and that, in fact, the whole thing had been a mistake.

‘The very elements!’ she said, trying my father on what she supposed was his blind side. ‘Look! The very elements are against us. Let us put it off to a

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more convenient season. It's Providence, I tell you!' said she. 'Ouch!'

And in fact, at that moment there came a flash so terrible that it seemed to throw Anne back into the coach by the very impact of the brightness. She covered her face with her hand. But through it all we heard the carriage driving on and on, and the voice of old Don MacTaggart proclaiming indomitably his view of the Law and the Prophets.

'Naw— naw, my bonny lass,' the Man-with-the-Bill-hook was declaring, 'Providence has other wark to do than to fright the worms and pismires o' the earth! For sic are we, and sic, saving your gentility, are you also, bonny Miss Anne! Ye trysted wi' me, Donald MacTaggart, to carry ye safe to the manse o' my freend Maister Ebenezer Heatherbrod, that is soond in the fundamentals, and in this thing also, a very Nicodemus of faith, in that he is willing to a richteous deed secretly by night! Noo, Miss Anne, I hae a great respect for ye, my lass. For as ye weel ken, I hae risked for your sake baith my place and my pension. Mair, I hae riskit my character, that has been three-score year and mair in the upbuilding! Ay, an' mairried ye shall be—if it be only for my credit. Or, in the name of his Maker and the Ten Commands, Donald MacTaggart will ken the reason why! Therefore draw in your bonnet like a guid lass and bide snug where ye are!'

This was indeed the Man-with-the-Bill-hook—his very style—the man before whom Rough Rob of

the Creochs appeared even as a little ill-behaving callant, that slinks from a whipping. And indeed within Lady Bombie's rickety old Gretna Green coach, I think even Miss Anne felt no whit different.

But it was doubtless a serious predicament for everyone concerned. The storm lashed the windows, till they had to be drawn up. It seemed no longer any use to argue with my father. For the drip was fast reducing Miss Anne's white bonnet, dress, gloves, lace, ribbons, boots, to a pulp— and it was her turn to cry now, which she did most heartily. I can tell you it was a strange thing to see Miss Anne, who always had a plan for everything, or rather the choice of half-a-dozen plans, fast in the grip of a plain old wood-forester, who sat on the box and drove us all towards the goal of his chosen minister's manse, where two people were to be made one flesh, very much against the will of one of them, and that the one who had made all the arrangements for the runaway wedding.

Anne was indeed hoist with her own petard. And indeed from the noise, petards seemed to be bursting everywhere outside the coach within a few yards, while fresh streams of water began to trickle in at the cracks of Lady Bombie's ancient framework, seeking out the foldings of the leather and coming through the chinks of the 'gizend' doors.

'Oh, I won't be married— I won't be married! Take me home! It's all your fault, Clemmy, this!'

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Anne cried louder than the high singing note of the storm fresh from the west, 'Yes, all your fault! If you had not said he was so splendid, I would never have wanted to go to that old Orchard— horrid place! And you—oh, let me out — let me out! or I declare I will kill myself. I will not go before that minister and be married at eighteen! I will die first!'

I held her firmly in my arms, whereat Alain looked as if he would like to assist. But each time he came near her Miss Anne cried out, 'I will kill myself! I will kill myself!' So that in the end he retired, disconcerted.

Though I loved Anne— yes, more than my own soul, I declare I could have slapped her. Yes, no other word expresses it. I could have slapped her soundly— and with pleasure too.

Then, presently, seeing nothing could be made of this, she dried her eyes, and in a little lull of the storm, she said, meekly enough, 'Now I did all this for you, Alain, and you must do something for me! (Let Anne reconcile this with her own conscience when she reads it.) Now Clemmy's father will not stop or let me out. But do you wait till we are passing through a wood, and then you, Alain, open the door gently. The step will fall out of itself. The carriage will go slower up the hill, and I will drop off!'

'But what are we to do then?' I cried, instinctively grasping her purpose of leaving us all in the lurch.

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'And pray, what of me?' gasped Alain, but as I could see with no real purpose of disobedience.

Anne's eyes took on that look— there ought to be a special word to use when one is disappointed in one's nearest and dearest—evidently Anne had expected quite other things of Alain—for her eyelashes quivered.

'Well,' she said softly, 'I did think you would have done a little thing like that for me. I thought—you said—you loved me!'

She murmured these words and sighed. 'Besides which, when you do get to the minister's—you two—they can't marry you against your will, can they? But if I went, that terrible father of yours, Clemmy, would make me get married in spite of myself! I never saw such a man. He does not mind what I say—not even when I cry!'

'I should not mind at all!' said Alain, mournfully, 'and only this morning you said it was the dearest hope of your heart!'

Anne waved her hand to signify that what he felt or thought was of no importance whatever, any more than what she might have said so long ago as that morning. It is so absurd to rake up ancient history.

It was a quarter of a mile farther on that we managed it. After this little outburst, both Alain and I occupied ourselves in implicitly following Anne's directions—as of yore. Well, at the appointed place

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Anne dropped on the road, her white slippers splashing in the mud, and I am quite sure she was wet through to the very skin before she had gone fifty yards from the coach.

But I did not care a button, so long as I was not to be married at eighteen!' she said afterwards. 'And if I had let your father take me on to his old minister's, married I should have been, with my will, or against it! Then fancy having to wear a bonnet and be sedate, like mother, on Sundays! Oh, no, no?'

Ebenezer Heatherbrod had, for well-nigh half a century, been the minister of the parish of Drunts, a widely scattered parish inhabited by about a thousand black-faced sheep for every man in it. The minister was a simple-minded man in a simple-minded place. My father had known Ebenezer as scythesman on the same swathe, when he was doing his own first stint of harvest work as bandster to my mother's lifting. And, in spite of such slight accidents of life as the colleging of one and the settling down of the other as wood-forester, Ebenezer and Donald had remained staunch friends unto this day.

This, then, was the man at whose door the late Lady Bombie's carriage pulled up in the dusk of the evening. The minister was on the steps to receive us, dressed in his best for the unwonted occasion. He had had two or three days' warning. Don MacTaggart had sent over one of his myrmidons,

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with a letter, a little lad who had come to the 'tree-barking' at a nominal wage to 'get his hand in' for the forestry.

'In bye wi' the lot o' ye!' cried my father imperiously, from the far side of the coach; 'the beasts winna stand in sic a storm!'

'My daughter Meg will see to them!' said the minister.

'Meg will do less, some deal!' replied the young lady addressed, with extreme promptitude. 'I am to be a bridesmaid. It is a promised thing. By my faith, faither, to hear ye, you would think we had a wedding in the manse of Drunt ilka day o' the week! If there is naebody for us to marry— Mary and Bess and Davidia and myself, forbye the whaups— surely we hae at least a richt to look on when anither lass has better luck!'

The minister appeared to consider for a moment. He scratched his thick grey poll indulgently. He knew the curiosity that loneliness and lack of opportunity breed in all women's hearts.

'Send for the Session-clerk!' he said, with an air of authority. Whereupon—a man broad and solemn, with the air of a moderately well-off farmer, and evidently in his best attire, showed dimly at the door far within.

'Session-clerk,' cried the minister, 'come oot this moment and haud thae horses.'

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‘But, sir,’ remonstrated the official, ‘I am needed— as registrar of the parish I have a double duty to perform!’

‘Haud thae horses!’ repeated the minister, ‘as Moderator of Session, I command you! Disobey me at your peril!’

‘Weel,’ said the Session-clerk, ‘dinna blame me if the marriage is tried afore the Fifteen and fand no to be lawful!’

‘Hoot,’ said the minister, ‘the difficulty in Scotland is to keep a mairriage frae bein' legal. Onything is legal. Ye canna blaw your nose on the same hanky wi' a lass without being married to her— that is, mair or less!’

At which the four Misses Heatherbrod sighed. They had not found the matter quite so easy, not from want either of will or of ‘hankies,’ but from positive lack of men. Even in the parish of Drunt, with the Session-clerk under the orders of your father, who is Moderator of Session, you cannot get married without a man to have you. It is a great pity. The Misses Heatherbrod thought so.

The Session-clerk went out sadly and took the heads of the horses. He looked so piteous that the minister consoled him thus:

‘Ye can come ben at the signing o' the names. We will be the better o' ye then, and, forbye, we will keep a chack o' the bride's cake for ye—and a sup o' drink!’

CHAPTER TEN

CONCERNING WITCHES

But there was no thought of bride's cake nor even supps of drink when my father realised that he had been tricked. His wrath was terrible, and curiously enough, turned chiefly on me. I have never yet understood how I won through with it. He stood and gusted at us—now silent as if gathering strength, anon breaking forth with a roar that put the tempest outside to shame. At one time he was for driving straight back to catch Miss Anne, but even in his passion he realised that one who had tricked him (and all of us) so cleverly, would never stick to the made road, and as it was now dusk, it would be more impossible than ever to overtake her in the coach of my late Lady Bombie—though had it been day her white dress might have proved a far-seen fairlie on the great moor we had been crossing.

Ebenezer Heatherbrod was, I think, at bottom not a little edified and somewhat amused. He rather liked to see my father lose his temper.

However, in one of the brief lulls he hazarded a suggestion.

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'Donald Mac,' he said (for that was the name my father and he had between themselves), 'what say you?'

Here is a young man grainin' for a wife. And here are nae less than five honest lasses, ilka yin without a man, and, as far, at least, as my ain cleckan are concerned, little likely to get yin. What then is to hinder him frae makkin' his choice amang the five. Dod, it's few that get sic a pick. I declare it minds me o' Solomon at bedtime. Lord, often and often hae I thocht that he maun hae been sair pitten tilt, to ken at wha's bed head he was to wind up his watch—wi' a' yon three hunder to choose frae. It is nae merrickle that King Solomon was caa'ed the wisest man that ever was! Na, the wonder is that he leaved to tell the tale! And thae proverbs o' his! There's juist nae end o' common sense in them. But as for his Sang—I am guessin' that he made that up, before he had sae mony weemen-folk to bother his heid about?'

'Faither,' interrupted his daughter Meg, 'you forget yourself! What ye say is maist unbecoming. Neither my sisters nor me will be spoken of, in ony siccan company—three hunderd, indeed, and winding watches at bed heads! Think shame o' yoursel'.'

The minister of Drunts might have been somewhat abashed but he was far from quenched.

'Aweel,' he said, with philosophy, 'ye are the children o' my auld age, and Guid kens I did the

best I could. But ye are no to say bonny, ony o' the fower o' ye! Noo, there is a young man here. And ye ken weel that I never believe in throwing awa' the mercies that a kind Providence scatters no to say ower freely, on our pilgrimage road. What says the youth himself?'

But Alain was for the moment too broken-hearted to say anything. Though in the carriage he himself had aided and abetted the flight of Miss Anne, the sight of the preparations, the wine and the bride's cake set out and even the plain, kind, moorland faces of the Misses Heatherbrod awaked in his heart the image of what he had lost. He hung his head and was silent. On the worn carpet in front of the fireplace my father volleyed and declaimed till he was a mere extinct volcano. Then he too stood silent, the wet running steadily off him on to the threadbare Heatherbrod rug. He was remaking his plans.

At last he spoke.

'Come your ways home, Clementina,' he cried, suddenly, 'let us return to that deceitful woman. I declare that for what she hath done this night I could even in my wrath hew her in pieces. Ay, or strike her through and through in the midst of the camp before the Lord— for a warning, even as was done by Eleazar unto Cozbi, the daughter of Zur the Midianite. For that she hath made me a shame and a laughing-stock before the elders of my people.'

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'Hoots— toots, Donald Mac!' said the minister of Drunts, 'what hae ye again' the lass? She wasna gaun to mairry you, that ever I heard o', and if the young man is a wee kennin' wae and dowie at the heart— what o' that? Is that no the lot o' every man that makes and mells wi' the weemen-folk? Let twenty years pass, and ken ye no that he will be on his knees blessin' the day that she slippit awa' oot o' my Leddy Bombie's auld coach, and left him a free man?'

'Ebenezer,' said my father, coming down a little from off his high horse, 'there may be good matter and true wisdom in what you say. Because, who but a light woman and one of no instruction, would have brought us all hither through the storm—as it were, filling heaven and earth with laughter at our folly?'

'Hoots—toots,' cried the minister, again, 'tak' a gless o' something warm, Donald! The kettle has been on the fire for hours. The ham is ready to slice, and my douce Meg there—for a' her auld faither's daffin', is ready to do ony mortal thing to gar the wheels o' your cairt rin easier.

'Naw—naw—' said my father, earnestly, though with far less anger than I had expected, 'there are a pair o' horse at the door that are neither mine nor yet my master's. And it behoves me to see them into their ain stable in time o' nicht. Forbye—I have to settle with that vain woman— that licht Jezebel who would deceive the very Elect!'

Then quite suddenly and out of all expectation the anger of Alain Gairlies was kindled. No one had anticipated such a thing. No one could have believed it. He looked so young, and in a manner so frail. Yet he stood up to my father—the forester, looking like a wet standing-stone on the hillside, before which they light the Bale-fires on St. John's Eve, a menhir that the storms of centuries have beaten against. And yet this pale laddie with the curled hair bearded staunch old Don MacTaggart, the Man-with-the-Bill-hook. Or rather would have bearded him, if my father had worn the beard, which he did not (that I can remember) all the life of him.

‘Hold your tongue,’ said Alain, ‘you mean well, old man. But I will not hear a word against Miss Anne Kilpatrick. Who speaks even one such has to reckon with Alain Gairlies!’

My father bent his brows upon the venturesome youth, as it were from a height. His great hands twitched. I think he meant to throttle him then and there. And in spite of us all he could have done it, as easy as drawing the neck of a rabbit. But the lithe girlish form of the painter, and the swelling of his breast, half with anger and half with a desire to weep, somehow touched the elder man, and he turned away with a grim smile and one of his favourite proverbs on his lips.

‘How long, ye simple ones,’ he said, ‘will ye love simplicity?’

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And yet, as I got me obediently into the depths of that great shandrydan of my Lady Bombie's, I could not help thinking: 'And yet, where among all the sons of simplicity is a more simple to be found than this my own father, Donald MacTaggart?' I would have wagered even then that if Miss Anne had had the first five minutes over with him, he would have been as much her slave as ever.

As for Master Alain, he accepted of the free invitation of the minister and consented to abide in the manse. And I saw the four Miss Heatherbrods gather about him, each with comforting on her plain face, even while he was yet looking over their shoulders at me. Then very wickedly it came into my mind, that he would rather have had another kiss from me, even in the hour of his misery, than all the Heatherbrod comfort in the world. And I was glad that that demon Anne had made him do it at the first. It might at least be some comfort to him, if (as was little likely) he ever thought on the Back Pastures and the girl who first came down to him through the purple gloaming and the dewy grass.

Thus was ended Miss Anne's first adventure, made in search of information. Experience teaches fools, so they say. But I think that Miss Anne was far too wise to profit by it.

Moreover, Alain should have benefited more than he did. But he was naturally born Alain, and an artist. And the artist-folk, like the most beautiful birds, have to pay for their attractiveness by being

created with fewer brains than all other creatures devised by the Almighty. Once when I was at a certain garden in London, where they charge a shilling for going in, one of the keepers of the beasts, a wise man, told me that this was true, so far as the fine-feathered birds were concerned. As to poets, actors, artists, singers, musicians and such like I do not know— but think it very likely.

But I must tell of my getting back to Grennoch. My father dropped me at the little green gate by the sawmill, of which he had the key. It was better not to pass the lodge where my mother was, because thus we would avoid the asking of inconvenient questions. Nor, which was another consideration, would the great coach need to be taken up the main avenue. When I got out the rain had ceased, and every tree and bush was drenched and dripping with the patter of great blobs of water. There was a strange chill in the air, at once fresh and light after the thunder-storm. I fairly picked up my damp skirts and ran to keep myself warm. I could see the lights also in the little back room where Miss Anne and I took our meals, when we could manage it. I saw the narrow, slim, starched shadow of Sir Tempest come and go stiffly across and across the windows, moving with that well-known curious hitch of his, as if he had the right leg made of wood— which indeed had been my belief till once on a time I saw him kick a dog-boy down by the kennels.

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I went in by the little private door, which I knew Miss Anne would have left open for me. It was called the factor's entrance. But ever since Sir Tempest had done his own factoring, both the door and the staircase had been unused—except by us girls, when for some reason of our own we did not desire to call the attention of all the household to our incomings and outgoings. I knew the door would be open. One might always trust Miss Anne. She thought of everything. And on this occasion it was well that she did so. For had I remained in my wet dress one minute longer, I would have taken my death of cold. Even as it was, I sneezed three times on the way to my room. But once there, I stripped to the skin and had a good rub-down with a towel. Since I have become older, to this recipe I have added a glass of cordial. But at that time and for many years a rub with a towel did just as well.

Then I dressed and went directly into the dining-room.

Sir Tempest had sent away the servants and was attending on Miss Anne himself! I thought I should have dropped. Anne was indeed a marvel. I expected that at the least her father would have had her locked up in her own chamber, awaiting sentence. And that he would of a certainty have sent her to a convent in the morning.

But instead here he was, with a potato dish in his hand, the tears welling from his eyes, and murmuring at intervals, 'My poor girl, my poor, poor

girl— what perils you have been through! Do take another cutlet!’

The which she did, and seeing me, made room for me by her side, crying out heartily, ‘You are just in time, Clemmy. These cutlets are very good! It is a great pity that the peas are all done. Little pig that I am, to take them every one!’

Upon which she threw her arms about my neck, as I thought, impelled by an impulse of affection, but really to let me know how much she had told her father.

But, as for me, I could not eat. The dry potato seemed to choke me, and all the while as Sir Tempest kept patting his daughter's shoulder and murmuring, ‘My poor, poor child!’ I could see Alain Gairlies sitting with his head between his hands in an upper room of the manse occupied by the Reverend Ebenezer Heatherbrod, minister of the parish of Drunts.

But I did not know how at that moment Meg, the minister's eldest daughter, was at his chamber door with a plaster of oatmeal and cunning herbs for his chest, lest he should catch cold. Or that on the morrow he should decide that there were many fine subjects in the neighbourhood of Drunts, which would exactly suit his style. For in all things Alain Gairlies was the complete artist.

But my father was another swathe to cut. And indeed I trembled for Miss Anne's first encounter

with the Man-with-the-Bill-hook. Yet it came about quite otherwise than I had foreseen. I may add that I myself kept out of his way for some time. But Miss Anne on the contrary, seeing him crossing the lawn next morning with his forester's weapon over his shoulder, called out to him exactly as if nothing had happened.

'Come,' she cried, 'come beneath my window—I want to speak to you!'

My father made as if to pass by without speaking, intent to all appearance upon his affairs.

'I am sorry,' she called out after him. And I declare the tones of her voice would have melted a heart of stone. My father flung but one scornful look at her—and was lost. For the tears were on her cheek, and when she spoke it was in a choked voice. How she managed it I know not.

'I am so sorry—that—that you are angry with me!' said Miss Anne. 'It came over me somehow. I felt all at once that I was doing wrong to disobey my father.'

But for once Donald MacTaggart saw with the wide-open eye. He was not angry any more, indeed; but the sorrow of the man who has seen his idols shattered before his eyes did not depart from him.

'Ah, lassie, lassie!' was all that he said at the time. And so he went his way into the deep aisles of his woodland world, without giving her time or opportunity for further explanation or coquetry. And always after that, though Miss Anne's power over my

father was perhaps as great as ever, it was certainly different in kind.

And to do her justice, she had a sore heart because he had left her thus. She wanted to stand first in everyone's heart, even in that of an old seventy-year-old forester.

'I wanted to tell him, and he would not let me!' she said over and over.

Then the truth came upon her with a rush of self-revelation.

'And he as much as said that he would not believe me if I had told him!'

At the time I thought it very unjust of my father. For me also the gadfly had bitten, and I ran as wild on the mountains after Miss Anne as any Man-thing of them all.

I think these great woods had an effect upon my life— though indeed I lived mostly at the House of Grennoch with Miss Anne, unconsciously taking on many ways of speech and thought that were perhaps unbecoming in a forester's daughter. But as soon as I left the gravelled sweep of the drive in front of the house, passing through the earth-scented laurel coppice I found myself in the trackless woods, where never anything moved of human save Miss Anne and I alone— with perhaps a rare vision of my father, his bill-hook over his shoulder, or some of his men passing across a green vista, all self-absorbed, centred on the work in hand, and no more

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mindful of us than of the red-brown squirrels that ran up the trees or chattered with transient anger out of the branch crotches.

But there were nests in this wilderness, haunts of love and life and human endeavour. My mother's house, first of all, where were my sister Bess and the bees and the single cow, together with a myriad of kindly interests, my mother presiding in the midst, bland and gracious of mien, yet with a tongue that all feared. No wonder it has been the immemorial belief of the race that the earth stands still and the universe moves about it. They were right. For all women, and ninety-nine men out of the hundred, Galileo lived in vain.

The family gathering-place— be it gipsy-tripod, Indian bark wigwam, striped tent of the Bedu, palace-hall, savage with strewn rugs and battle-axes, clerk's suburban parlour furnished on the three-years' system (and an anxiety about the last payments, owing to the ... the unforeseen), these are for mankind the true centres of the universe. The worlds, near and far, revolve about them. And man with his eyes on his own hearth-fire may well say with a certain one of the poets — whose book, given to Anne by one of her adorers, I found on the shelf all uncut—

Your chilly stars I can forego, This kind, warm world is all I know!

Always I liked the words, and often thought of them when, out of the ruddy shine of the hearth, the

lighted glow of lattices, I emerged into silence and the solemnity of things. There was the world of birds and shy wild tree-dwellers, of rustling leaves also, of far-descending roots steeped in moisture and hidden in the rich red earth, of tall clean trunks, smooth all round save on the north side, where the moss clings and the lichen protects it from the winter blast—and then above, high in the garish sunshine, the final coronal of leaves. In such a world I loved to dream, sitting hushed, immovable as one of the grey oak stems. Anne was different. She must either be off in search of company, planning some new pretty devilry, or playing off upon some swain or milkmaid her tale of premeditated coquetries.

She felt it too, doubtless, but in a different way. There was a wildwood grace about my young mistress, and when she moved it was as one who had been used to take the burns in her stride. She gathered her skirts and sprang easily over the crumbling dykes. And if she accepted a hand at a stile, it was for quite another reason than that she needed assistance.

I think I have noted somewhere that my father had his differences with the minister of the parish, the Reverend Physgill McMachar. Yet each, I think, thoroughly respected the other. But they had differed upon some point accounted fundamental—some ‘filoque’ of Scottish controversy—I know not what. For I have never been skilled in the like, and

the Captain, honest man, cares more for the flavour of his Souchong than for all the seven points of divinity. But during these days, as my father's constant companion, I had enough instruction and to spare—the bulk of which, alas! went in at one ear and out at the other. My father used to say I must have a passage from one to the other of my ears, cut clean as a whistle. He could clear it out, he said, with a bottle brush. For I could forget more quickly and completely than anyone he ever saw. This might have been true at the time. But, after my education with Miss Euphemia, shooting up in unexpected places and insisting upon showing itself when least wanted, I have found ever and anon some of my good old father's teachings and arguments—which at the time I had minded no more than the twittering of the sparrows and starlings at war under the thatch.

Specially was this so in respect to those things concerning which I used to hear him argue, in company with the minister, Mr. McMachar, and still more with his yet closer friend the dominie, Mr. Hutchie. The Doctor-dominie was in the main of one mind with my father—stern Calvinists both of them, generally despairing of their own 'Election,' and always of each other's. But for all that good comrades, and gallant adversaries in many a hard-fought wordy combat concerning the things that are, and that were, and that shall be.

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It was in the wood, snuggled close in a tree-stump, that the next day I heard the two of them come along. Now had I been a proper young lady, or minded in the least the instructions of Miss Euphemia, of course I should have hastened to make my presence known. But in the woods I was more like a boy. I held by the elder ethics. I had the blood of the savage in my veins, or at least that of the Man-with-the-Bill-hook. At any rate, I abode still where I was, my legs (though I was full eighteen) platted Turk-fashion beneath me, caught up in the broad easy spread of an aged oak, and a perfect umbrella of shade all about me.

My father was speaking to his friend. They walked slowly and sadly, both of them pacing the forest aisles like patriarchs.

'Hutchie,' said my father, 'I have come back frae the Vailley o' the Shadow?'

The dominie, also a stern, grave man (the village doctor of a day before compulsory diplomas), glanced once at his companion. My father's face wore its usual ruddy hue of health.

'What was it?' he said. 'Maybe an accident? Ye have not been ill, surely, without sending for me!'

'Naw, Hutchie,' said my father, 'naw. But I have comed near to sinning the sin that hath no forgiveness — neither in this warld nor yet in the warld to come!'

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'Hoots,' said the dominie, thinking this the start of an argument, 'we have spent three years on that already —dinna let us begin at it again!'

My father shook his head. He had stopped, and in his earnestness he had taken the Dominie-doctor by the lapel of his ancient blue coat. It was the shape now worn only in evenings by gentlefolk. I mind it had broad brass buttons with a crown on them, and the sleeve-buttons (which were also used for the waistcoat) had an anchor.

'Naw—Hutchie,' he said again solemnly, 'but I have been making an idol of the creature—the poor weak creature. And I forgot the will o' the Lord. He was not in a' my thochts. And I am punished—ay, sair punished. The last nicht when a' thing was sleeping, I walked to and fro, and the Lord hid His face from me. Me that has served Him langer than I hae served Sir Tempest Kilpatrick there! The like never happened afore! I prayed to Him and the door was shut. Oh, Hutchie man, I saw it, a great Shut Door—awfu' to think on, wi' a seal on it. And I fell on my knees and prayed. I prayed, man— ay— I prayed lang an' sair!'

'And ye gat the answer?'

'Ay, I gat an answer!' said my father, 'but the answer was a Fiery Sword that waved up and doon afore the Shut Door—the Door wi' the Seal ontill 't! What think ye o' that for an answer?'

The schoolmaster thought a moment and then spoke.

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'Don,' he said, in a low voice, 'was it a woman?'

My father's head had been bowed. He had set the point of his bill-hook on the ground and leaned his chin on the shaft. He did not speak.

'And was there wrang?' continued the dominie, calmly.

At this my father lifted up his face swiftly, and it was illuminated even as I had seen it by the lightning of the night before. Something not of this earth shone on it.

'Wrang?' cried he. 'What think ye o' me, your freend? Wad I be speakin' to you, Hutchie, like this, if there had been wrang— me, a man on the verge o' the grave? Hutchie, there was nae wrang—save that I set the creature afore the Creator! Surely that was wrang eneuch. She is high abune the like o' me, even as the stems (stars) are hung high abune the earth. But the sin was nane the less again' the Lord that bocht me wi' His precious bluid!'

My father waited a moment and then went on more calmly.

'For not only did I forget fer her sake (baffling bairn that she is) my guid wife Janet, and my twa dochters, and my duty to my earthly maister— but I took the bit atween my teeth, and wadna let conscience speak wi' me! Man, Hutchie, I kenned I was wrang—ay, frae the start. But as sure as the Seal is on the Door—I couldna help mysel'.'

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'I dinna blame ye, Donald— I dinna blame ye!' said the dominie, gently laying his hand on the arm of his friend. 'She has maist awfu' winnin' ways! Even I mysel'.'

My father gasped and his face grew grim.

'I named no names!' he said. But his face was grey-white.

'There is no need in this countryside,' replied his friend. 'Witches are not so common, witches that gar men's heads run wud— ay, though they be grey and they be doomed to abide poor men all their days! And man, Donald,' he spoke in a low tone, so that I had to lean well out of my nest of leaves to hear him, 'ye ken I am a man that has baith children and children's children to provide for. And, forbye, I am a carefu' man. But fac' as daith, when she cam' into the shop the last time for sixpenny worth o' sticking plaister— ye'll no believe me, but I gied it her for fivepence ha'penny!'

CHAPTER ELEVEN

CONCERNING OUR FLITTING TO RAVENSNUIK

For the time and country Sir Tempest was a rich man. Grennoch was not his only residence. This Anne and I soon found (as we thought at first) to our cost. I know not how the matter of the elopement had gotten out. At that I can make no guess. But little by little there stole abroad a whisper, and out of the whisper issued a bruit, and out of the bruit came a gathering of heads about the kirk yett, which scattered shamefacedly as the Grennoch carriage drove up, or when Miss Anne and I walked smartly in, from the green quiet of our woodland paths.

At any rate, whether the heads of the family were informed or not, it came to be thought a good time for Miss Anne to pay one or two visits, and first of all to Ravensnuik, a property which her father held in Strath Esk in the Central Lothian. The house itself had been for some time uninhabited by the family. For up to the last year it had been let on long lease to a lawyer's family from Edinburgh, with whom Sir Tempest was wont to sojourn when he visited the Ravensnuik estate at rent-times. I have reasons for believing that Mrs. Justus Caption, the lawyer's wife, did not bless the circling seasons

which brought her such a guest as Sir Tempest. For the careful baronet was accustomed to run over the informal inventory of all the movables somewhat as follows:

'Eh, Mistress Caption, but I am feared that your servants need looking after. Yonder is a hole in the parlour hearth-rug, where the housemaid has let a coal drop off the shovel. That was not there six months since. Of that I am assured, by the testimony of my eyesight. And the spare-room fender has a dinge in it, which with careful usage should never have happened. Forbye, madam, carpets were intended to be beaten. They were never meant to be abused or torn into rags of tatters, as appears to be the custom among your domestics!'

In this way, immediately upon his arrival at Ravensnuik. Sir Tempest set about making himself beloved. It took some time to penetrate his rind, and appreciate the soundness of the nut beneath. And the Justus Captions did not give themselves time. For the lady of the house, immediately after one of these annual inquisitions, caused her husband to give notice of removal. So that for the last six months, Ravensnuik had been under the care of the gardener and his wife. The day before we started Sir Tempest, quite unexpectedly, declined to make the journey with us. He had been there quite recently, making out the bill of costs and damages which Mr. Justus Caption was at present busily engaged in contesting from court to court. For the present

therefore he had done with Ravensnuik. He hated, he said, to go there except to gather in the rent. He found the Lothian farmers 'the deil and a' for demanding reductions, improvements, onsteads, dwelling-houses, fences—and Providence alone knew what! All this offended the Laird of Grennoch, accustomed to the more easy-going, 'let-ill-alone' of the Galloway fanner. No words were bad enough for the forward rascals whom an unkind fate had given him as tenants in the metropolitan county! So Sir Tempest, believing in his heart that the two of us would be none the worse of a chaperon, and willing also that Miss Anne should be in a position to return as well as to receive callers, ordered Lady Kilpatrick to be in readiness to accompany us forthwith to Ravensnuik.

I think that a certain hope of emancipation for a time made Lady Kilpatrick the more ready to obey. She too must occasionally have suffered from an overplus of the husband of her bosom. And I think she left Grennoch with the firm intent to let her duties of chaperonage sit lightly upon her. Her daughter at least allowed her no illusions upon the subject. Whatever she had done at Grennoch, at Ravensnuik she was to do as she was told.

'It will be better in every way,' said Miss Anne to me, 'there will, of course, be new young men calling, and we can always tell mamma that the east winds have an effect on her nerves, so that she had

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better not see too many people. Then she will be sure to stay most of the time in her bedroom, which will give us a clear field and the favour we will see to ourselves!’

‘Not that mamma matters much anyway,’ added this dutiful daughter. ‘Nor father either—except when he gets the tantrums!’

But then the disease so unfilially alluded to by Miss Anne, was almost chronic with the Baronet, so occasionally Sir Tempest mattered very much.

We found that Ravensnuik sat pleasantly enough on a sheltered knoll among the woods beneath the Pentlands.

There was an artificial pond at the back, large enough to row ten strokes upon, before the prow of the boat went into the opposite bank. But, by tying the rudder square across the stern, one could get a good deal of exercise going round and round as upon the hobby-horses at a fair.

The house was not nearly so large as Grennoch, but all the more for that it possessed a certain charm of homeliness. There were long walks, planted on either side with gooseberry and currant within the garden, or shaded deep with yew outside it. At any rate, left to ourselves, we thought it would do very well. And, this being decided, Anne began immediately to arrange her plan of campaign.

‘Mother can have the south drawing-room because the sun comes in there, and makes everything look faded. Now faded things do not suit

me. So we will take the white drawing-room with the old-fashioned roses on the floor. That will do far better. Besides there is a second little room off it where you can go and read—that is, if he looks as if he were going to stay extra long, or is very nice indeed!’

‘Then sometimes I will take the back room—but mind you—I shall certainly look through the keyhole to see how you are managing!’

But how Miss Anne herself managed, how she bagged her game was by far the more interesting study. For she was never twice the same in her methods. I suppose there must have been girls like Anne before. Only of a certainty I never happened to see them or hear about them. But then, again, that is not the kind of thing they write about in history books. They would not put one so promptly to sleep if they did.

There was an evil twinkle in Anne's eye on our third day at Ravensnuik—the day when we expected our first visitors. For the fame had gone about that Miss Anne was a great beauty as well as a rich heiress. Now there were not many county people of the Kilpatrick standing dwelling on their own lands near to Ravensnuik. Misfortune in various forms had overtaken them, from high farming to a taste for the junior stage, and... the proprietors lived anywhere else except on their estates.

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It was a Thursday, as I remember. Somehow that day Miss Anne could not bide out of my room. For one thing she insisted on dressing my hair herself, and said how becoming the dusky flosses were about my brow. My hair would never lie tidy all the days of it, and will not now even when kept in place by a decent cap. But in those days— well, it was a thousand times worse. Nevertheless, some folk liked it so, and even now the Captain when his pipe draws well and his grog is to his mind says...

But there is no use in bringing the Captain too early into the story.

Anne ran downstairs to the garden for a kind of rose-bloom which she called a cardinal, though I have never seen the name in a gardener's catalogue (I have often looked). It was a favourite of old John Forrest's, and grew on a kind of paling he made for it Miss Anne had insisted on me wearing one of her own creamy had insisted on making me wear one of her own creamy dresses of thick silk, with flowers upon it of the same hue, but raised—a kind of work they are famous for in France. So at least Miss Euphemia told me. As for Anne I thought she would never be done pulling me this way and that, tugging my belt in at my waist, and patting my hair to make it puff out here and lie flat there. But I thought no more of it than of any other of her daft-like ploys. She was always at the devising of some of her tricks, and when she had nothing else to do she would drag

me like a merryandrew in a play. All which I suffered to please her and never thought of complaining.

At last just as she had got all to her satisfaction, there came a loud ringing at the bell. The Ravensnuik door-bell always sounded from top to bottom of the house, and made every one look out of the window to see if the ringer had fetched away the bell-pull in his hand. In the passages it did not sound so violently, but rather squeaked like a line of trucks with wooden wheels that wanted grease. As for the kitchen, where it really did ring, everybody fled with their fingers in their ears at the first jangle. The Ravensnuik door-bell had been put up when bells were bells. Anne swore that it had been the old church bell, which Sir Tempest bought cheap when they got a new one in the belfry. And I saw nothing unlikely in the suggestion, for Sir Tempest was not only a careful man but one of the heritors of the parish.

At the first sound Miss Anne darted upstairs to make sure of her mother, whose nerves that day were in a specially critical state.

She came down panting and breathless.

'Yes, they are two young men,' she said, 'I saw them from the staircase, and I think I have settled mamma. But if she does come, we can always insist upon her deafness. She really is getting deafer every day!'

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Then on the stairs before we entered the white drawing-room Miss Anne added her last word of caution.

'And mind you back me up!'

It was John Forrest the gardener who had brought in the gentlemen's cards. He did it on a silver tray. John was an institution about the house of Ravensnuik. He might be working on the front walk in full view of the visitor. Nay, simply attired in trousers and checked shirt he might have some appropriate conversation with him (we had not many 'hers' after the first few days) upon the weather and the forwardness of the fruits of the earth, each in his season. But as soon as the visitor reached the front door, John made haste to enter first, with only a muttered 'By your leave, sir!' Then disappearing round the back of the solid oaken door, he would there proceed to change his coat, appearing presently properly buttoned up in a bottle-green coat with an ancient rolling collar. In the most pompous fashion he received your card on the proper tray, and having showed you (that is, if known to him personally) into the dining-room, he would proceed upstairs to announce you—usually with some comment, favourable or otherwise, upon your character and probable purppse in calling at Ravensnuik. If you came soliciting a subscription, or were what John called 'a strag'— that is to say, an irregular person of ill-defined purposes, you were left to cool your heels on the gravel till John was ready

to show you upstairs in person, with an eye upon the plate cupboard. John entertained no angels unawares. He required, as with his favourite breed of Scotch terriers, to know your pedigree.

On the present occasion, however, the two young men were Ralph and Ernest Errol, the sons of a neighbouring landowner, who had early taken to the law as a career. They were fine youths, rather loosely reported of, indeed and with minds not much broadened by contact with southern civilisation. Now the air of Edinburgh breeds conceit, specially when breathed in the windy swirls about the Parliament House— where, they say, you always know a nascent lawyer by a slight sneer, and a drop at his nose. Both it is believed are owing to the east wind, which is snell up there, and as it gets older and more wayworn, the black stuff hides many an honest heart.

The young men bowed and began some of the commonplaces of conversation as, at that date, arranged for afternoon callers.

Anne was ready for them. She looked them both boldly in the face and said, 'I am afraid, gentlemen, that I shall have to do the honours of the house in the absence of my Lady, who regrets that she is not able to come down. She is very sorry indeed. But I should tell you that this is Miss Anne Kilpatrick, and that I am her companion and

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governess, Clementina MacTaggart— at your service. Can we offer you a dish of tea? Come along, Anne.'

Now I suppose I ought to write in a page or two about my surprise, my indignation, the impossibility which overwhelmed me of passing myself off as an heiress under the eyes of two young men fresh from the city. But as a matter of fact, nothing of the kind troubled me.

In a measure I was prepared for Miss Anne's prank, because whatever she might do, caused me no great surprise. And young men, if a girl is well-enough looking, and has the sense to hold her tongue, are as ready to see an heiress in one girl as in another.

'For,' said Anne, truly enough, 'in the eyes of a wise youth an heiress wears a kind of halo.'

'Very well, then,' she added, after impressing this fact upon me, 'all that we have to do is just to pass along the halo!'

So this was why Anne had been mousing and phrasing all the morning about my wonderful beauty. This was why she had run down for the cardinal rose from old John Forrest's garden, why she had stood turning her head from side to side, and running back and forth with little hand-clappings and cries of delight, when at last she had found a place for it in my hair. She was manufacturing an heiress, and I, in my innocence, was the finished article.

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Then, of course, it was not so difficult as one might think. I had had the same education as Miss Anne. I had been constantly with her these many years, and though, perhaps, some women might have found me out (chiefly owing to my diffidence), such a thing was not within the capacity of the two young gentlemen before me. Besides, it seems that they had already heard of Miss Anne as eccentric. Whether they were disappointed in my looks or not, I cannot tell. I only know that whereas they had been sitting on a couple of chairs, nursing their hats and gazing about them with a lost look, upon hearing the announcement of my quality, the fashion of their countenances changed. And, without my growing one whit more attractive, more wise, or in any way more desirable, henceforth it was to me and to me alone that they addressed their remarks.

Now I ought to be able to write a description of these young men. I have looked up the authorities, and this is the way it is done.

The elder, Ralph, was tall and dark, with a noble brow, a thin aquiline Roman nose that looked capable of many things (i. e. picking up bread-crumbs off the floor perhaps)—a full Grecian mouth, etc., etc., etc. The younger, Ernest, was of quite another cast, slender, of a medium height, a pale countenance, pathetic china-blue eye, rippling hair worn low over his brow, and indeed possessed a

remarkable resemblance to Rembrandt's portrait of ... a King Charles spaniel.'

That is the correct style—a guinea a page with a discount for cash, but I declare I cannot compass it. For, so far as my observation goes, women do not think of these things on receiving a first visit. It is only after it is all over that a woman, in that first charming intimacy which follows the exchange of the mutual affirmative, puts back his hair and says, 'Heavens above and earth beneath, your eyes are blue!' Or, 'I never should have thought it, but you have got a mole on your chin! This is Providential!'

That is how descriptions are made— some time after the event. Now about the Errol boys, as I say, I noticed nothing particular, except two young men dressed very much alike in grey pepper-and-salt suiting, cut probably by the self-same tailor, and nursing identical hats on similar laps, as if they were afraid of sitting down on them— which very likely was the case.

But they talked to me, and I answered as best I could, while Anne, demurely playing the part of the perfect companion, retired within the inner room and busied herself with wool work, every stitch of which I knew in my soul that I should have to do over. As I listened to the click of her ivory needles I felt in my throat a wild impulse to laugh. I wanted to spring from my seat and rush in upon her, to catch her by the shoulder and run her out into the white

drawing-room. Then, standing her before me upon the carpet of red roses, I would say.

‘O, you gulls! This is the real Miss Anne— this and no other.’

But something prevented me—I think the demure self-satisfied look on the young men's faces. They had, they informed me, passed certain examinations, and they could certainly suck the handle of a walking cane gracefully (I am glad the fashion has died out, but it was very prevalent at the time, and indicated the highest culture). So I stuck to my post and indeed proved myself as good and satisfactory an heiress as could be extemporised on the spot.

Would I go to the ball at Muirfield on Friday? I would ask mamma. They were sorry for Lady Kilpatrick's indisposition (third time of asking) and regretted that they had not been able to see her. I replied that she was often ill; and Anne, who had at that moment strolled in to ‘look for a book,’ added that her employer's unfortunate deafness made it almost impossible for her to understand the simplest question. The young men turned to look at the intrusive giver of the information, but Miss Anne looked so depressed and listless, so patient and so—pathetically pretty that Ernest, the younger, murmured something which was evidently intended to be sympathetic before turning again to me. Never before had I had a proper idea of my own wisdom.

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Pearls of speech dropped from my mouth. The two young Edinburgh lawyers fairly hung upon my lips. So, at least, said Miss Anne afterwards (but the expression is figurative, as well as malicious). At any rate, it is true that my slightest wish was attended to, as it never had been before.

At last they went away, after bowing low, Ernest, however, looking round for Miss Anne, who was concealed behind the curtain. No sooner had they been delivered into old John's hands in response to our ring, and the door had closed upon their backs, than Anne dashed at me with a yell, and whirled me into a wild waltz round and round the rose-strewn carpet.

'Oh, didn't I tell you?' she cried, as if they were already a thousand miles off, 'you are ever so much prettier than I! And ever so much more attractive! Did you ever see such calves of the stall? No wonder they worship their Golden Brother! Oh, I have not had such a good time for years, and you did it like a princess. We must keep it up!'

And just then we turned our eyes to the door, which had reopened noiselessly. There stood the younger Errol, with his mouth more than slightly open, regarding our performance. And from the expression of his face as he watched our wild dance, I think he must have more than suspected our sanity.

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'I beg your pardon,' he stammered at last, 'I forgot my hat. I—I think it must have rolled under a chair!'

And he got down with his head under an easy-chair to look for it. Now the chair had deep fringes and at the sight which resulted, Anne exploded into wild and helpless shrieks of laughter. Finally the young man discovered his hat, dislodged himself carefully, bowed stiffly to me, and without deigning so much as a glance at Miss Anne stalked majestically out of the room. He might forgive an heiress for laughing at him, but he would show a governess that she couldn't do it with impunity.

'I declare he thinks,' Anne sobbed, in the excess of her joy, 'that you and I are both lunatics—but that you are the keeper!'

And looking from behind the curtains we could see the two young men regarding the front of the house with grave futurity characteristic of the lower limbs of the great tree of the law.

'They are looking for the bars on the windows!' sobbed Anne, wiping her eyes. 'Oh, if I could only fire a blunderbuss and yell after them, I should be quite happy. But ladies' companions don't usually do these things in the Lothians, do they? But oh, it is hard—I do wish I could. Oh, these hollow conventions of society! And they looked so nice and prim as they rose and bowed and sat down, just like a pair of marionettes in a show! I did wish I had

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thought about pins in the chair-bottoms. They would never be noticed among Sir Tempest's old black hair-cloth— 'Unseen but not unfelt.' Oh, Clemmy.'

And then we both fell to the laughing again.

This will give some idea of the difficulties I had to contend with on my first coming to Ravensnuik with Miss Anne.

It was on the following Tuesday that Lady Kilpatrick received the visit of the minister of the parish of Easter Hippens, in which the house of Ravensnuik was situated. Sir Tempest always thought it right to patronise the worship of the Almighty, according to the forms most strictly governmental, in what place soever he and his family might be. So in accordance with his command, we went to church, that is to say, Anne and I. Miss Anne did not encourage her mother to accompany us. It appeared that it would be better for Lady Kilpatrick to walk to and fro in the garden with a shawl about her head, with old John Forrest's wife in peaceful attendance. But, as I described before, Anne once more made me smart, and having equipped herself in a gown and bonnet of mine—not of the newest, off we set— I must say that Anne in my things was looking as pretty as an old-fashioned picture, and just as demure and harmless as a wax apple under a glass shade. I wondered how anybody could keep their eyes off her.

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On the other hand, she said the same of me, so we were well pleased with each other. But it appeared that one person at least was not, and he, to his shame be it said, was the minister himself.

The Reverend Septimus Gilfurly was a very different sort of pastor from our orthodox Mr. McMachar or good Mr. Heatherbrod of Drunts—different indeed from any that we had seen or heard tell of in all Galloway. If you had told this Mr. Gilfurly that he looked exactly ‘like one of the higher clergy of the Anglican communion,’ you would have pleased him all down his back. If you had added ‘dipped in grease’ you might not have pleased him so much, but you would have told the truth.

The Reverend Septimus desired to carry himself Anglicanly. He also wished to marry a fortune, which, as his tastes were expensive, would certainly be an advantage ... to his creditors. He intoned the prayers as much as he dared, with the book open. For he had a Session-clerk who was a close-mouthed watchful man, and Kirk Sessions in Midlothian are public bodies not to be trifled with. His greatest affliction was that the Kirk of Easter Hippiens possessed an American instead of a pipe-organ. Septimus had it on the best authority that the kingdom of God would really never be advanced in Easter Hippiens so long as the service of praise was led by an organ made at Brattleboro, Vt. Septimus Gilfurly it was who began his weekly

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worship on Sunday precisely at noon with these words: 'Let us begin the stated service of God in this parish by singing the Hundredth Psalm.'

Two or three other churches went in at eleven and half-past. But they did not count— being dissenters, Baptists, and so forth.

The Reverend Septimus had large hands, and when you shook one of them (he shook hands heartily enough when he had anything to gain by it) you were left with the general feeling of having reached down a half-cured ham from the joists. You wanted a towel to wipe your hand upon. In after years the Captain always wiped his hand upon his . . . but no, even death shall not wrench that secret from me.

Well, this man came to see my Lady. And we let John Forrest show him upstairs, thinking no evil. Anne indeed listened at the door of my Lady's drawing-room, after pushing John down to the hall, but I think it was more from force of habit than from any real suspicion. 'Who would suspect of deliberate evil,' as Anne afterwards put it, 'the unclean beast that lives in a sty? You have him fried to breakfast, with eggs and buttered toast—but you do not suspect him.'

Our Anne had sometimes an unpleasant tongue, that is, when she did not like any one. And she had her reasons, after this interview, for disliking the Reverend Septimus Gilfurly. In which she was far from singular.

But I must rest a while before I begin to tell about this momentous interview— and so, of necessity, leave our poor Anne all the while with her ear at the keyhole. John Forrest had orders to tell everyone as they came up the stairs that my Lady Kilpatrick was hard of hearing, and Miss Anne gave him to understand that if he could also manage to convey an idea that discrepancies were to be looked for in her conversation, his wages would be raised. I remonstrated with Miss Anne as to this, and reminded her of the fifth commandment. But she said (what was quite true) that her mother was naturally nervous, and the fewer people who bothered her, the better. The corner of a sofa, a secluded seat in a garden, a novel with no spark of cleverness and very few hard words— these, with peace thereto— were the elements, few and simple, of my Lady Kilpatrick's personal happiness. I omit the absence of Sir Tempest, which was really the one thing needful.

But as on the previous day, which was Sunday, the Reverend Septimus had preached a beautiful (if somewhat buttery) sermon about forgiveness among neighbours and the evil of suspiciousness (with examples taken from lambs and doves and butterflies) together with quotations from the Fathers (Miss Anne whispered, 'Whose fathers? Neither yours nor mine!') in a tone which must have been distinctly audible in the pulpit— which as it

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turned out was perhaps the reason why he came. Anne never would be cautious, which is very well when you are a great heiress, but then she forgot that she had abdicated temporarily, which made a difference.

At any rate, come he did, and Anne listened, after he had gone into the front drawing-room to see my Lady. As for me I had got the volume of the 'Antiquary' which tells about the storm, and the people being caught between the tide and the cliff, so I did not trouble my head about any minister. For Anne had threatened old John to pull up all his best standard roses by the roots if he let on to Mr. Gilfurly that we were in. Then all of a sudden Anne came flying downstairs, and I saw in a moment that something was the matter.

So there was. Miss Anne could hardly control her indignation sufficiently to inform me.

'He wants,'—she gasped, 'he wants ... oh, how can I tell you? He has asked mamma's permission to pay his addresses to you. And . . . he does not consider me a suitable companion for you. There!'

She then threw herself on a sofa and pressed a pillow into her mouth, for indignation was fast giving place to amusement, and threatened to end in hysterics. So I hurried to get in my questions ahead of the possible seizure.

'He thinks—the minister man thinks that my conduct... my conduct is most unbecoming—considering my position as a dependent. He heard of

it first from two of his young friends—oh, the pigs, and we gave them tea and such good toast! I made it. And yesterday in church he watched and saw with his own eyes, heard with his own ears! So we are to be sent for—you to be proposed to, me to be reproved! Oh gravy!’

This somewhat childish and out-of-date exclamation did little justice to the situation, and as for me I calmed Miss Anne as best I could, advising her to make a clean breast of the whole affair forthwith.

‘Oh,’ she said, ‘you are nothing of a companion at all. Anybody can be an heiress, and you make just as good a one as I did. But it has always struck me that as a companion, you did not half live up to your opportunities, I’ll show you. Why, it’s all in the books. Heiress, tall, erect, on her good behaviour—walks so—sits so, smiles as if cold water were all the time trickling down her back. On the other hand companion with dimples, little blushful thing—always busy, never weary! Everyone says, ‘How on earth do you do it, you little dainty fairy?’ Always bright, always happy, always a gladsome smile for every one? Welcomes the people in! Good! Smiles and dimples while they are there. Shows them out—door has difficulty in opening—ditto in closing! Smiles, blushes, laughter, tears, what you please to call for! Then a burst of birdlike melody! No, give you your dues! You are a dear sweet girl, Clemmy, but

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you have never had a due conception of your position as companion to an heiress—you have never taken your duties seriously. Now I will for you!’

But at that moment a knock fell upon the door. It was John Forrest with his coat awry and the rolling collar rolling all the wrong way. He had been summoned in haste to bring a message for Miss Anne and her companion Clementina MacTaggart to appear forthwith in the front parlour before the assembled court.

‘It’s a blessing dear mamma is so deaf,’ said Anne, ‘and I think we can make her out a little deafer than she is—that is, if we back one another up. Will you?’

Of course I had to promise co-operation. After my father’s late disgraceful compliance, what was I to do? I never yet saw man, woman, or child who did not obey Anne—except the Captain, and as for him, he says he wishes he may be sun-dried on the Tortugas if he sees what there is in the woman to make such a fuss about. But then even he did not know her when she was young. And then, when she brought him tobacco once to soothe him, and earn his good opinion, lo! it was the wrong kind. I saw to that. I wanted to keep just one person to myself.

But at any rate up we went to the big front parlour where were my Lady Kilpatrick and the Reverend Septimus, minister of the parish. Of course, if I was to be Miss Anne and an heiress, I

should have had to go in first. But then what would my Lady have said? For though she was about as observant as a puddock in a pond, she would surely have noticed a thing like that. But Anne herself solved the difficulty by entering with bent head and a sort of meek self-effacement (like a mouse going into the cat-house), and holding the door for me to follow.

Anne really had more pranks than a hedgehog has spines. She had them all over. There was no end to her imaginings, and, but that my heart beat a little faster at the seriousness of the position, I could have laughed. But indeed with Miss Anne we were all alike at such times—except the Captain, as I have said. We all trusted, just as Alain Gairlies had done, to Anne bringing us out of the difficulty with drums beating and colours flying. And to do her justice she generally did, especially if you were another woman. If you were a man, Anne had a theory that you could take care of yourself.

Well on the sofa lay Lady Kilpatrick with a knitted brow and the general air of saying, 'How can anyone come worrying an uncomplaining much-enduring creature like me?' While beside her, balanced erect on a chair, with a face like a mask of streaky kitchen suet, and hands like those loathsome fishy things I once saw taken in nets, called 'Dead Men's Fingers'— one clawing at each

knee, sat Septimus Gilfurly, minister of the parish of Easter Hippens.

'Oh, to think of it! To think of it!' groaned my Lady. 'And Clementina so utterly trusted, and after being with us so many years! A complaint like this to come about her conduct upon the Lord's Day from a minister of the Gospel! And Sir Tempest not here! That makes it more difficult. He would have known what to do. Not but that he was always over-partial to the girl, I remember that now! Indeed I always thought so, and have said so to Sir Tempest more than once.'

Smugly and suavely the Reverend Septimus bent himself again and again in a kind of hateful apology for interfering. He wriggled his head like a slug coming down a wall. His fingers clasped each other in hoops, in the horrid way that candles bend when they melt with the heat. As will be obvious, I do not love the Reverend Septimus, so these comparisons arrive quite without solicitation.

'My Lady makes a mistake,' he tortured the words out of him, 'I did not make a complaint. Far be it from me. I think, owing to her well-known infirmity her Ladyship misunderstood me (here he elevated his voice till it was like a steam-whistle, and Lady Kilpatrick involuntarily shrank back)— I did not complain! Who am I that I should complain? But my office... as minister of this parish... brings with it duties as well as privileges, and in expressing my utmost admiration for the fair daughter of this

house I felt it was also my duty— my bounden duty, I may say!

Here the abominable creature solemnly looked about the room, blinking out of the suet mask till he caught sight of me. Then a horrid contortion afflicted the lower part of his face transversely. There was a momentary glimpse of teeth—greenish, I think. The Reverend Septimus had smiled. At the same time he bowed, and so resumed his argument with perfect self—self-satisfaction.

‘It may seem to some,’ he said, ‘that it would have been better to wait. But those who argue thus know little of Septimus Gilfurly—B.D. by examination, and minister of this parish! It was my solemn duty, young woman (here he turned to Anne, happily dropping his voice), to reprove you for the unseemly behaviour which I was astounded to perceive, and for the personal remarks which you saw fit to offer yesterday in church during the holy office. I have only done what I conceived to be my duty in representing your conduct to your lady mistress. But upon any repetition of the same, be assured that I shall take yet stronger measures, even to naming you openly in church in presence of the whole congregation. And also, and not least, I shall write to your worthy employer. Sir Tempest Kilpatrick, patron of this parish, detailing the fullest particulars! After which I will leave him to judge

what had best be done to vindicate the proprieties of conduct, parochially considered!

During the harangue I could not help stealing a glance at Anne. She was the complete penitent, and I knew whence the little witch had got the idea. It was from a French picture called 'At the Shrine of Our Lady of Tears' which used to hang in the spare-room at Grennoch, between the windows (where it was not very easy to be seen, because Sir Tempest thought it Papistical in tendency). But all our lives Anne and I had been accustomed to kneel on the ottoman and gaze at it with a sort of fascination, debating what the weeping girl could possibly have done, to be so sorry about it, and explaining her crime variously as the theft of apples from her father's orchard, and the murder of her governess—according to our mood for the moment. So soon therefore as I looked at Miss Anne, I recognised her model. It was the Returned Penitent at the village shrine, in the picture which hung between the windows in the Grennoch spare-room.

She looked at the floor long and pitifully, a tear (Anne could produce them on the spur of the moment, wholesale and retail) dropped prettily down her cheek. Even the heart of the self-styled priest of the parish (presbyter writ small) melted somewhat at this proof of penitence.

'I am glad,' he went on, 'to notice some tokens which allow one to hope that the conduct complained of was more owing to an efflorescence of

youthful spirits than to the deep design which one is compelled to connect with a heart altogether given over to iniquity. Yes, I shall hope for amendment—and in future I shall expect behaviour more becoming the sacred place and solemn circumstances. Is not that so, Lady Kilpatrick?’

Whereupon he dismissed Anne with a wave of his hand, greatly to her mother's astonishment, who all the while had kept murmuring, ‘No, no, it is too hasty! What would Sir Tempest say? I have always wished a clergyman in the family, but I really can do nothing in the matter without Sir Tempest! It is not to be expected. It is altogether too unexpected—too hasty! Though I will say that he seems a nice gentlemanly man, if he is a trifle old for Anne!’

Now ever since Anne had adopted long dresses her mother had made a possible husband out of every unmarried man who approached the house within two hundred yards. And at this moment, having heard from the clergyman's own lips his admiration of her daughter, as he sat beside her, Lady Kilpatrick very naturally supposed that in his present fervent declamation he was taking the opportunity of declaring his passion.

As soon as the sound of his voice ceased, she broke in.

‘Really Mr. Gilfurly, what you say may be very reasonable—very reasonable indeed... But you could not expect an immediate answer, sir, knowing

Sir Tempest as you do! You could not expect me to do anything in so important a matter without the presence and advice of my husband. If you wish for an answer— if your state of mind gives you no rest, I will send for Sir Tempest at once!’

At this the Reverend Septimus visibly wobbled on his legs. So immediate a conclusion had been far from his intention, when he had called— which had been first of all to show his authority in virtue of his ‘position,’ and secondly to detach a dangerous companion— and one seriously lacking in reverence—from the side of the heiress of his choice.

For it was a fundamental principle with Septimus Gilfurly that wheresoever he cast the handkerchief, there he would be thankfully accepted. So much was this ingrained that even the thought of Sir Tempest only gave him a passing twinge or two. He had not met his patron often, or he would have been less cocksure. There are fidways, thought the Reverend Septimus, half-a-dozen damsels of good family in a thinly populated county, fairly gasping for a minister— husband— and for such an one as the Reverend Septimus Gilfurly, how many such must there be? Hence the young man's imagination failed him, and the self-satisfaction of his smile became something too awful for mere words. It exuded from him visibly (Anne remarked subsequently), as if he had been hung up to the ceiling before the kitchen fire!

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When he rose and took his leave, he touched my cheek, when her Ladyship was not looking, with something between a caress and an episcopal benediction. And when I was washing it off afterwards with soap and pumice, Anne said: 'Don't be wasteful, Clemmy, if you are an heiress. Cook sells dripping regularly to the man who comes for the rabbit-skins. It amounts to quite a lot in the six months!'

Which, I think, was very nasty of her.

CHAPTER TWELVE

CONCERNS THE SECOND PLOY OF THE NEW
COMPANION

Well, we did not go to the ball at (I forget the name of the place) for the good reason that, in spite of the good report of the Errol boys, we were not asked. Perhaps the invitations had been too long out—perhaps— but no reproachful doubt of the joint excellence of our conduct depressed either of our minds. At the worst, as I remarked philosophically to myself, it was not my affair.

But if that door was shut to us, I am sure that we were not much worse off. For we went to a dance at Newhall instead. Now that was altogether charming. At the time of which I write (which is long ago, for I am an old woman) there were still a few of the oldest families living patriarchially upon their properties and in their old houses. For the higher region of the Middle Lothian is not divided up among two or three great land-owners, like some of our more southerly counties. Contrariwise, it is parcelled off among smaller thanes and squires, lairds of scanty acres but heirs of ancient names. Mostly they are done away with now. The resident moneymaker from the city is in their places. The shooting tenant

is to be found making himself great in their deserted halls, and his women-folk turn up their noses at the small accommodation for afternoon teas in his cropped two-hundred-year-old Dutch gardens, and bowers long left desolate. Drummond sang of them, and Glorious Ben drank his beaker of English ale in their recesses. The Sherra himself, riding by to Selkirk, ordered Maida to lie down and remember he was not at Ashestiel—the while he himself tasted his drap and munched his 'lippie' to the entertainment of his own glorious talk.

At any rate, both the two of us went to dance at Newhall. The petty lairdship was still in the possession of its ancient possessors, known far and wide as the Auld Laird and Leddy of Newhall. But on envelopes and official documents they were severally addressed as Mr. and Mrs. Hector Newhall of that Ilk. They were now old people, but had learned the best lesson of old age—that its supreme purpose in being continued upon the footstool is that it may spend its time (and money, too, if it possesses such) in making younger folk happy.

One moment and I will tell you all about Newhall. A Scots poet, whom nowadays the people who write in penny papers would dub of the 'kailyard' or some such name, sang about it and its bonny summer waters nigh onto two hundred years ago, in the days when to the folk south of the Tweed, Scots was still a foreign tongue. And now in the days

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when all the world knows that song by heart, the water at Newhall is as clear as ever and clatters as briskly over the stones, among as bonny woods, and with the same hills looking down upon it from above, softly or severely, according to the season. The whole neighbourhood has been besung—each knowe, almost each clump of bracken and whin. The old thorn has had its sonnet before, in the Judgment Day of all things, it came to the hag-clog. Its 'fragrant gale'once warmed the lover's heart in youth, even as now in age it warms his toes. A kindly land it was, this valley of Newhall, a minstrel's land—not, perhaps, so full of tragedy as Yarrow, nor so warlike with the clink of mail as the Border country, nor so full of smuggling and covenanters as Galloway. But fair, outspread, open with the broad glinting of sunshine, the purl of brook, and at every field-corner the handgrip of heartsome black-a-vised folk of a race little crossed with Saxon or Dane.

The house, bosomed in trees, can be seen only from the level scarp of the opposite moors. The rush of leaves windblown, or the boom of the waterfall low down in the glen are for ever in the ears of the folk who dwell there. As it was two hundred years ago, so now.

But the Newhall folk of our time cared little for these things. They conquered the solitude, first, with their own lifelong loves— next, with the old-time singings of the dead poet (concerning whom they

had established a kind of local cult) and lastly with the young voices and budding loves of the lasses and lads with whom they delighted to people these uplands.

As we went thitherward in a carriage hired from the neighbouring town of Cuiken, Anne told me all that she had been able to learn of the two old people of Newhall and their guests. She had, it seemed, been pumping old John Forrest and his wife to some purpose. There would be Haigs, she said, and Bennets, and Watts, and Hendersons— at least, the young people of these families. They are famous, too, for old folks' parties at Newhall — but this is not one of them. Old or young— there is no formality. And the young foresters, the farmers' sons, the gamekeepers would be haying a dance with the serving-girls down below, when they were dancing in the hall above. At this point it was that Miss Anne added, 'And I am going below stairs.'

I gasped, in my astonishment and alarm. Where would the ploys of this most ingenious of minxes lead her, and me with her? I opened my mouth to protest, but she stopped me. She had her answer ready.

'See,' she said, switching off the shawl that had been drawn about her head, as if to shelter her from the wind of these heights, 'for tonight I am not your companion. I am your maid. And as such— look at me—pray regard me with some attention.

Can I take my place in the hall with the first families of the Lothians Three? Certainly not! I have too great a respect for gentility. Besides, I have a notion that the fun will be much better downstairs!

Miss Anne had certainly dressed the part— not wisely, but too well. A more enrapturing serving-maid than she never snooded her hair with blue, nor set a lace collarette about her neck. She wore on her head the first and the prettiest of all servants' caps, dainty as if blown from sea foam, yet with a sufficiently decent suggestion of the local mutch about it to bring to silence any jealous rivals. The strings were tied beneath her chin in an aggravating bow, and when she pouted and bridled (as she did to show me how she meant to do it, in the servants' hall) I felt that all was lost except honour.

I lay back in the carriage, speechless. What was I that I should bring forward my trivial objections to such a girl? Rather, how was I to play my part? I asked Miss Anne, and she said, 'Oh, just look prim, turn up your nose at everybody, and say the impudentest things that come into your head. Then everybody will think you the most delightful heiress that ever was seen. If the Errols are there, they will be so glad to be rid of me, that they will never leave your side the whole night. But— there are many fine-looking fellows among the foresters and the farmers' sons— not to speak of the herds from the hills. I saw them in the gallery of the kirk on Sunday. All this came into my head then.

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Whatever mother may say, I just love going to church! One thinks of such a lot of things during sermon time.'

Compared with Miss Anne's adventures, below stairs, mine were commonplace enough— that is, till the very last, when they began to be as stirring as you like. But that was the way with most of Miss Anne's ploys. You paddled on famously till you were in the middle of the pond and then the bottom fell out of the tub!

It was Miss Anne who told me about what follows, as of course it naturally would be. Though there were others who told me also— afterwards, that is.

'You remember the maid at the door?' she asked. 'No, well, she helped you off with your cloak, and let me stand where I was, in the draught. But when we were going down the stairs together, she said, 'Your mistress maun be an awesome grand leddy to bring a maid wi' her! — 'We hae few o' that kind! Na, that was never the fashion in oor pairt o' the country!'

'So said I, in her speech, which I had been practising, Maybe no, but ye must mind that my Miss Anne is a baronet's dochter, and an heiress forbye.'

'You see, Clemmy, I was doing the best for you I could. For, believe me, there's never a word spoken

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from kitchen to pantry that is not repeated in my lady's chamber!

'When we got to the bottom I slipped off my shawl.

'Lord keep us! What a kep' the maid cried, aghast at the cap I had on my head.

'It's a mutch my mither learned me to mak', said I, meekly. For I did not want to quarrel at first. 'If ye like, I'll learn you how to mak' yin the very marrow o't!'

'Will ye so?' says the lass. 'My, but ye are bonny. I howp ye are honest!'

'Upon which I said I hoped I was at least indifferent honest. It is a difficult question to reply to.

'Ye see, my Wullie's here the nicht— that's my intended, ye ken,' the girl went on, 'and he has the wanderin' eye for the lasses. Promise me, ye will no encourage him if he comes keekin' at the kep, and what's under it!'

I set her mind at rest at once as to Wullie, informing her that if she would point out the particular youth to me, I would give him a sermon, both preface and pirliecue, that would settle him from going to see the lasses for a month of Sundays!

'At this the maid was very grateful, and told me that her name was Eccie Porterfield. 'Ye see,' she said, 'my given name is Alexandrina. But it makes me juist fair ashamed when I hear it, and sae the world caa's me 'Eccie.' If it hadna been for that name

Alexandrina I micht hae been decently married afore this, mair than yince— though I am no bonny like you— at least no to mak' a speakin' about!

'How cam' that aboot, Alexandrina?' I asked, still keeping up her manner of speaking, which was high and rapid with a strange squeak to the letter 'e,' as if it had been a French 'u.' Eccie was a fine girl and counted 'through-gaun,' as I heard afterwards. And Wullie, when he gets her, will have a clever housewife. Better than he deserves, if so be it is true that he is cursed with the wandering eye of which his betrothed spoke.

'Ye can come up to my room to fettle yoursel' some,' she said, 'it will be nicer for us to gang in thegither. And, ye see, as lang as the upstairs fowk keep on comin' I'll get nae rest for daffin' but ye can help me wi' the cloaks and umbyrellies, gin ye like. Though I maun say that Maister and Mistress Newhall baith o' them are terrible thocht-fu'—and hae a' the refreshments laid oot on tables in the hall up-the-stairs, sae that the folk can help themsel's. Ay, they think on us servants— they ken that we hae souls and bodies too, as weel as oor maisters! Are ye weel treated at your place?'

I said that I had nothing to complain of, so far—except my employer's temper, and the fact that sometimes he was inclined to show me rather more affection than was right and proper from a master to a servant.

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'And 'deed I dinna wonder, wi' a kep like that on your heid!' said Eccie, divided between admiration and a certain austerity of moral condemnation.'

'For shame, Miss Anne!' I interrupted, when she had got this length with her recital, 'thus to take away your innocent father's character!'

'Oh, nonsense,' said Miss Anne, 'I was learning, that's all! Eccie will think more of him than ever when Sir Tempest comes to Newhall. Ay, and I'll wager my head that, in despite of Wull, Eccie will be trying her cap-strings at my father! Besides the thing is true. You remember yourself the night I ran away (and ran back), he just hung over me and...'

'Spoiled the gravy by greetin' intil't!' I added, laughing. 'Well, but that should have touched your heart—instead of which...'

'I go about the country stealing ducks!' cried Miss Anne, glad to get in another of our catch-words. This was the famous summing up of the judge who charged it upon the prisoner at the bar, by way of prejudice, that he had enjoyed the benefits of a university education, 'instead of which' said he, 'you go about the country stealing ducks?'

'At last Eccie and I entered the great basement hall of Newlands. We were the closest and most intimate of friends by this time, and went in with our arms about each others' waists. There would be perhaps twenty young men present and half as many girls. Some of the young men were grooms

who had driven their masters over to the dance, and these were by far the most impudent. For service about a great house does not make for modesty in an unmarried man.

Eccie had barely time to make my introduction in due form, 'This is Miss Clemmy MacTaggart that has come over with her mistress, Miss Anne Kilpatrick— 'when there was a rush for us, and the two of us were nearly swept off our feet. Half-a-dozen youths, so I thought, were contesting for the honour of dancing with us. Eccie was, it seemed, quite accustomed to the scene, and dealt out sound cuffs to all who came near her. But I think I must have looked a little surprised and perhaps even frightened. Though I was not a bit really. For a great stalwart colt of a youth, who seemed by his heather-mixture coat and his greased boots to be either the son of a small farmer or a well-to-do herd from the hills, got quietly between me and the riot.

'Hands aff!' he cried, 'let the lass get her breath, I tell ye! Ye hae as little mainners as sae mony young nowt. Think shame o' yoursel', Wull Telfer! And you wi' a lass o' your ain.'

'From which, and Eccie's resentful eyes, I learned that 'Wull of the wanderin' e'e had indeed been first in the attempt to secure the beverage of my cap.'

'But I must explain.

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It seems, so strange are the manners and customs of the under-world, that when a new girl comes among them, or even when a lass who is well known appears with a new article of dress, the young men have the right to take a kiss—by force of arms, if need be, which is called 'getting the beverage' of the newcomer or of the new article of dress.'

This is the continuation of the story that Anne told in the fastnesses of her own chamber with the doors double locked and barred.

'My strong-limbed young Hercules (Anne went on) set a chair for me in a corner. Not only did he not allow any other to scuffle for the 'beverage' of my cap, extending his long legs across the gap like an old-fashioned toll-bar, but he made no attempt to obtain the favour for himself. Which was exceedingly delicate of him, and indeed hardly to be expected of one in his position.'

'For which you were rather sorry, were you not. Miss Anne?' I could not help saying.

'Oh, not at all, as you shall hear,' Anne retorted, 'I had quite made up my mind how it should end, but for the time being it would have been the means of removing temptation—that was all. You see, as long as I was unkissed, the fruit was on the tree. I was, in every sense and by every law, fair game. But once plucked, even as a mere matter of duty, the game was finished for all and sundry. But my young giant was evidently too bashful for

this, and I saw some of the coachmen eyeing me in a way I did not like— nasty, smoking, chewing, cleanshaven, smug-faced insolents. I resolved to keep very closely under the protection of my first defender. I saw with pleasure, also, that the tolerant Eccie had adjusted her cap, and resumed her empire over the ill-balanced affections of her 'Wull.'

'What is your name?' I demanded, so suddenly that I quite put my young man out. For in these sub-circles you are supposed to say 'Hem' at least six times before you speak.

'What's your wull?' he ejaculated, clearly taken by surprise. I learned afterwards that I should have looked at him provokingly and said, 'Ay, and wha's calf-byre do ye come oot o'?'

Then there would have been no difficulty. It was my unfortunate politeness and backwardness that came near to ruining me. But I learned better afterwards. Eccie it was who told me. For all that I learned rapidly, and I think surprised some of the older professors.

'Oh,' he answered, 'I am juist Young Dan Weir.'

'Yes,' said I, 'but where do you come from, Young Dan Weir?'

'He looked at me as much as to say, 'Certes, but you are a stranger indeed!' Very much as if one had said to you, 'My name is Guelf, I come from Windsor Castle!'

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'I am Auld Dan Weir's son,' he repeated. And then, seeing that even that brought no illumination, he added, frae Venturefair!'

'Is your father a farmer?' quoth I.

'Hoot,' quoth my lad. 'What else?—he's juist Auld Dan Weir. Ye dinna think he was a grocer, did ye?'

'At this I laughed and said, 'Yes, but you are Dan Weir too. What is the difference between the old cock and the young, when they both crow so croose on the same midden-head?'

The youth sat with his mouth a little open, gazing at me. Then seeing that it was hopeless, he gave a sigh, as much as to say, After that, what is fame? I declare she has never heard of my father.

Then he spoke briefly and to the point.

'My faither, Auld Dan Weir o' Venturefair, can lick ony three men in the Lowdens wi' his left hand tied ahint his back. An' when he was ten year younger, he could hae dune it wi' his richt tied.'

I looked across at the thews and sinews, the bones and gristle of the young man before me.

'Your father can thrash you?' I asked.

'Dan Weir the Younger laughed loud and long—so much so that several of the company, both maids and men, came towards us and begged us to let them participate in the jest. Between his gasps Young Dan told them. And then they laughed too, but as I thought a little uncomfortably.

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'Then you are no fighter?' I said to him, when we were alone again; 'you look peaceable. I think I could trust myself with you!'

'Ye could that!' the young man said promptly, 'man, I wad juist kill ony chap that meddled ye. As sure as Providence is kind, I wad break him like a rotten stick across my knee!'

'Oh,' said I, in a hurry, 'I did not think of that. I hope there will not be any fighting here!'

'Me fecht here?' he said, looking round him with a little air of being once more misunderstood. 'I wad hae ye ken that I hae been wed brocht up, mem.'

'Whereat I expressed my penitence, if I had said anything to hurt his feelings. Then he bent towards me and laid his hand on my arm with a grip like a vice.

'Na,' he said. 'It's never here that yon callants wad come to the scratch. It's on the road hame that there will be the fun. Whiles half-a-dozen o' them, that hae ta'en mair than is maybes guid for their digeestion, will get up a ploy to set on me at some quaitie spot. No that they hae ony thing again' me, ye see, or that there's ony ill-feeling atween us. But juist because I am my faither's son, and to my sorrow, bear the self-same name! It's an unco thing they canna let me alane, a man o' peace like me! But my faither kens that, and every day he gies me a bit turn-up to keep me in trim—Sabbaths aye excepted

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of coorse, for he's a great stickler for releegion, is my faither. And what wi' farm-wark and dumbbells and cairtin' manure, the hour's practice keeps me fairly up to the mark. Grip that— when they are no lookin'! Never in my life hae I let a lass get her fingers on it afore. But fegs, I'm fair ta'en up wi' your face. Ay, and that 'kep' ye hae on your heid. Ye are desperate takkin'—no as bonny, maybe, as some, but juist ex-traordinar' takkin'!

'Obediently, I laid my hand on the round of his arm. He moved his clenched fist up and down, and I declare to you, Clemmy, that I thought that the muscles would fairly burst his coat. But Daniel Weir the Younger reassured me. I declare to you, Clemmy, he had the most reassuring ways of any young man I ever met. How was that? Well, I will try to tell you!

'Dinna be fear't,' he said. 'I get them made wide on purpose, by a tailor in Dawlkeith, the name o' Wauch, a lad that I can trust. Half-a-dozen grown men I can stand up to, when I am in fettle, on the plain road. And if there's nae mair nor that, and guid moon-licht to see by, my faither lets me alane. Because he thinks it's guid for me to bear the yoke in my youth. Oh, he follows the Scripture, does my faither. But gin there's seeven or mair, then he juist steps over the dyke— an'— an'—somebody is apt to get hurt! Ay, they are gye no weel after!'

I now began to see why I had been so completely left alone after Young Dan Weir took me,

as it were, under his wing. But the other lads kept looking at us, and as we sat down after our third dance, Dan said to me softly for so big a man, I'm thinkin' that there will be a sicht mair than sax on to me the nicht.

'And what for that?' I asked, in the language of the country, which I was acquiring rapidly.

'He took one quick look at me.

'Juist your 'kep,' he said with a smile, 'and what's under it!'

I declare I have rarely, if ever, had a more prettily turned compliment.

'Now the servants' hall of the old Newhall mansion went nearly the whole length and breadth of the house, and here and there round it there were mysterious little passages and elbows leading no whither— that is, not in particular. We were standing just in the nook of one of these.

'Will they set on you tonight, do you think?' I said. 'Tell me—why should they?'

'Oh, they will think I hae gotten 'the beverage,' he said, shyly, 'and I haena. But if I had'— here he paused a little, 'if I had— then they micht kill me for ocht I cared.'

'Really there were the makings of a very pretty fellow about this Dan Weir the Younger, of Venturefair. He looked at me a little wistfully, I thought.

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'No, not here,' I said, a sudden resolve coming over me, 'let it be where it will do them some good.'

'So with that I stepped quickly out of the little passage in which we had been standing apart, into the light of the dancing hall.

'Now— take your beverage!' said I, here before them all. And I held up my face to him. And no man deserved it better.'

'You didn't, Miss Anne!' I cried, aghast.

'Did!'

'And why?' I almost shouted, catching her by the wrists.

'Because he was a man.'

Then she sighed a little, and looked sad for the better part of a minute, which was a long time for Miss Anne. 'Yes, it is certainly a pity,' she repeated.

'What is a pity?' I asked her, though I knew well enough.

'That he is what he is,' continued Anne; 'do you know, I like him! And I have not told you more than half yet. The best is to come. Well, no— now the best!

'After he had kissed me, which of course he had to do, I declare he took a face as red as the beet, and looked about so fierce that nobody dared even to laugh. I saw it on their faces. And I was glad, for now the 'beverage' was paid, and everyone knew about it. So of course the lads (who really meant no harm) would let me alone. But Young Dan Weir said in my ear. 'Whether my father comes or not, I will

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hae a tough job this nicht. For there is not a man in the room that will forgive me that.'

'What?' said I.

'The beverage,' said he, 'ay, and the way you gave it to me—so grand and defiant! I will never forget it— no, never— though I live to be a hunderd. And now I do not care if they batter the life out o' me between here and Venturefair.'

'Then I began to be a little frightened for what I had done— though really I had not done it, but the queer little thing that jumps up inside of me, and says, 'Do this and that.' So I begged him to come home with us on the box of the carriage, or even inside. Yes, in my folly, and not knowing what to say or do, I proposed that he could come in with us. At that he just looked at me strangely and said, 'And you think I could do that?'

'I do not see why not!' I made him answer.

'He moved his arm slightly, as he had done when he was letting me feel his muscles, and said in a slow soft tone—quiet and a little sad— 'Well, I do!'

'And at that, I was thankful that I was not to be one of the men who were going to meet him on the road. I even began to take a kind of pride in Young Dan Weir, though I cannot for the life of me tell why. For of course that absurd business of the 'beverage' did not mean anything to either of us. How indeed could it?

'And just then John Barnaby came in.

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Yes, my brother! We have not seen much of him lately, have we? I knew that there was a reason for it, and that night I was to find out what that reason was. Tempest John Barnaby is going to be no credit to the Kilpatrick family, so far as I can see. And in spite of the overwhelming sisterly affection I feel for him, I am going to pester my father to let him have nothing to do with the handling of my money. Yes, I shall begin as soon as ever we get to Grennoch, and if I am my father's own child Sir Tempest will know no peace till he does. I don't mind being in the hands of lawyers. I never yet saw one I could not hoodwink if I had him five minutes to myself. And you always do see lawyers in their private offices, don't you? At least books say so—though at the theatre they generally have the life or death interviews in the passage while they are shifting the scenes, and you can't hear the details of the murder for the stage-manager shouting at the carpenters— as it were, in Hebrew and Greek and Mesopotamian.

'But that is no matter. Well, John Barnaby had come out from town and two or three of his companions with him. I do not know whether the Errol boys had fetched him, or whether he had gone first to Ravensnuik, and there heard of the festivity at Newhall. At any rate, there he was, and— the night air had so worked upon his head that he thought that the best fun would be in the servants' hall. It was just like John Barnaby!'

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'The idea may run in the family!' I suggested. But of this Miss Anne took no notice.

'So as I told you, the Errol boys and he rode across. There was also another young man, but I did not catch his name. I tell you, Clem, it was fun to see those Errol boys. You remember how stiff and starched they were when they came to call on us. Well, in the servants' hall it was different. The night air and . . . the songs they had been singing on their way out had had a certain effect on them.

'But I could see the stalwart herds dourly pull down their brows, and as for the foresters and gamekeepers they gathered in groups. For they, you see, were in a sense men under authority. But these farmers' sons and the other lads had no such drag upon them.

'Ralph Errol had just caught Eccie about the waist, when Wull Fraser—yes, the erring Wull, disengaged his hand with a jerk of the wrist which would hinder Master Ralph from holding the goose-quill for a term of weeks.

'Now it chanced that I and my 'beverage' (as they now called this Young Dan Weir of Venturefair) were standing at the same elbow of passage, which led to the doors labelled 'Cheese-room' and 'Housekeeper's room.' The young men did not see us at first, because we were standing so quietly. And by all queer happenings, it was John Barnaby who was the first to catch sight of us. I think he saw the lace

cap. It could not have been more, for I had my back to him. He has always had a weakness for maids' caps. And so without Yea-say or Nay-say up comes Master John Barnaby, with his coat-tails flying, and putting his arms about me, in the dark of the passage, he kissed me there and then.

'Just what happened after that it is difficult to tell, but there was trouble. The sequences of things got a little mixed for about five minutes. It is difficult to see how Young Dan Weir could have held a window open with one hand and pitched John Barnaby out of it with the other. But he did. I saw him. My sisterly affection made me sorry—that the window was on the ground floor.

About the height of the second would have been more like John Barnaby's deserts. And you can tell my father that I said so. I wish our young men were like that . . . Dan Weir I mean.'

'Speak for yourself!' said I. 'They are not my young men!'

But Anne went on.

'Then he sent the Errol boys the same way. They did not stop for their hats this time, and he gave them no time for apologies. The Errol keepers were there, but they had slipped out when the young fellows came in. They had good judgment.

'Then Young Dan Weir looked out at the dark grass and the sprawling figures slowly picking themselves up, like crabs getting over the edge of a basket.

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'I'm glad that first young fellow's neck is not broken,' he said. 'I'm feared I gied him a nasty twist!'

'That is not very kind of you,' I said, 'for if his neck had been broken my mistress would have been ten times as great an heiress as she is! Besides which, her father would have been saved a lot of trouble!'

'Oh, Miss Anne,' I cried. 'You never said that of your own brother?'

'Indeed did I,' she retorted, 'and what for not? What did John Barnaby ever do for me, except plague the life out of me, and make my mother cry? He is going to the dogs anyway, as it is. And, let me tell you, Miss Clemmy, that if he is to be a fixture at the Grennoch, you will have your hands full. Last time he came, he told me that he thought you were the best-looking girl he had ever seen!'

'Well, that is no crime, is it?' I retorted, with some spirit. 'Hundreds think the same of you!'

'No, it is no crime,' said Miss Anne, 'and what is more I quite agree with him. But—wait— you don't know Master Tempest John Barnaby Kilpatrick, younger of Grennoch and Ravensnuik — no, not yet, but you will.'

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

CONCERNING GOING UP HIGHER

This, or something like it, is what a certain brother told his sister in fraternal confidence. John Barnaby did not die, and Dan Weir was not arraigned before his peers on the capital charge. If he had been, I know of one witness upon whom he might have counted to the utmost extent of her swearing power. She was the sister of the victim, and though John Barnaby confided to her the whole story from his point of view, it did not in the least soften her heart or prevent her from telling him what she thought of him.

When the Errol boys and Jim Scudamore, known as the 'Drucken W. S.'(but a gentleman all the same) picked themselves up off the dewy grass, they laughed, and Jim Scudamore said, 'Served us adjectivally and adverbially right!' John Barnaby, who had gotten the cream of it from Young Dan Weir, raised himself more slowly, muttering varied and picturesque vengeance. But Jim Scudamore, whom an old-established legal firm was trying to buy out, because they did not consider it respectable to have a champion middle-weight— just merging into a heavy—doing the firm's business with imperious dukes and marquises most maganimous.

Wherein be it said they made mistake. If they had been dealing with retired oilmen, contractors, and other respectable people, the case might have been different. But dukes! It shows how little the firm of Scudamore, McMather & Scudamore, Writers to the Signet, knew about their business, that they should have supposed that peers of the realm (and people who liked to be seen arm-in-arm with them) would think any the worse of a man for fighting with two-ounce gloves. Why, one of them made the rules for all the others.

Besides, Jim Scudamore was made squarer than most belted earls, and was as 'up-and-down' in his actions as any known wearer of the strawberry leaves. It was, however, a pity that he drank. But, alongside of Barnaby John, Jim Scudamore was an angel of light— yes, even though he had been twice up before the committee of his club, and once warned. For all that Jim Scudamore was an angel— a fallen angel, it is true, but one who nevertheless moved with some of Lucifer's pride of port.

As for Barnaby John— well, he was Barnaby John, and the very messan curs avoided him when he lay asleep and snoring at the street corners. But he was Sir Tempest Kilpatrick's only son and lawful heir. He would have a title one day, if he lived. His wife when he got one (God help her) would be addressed as 'My Lady.' And for these reasons the Errol boys, who were never quite sure as to the

number of their portionless sisters, were instructed by their God-fearing parents to cleave with exceeding closeness to Barnaby John. Accordingly they clove.

But it was altogether different with Jim Scudamore. He only tolerated Barnaby John. Occasionally he kicked him. And all the nobler instincts of Barnaby John's nature, all the strength of his bemused affections, were centred about this idol, who could in very truth do all the things which he only pretended to do, who at thirty-five was the picturesque wreck of his own noblest ambitions, and who had already dragged in the mire a father's good and honourable name, as John Barnaby only aspired in the years to come to do with that of Sir Tempest Kilpatrick.

There was the devil in both of them. But whereas Satan's approved attitude in Barnaby John was 'squat like a toad, close at the ear of Eve,' in Jim Scudamore he was never other than 'the superior fiend— like Teneriff or Atlas unremoved.'

Altogether these four were a fine and creditable selection, which the Grey City had sent us on the evening of the dance at Newhall. In strict accordance with the facts as recorded by Milton, it was Jim Scudamore who called his fallen comrades about him— very much too in his predecessor's words as reported by the poet: *'What if the field be lost, All is not lost!'*

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However, the Errol brothers had no aspirations to be of the noblesse of that fallen host, and as for John Barnaby, if he had a superficial resemblance to 'Moloch, horrid king,' it was for a reason that was not yet made fully apparent.

Well, they had been cast out, their master informed them, with an agreeable smile. That they could not help. It was chiefly the fault of that last 'mutchkin' at the Fisher's Tryst. Also it was Fate, and in John Barnaby's case a most just and retributive Providence had taken the matter in hand. If it had fallen out otherwise, he, Jim Scudamore, would have kicked John Barnaby himself— 'into Hades and out again' was the characteristic expression he used. For the words of the Drucken W. S. were nothing if not characteristic.

'Come, lads,' he continued, heartening his followers, 'we have been kicked out down below. So, according to the Scripture, let us go up higher! You see what it is to have been brought up strictly. Then you always know what to do!'

'But our clothes,' said the elder Errol, 'we can't go in like this to a dance! What do the Scriptures tell you about them?'

'Well,' said Jim Scudamore, 'now on the contrary you will see what it is to be acquainted. When I was here last I saw the night out with the Newhall head-groom. He sleeps in the stable-loft. I know where he keeps his looking-glass and clothes'

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brush. John Barnaby there has matches, I'll wager. Thus we will repair the ravages of time and circumstance before venturing into the whirl of fashion and beauty— no, not beauty. I guess we left most of the beauty downstairs, owing to circumstances over which . . . etcetera!

And so they did. So while the dance was gay above and Miss Anne sighed below stairs for the low social condition of her. Valentine, the four young men, led by the 'Drucken W.S.,' groped their way cautiously up the stable ladder, lit a match, found a candle stuck in a bottle, effected each other's toilet, and in a trice stood ready to present themselves at the front door of Newhall. Jim Scudamore, however, had the nose of a beagle, and he ran to earth a half-empty flask under the straw of the groom's mattress.

'The rascal,' he said, shaking his head, 'and his master engaged him because he was a teetotaller! Let us remove temptation from his youthful path. It is at least one good deed!'

And when in the stark grey of the morn that groom returned, battered and bruised from the 'handling' of Young Dan Weir, in which he had borne a part ('borne' is a good word), he had to content himself with what comfort compulsory virtue and an empty whiskey bottle could afford him. But he found the card of his Temperance Society prominently tied to his bedpost with a piece of blue ribbon and the motto written across it in a large legal text-hand, 'Young Man, Beware!'

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'He may not thank us at the time,' said Jim Scudamore, morally. 'He is a hasty man. But he will be grateful afterwards. At least I hope so. At any rate, we are doing it all for the best!'

So, having done it, they went out.

For me above stairs the time had gone slowly enough, in spite of my heiress-ship. The master and mistress of Newhall were certainly as kind as possible, with an antique and human kindliness which, being in all respects eminently Scottish, reminded me of my mother. But, after all, I was bearing the burden of an honour unto which I was not born.

Then Miss Anne's reputation had gone before her, so that for a while the bruit of her sharp tongue kept the men on their guard. But it was not long before I had them thawed out. After that things went better. Several proposed to call, and I did not say them nay—out of respect for my position, that being a matter for my Lady Kilpatrick. Besides, as Anne had frequently left me in the lurch (and indeed thought nothing of it), I did not see the harm of laying up for her, as it were, once in a way, wrath against the day of wrath.

I was not unengaged at a single one of the dances. I thought it no wrong to give definite encouragement to as many as seemed to require it. Most of them said that fluffy dark hair ('like a raven's wing,' was a favourite phrase) had been the

inmost ideal of their young hearts. They had dreamed about eyes like mine. The cardinal rose set in the dusky floss above my left ear reminded them opportunely of pictures by various artists. But as I had never heard of any of these before, I am the less afraid of confusing the names at this time of day. One of them, a young Chisholm of the Grange, and (I am given to understand) a poet and an arrant flirt, had the face to ask me if I was not aware that the rose became me mightily.

‘Yes,’ I replied, fanning myself languidly as I had seen Miss Anne do, ‘my maid is rather clever in that way. I will pass your compliment on to her!’

Then I asked them all to call—specially this young man, Hugh Chisholm, and every one promised to be punctual. In each case I thought Saturday would be a good day. Now I had learned many things besides tatting from Miss Anne, and it struck me as curious that so many among the present company should prefer dark hair. I had always understood that men liked girls with golden curls and blue eyes. After I had developed this theory to them, they each and all, one after t’other, swore (to the limit imposed by the presence of ladies) that for them there was only coal-black hair and eyes like jet! So, as I had a certain convenient little pocket-book, called ‘My Preferences,’ all rigged out with questions, and spaces for answers as to such things, I drew it out, and made them all express themselves clearly on these and other points above

their several signatures. I knew that that would please Miss Anne.

Besides which, this young Hugh Chisholm was really too conceited and superior to exist on the footstool, along with ordinary meek, humble-minded men and women. Him I got to write a complete sonnet, I think they call it, in which he was notably scornful about the commonplace beauty of blue eyes and golden hair.

'Why, every doll has them!' I remember him saying— or words to that effect.

But on the whole it was dull. For, by yourself, amusements like these soon pall. If you have another girl— like Miss Anne say— to compare notes with— why, of course, that is quite another affair.

But on the whole it cannot be said that I waited my time. Miss Anne had so often left me with her ravelled skeins to untangle, that it was something of a pleasure to me to set one or two cats'-cradles for her. I think that the best of all was Hugh Chisholm. He was a son of a small proprietor of the neighbourhood. And what he lacked in acres he made up in good looks; and, as I have said, in self-conceit.

I danced six times in all with him. He was a good dancer, and knew it. Also I told him so. He listened to my praises as if he had never heard the like before. After that he disliked golden hair and sky-blue eyes more than ever. Indeed I may say that

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I made it pleasant for everybody all round. It was not for nothing that I was an heiress . . . for one night only. But I have never had the least desire to repeat the experience.

I think (I am not sure) that Mr. Hugh Manners McNeil Chisholm made an offer of honourable wedlock as we went down the stairs. But I had been brought up doucely— in spite of the influence of Miss Anne, which, I fear, made rather in the opposite direction. So I told him to consult my mother. If he could wait till the Saturday week he might have a chance of applying to my father, but in his interest (and my own) I advised my mother.

And in so saying I gave him no bad advice. For my mother, good honest woman, would at the worst have taken him for a lunatic escaped from the Crichton Institution, while my father— well, he was as like as not to have made Mr. Hugh's ham-pan play clack against the wall, even if he did not take the bill-hook to him. It was no canny thing, as all in our parish knew, to draw a wheat straw afore my father.

Besides those I have mentioned, I admit that there were several others who had hopes, and (doubtless) also their own reasons for having them. For once in my life I experienced the maddening feeling of unlimited freedom of action, without the least consequent responsibility. Whatever I did or said. Miss Anne, and not I, would be called upon to answer for. Moreover, answer she could and would!

Yet the feeling did not make for sobriety of demeanour. However, on the whole, like the man in the Indian history book, when I look back now I am astonished at my moderation.

But such was not Miss Anne's immediate feeling. However, I must not anticipate. The story, at all events, can be made to proceed doucely enough, in spite of my having to chronicle the harum-scarum doings of a hempie like Miss Anne and of those silly folk whom she infected with her spirit.

I never knew for certain how the four young men made good their entrance into the drawing-room at Newhall.

Certainly Eccie did not show them in, or she would have called downstairs for assistance— ay, and got plenty of it too with extreme promptitude. I suppose Jim Scudamore used the same cheek of brass which had showed him the way to the winning-post many a time, when he had ridden the most dangerous steeplechases in England as a 'gentleman-jock,' and the readiness of resource which had brought him to the head-groom's looking-glass and bottle of comfort in the stable loft. In brief, I have my reasons for believing that he had simply opened the outer door of the house of Newhall, and walked upstairs to the drawing-room. And the first that I knew of the matter was that I saw the four of them, all in a clump, shaking hands with my host and hostess!

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I think that I have some slight staunchness of spirit, or, at least, that my long and intimate association with Miss Anne has supplied me with its substitute in an emergency. But when I saw John Barnaby welcomed with some effusion by Mrs. Newhall, a little old lady, and somewhat short-sighted, I may as well acknowledge that my courage (or impudence, or what you will) completely deserted me. It was, however, only for a moment.

I could see Mrs. Newhall, of Newhall, looking about her in a dazed way and beckoning to the nearest lounging young man. By this time I knew as well as if I had heard that John Barnaby had said to her, 'We only arrived at Ravensnuik late this evening, and, as I heard that my sister was with you, I came on at once!'

'Of course—of course!' Mrs. Newhall would reply, 'you did quite right. We are most pleased to see you and your friends!'

It was as natural as that hens should lay eggs that she should reply like that. For that was the kind of woman Mrs. Newhall of Newhall was. She simply could not help it. She would have been sympathetically polite to the leader of a company of hungry wolves, parleying at the door of her sheep-fold.

I hastily got away from the young man I had been engaged with, and commenced tacking towards the door. But before I had reached it, I heard the

high voice of my hostess calling me back. Somebody had pointed out the heiress. Sir Tempest's daughter.

'Miss Kilpatrick—'Miss Kilpatrick,' called Mrs. Newhall, 'here is a happy surprise for you and for us all!'

I quite agreed about the surprise, but then John Barnaby was never a 'Happy' surprise to anybody, so the adjective at least was misplaced. All the same, I had now to stand my ground. They were too near for escape. I could not possibly make a rush for it.

John Barnaby strode up to where I stood, sulky and glowering. I think his neck and ribs were still stiff and sore from the hurl through the window he had gotten from Young Dan Weir. At least I do most sacredly hope so.

'Clemmy,' he cried, 'where is Anne? And what are you doing here and in that dress?'

The old lady looked at the young man anxiously, to determine if John Barnaby had suddenly lost his wits.

'Why,' she said, 'this is your sister— ah, you rascal, to try and deceive an old lady. But I am not altogether blind. She is the very image of her father. Sir Tempest!'

This was no great compliment, and would have but little pleased my mother— but it was no time for the discussion of trifles.

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‘Why, she is only our —,’ began John Barnaby. But at that moment another voice, smooth and slow and masterful dropped over his shoulder like a compelling hand.

‘Of course it is his sister. He is, as you say, madam, a complete rascal. But there is an excuse for him, and for us all. I fear, Mrs. Newhall, that we all of us tarried too long below there at the change-house down by the Nine-mile-burn! Indeed, I don't think John Barnaby is properly himself yet. Do you hear, sir? Salute your sister, or shall I do it for you?’

It was the voice of Jim Scudamore, whom, as you say, in his better days I had seen time and time again at the Grennoch— though always at a distance, for Anne and I went in fear of him. Now, however, the heir of Sir Tempest was under the orders of his master, and he had to do as he was bidden. Happily for our further concealment, our hostess had turned away immediately that she saw, as she supposed, an understanding re-established among us. We three stood at the door or at least close to it, where a large curtain had been swung on a movable bar to intercept the draught when the door was opened. John Barnaby stooped to kiss me. But as I was no fine lady and he no Young Dan Weir, I e'en let him have the weight and force of my right hand fair on his cheek— which, I think, considerably jolted my young man.

Jim Scudamore rubbed his hands with delight.

'Jove!' he said, 'I wish I had had a sister like that. She would have saved me many an ill-spent hour. With a relative like that at home to keep one lively, who would want to go forth 'in pleasure's primrose paths to stray,' as the poet says?'

'She is not my sister, I tell you,' growled John Barnaby, more sullenly if possible than ever.

'So much the better!' said Jim Scudamore, W. S., philosophically. 'So far as I have seen, a fellow has always more chance of happiness from another fellow's sisters than from his own!'

'Oh, she won't look at me—' snorted John Barnaby. Then, turning fiercely to me, he added, 'Where is my sister Anne—I demand to know?'

The strong air of the upland road had indeed not wholly died out of his brain, or he would never have dreamed of speaking like that.

'Dry up!' said Jim Scudamore, shortly, 'she won't look at you, will she? Well, that only proves that the young lady has marvellous good taste for her age. She is, if I remember right, your sister's companion. I have not the least doubt that the two of them have some sort of fun on hand.'

He came nearer to me and lowered his voice.

'This thing,' he said, indicating John Barnaby— as it were, casually with his thumb jerked half over his shoulder, 'has not enough grit in him to keep from spoiling sport. Speaking in the vulgar tongue, he is even capable of giving you both

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away, unless you tell him where his sister is, and what she is doing. But he has still enough sense left in him to obey Jim Scudamore. So tell him now, before me— and I promise you on my honour I will see that it goes no further!’

The man spoke, and even through the mask of sodden flesh and from the pitifully desperate eyes the gentleman's hopeless soul looked out upon the world.

‘Miss Anne is below stairs,’ I answered him simply. ‘She wished to change places with me for an evening! That is all!’

Jim Scudamore hung one moment on the brink of a tremendous laugh. His elbow curved to slap his thigh. But with a supreme effort he controlled himself.

‘Has she a white lace cap on, with wings like gossamer —and a gentle giant with arms like a windmill to look after her?’

I answered that, though highly probable, I knew nothing about this last. But that the gossamer cap was Miss Anne's and had been described to a single wing-feather. Whereat Jim Scudamore looked at John Barnaby, and John Barnaby for the first time met his master's eye.

‘Come!’ said Scudamore, ‘retreat in good order— I want to laugh! I must laugh or I shall die! The cap— oh, the cap! We are smitten hip and thigh! Four of us—not one of us has the joke on another! Whistle up those heaven-forsaken Errol fellows. We

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must get out of this as best we can. Lucky this is Liberty Hall! So, do as I bid you, my young baronet! Stand not on the order of your going, but go. Miss Clemmy, I would I were a brother or anything else to you— just as you would prefer. The same to Miss Anne! I leave you in full possession of the field, and march off my shattered forces without any of the honours of war. Come, lads I John Barnaby, don't stand there looking like the city hangman out of a job!

And so with Jim Scudamore leading, the four young men filed out.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

CONCERNING THAT SATURDAY

Shall I ever forget it? Well, I think not. No more will Miss Anne. And Sir Tempest for once omitted to register the temperature at 6 A.M., noon, and 6 p.m. in his diary. Though he had little to do except hear the door-bell ring, his own temperature was permanently high. The tornado that passed with scarce an intermission over his spirit, leaving desolation in its track, really so monopolised his attention that his diary for Saturday, the third of September, presents a virgin page, blank as somebody's shield I have read about in the old romances.

For it was a singularly calming circumstance that, when we arrived home at Ravensnuik House, we found Sir Tempest there before us. I really think the peppery little spit-fire of a man could not do without his daughter any longer. Miss Anne was his adoration—the good and the—well not the ill—but the mischievous part of her, were alike dear to him. She consoled him for his disappointment about John Barnaby—which, though Sir Tempest said no word about it, no doubt bore right sorely on the proud little gentleman.

'Oh, if only ye had been a laddie and the first born!' he would often say, patting Anne's shoulder as they talked together. For with her he was wont to lay aside all his stormy tempers as completely as if they pertained to another person.

'Ah well, daddy,' she would reply consolingly, 'I must e'en make up for what we can't help by 'wearing the breeks' all my life!'

'Of that there is small fear, Anne!' Sir Tempest would answer, patting her smooth cheek in high good pleasure. 'God pity the man that draws up wi' you.'

That night as soon as we went to bed, Anne came across to my couch, and sitting down on the edge of it, crossed a foot over her knee, and as usual began caressing the shell-pink of her instep. This was the signal for a 'confab,' as we called it in those long-past days. Everybody calls it so now, but in those days we had the word all to ourselves—or thought we had.

'Clemmy,' she said, 'our fun is at an end, or nearly— now that my father has come.'

I smiled quietly, and at that she threw herself upon me, threatening me with the direst pains and penalties if I did not immediately reveal to her what that smile meant.

As if a woman could tell at any time what a particular smile meant, the ins and the outs of it, the beginning and the end of it. She would have to

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lay bare all her mind, all her soul— which God forbid! Anne should have known better.

Nevertheless, I told her part—enough! I informed her that certain young men were coming to see the heiress of Sir Tempest Kilpatrick on Saturday, the third day of September in the present year of grace in his house of Ravensnuik— that I did not know all their names, at least not to be particular about. Most of them were coming to demand Miss Anne Kilpatrick's hand in lawful and loving wedlock. Some were trysted to see the mother, others were to prosecute their suit at her own lovely feet. But, of course, with a father on the premises, everything would be simplified. There would be no difficulty. Merely supply Sir Tempest with a soothing mixture, a shot-gun, unlimited cartridges, and— something interesting was sure to happen. No, they had not all been accepted. Of that I was certain. It was only as to particulars that my memory was hazy. Especially as to which of them was which— small wonder among so many! But they were coming. Oh, yes, they were coming! For they all, every man of them—loved, adored, doted on hair black as the raven's wing, eyes dusk like night. And they hated, collectively and individually, such common, dollish, vulgar evidences of beauty as curling golden hair, sky-blue eyes, a rosebud mouth, and a pearly complexion. They not only scorned these things, they had said so over their signatures.

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'Oh!' exclaimed Miss Anne, looking momentarily uncomfortable, for almost the first time in her life.

'Yes,' I continued, 'all of them like dark-skinned beauties—preferably with a single rose (cardinal) in her hair! One of a literary turn (little he will make of it at the law!) stated on oath that he was very far indeed for misliking me for my complexion, which was the shadowy livery of the burnished sun!' While a young minister just newly off the irons gave it as his opinion that I was 'dark, but comely as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon.' Whereupon I reminded him that the word in the Bible had used to be 'black.' But he assured me (staking his professional reputation upon the fact) that that was only owing to a mistake in translation, which I would find set right in the Revised Version.'

'Let me see the book!' said Anne, suddenly.

And as she looked her eyes began to blaze. She read page after page, murmuring at intervals, 'Oh, you darling Clem!' 'Clemmy, I love you!' 'My word, Clem, but you have not wasted your time!' 'I never thought you had it in you!' 'And it is to be Saturday— first— the day after tomorrow. That will just give us time! Oh, we will manage, you and I! Small fear!' 'Oh, you cleverest girl— you have beaten me into ploughshares— yes, into reaping hooks and pins and needles and things!' 'There never was any

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one like you, Clemmy!' 'I thought I had done very well— poor me! But now—even Young Dan Weir and the window are nothing to this!' 'Oh, blessings on the day my mother brought you to Grennoch to help me in my education!' 'You have helped indeed. I knew the moment I saw you that we should be— what is it they say—'mutually beneficial.' 'But—oh, come to my arms, Clem, my Clem! I may live to have a dozen husbands—but— may I drown myself in the Ravensnuik mill-dam among the puddocks if ever I love one of them as I do you! There! Oh, the book—the beautiful book! I will take it and sleep with it under my pillow all this blessed, this thrice blessed night! And now I will go and say my prayers!' The which she did — like a little child, and in essence to the full as innocently.

The Saturday came. There was much to be done. Priority of appearance it was, of course, beyond us to arrange. We had to take the wooers as they came, and deal with them according to the light of nature.

Nevertheless, certain things were in our favour, and we manipulated others so that they also would make for our designs— which, be it known (it may not appear on the surface) were both serious and salutary. If deep and pure affection had been involved, I think that neither of us—not I, certainly— would have been a party to such a plot. But with a number of young men who, upon being introduced for the first time to a young girl, reputed heiress,

had proceeded immediately to extremities (with or without encouragement), we did not feel that it was necessary to stand upon the niceties of sentiment.

Madam, Anne's lady mother, was lying on a sofa in her large front drawing-room, the same in which she had received the minister of the parish. She was our first reserve. Sir Tempest, in what his daughter called, and not without reason, his 'growlery'— that is, the little office on the opposite side of the passage which led to the white parlour in which Anne and I abode, was at once our 'Ban' and 'Arrifere Ban.' We had enjoined old John Forrest to walk softly all that day, and to use his head piece in distributing the candidates as widely as possible about the front of the house, if there should be any delay in admitting them. It would spoil everything if they told one another.

'I micht set them to the gairden weedin' John said, scratching his head with a thoughtful air, 'this wat wather has fair sent the weeds up like young trees. I declare they are met over the potato shaws! D'ye think that I micht set the callants to the push-hoein'?'

We gave him the fullest discretion, and in the case of Master Hugh Chisholm we recommended John to give that youth a job at carting good mixen stuff, or anything else that would come unhandsomely betwixt the wind and his nobility. Yes, I know. Young ladies do not talk or act that way

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now. But we did in our time, and I can never see, perhaps because I came too early into the world, that either one or the other of us was one whit the worse for it.

Then closeted in the white drawing-room Miss Anne and I drew the curtains religiously close, shutting out the garish world. There was a dimpling simmer of expectation about Anne—which was not a smile, still less a laugh, but which, at any moment, might possibly eventuate in her.

When Anne had dressed herself carefully in garments similar to those I had worn at Newhall, and when I had fitted on the dark-coloured stuff dress and maid's butterfly cap of lace, in which Anne had made such a sensation in the servant's hall, we were, so to speak, ready to receive cavalry!

With her feet on a wire-framed chair and her head thrown back, Anne chanted like a child reciting at infant school,

'Will you walk into my parlour, said the Spider to the Fly, 'Tis the prettiest little parlour that ever you did spy!'

Then she would get up, and so long as there was no one there, make little runs at me, catching me and hugging me close with the oft-repeated assurance that I was a dear.

'And I am a perfect pig— my dear,' she would add, 'for I never once thought about you, nor made any arrangements for your having a good time afterwards with the lads down below. But then, after

all, it would not have been fair. They were so dreadfully in earnest—especially Young Dan Weir. I have looked at the paper every day since, to see if he killed anybody on the way home. I hope he did not, but—at least, if he had, it would have been for my sake. And I would have forgiven him!"

'I doubt,' said I, 'if a British jury would have taken your view of the matter. Though with you in the witness box, they might have admitted extenuating circumstances!'

Anne toyed with a fresh cardinal rose which she had brought up from the garden and placed prominently in a glass of water on the small centre table. The room was so dark that it looked almost black. Beside it lay the little book, called 'My Preferences!'—as harmless an arrangement in paper and ink as one would wish to see.

Thus was the springe set, and along the forest paths came the woodcocks eager to be taken—or at least we presumed so.

'Gracious!' cried Anne, 'there's the bell, I declare! Who is the first? He deserves to be let off. For you did look too lovely that night, with the cardinal rose in your hair! I declare that I would not have behaved a whit better than the others, if I had been a man!'

'Well,' I said, 'it's a bit too late to think of that now, Anne! Heart up! We must go through with it. England expects.'

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‘Oh, bother what England expects!’ said Anne, ungratefully— to me who had done so much for her... ‘Mind you come in when I throw a book down on the floor with a plop! Or in any case when I ring the bell— then come quick! And don’t you dare to move out of the next room. Yes, you may leave the door open, of course. If this is not your show, I wonder what is. After all, they can’t kill me, and if the worst comes to the worst, I can’t marry more than one of them! The law doesn’t allow it. I have made inquiries! Besides which, I shall tell my father that I never gave any one of them the least encouragement, which will be the sacred truth!’

And Miss Anne withdrew her feet from the chair and sat up with a consciousness of virtue all the more delightful, that, with her, it was a thing so rare. So that, just at the last, I take it that Anne showed more of nervousness than one would have expected from so cool a hand.

It was no other than Mr. John Olifant Elton of Elton, an old-young man of mature years, many debts, and few expectations, but for all that the representative of an ancient county family, who had called to prosecute his suit. Anne and I could not speak aloud to each other when we made this discovery, because we could only see his slightly bald head over the banisters of the staircase, our white drawing-room being, of course, to the back as Lady Kilpatrick’s was to the front. But I had arranged with Anne that I should intimate (to the

best of my knowledge and belief) how far the thing had gone in each case by the holding up of fingers. Five was the normal, ten the limit.

‘Two,’ I signalled.

‘Twill suffice!’ ‘Twill serve!’ replied Anne noiselessly screwing her mouth. ‘But I wish I had had somebody nicer to start with!’ For Mr. John Olifant Elton was not a man to commit himself. Upon this occasion he was faultlessly attired in half-high boots, knee-breeches very tight above the calf, as the fashion was then, a long-tailed cut-away coat, and he carried his hat before him with a dandling motion as if it had been a fractious baby. This was almost too much for our gravity—at least for mine. As for Miss Anne, she had presently enough to think about. You see I was in the next room, immediately behind the curtain.

Anne nodded again. She had made up her mind. We could hear old John's foot on the stairs. He was to show the first corner straight to our den—such being Miss Anne's orders.

‘Oh, I wish it were darker!’ whispered Anne, with a sudden access of nervous fright. But it was too late. I had just time to disappear completely, when old John Forrest's voice was heard ponderously announcing the visitor—as usual with such remarks as might occur to him as to his purpose or quality.

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'This is Maister Olifant Elton frae Elton—' he said, 'and the first time he has ever been here to my knowledge. I wonder what has brocht him sae far frae hame in the harvest time. And I'm sure nane o' his neighbours has mair need to see their craps safe into the hands o' Jeemie Gordon, the corn dealer in Dawlkeith toon— and the siller liftit!'

'Ha!' said Mr. Olifant Elton, looking about him with a puzzled air, and shaking hands somewhat languidly with Miss Anne, as she went forward to meet him. 'I—ah— I came here expecting to see ... in fact, as I understood it, I had an appointment to meet—a young lady.'

'Well,' demanded Miss Anne, haughtily, 'and pray what have you found?'

'But,' said Mr. Olifant, nervously beating time to an audible Turkish patrol with his hat-brim, 'but ... in fact . . . the young lady was ... as I understood it . . . ahem . . . Miss Anne Tempest Kilpatrick.'

Anne eyed him sternly. Mr. Olifant Elton was conscious that he was not acquitting himself well.

'You may consider me as authorised to act for Miss Kilpatrick,' said Anne, severely. 'Whatever you say to me is the same as if you said it to her!'

'I am afraid you do not understand,' he stammered.

'I am here by the young lady's own personal desire, clearly expressed.'

'Well, so am I!' retorted Miss Anne, 'say on what you have come to say.'

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‘Ahem—I—,’ was all the length this rather tongue-tied young man could get in his love-declaration.

‘He was really not worth powder and shot, my dear,’ said Anne afterwards. And happily she was saved further debate. For at that moment the outer door-bell rang, and they could hear the hurried scuffle of old John’s feet. John had a pair of boots which he called ‘his other pair.’ Originally manufactured for the garden, they were fitted for the drawing-room by having the heels cut away, and gradually by constant use they had come to lack also that fine full-flavoured bouquet of the stable which distinguished John’s ordinary foot-gear. We never could make up our minds whether this was an improvement or not. It was certainly highly un-Johnian.

But it was time to bring matters to a climax and dispose of Mr. Olifant Elton of Elton. Metal more attractive might even now be brushing its soles on the mat in the hall.

‘Sir,’ said Anne, acridly, ‘I have told you that I am fully in the confidence of the young lady you mention, and I have only to say that she absolutely denies having given you any reason whatever thus to intrude upon her privacy, in the absence of her parents. But, as you are distinctly within your right in attempting to prosecute the acquaintance (if so it seem good to you) I take pleasure in informing you

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that Sir Tempest Kilpatrick is in the house and immediately accessible— though, I should perhaps warn you, suffering somewhat severely from an attack of gout. But, sir, one so correct and ceremonious as yourself will see the absolute propriety of conducting the acquaintance in the only legitimate way— through the young lady's parents. Shall I call the maid to show you to Sir Tempest's chamber?

'Ahem,' said Mr. Olifant Elton, who by this time had almost shaken off the body of his unfortunate hat from its brim, 'ahem— no— not on the present occasion. I think I will ... it would perhaps be better not to intrude, for the present, upon Sir Tempest's valuable time!'

Miss Anne rang the bell and I appeared promptly, like the Turkish slaves when the pashas clap their hands. You never saw a man more taken aback. At least I had not up to that moment. Though indeed, he was nothing to some that came after him. He only gurgled and gasped, looking from one to the other of us.

'Miss Anne,' he muttered involuntarily, glowering at me in my cap, standing as meek and demure as a cat— after the little episode of the cream-jug.

'I beg your pardon,' said Miss Anne, who was also standing, inflexible as fate by the table, with the back of the black Book of Destiny in her hand, 'did

you speak. Perhaps you have changed your mind and would like to see Sir Tempest after all?’

‘Oh, no, no!’ cried Mr. Elton, visibly trembling with the nervous shock, and quite unable to take his eyes off me. ‘I could not think of troubling Sir Tempest—I could not indeed. Good-day—good-day!’

‘Good-day, then, Mr. Elton,’ said Miss Anne. ‘Clemmy, be good enough to call John to show the gentleman downstairs!’

Anne and I clasped hands as we watched him over the banisters.

It was Anne who spoke.

‘Oh, the cold milk-and-water cray-fish, that nose-of-wax, that stick of black toffee licked smooth! Call that a man! Feech!’ said Miss Anne, in a whisper.

‘Hush!’

And we heard him distinctly ask old John, the while he endeavoured to pass the major-domo of Ravensnuik something of the nature of silver, ‘Who is that servant girl in the lace cap?’

Well, he got his money's worth— and I a certificate of character that gives the lie to the ancient maxim that listeners never hear any good of themselves.

‘And what for may ye be speerin’?’ said old John Forrest with indignation; ‘maybe ye are thinkin’ that she is some licht-heided piece frae a big toon! But I can advise ye that she is nane ither

than Clementina MacTaggart, the dochter o' an honest God-fearin' man, that Sir Tempest has brocht up regairdless o' expense for company to Miss Anne. And verra pack the twaesome are! Na, I want nane o' your siller. Wha kens but ye mean it for the wages o' eeniquity! Keep your half-croons in your pouch, Maister Elton, and pay your ain servants wi' it. They will be the better pleased—that is, by what they were tellin' me the last time I fogathered wi' them in the Grass-Market!

'You impudent rascal!' cried the justly incensed Mr. Olifant Elton. 'I will instantly report you to your master.'

'Then come richt up the stairs wi' me this verra moment,' said old John, by no means intimidated; 'I hae juist ta'en Sir Tempest his medicine! And the last I heard o' him he was usin' some grand, fine, muckle words that maybe you, bein' a learned man, will be able to understand better than the like o' me! His gout is troublin' the maister sair the day, ay, I am thinkin' that!'

But that was the last we saw or heard of Mr. Olifant Elton at the house of Ravensnuik for many a day. He went down the gravel as John said afterwards, 'like a young four-year-auld that hasna been oot o' the stable for a month. He garred the stanes fair flee aff the noses o' yon ground polished boots o' his! It canna hae been guid for the leather!'

And the bell rang the second time.

Think whether there was not excitement unspeakable upon the verges of the first floor banisters— till we could see the visitor. We actually pushed one another like boys at a circus procession. Then when at last I did see him— it all came rushing back. The newcomer was a middle-aged man— hearty, well experienced in the world, with a glib tongue, and a way of saying practical things which I had hardly ever heard equalled. I did not recall his name, but to talk with, I had certainly infinitely preferred him to any cub-laddie of them all. With me, a slight flavour of the ripeness of age has always added to a man's attractions. But I did not know how it might be with Miss Anne. However, I judged that they would soon mutually find each other out. I had quite forgotten to mention him to Miss Anne. What, after all, was one among so many?

I was in my place behind the curtain when John, still fuming warm from his last interview with Mr. Olifant Elton, introduced the stranger.

He did it as follows: 'This man says that his name is Abram Priestly and that he comes frae Glesga! There's a heap o' folk comes frae Glesga.'

Anne reproved John for speaking in that tone of any visitor and advanced to shake hands. This the newcomer did heartily, while John retired, still, however, impenitent and unabashed.

'Ah,' he said, 'I did not know that Miss Kilpatrick had a younger sister! I had been

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informed—it was my impression— that Miss Anne was an only daughter!’

‘Your impression was correct!’ was the answer, given, however, with a most disarming smile.

‘Ah,’ continued the worthy citizen of Glasgow, ‘I thought I could not be mistaken. I am not often wrong (here he smiled). You see, I am a single man, and have a shooting in the neighbourhood. In fact, I lease it from our mutual friend, the worthy Mr. Newhall, laird of that ilk, where I had the pleasure of meeting you— ahem.’

He paused for a reply. Anne, however, gave him no encouragement. But never was man more sufficient unto himself than this same Mr. Abraham Priestly. In his quality of eligible bachelor he had no objections at any time to conversing with a good-looking girl. Only he wished very much that he could orient this particular one. She was not a servant—evidently not, being in possession of the drawing-room. She seemed much too self-possessed and too thoroughly mistress of her surroundings to be a lady's companion.

‘Ah, she must be a visitor,’ Mr. Priestly smiled, having solved the question to his satisfaction.

‘How do you like the country?’ he said immediately as a feeler. ‘Very charming about here, is it not? I at least have found it so, and your hostess is a delightful girl. It was, in fact, at her suggestion that I called— to pursue an acquaintance so agreeably begun. Ah (thinking that this had gone

on long enough for practical purposes), may I inquire if Miss Anne Kilpatrick is at home?’

‘She is.’

‘Then— would it be convenient for me to see her?’

This man had the direct method which women love, and even I was beginning to be a little sorry for him. However, Anne could be equally direct—upon occasion.

‘You do see her,’ she said, ‘I am Anne Kilpatrick!’

He fumbled in the breast of his frock-coat for his glasses, failed to find them, and began his apology—a clever man can instantly change his whole plan of campaign, and Mr. Abraham was very clever indeed.

‘My dear young lady,’ said Mr. Priestly, with an indefinable accent of tenderness, ‘you must pardon me. I have been ever since a boy blind as a bat. I really cannot distinguish objects across the room. I had an impression that— that— Miss Anne was a dark young lady— a brunette— while you appear to me to be, on the contrary—!’

‘What does that matter?’ cried Miss Anne, with a charming rise and fall in her voice (and her hands expressing anything you like— bar her real sentiments, ‘when heart can commune with heart, and when, upon subjects of lasting interest, such as

the—ah—Corn Laws and International Ocean Cables, you and I think the same.’

(I had just passed her a little folded paper with these words written upon it from behind the curtain. But I must say that Miss Anne, for once, used her material a trifle crudely.)

By this time, however, Mr. Abraham Priestly had achieved his self-possession and also recovered the use of his eye-glasses. But the white drawing-room was still too dark for him to make any great use of them.

‘I am a plain man,’ he continued, fumbling with the fine hair guard which secured them, ‘so you will find me, Miss Anne, and indeed, I warned you of that before. But this I will say, that seldom in my life have I been so much taken as by my too brief experience of your conversation and appearance. My dear Miss Anne, indeed I can hardly trust myself to speak. I am, I cannot repeat it too often, a plain man, and a banker—much trusted by the corporation which I have the honour to serve—and, I may say also, looked up to by its best customers. Of which, I presume to say, my salary is the best proof. Your conversation the other evening, my dear Miss Anne, convinced me that your mind was far from light. And furthermore you possessed a fund of information upon various important subjects— not only those you have now mentioned, but others even more absorbing, which would indeed do credit to any man of practical experience and observation.’

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During the whole of the interview at Newhall with the Glasgow banker, I had observed a complete but sympathetic silence, while Mr. Priestly talked, and this outburst of admiration was the result—a lesson to all chattering gabies of young women.

‘It is perhaps somewhat early days, Miss Anne,’ he continued, ‘for me to speak of hopes which, perhaps erroneously, you appeared to permit me to cherish on the subject of a yet dearer relationship—which might, perhaps, one day exist between us—.’

Anne felt that it was now high time to put a spoke in the wheel of this too enterprising Glasgow man of affairs. Accordingly she quietly remarked, ‘Will you come a little nearer?— perhaps upon a second interview I may not appear to be everything that your fancy painted. The evening proposes, the morning disposes, you know!’

‘That were impossible!’ said the gallant Abraham: ‘no hues ever laid on palette by Raphael or William Stott could do your beauty justice— if as a practical man I may be permitted the expression.’

‘Nevertheless, come!’ said Anne, smiling with subtlety.

And as Abraham Priestly went towards the sofa on which she sat, Anne jerked the curtain sharply back. He started and checked himself in midstride.

‘Am I then as beautiful as your fancy painted?’ Anne spoke kindly with lowered eyelashes, and a

sort of lingering, gentle, tearful smile of which she had the secret.

She seemed to say, 'Ah, do not disappoint me—do not break my heart!'

The banker threw himself into an attitude which, however, curiously enough suggested the air with which a branch-manager receives his best customer—the one whose account is never overdrawn and who has always a few thousand lying to his credit on deposit receipt.

'Far more beautiful than I had ever dreamed of!' he said, sticking to his passed word.

'You like my hair—its colour?' Anne went on, coaxingly.

'It is the very colour of gold,' he cried in ecstasy, 'can I say more—as a banker!'

'You like my complexion?'

'Why, it is lily and rose in one!' affirmed the business man, with quite unprofessional enthusiasm of language. Then, perhaps feeling that some apology was necessary, he added, 'You see, when I was young, I wrote poetry—of course not in office hours.'

'Of course not!' said Anne. At the same moment nonchalantly reaching out for the black leather book—'My Preferences,' she continued. 'Then since you are a business man, I take it for granted that you will not deny your signature?'

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‘Certainly not!’ cried the banker, indignantly. For this was his tenderest point, and he had still no idea whither he was being led.

‘Now listen, Mr. Abraham Priestly: My Preference — my favourite lady’s name is Anne (There is nothing to find fault with in that). I have always preferred hair dark as night, with a red flower for sole ornament. That is better than rubies — also cheaper!’

‘Well, Mr. Abraham Priestly, what say you to that? If that be so, you cannot care much for me. But I suppose you will say ‘it is poetry,’ I only hope that the Board of your bank and the manager may take the same view of the case when Sir Tempest goes to Glasgow!’

And Anne shook her crispy yellow locks defiantly before reading further.

‘Furthermore my preference is strongly for a fine rich olive complexion. I entirely and conscientiously object to pale-faced, blue-eyed, rose-leaf and china girls. They are particularly unfit to be the wives and—ahem— the mothers of the future business men of our great country!’(That’s not poetry, at least!)

(Signed) Abraham Priestly.

‘This document is, I think, your handwriting in holograph, and it is signed with your ordinary signature. So much you will not dare to deny?’

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She handed him over the incriminating document. No one could surpass Anne in real virtuous indignation.

While Mr. Abraham Priestly was considering this problem so suddenly presented to his notice, and before he had time to recover his speech, Anne dropped a book heavily on the floor. It was No. 1 of our Code of Signals. I appeared instantly—from behind the curtain.

There was more light in the room now, and in a moment, while the banker still gazed at the signature as if it had been a cheque upon an overdrawn account, Anne picked the cap off my head, as a bird does a seed from the threshing-floor. With her light fingers she gave a toss and a curl to my locks, and, then snatching the cardinal rose from the epergne on the table, she set the flower in the identical place it had occupied on the evening of the Newhall dance.

The banker lifted his eyes from the written condemnation, and the black book fell from his hand.

‘Miss Anne!’ he cried, astonished, but with an unmistakable air of relief, as he gazed at me. ‘It was, after all, only a young girl’s trick.’

‘No, this is not Miss Anne Kilpatrick,’ said the proper owner of that name, with the great calmness which the occasion demanded.

‘You have made a mistake, sir. This young lady is indeed all that you have stated in the book

which you have just dropped upon the floor. Only, what of course will not matter at all to you, she is unhappily poor. She has all the virtues, but not a single pound, Scots or sterling, to her name. She has nothing to her bank account, nothing in funds, nothing upon deposit receipt. But of course with your position, the confidence your firm reposes in you, and your admirable prospects, poverty will be no barrier to the heart's true affection. The young lady's father is a highly respectable man, a wood-forester on the estates of my father, Sir Tempest Kilpatrick, and— I shall be most happy to give you his address.'

Then in a low tone she conveyed the following stage direction to me, 'Simper and look sweet, you idiot, Clemmy!'

As she was speaking she had drawn back the curtain a little further. So that the light shone more clearly on my face.

'See,' she said, pointing with her finger like the showman of some notable wild animal, 'see, she blushes. She owns her affection. Can you ask for more? I put it to you, as a man of honour, as well as commercial probity, can you wish for more?'

But by this time Mr. Abraham Priestly was well on his way downstairs, without waiting even for old John's guidance. And as the two of us looked delighted over the banisters, we heard him saying again and again to himself, 'Not ask for more—not

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ask for more? Oh, yes, I assure you— more, much, much more!’

And after this fashion it was that the sun of Abraham Priestly, banker in Glasgow, much trusted by his firm, set once and for all, upon Ravensnuik— so far at least as two young innocent things were concerned. I believe he came back to shoot pheasants, however, in the autumn, after having informed himself very particularly of Miss Anne's absence.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

CONCERNING THE PRINCE OF POETS

And our next was the poet—that is to say, Mr. Hugh McIan Chisholm, who considered himself such. What, I wonder, makes poets so conceited? As to this Anne and I would, though we are now old women, still give a good deal to find out. For the curious thing is they are so only up to a certain definite period—perhaps while they are moulting. It wears off, however—for instance if they take to saw-milling, or the daily press. We have met, Anne and I, some authors whose books really sell. But they are not proud about it—not one bit. If you begin to talk about authorship they rather seem to ask to be let off, but instead pride themselves on their golf, or on having ‘got away one to leg for six,’ whatever these words may mean—something about cricket, I think. I have seen Anne's boys playing that game, generally with some kitchen utensils (borrowed without formalities) and a croquet ball. But the authors, of course mere novelists and men-on-the-press, are proud of such childish things. At least Anne says so, and she knows many of them. They come down here too, to this very house, and share the Captain's tobacco, and listen to his endless stories till there is

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no doing with him for days. But poets—never! I suppose it is very hard to have to keep on being a poet all the time. So they should really have our pity, rather than any harder feeling. But Miss Anne, who is less forgiving than I (being a blonde), says not.

Yes, we looked through the staircase bars with our heads down near the carpet, and saw him in the entrance hall with old John making him clean his boots on the mat. By that we knew he had been usefully employing his time outside in practical gardening. We could even hear him ask to be allowed to wash his hands. Then we knew that the agriculture had been very practical indeed. It may seem undignified in us thus to put our heads near the carpet. But if you once go in for having a good time (as Miss Anne in her innocence used to remark) you must be prepared to put your head down a well or up the chimney, as the case may be.

Now this Hugh Chisholm had once been in London. He had contributed some verses to a certain expensive weekly journal of exceedingly limited circulation, but devoted to high thinking and (its enemies said) poor writing. On the strength of this, having returned to his native province, Hugh Chisholm felt himself compelled to wear long hair, which curled or rather swerved outward at the ends, and a velvet jacket of the particularly disgusting brown which one sees (and loathes) in bad dreams. He carried his head, which he considered classic

(he did not know the classics), a little to one side, and he also kept his chin up, because otherwise he might have been mistaken for something else than a poet. And a poet he not only was, but he expected everyone to know it without being told.

For such there are no waters of compassion, neither in the heavens above, nor in the earth beneath, nor in the waters under the earth. Even Anne, who always cries about the poor gladiators, and Christians, and people, being condemned by the Roman ladies when they had bad luck in the arena, says if they had all been poets, she would have kept her thumbs down as firmly as if they had been fixed to the bench in thumb-screws. But then Anne is apt to say more than she means. Altogether Mr. Hugh Chisholm little knew the cake that was cooking up in the oven for him, when old John Forrest made him cleanse his boot-soles at the foot of our stairs. If he had, methinks he might have turned and fled. Or at any rate he would have 'refused to trust himself to the savages,' like the Caius Volusenus about whom Miss Euphemia used to try to interest us (it is in Caesar, his Commentaries), whom his commander sent over to Britain to spy out the land— as it says— 'in a long ship.' But after getting there and not liking the look of affairs Caius Volusenus 'dared neither to disembark nor to trust himself to the savages—so he returned incontinent and told Caesar what he had seen!'

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I have always thought that this ignominy was owing to the 'long ship' aforesaid rolling its engines out in the chops of the channel. But the Captain, who, of course, lacks bowels of mercy for this kind of thing, says that if he had been Caesar, 'Caius would have got the great chuck. Yes, madam, I would have broke Mister Caius on the spot!' But this is language which, save that the Captain is the husband whom I have promised to love, honour and obey, I certainly would never have permitted to be set down in this chronicle.

At any rate, the curtain was restored. A funereal gloom enveloped the white drawing-room. As I remarked to Miss Anne at the time, it looked 'as if someone were laid out in it.' To which she made answer viciously. 'There's nobody laid out in it yet, but if Mr. Hugh Chisholm is all you say, there soon will be!'

You never saw anything like the pick Miss Anne has at professional poets. Occasional verse-makers she may tolerate, because there is no evidence of malice aforethought. But Hugh McIan Chisholm bore guilt upon his countenance and in the meshes of his hair.

At all events, the room was dark, with the kind of gloom which staggers the eyes, coming into it out of the sun-glare of August. It was, however, highly poetical, and as such ought to have been satisfying to the young man.

And so, in a manner of speaking, it did. No one could have been more content than he was with the reception he had. In spite of his long hair, which is said by the medical faculty to impair both brain-power and eyesight, he could see well enough—that is, when he took off his glasses. The sun of Anne's beauty rose upon him. Suddenly he was conscious of a subtle difference. As, however, he had flirted with some half-dozen other girls since the ball, he could not at once diagnose where the difference lay.

'Miss Anne Kilpatrick?' he murmured, tentatively.

'Yes,' smiled Anne, 'that is my name!'

'I think,' he began, still uncertainly, 'that—that— I had the pleasure of meeting you at the dance at Newhall the other evening. I remember that a happy and poetic expression occurred to me on that occasion. I said, 'You are fairer in the eye of day than under the shine of a hundred lamps!' You must, of course, remember?'

'Yes,' said Anne, promptly, 'and do you know I think you were right— somewhat fairer! I am indeed 'somewhat fairer' in the daytime! Don't you find it so?'

But he was not stupid, this Hugh Chishohn, for he tossed back his poetic hair and smiled knowingly.

'Ah,' he cried, almost gayly, 'you must not imagine that I think the worse of you for that— why,

never a whit. I am nowise provincial. I can quite conceive, however, that it is a secret which you would fain keep from those who never stirred from their native valleys, who think that wholesome stodgy porridge and milk is all men's delight. But I am somewhat wiser. I have not lived in vain in our great metropolis—and among that select few who have a right to the title of Bohemians! Perhaps you do not know that I am a member, however unworthy, of more than one learned and literary society. And I hold that if women change the flowers in their bonnets, the gloves upon their hands to suit the changing seasons, why not the colour of their tresses? And indeed, in the present instance, it is a great improvement, if a mere man may make so bold as to say so. Anne (I may call you so, may I not?), my glorious Anne—I pray you do not weep, because I have discovered this, even though, as the ancient early English poet says: *'Thy tears do thread instead of pearl. The bracelets of thy hair.'*

'Beautiful— most beautiful!' said Anne, drying her eyes with the aftermath of enthusiasm, 'ah, you poets— you poets, who can resist you? It is that which gives you such an unfair advantage of us poor girls.'

At which Mr. Hugh McLan Chisholm smiled with evident satisfaction and curled his tiny moustache—as who would say that, after all, it was not his fault. He, at least, could not help it.

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All the while he was speaking the poet was moving restlessly about, stretching himself as if about to crow— ‘for all the world like a cock on a dyke at six o'clock of the morning!’ said Miss Anne, who is excellent at comparisons.

He simply could not keep still, but all the time kept edging nearer Miss Anne's chair to contemplate her beauties at shorter range. Once he put out his hand as if to touch her curls, but the look which came over Miss Anne's face would have frozen a volcano. He muttered something about wishing to retire, in order to set down a stray scrap of rhyme which had just arrived in his head, from nowhere in particular.

‘These jewels come to us poets. It is our misfortune,’ he said, ‘we cannot help it. They are born in our brains, and we are unhappy till they are properly polished and set.’

‘Go then, by all means,’ said Miss Anne, ‘cut and set your jewel. Only, I am sorry I may not be able to see you again today. I shall be engaged!’

The young man was astounded. He thought the whole field was his from horizon to horizon.

‘But,’ he said, ‘your mother—your lady mother! I was to see her—you will remember— by your own desire—at least, so I understood!’

‘Oh, certainly,’ said Anne, with a mighty assumption of carelessness, ‘John will take you to my mother. Only—pray don't make a noise. She is

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sure to be asleep. You can get rid of your poem there as well as elsewhere, without hurting anybody. Only be careful not to wake her. Mother is so dreadfully frightened of burglars and keeps a pistol in the drawer beside her. If she moves her right hand— get ready to duck!’

‘But,’ stammered the young man, ‘I understood... I came prepared—.’

‘But—but!’ said Anne solemnly, ‘your poem! That comes first, does it not?’

And she smiled as only Anne can smile.

‘True,’ he said, ‘true! How well you know me! How thoroughly you interpret an artist's feelings! This shows me, if ever I had a doubt, that our souls were made for each other! But I think I can write my poem quite as well here, if you will permit me—?’

‘No, for heaven's sake, not here!’ cried Anne with sudden vehemence, running towards him and taking him by the arm. Hugh Chisholm smiled, well pleased at her solicitude. He was a poet, and took such things as his natural dues. But it was not that. For once Mr. Chisholm had made a mistake. It was because I was hidden behind the curtain of the portaire he was making for, and the next moment he would have come upon me, very much at unawares.

‘Ah,’ he smiled upon Anne, who had dropped his arm with a little spasm of disgust as if it had been the limb of a frog, ‘then I will stay with you. But— you need not have been afraid,—ah, no, little one. Such eyes, such hair, such lips, surely these

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were never made to be left long alone! But after all, art—the Poet's art, must come first, even before Love!

It was all that Anne could do to keep from braining him with the poker for daring to call her 'Little One'— and Anne's arm is no joke when she hits to hurt. Once John Barnaby— but the tale of John Barnaby can wait.

A movement of Anne's hand guided the poet to a sofa near the window, where by rubbing his nose against the paper it was possible to make out what he had written previously.

'He is altering his sonnet to suit the case!' I wrote on a scrap of paper and projected it in Anne's direction, laying it on the back of my hand and flipping into space with my forefinger, a very good way.

Anne frowned and grasped the black book with a close-lipped determination which said, 'Oh, wait, I'll sonnet him!'

Presently he came across smilingly to Miss Anne, and said in a manner at once superior and confidential, 'Of course I cannot expect you to take in both the matter and the manner at the first glance. You must know that the delightful mixture of simple candour with courtly form as devoted to rural subjects which (in brief) characterises the delightful poet Herrick has been my life study. I may add that I have made him my master. Indeed the words I have

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just quoted were (I may say) a portion of a review of my celebrated poem 'Venus Doves and Venus Sparrows,' the first work by which I became famous.'

'Oh, thank you so much!' said Anne, meekly, but whether for the information or the poetic compliment did not appear.

'Do not thank me, but read!' said the poet, grandly—tossing back his crispy locks 'like the tail of a docked horse in fly-time' (Anne's simile).

Anne read obediently as follows:

'Anna, thy Threads of Life are Thrums of Gold,
Thine Eyes are bluer Diamonds than the Sky doth hold.
Thy Lips are Rubies, and thy pink Cheeks be
Fresh as Aurora rising from the sea. Sweet-pea in
Blossom, Roses in their Bloom, Within thy Hair
might find a fitting Tomb.'

Small wonder that Miss Anne took her breath short at this wondrous production. While distrusting her taste, the author leaned over her shoulder and explained its merits as she went along. That is a way they have. Authors always know their own points best.

'You see,' he said, 'the style is that of my master, but I think I may flatter myself that the matter is all my own. Indeed it is inspired by the lovely complexion, the clear blue eyes, the wondrous blonde beauty which is now before me! If I may say so, I am particularly struck by the freshness of that comparison with Aurora rising from the sea. It is so new, so original—though perhaps I ought not to be

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the first to say so! Yet, after all, an author, a poet, you know, may be allowed to be a little garrulous as to his works. And indeed to whom should I speak, if not to her who carries all my heart— all my life— within . . . ?’

Anne broke in unsympathetically at this point.

‘I should much like to see the verses in their first form,’ she said— ‘before you began to tinker at them on the sofa there, I mean!’

Hugh Chisholm stared at the bold girl as if she must needs be mad.

‘Artists never do that kind of thing, my splendid but Ignorant little Anne!’ he said, with indulgent patronage. ‘The finished jewel is all that any may see— even you.’

He added these two words very tenderly— if he had but known it, at the risk of his life.

‘You are sure this has never been used before in any form?’ said Anne, archly. ‘I have heard of such things —ah, you poets, you poets, there is no trusting you! You dress up your verses and send them to one girl after another, and we believe you. We all want to think that our charms only inspired your immortal lines! Ah, do be kind—I ask you—I pray you—show me the first copy — the dear seed of so perfect a flower!’

He shook his head, smiling gently.

‘It is, alas, impossible—quite impossible. Art is sacred, especially poetic art. All is for the beloved

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object, and she must only receive the perfect product. Not even at her request can Art's secret processes be laid open to the day!

'Ah,' said Anne drily, 'well—it does not matter so much after all— perhaps I can arrive at something like correct knowledge by another route!'

And she opened the little black book, which in the interstices of his many loves Master Hugh had completely forgotten. She found the place and read aloud, with due attention to the accent, and the poet's latest recension of the poem firmly grasped in her other hand— filed for reference, as it were.

'Anna, thy wealthy Hair is threaded Jet: Thine Eyes, black Diamonds in pure Argent set. Thy Lips upon thy Cheeks' dark Ivory, Glow like Aurora rising from the Sea! And blood-red Poppy, Rose of damask Bloom, In thy Hair's Night may find appropriate Tomb.'

Here Miss Anne let a book fall— heavily, this time. It was a concordance. Therefore I knew I was wanted in a hurry. So I came. The cardinal rose, admired of Glasgow's business man, was still in my hair. I turned my face toward the poet.

'Now,' said Miss Anne, 'which?'

For once in his life Mr. Hugh Chisholm stood dumbfounded.

'Whose mother do you want to see— this lady's or mine?' said Miss Anne. 'Mine, you will find in the front drawing-room, as I told you. Good-morning!'

And the curtain fell.

But this adventure of the poet was the apex and crown of our endeavours for the production of the greatest misery to the greatest number. After this, the pastime somehow palled upon us. The heiress declined to interview any more unfortunates. I might sit on the porch and pick them off with a shot-gun if I liked. I might take them into the labyrinth and play at hide-and-seek with them. As for Miss Anne, she would have no more to do with them on any terms. In fact, Anne was approaching the crisis so well known to all women and other children (sometimes not unknown also even to grown men), when they begin to tire of a toy, and are inclined to quarrel with the giver thereof—if upon the premises and convenient to their hand.

She sent this word and order out to old John, who only replied 'Umphumm! And a bonny lot ye hae had o' them! Nae wonder that puir Miss Anne is tired! That Glesga man was the only yin worth a pitota-pealin'. Yon lad wi' the lang hair was mair fear't o' fylin' his denty hands than a lassie fresh frae the boardin' schule. But oh, I wad gie a week's wage to ken juist what took him doon the avenue in siccan a deil's hurry. I declare his hair was fleelin' oot ahint him, like Borealis on a frosty nicht. But certes, the face on him was nane frosty! It was raair like a harvest mune!'

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As I say, our triumphs were over. Retribution lay in waiting for us round the comer, as it mostly does on such occasions.

We had put the curtains back and were sitting talking things over, smiling at one thing after another, peaceable and free, as all girls love to do when they are content with the way they have put in their time. Miss Anne's foot was in her hand and she was loving it, as if part of the credit were owing to it, when, suddenly, in the hall beneath, there was heard a man's heavy foot, and a strong masculine voice demanded 'Miss Anne Kilpatrick!'

'Don't tell me, John Forrest,' said the voice, 'I know she is not out. I have just seen young Chisholm—going down the avenue like a fast trotter. And he came directly from seeing her too. Now, John, take up my name. I will wait here— till you come back— you know it, I think—James Scudamore, Writer to the Signet.'

I do not know whether it was the legal appellation or Mr. Scudamore's masculine determination which imposed upon old John. But at any rate he came up with the information. 'He's an awesome man, yon. He winna be said nay to. Scudamore is his name— and a decent man the faither o' him. I kened him weel. But—I'm thinkin' that the young yin will never fill the auld man's shoon. And—when they come to dee, the twa o' them maun be prepared for a lang, lang separation! Ye see, the auld man Scudamore is a guid kind o' a

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man for a lawyer—a great kirk-ganger, a professor o' releegion and kind to the puir. And gin a' be true that's i' the Bible, it's little likely that faither and son will forgather wi' yin anither again on the T'ither Side Jordan! Na, there's a great gulf fixed! See Luke Saxteen an' Twenty-sax!'

Nevertheless, such was old John's admiration for a man who knew his mind, that he was ready to show Jim Scudamore up in the face even of Miss Anne's strictest orders.

Old John added, turning in my direction with a queer smile, 'Missie, it's hardly kitchen caa'in hours, but there's a lad ben wi' my auld woman yonder speerin' for you. It's no easy for an auld dune man like me to say no to thae maisterfu' young callants. He's bletherin' awa' to the auld woman, though, as croose and cagy as ye like. But he says he has come to hae a word wi' Mistress Clementina MacTaggart, and declares that he willna budge an inch till he sees her. And dod, but that bein' sae—I dinna see wha's to move him, either.'

At this announcement I looked so distressed and put out that Anne laughed, cruelly as it seemed to me.

'Ah, my lady,' she said, 'you have laid snares for me to get out of as best I could, all the afternoon. But now you are in one yourself, hand and foot. Now see how you like it! I'll wager my threepenny bit with a hole in it that it is Young Dan Weir!'

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And Miss Anne sighed, a little wistfully as I thought.

'The same!' cried old John Forrest promptly, 'and as bonny a lad as ever steppit to kirk or market in Selkirk single-soles! Faith, they are tellin' me that he made fair hen's-meat and puddock-rid o' the hale score o' lads that set on him that nicht ye were up at the Newhall. I'm thinkin' (here he looked at me with a twinkle in his eye, and then, his respect for his master's daughter overcoming him, he added)—aweel— it's little maitter what auld doited John thinks aboot young folks' boys.

His puir bits o' banes will sune be a' happit up aneath the green grass o' the kirkyaird. But John Forrest— ay, even auld John had his day—an' he is no compleenin'. But dinna tell the wife. It was afore her time.'

(He said these last words in a lower tone.)

John stood a moment rubbing the back of his hand across his face. Perhaps it was really his eyes that needed the attention, but this was too great a strain on the old gardener's dignity, so he compromised by rubbing his nose quite fiercely till it glowed again.

'Weel, then,' he said, 'wull I show the man in—Maister Scudamore, I'm meanin'?'

'Certainly,' said Miss Anne, 'tell him to come up at once!'

Then turning to me, she added, 'Clemmy, you had better go down to the kitchen and get rid of that

young man Weir. I'm sure I cannot imagine what is bringing him here!

From beneath his bushy badger-grey eyebrows old John glanced sidelong this way and that at us, taking in what he could of the situation, which after all was not much.

'Humph,' he said, 'I'm thinkin' that may be easier said than dune! They are a dour lot, thae Weirs o' Venturefair! No that I bemean you. Miss Clementina, wi' Young Dan. Ye nicht do waur. He's a braw lad and nae man's son will cry names ower the dyke at him— at least, no twice!'

I descended the staircase— not, however, with any great readiness, but still resolved to play my part with what of wit heaven had endowed me. Down, down I went into the kitchen of the House of Ravensnuik. John preceded on, smiling sedately to himself like a man who has had his first course at dinner, and knows that there is more and better to follow.

John Forrest announced me in form, for he was an old friend of my father's, and quite unaccustomed to use ceremony with any one.

'This that ye see afore ye, Dan'l Weir, is Mistress Clementina MacTaggart, that caa's hersel' companion to oor Miss Anne. But what she does that for is mair than I can tell, when her faither is juist a servin' man, and hersel' a servant lass like the lave o' us!'

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Now I had never seen Young Dan Weir, nor on the other hand had he seen me. I think we were mutually astonished. At least, I know I was. From Anne's description of him I had expected a veritable giant, boned like an ox, coarsely made and rough—what in our part of the country the folk would call a 'regular quarry-man !'

Instead I saw a young man, of great brawn and muscle indeed, and of a tall stature, blonde of hair and beard, with kind large eyes of grey-blue, very widely set, and features pleasant and regular. About him was nothing rough, nothing to indicate lack of breeding. But on the contrary, there was evidently a great force of character stowed away beneath that quiet and even reserved exterior.

He stood looking at me fixedly for a long time without speaking.

'I do not know you!' he said at last. 'You are not the girl of whom I had the 'beverage' at Newhall.'

The words were so simple and without pretension that I could not put them aside. This young man was not to be played with like the others. I felt that old John was saying to himself all the time, 'What did I tell you? The Weirs of Venturefair are no canny to meddle with!'

'John Forrest has told you the truth,' I answered, resolved to be as plain as he. 'I am Clementina MacTaggart,' I said, 'companion to Miss Anne Kilpatrick. I was at the dance the other night at Newhall, but I do not think that I saw you!'

'No,' said he with a glance at me in which was small liking or favour, 'her that I saw was bonny and wore a cap on her head!'

'Oh,' I cried, looking about me unguardedly. For at that moment Mistress Forrest herself was 'doing up' that identical cap with the goffering iron immediately under the young man's eyes. O blessed blindness of men! At times women were all undone without it. Young Dan Weir was no clearer seeing than his fellows. I knew what he was looking for. It was a girl with the sweetest face in all the world, that his eyes were searching for, a brisk ripple of curls zigzagging and crisping like a sea under a short chopping wind from the north, eyes in which mischief eternally wrestled with tenderness (and where, generally speaking, mischief had the best of it).

So with his heart filled to the brim with the love of another, to Young Dan Weir I was no more than the unclassed cur he had kicked out of his road that morning. True, his soul desired a vain thing. He was seeking that which was too high for him—an uncommon quest, and one not altogether ignominious. Nevertheless, just because of this a part of my heart went out to the young man. He was so set on seeing Miss Anne— at the very moment when, above stairs, Anne sat talking to Jim Scudamore, the man whom Dan Weir had, amongst others, flung out of the kitchen window of Newhall.

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But then, though in character a proven waster, Jim Scudamore was born near enough Anne's social level to be allowed to come to her drawing-room instead of to the kitchen. And to do him justice, Jim Scudamore would have been the first man to have acknowledged the anomaly. There were no false perspectives about Jim Scudamore, Writer to the Signet. More accurately, perhaps, than any man I have ever known, he saw himself as others saw him.

Meanwhile I stood there, and looked—I think, like a fool—or at least like the boy whom the schoolmaster sets on high upon a form, with the peaked cap of shame on his head. Presently old Mrs. John left the room—I suppose from a feeling of delicacy or in response to some secret signal from her husband.

Now if this be not a strange thing, judge ye? I had had no pity for the others—those who had come that afternoon in search of the heiress. But something about this youth, his very strength and beauty—and the uselessness of both, appealed to me most wonderfully. I know not when I felt so touched.

For me, I was no heiress. But if I had been—well—I do not know, perhaps I might have tried eloping on a different basis than Anne had done with Alain Gairlies.

Young Dan Weir stood awhile, looking so strong and firm and fit, a man for any woman to be proud of having beside her in kirk, or street, or at

merry-making— a man to be sure of in time of trouble, and above all a man to keep an arm about you at the times when—when— you want to cry, a man who could be depended upon to say— it is no matter what, but at any rate just what you wanted to hear at the moment.

Now the Captain does his best, honest man. But to say the least of it his imagination does not run away with him. And in such cases he can only bethink him of the axiom that after all it was not so bad yesterday, and it will probably be better still tomorrow. It, of course, is that peculiar and undiagnosed disease which besets all womenkind at intervals more or less uncertain, when they want to slap somebody, and specially to snap the head off their nearest and dearest. I have it myself often and often.

‘Can I see her?’ he asked, abruptly, almost making me start.

‘It were better not,’ I answered as gently as I could, ‘it would do no good, Dan Weir!’

I used his name because I was sorry for him— yes, sorry from my heart. Because, after all, he had not deserved it, and the reasoning is this. A woman may go above her position, and be mischievous, without much harm coming of it, except, of course, to herself. Because, more or less men up above can look after themselves. But it is battle, murder, and sudden death when a woman goes beneath her

position in order to draw to her the heart of a man. Whether or not she intends it, makes no matter. For, you see, these men are not expecting it, and— their methods are crude. But, of course, there was nothing in the least brutal about this Young Dan Weir, whose name I had spoken so glibly to his face.

‘Can I see her?’ he repeated firmly, without much heeding me, a thing which began to pique me.

‘No!’ said I, thinking it best with a simple and straightforward nature to be simple and straightforward also, ‘it was all a jest of my mistress’s—of Miss Anne Kilpatrick’s— the daughter of Sir Tempest. She was foolish, I admit. But, after all— there is no harm done.’

But of that I was not so sure as my words made out. The young fellow drew his hand slowly across his brow.

It was wet and pearly with perspiration. His curly hair was slaked with it.

‘A jest!’ he said, speaking in a numb, muffled sort of way, as if the meaning of the phrase had not yet reached his brain, and he was wrestling with it, wondering what the spoken words might import. ‘A jest! You mean it was only fun to her— that she was laughing at me all the time?’

I assured him no. That, at least, was not true. Anne had never laughed at Young Dan Weir. If she had, I, after looking him between the eyes, would never have forgiven her. He stood considering a long while, with the same dumb-stricken look on his face.

I was heart-wae for him. He seemed to feel that there was a mistake somewhere. So I went up and put my hand on his arm. Indeed, for the sake of human kindness, I would have helped him if I could. But he would none of my sympathy, shaking off my hand as if it had been a leaf fallen from a tree.

‘A jest to her!’ he repeated. ‘Well, it was no jest to me!’ Then all at once he had a curious thought.

‘I would like to see the cap she wore that night,’ he said— ‘it was, I think, a servant's cap. Perhaps it was one of yours. I have money. I will pay you for it.’

Upon the instant I picked it out of the little basket of ironed ‘things’ which old Mrs. John had set aside to be taken upstairs. Something stirring in my heart moved me to set it coquettishly on my head. The rose which had served for the undoing of more than one cavalier above stairs was still in its place. Altogether at the time I had reason to think (and even now I see no reason to alter my judgment) that I looked nowadays amiss. But it was all one to Young Dan Weir of Venturefair. More contemptible in his sight than the meanest flower that blows, of less account than the two-ounce trouts which he tossed so carelessly back in order that they might have time to grow larger in their native streams, he wanted nothing whatsoever to do with me. That which had stirred the hearts of such competent upstairs judges as Mr. Olifant Elton, or Mr. John

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Barnaby, Mr. Abraham Priestly (trusted by the great banking corporation which he served), ay, even our Poet's sensitive nature, fell harmless before the slow, faithful reticence of this young man of my own class. If only Miss Anne had not met him first. But she had—and there was an end to it.

As I say, I set the pretty lace cap on my head, daintily as a butterfly might light on a flower. (Did I use that comparison before? Anyway, if I did, it was of Miss Anne that I used it, and she it was showed me how—as indeed she showed me all the things that are dainty and pretty, which I have loved ever since.)

Something glowed in Young Dan's eyes. He bit his lip, and, somewhat rudely, as I then thought, he snatched the poor little fluff of lace away, kissed it with violence and thrust it into the breast pocket of his coat.

Then he marched to the door very steadily, paused a moment with the latch in his hand, and threw this word over his shoulder at me.

'Tell her,' he said, 'that to me it was no jest. And tell her, too, that this is mine! Mine,' he repeated the word with a kind of fierce pride, clapping his hand on his pocket as he did so. 'I had the 'beverage' of it. Dearly did I pay for it! Tell her that! Do not forget! See here!'

And bending towards me, he lifted the heavy curls off his brow with his fingers, just sufficiently for me to see a ghastly unhealed wound, and losing

control over myself, and being heart-sorry for him, I burst out crying. Who would ever have suspected I could be such a fool? Then Young Dan took me in his arms, and for the moment the very strength of them about me made me feel happy. But not for long, for his next words were, 'Have you a brother?'

'No,' I answered, somewhat sharply, 'I have no brother, but if the matter concerns you, I have a sister— prettier even than Miss Anne!'

I do not know what made me say that, the devil, I expect. For Heaven knows it was noways true. Only something, a kind of exasperation that women will understand, came suddenly over me. Nothing seemed to be of the least use. Anne— Anne— with him, as with everybody, it was all Anne! And he would go on crying for the moon, whatever I might say or do. Well, let him cry! What did I care?

But the mischief was that I did care. I did not want this fine young fellow, straight and single-minded as all the rest were not, to be thrown away on one who could never help him or afford him the least comfort. If she and I could only have changed places— and Anne have been the daughter of the wood-forester, and I the heiress — why, I could have let him go cheerfully. But as it was, it seemed a pity. At the time I did not think that Providence was at all acting up to its reputation. But, now, grown old and wise, I see that we were just beginning to reap what we had been at such pains to sow.

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At this moment old John, happening to pass about the door upon his perambulations, cast a sly glance within, and seeing Young Dan holding me in his arms, was of course swift to draw his conclusions. Which, though quite erroneous, were, of course, all the easier to draw on that account.

‘Shin suis ,Cormack!’ he cried, comically. Which being interpreted (old John had been many years in the West of Ireland, where Sir Tempest had a property) meant simply, ‘Play up, Cormack!’

For old John was so convinced that Young Dan was having it all his own way, that when he was going out and I simply seeing him to the door— both of us looking I doubt not (what we felt) very sad at heart—old John put his finger up and slyly rubbing the side of his nose with it, quoted yet another Irish proverb: ‘Aha,’ he said, ‘I have been there myself, and, you know, ‘Tim understands Theady.’

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

CONCERNING THE MAN WHO HAD LOST THE
BATTLE AND KNEW IT

I have often thought, sitting alone with my seam, the Captain a-snore in the next room over his paper or sitting wearing a fine polish on his moleskin trousers by rubbing them on the logs by the saw-mill, how curious and mixed is the lot of woman. She has far less to say to the matter of life than a man— I mean by that all that she has to go through with in this world, beginning often when she is a lass in her teens, and about the aftercome of which she knows as much as the Captain's pet canary, which was born and bred in a gilt cage.

Now man's happiness is chiefly an affair of his work, and of the world of men and things. But to the woman, the man with whom she is thrown is heaven and earth and hell. If he fail her, she may do her best to make a new world out of her children, or her domestic duties. But it is a poor second-best, mended-plate world at the best— like the huts which, mixed with mud-built swallows' nests, still cling to the ruins of the Parthenon. Or at least so they tell me. I have seen many things and in my own person proved some few. But no one will persuade

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me that woman does not carry the heavy end of the cross of life.

Not seldom indeed she is the Christ of these later days. For oftentimes it seems expedient that one woman should suffer and die— the innocent for the guilty. Yet how silently, how unrepiningly she goes her way, stones under her feet, thorns on her brow, but with no Simon the Cyrenian to give her the helping of a sturdy shoulder ere she pass out of sight along the dusty road which leads to Golgotha.

Ah, well, I must not dream or repine— there is the story to tell. Of course when Miss Anne was having her interview with Jim Scudamore in the white drawing-room, I had my own weird to dree down in the kitchen, which old Mrs. John had so uselessly vacated for my assistance. So that the tale of this upstairs interview I can only tell at second-hand. But I think Anne gave me the facts plainly enough. I shall retail it as she told it to me, without those terrific 'double turned commas,' which, I declare, bother my old head more than death, judgment, and the life to come— which, the ministers tell us, are all vicariously arranged for us. Whereas, if one does not put in those commas right the printer won't either, but throws the erring copy into the waste-paper scoop, which is his Limbo, first, however, signing it copiously with his indignant thumb-marks.

Well, Jim Scudamore came to Ravensnuik, and I still think it likely that Miss Anne really wanted to

see him alone. Or else why should she be in such a fret about my going down to interview Dan Weir? Of course, she will not own this. No woman would, not even when they get old and have grey hair, like Miss Anne and myself.

At any rate, Jim Scudamore came. He was a tall fellow, with his head very trim and well set— the features fine, save where they were worn and lined with what he had been through, the hair grown quite silvery and thin on the temples and behind the ears, for that is where it shows. Jim Scudamore had had trouble, any one could see that. And most could see also that he had brought that trouble upon himself.

'You came to see my father, Mr. Scudamore,' said Miss Anne, arranging her skirts with great severity and motioning him to a seat at the end of the apartment farthest from her sofa.

Jim smiled at these preparations. In his day he had seen many things and he recognised innocence and inexperience when he met them— knew them on sight too. One could not play kitten with Jim Scudamore. One had to be kitten.

He kept his eyes on Miss Anne, a deep irony in them— perhaps also that solemn inexpressible anger with which, in the presence of a young girl, such a man regards his own wasted life and misused opportunities.

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'No, Miss Anne,' he began, when he had seated himself, quietly and gracefully—like a statue of one of the ancient gods about which the tides of sin have washed and worn away the outlines— that is what he looked like. 'No, Miss Anne, I did not come to see your father. I came to see you.'

And curiously it was not Miss Anne who had the top hold during this conversation.

He and not she controlled the situation. And Anne, secretly pleased with the change, sighed and resigned herself to listen.

Jim Scudamore sat for full five minutes motionless, one hand upholding his brow. He was making up his mind what he had come to say, which characteristically enough he had left to chance.

'You know what they call me?' he asked at length.

Anne nodded. The 'Drucken W. S.' was a title too widely recognised for her to plead ignorance of it. He sighed. I think he had cherished a hope.

'Ah, well,' he made answer, 'then let us start from that! Will you listen to me, Miss Anne?'

'That depends on what you have to say!'

'No—pardon me— it does not!' said Jim Scudamore, with that curious firmness which he always showed to women— at least to the women to whom he pretended nothing. 'What should any man say to such a girl as you?—Naturally only that which you have heard and answered a hundred

times. Who is to prevent them? And they have a right. Yes, they have a right. Why, there is a well half-way down the avenue. The Lover's Well, they call it. I stooped and drank as I came up to Ravensnuik today. It was free to the evil and to the good, to the just and to the unjust.'

'But I am not a well,' said Miss Anne, once more mistress of herself, 'no one can take of that which I have to give, without my will.'

'I beg your pardon. Miss Anne,' said Jim Scudamore gently, 'I but spoke of your beauty— nay, do not mistake me, or dream that I meant any foolishment of compliment. That is far past for me. But the beauty, the sweet mirthful innocence, the light in the eyes are there for all. They are as free to Jim Scudamore as well as— as to the man whom your father shall choose for your husband.'

'That task I shall take off my father's hands!' said Anne, indignantly. Though I think she liked what he had said before, and especially for the way he said it. At any rate I should. Though after all is said and done, I married a man who has nothing of that skill. Perhaps that also was for a change.

'Ah,' said Jim Scudamore, 'so you will choose for yourself, will you? Then God help you, girl! You are about as fit to choose a husband as the lamb is to say which wolf shall have the eating of it! I wish you would let me chose for you— and— by heaven, the lot would not fall on myself.'

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He said these last words with a bitter concentrated irony, which was almost unbelievable. It sounded like the clank of chains. Jim Scudamore certainly obeyed the ancient precept. He knew himself.

After this Anne looked at the man with a certain amount of respect, not unmingled with fear. Compared with the men of smooth speech who had flocked about her ever since she lengthened her frocks, this stranger's words were in her ears like the clash of battle-arms, yet withal Jim Scudamore spoke gently, rather indeed with a soft melancholy cadence, and his eyes had a hopeless look in them. So out of the guard cells might have gazed the evil-doers of the doomed regiment, while the 'Birkenhead' was going down. 'All very well for you fellows,' they might have said, 'men with a fairly clean record— but for us!'

Nevertheless, they went down with the others, no man, still less any woman, knowing the difference.

But Anne had not done with him yet.

'I have a brother!' she said with meaning.

Jim Scudamore lifted his eyes to hers quickly, before she could lower them.

'You think,' he said softly, 'that I tempted him— preyed upon him— led him astray?'

'He told my father so!' said Anne.

This time Jim Scudamore was silent a long while, but his lips were compressed and angry. He

looked as if he could have slain a man. Suddenly the cruel resolve gave way. He did not smile, but something gentler came all at once into his face.

‘Well,’ he made answer, ‘we will let it go at that!’

‘I am disappointed!’ said Anne, looking down at her own toe tapping the carpet.

‘So am I!’ said Jim Scudamore, grimly. (But as I pointed out to Anne afterwards, he must have meant ‘disappointed in John Barnaby.’)

‘And for the future?’ demanded Anne, still avoiding looking at him.

‘For the future?’ inquired Scudamore, quietly, ‘I suppose by that you mean your brother. I am to keep him right—that which neither God nor his father have been able to do hitherto—well, I can only say I shall try. At any rate he will probably remember my methods!’

‘And for yourself?’ said Anne, suddenly and without any visible cause moved to tenderness, ‘can you not—?’

Jim Scudamore made that indescribable gesture with his hand which implies an utter hopelessness. It was as near as might be to the half-humorous, half-serious farewell of the old fighting gladiators of the arena whom Miss Euphemia used to talk to us about.

‘Ave, Anne,’ he said, ‘morituri salutamus!’

‘We who are about to die salute you.’

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Yes, that was it. He had well said. He diagnosed the situation perfectly. For James Scudamore there was no hope, and indeed he saw none even for John Barnaby, who was younger. Yet he rose to go, graceful and smiling, the winsomeness of a spoilt boyhood still lingering on his face.

'Can I see you again?' he said. 'It does me good. It serves instead of religion. You see I dare not go to church. It makes me feel a hypocrite. But to talk with you is—is— like the heaven I shall never see—except, perhaps, across the Great Gulf the parsons tell about!'

'Hush!' said Miss Anne, 'do not be irreverent!'

His face fell quickly.

'God knows I did not mean to be,' he said. 'This is my religion. I was telling you so. Or at least I tried to. One does not jest with the thing which he worships—even from very far off.'

Involuntarily Miss Anne put out her hand. It trembled. The tears were wet in her eyes.

'Yes, you may come!' she said.

'You precious rascal, what are you doing in my house?' cried, at this point, the voice of Sir Tempest from the doorway. He stood with his hair all white and bristling, like the quills upon the fretful porcupine. And the least amiable of porcupines could be no more fretful or porcupiny than Sir Tempest Kilpatrick with the gout and a grievance.

'Is it not enough that you should betray and rob my son, James Scudamore, but you must try

your wiles on my daughter also? Begone, sir, this instant! Out of my house with you. I will not have you cross my threshold!

‘Sir Tempest,’ began Scudamore, calmly, having now a man for an adversary, ‘I do not think you have ever heard my defence.’

‘Nor do I wish to hear it. You and you alone have made my boy what he is,’ shouted the fierce little old man; ‘is not that enough? or do you wish to make of my daughter—?’

‘Sir!’ cried Jim Scudamore, with something like the flashing of red lightning in his eyes, ‘if you say more, I will not answer for the consequences. I will go at once!’

‘Go then—and for ever!’ cried Sir Tempest, pointing his finger at the door.

Jim Scudamore, who, unlike Mr. Elton, had had no difficulty with his hat, and had occupied Anne's drawing-room with well-accustomed grace, looked round for his hostess. He was going to bow the most distant adieux.

To his surprise Miss Anne was coming towards him with her hand outstretched. Sir Tempest, alternately red and greyish-white with anger, stood motionless—fixed.

‘Thank you for coming to see me!’ she said in a clear voice. ‘It was kind of you. And especially for what you told me about my brother. Good-bye!’

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He held out his hand, a little puzzled by the swiftness with which Anne had taken the initiative—which he would not have been, if he had known Miss Anne better.

‘Good-bye!’ he said quietly and was going away.

She retained his hand the merest fraction of a second longer.

‘In the heather-house — near the pond,’ she said in a low tone— ‘to tell me more about John Barnaby.’

And it was only after she had fairly and in battle array outfaced her father—first with anger and finally with the impregnable defence of tears, that Miss Anne remembered how of her own accord she had given to a man the first rendezvous of her life. And that man was the ‘Drucken W. S.,’ Jim Scudamore!

Ever since I have become— well, no longer young, it has been borne in upon me that the aged are by no means so blind, nor yet so self-absorbed as their juniors somewhat complacently believe them to be. They see more than they ‘let on to see,’ as they say here in Whinnyliggate.

Now, there is myself— I have never set up for having extra good eyesight, yet I can see when Lisbeth Forgan, the smith's lass, lets a corner of the upstairs blind flutter out by chance, though there is no wind to flutter it. Her father is safe in the smiddy, as you can hear by the hammers, and her mother

has gone to Cairn Edward with the carrier to buy sugar and tea (having quarrelled with both the shops in the village). Well, in a little while you will see good-looking young Rob of Barbeth coming whistling down the road from his father's farm. He has a hay-fork in his hand, which needs a new band where the head clips the wood. He is going to the smiddy and that is his errand. Nothing more natural.

Ay, but does he?

To all appearance he does. But these old eyes of mine, which have watched young men a long time—even before I married the Captain, honest man—tell me that young Rob does no such thing.

The 'Tang - tang -TANG' from the anvil goes on. Rob knows very well that there is a job in front of his. He can see a horse's heels through the smiddy door. It takes some time to shoe a horse. Now, why should he go in and waste the smith's time (also distracting his attention), when by merely leaning the hay-fork against the wall and leaving the man of metal to his horseshoes, just through the back door of the smith's house, he can find metal more attractive.

So he does indeed enter by the back door, with one little look over his shoulder—to see that his hay-fork is all right. And so careful is Lisbeth of her mother's chairs in her absence, that I have the best

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of reasons for believing that Rob and she use only one between them!

It is none of my business, of course, but it is to an old woman an amusing thought that though Rob and Lisbeth are to be married next month, they will go on, till they have grandchildren of their own, firmly believing that no one remarked the fluttering blind, the open back door, the leaning fork, and the curiously complicated silhouette which Lisbeth's mother's rocking-chair made against the back window!

But it is better so. Young folk will continue to hold as an article of faith this partial blindness of their elders, while the old folk will persist in seeing more than they get credit for, till the elements melt with fervent heat— as hath been foretold.

But to my story.

Miss Anne was trysted to meet Jim Scudamore, the 'Drucken W. S.,' and that by her own appointment, at the summer pavilion by the pond upon the road to the muir. And Miss Anne would have kept her word. She was capable of anything—that is, with me hid among the willows by the pond's margin a little way off, with instructions to whistle on a dog-call of old John Forrest's at brief intervals. This, Miss Anne said, would give her a sense of companionship, and keep her from making a fool of herself. Though how a dog-whistle could do all that is more than I can make out. A dog-whip is a moral

argument, but it was not that which Anne wished me to bring with me.

Miss Anne proposed, and borrowed the dog-whistle. But Providence disposed, and the interview never took place. So about this time John Forrest mysteriously lost a dog-call, which he sought for in all unlikely places till the day of his death, many years after, and vehemently accused Jim Scudamore of having stolen for the purpose of pawning. But for all that, it now hangs on the wall, just above where I am writing, in what the Captain calls my 'Museum of Crime' (But he likes to hear about these things, all the same!)

For whether it was bristly little Sir Tempest or my Lady Kilpatrick, smooth as a pat of butter done up in black satin, who saw more than they got credit for— certain it is that the very next day the heads of the house decided that the air of Ravensnuik did not suit Miss Anne, and so we were driven off in a carriage to Edinburgh, without so much as giving us time to say good-bye to our various friends and admirers. Here we lived some time— I do not know how long— in a tall house in York Place, where his family made violent attempts to cure John Barnaby of his weakness. These were successful just so long as he could be kept in the strong room upstairs playing dominoes with his mother— his diet light but wholesome, and for his drink the excellent milk

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driven in every day by old John Forrest from the Ravensnuik dairy.

But when John Barnaby escaped, having taken advantage of a time when his mother and the minister of the parish (upon his statutory visitations) were talking over 'my son's case' (as Lady Kilpatrick loved to call it) in the next room—John Barnaby was seen no more within the city bounds. Mr. James Scudamore W. S. also vanished.

From thence, after certain Wearisome months looking out on the slate-blue Forth, we went to London, where the situation immediately began to improve, though Sir Tempest would only go into a 'suite of apartments' in an unfashionable part of the city.

It was the break of a beautiful June when we returned to Grennoch. And oh, the delight of the drive home by the lochside and through the hedges of the hawthorn (which was just over) and of the wild roses (which were just beginning)! It seemed incredible that things like these could have stayed the same all the time, the air as delicate and fresh, and we smelling only the soot and the dust of a great city.

Yes, I think we had learned something in London— Anne to talk—I to hold my tongue. Perhaps all the same, Anne was a trifle less exuberant, and I— well, I think it made more difference to me inwardly than outwardly— that is, all the classes and lectures we had attended, with

the entertainments and theatres Sir Tempest had treated us to in the evening. I watched and listened, but I said nothing. Nor will I now. For that was not to be my life, and even thus early I had resolved to 'cut my cloth according to my stipend.' For all that Miss Anne was an heiress and I almost a sister to her, never for a moment did I lose sight of the fact that I was a poor man's daughter—and, if I married at all, I must be a poor man's wife. So I looked and hearkened, coming away with a quiet mind, much as they say in books the Red Indian regards a railway engine. These things were no part of my life, and they never could be. So, as it were, I lifted the blanket over my head and smoked the pipe of peace. Or, at least, the Captain does it for me, which comes to the same thing.

Sir Tempest was at Grennoch before us. He met us upon the steps, pecked at his wife, pecked at Anne—and seemed inclined to peck at me (but thought better of it). He was booted and spurred, and held a thick roll of plans and tracings in his hand.

'I cannot wait, Anne,' he said, as usual ignoring his wife in all that concerned business, 'I have a great deal to attend to. I have engaged a factor and land-steward—a fine young man, and he is showing me all that ought to be done with the property. I declare I never knew before. I would have been a richer man today, Anne, had I taken such a

course sooner. It is a mistake for a gentleman to be his own man of business, his own factor as I have been. They take advantage of my easy temper, my yielding nature. Ah, they know it too well, the scoundrels! They are only too ready to encroach, and to impose upon my ignorance.'

It was possible that this estimate was correct, but these gentle and yielding dispositions were such as we, in his own house, had never dreamed of attributing to Sir Tempest.

The Baronet twined his fingers in the mane of his sturdy little pony, and was in the saddle in a moment, riding with a steadiness and rigidity of back which would have done credit to many a light horseman.

Miss Anne waved her hand in token of adieu.

'I hope he is nice-looking!' she called after her father.

'Eh?' cried the Baronet over his shoulder.

'I— hope— he—is— nice-looking!' Anne's voice carried far.

The Baronet reined in a little and shook his fist at her.

'Go to your sampler, missy,' he cried. 'In my time, young women did not speak in that fashion to their parents.'

'You are my sampler, sir!' said Miss Anne sweetly, making him a low courtesy and simpering a little with downcast eyes. 'I try to imitate you, dear father!'

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‘Tut,’ cried Sir Tempest, ‘I lose good time— I will attend to you on my return, young woman!’

And with that he galloped off as hard as his pony would go, in the direction of the woods.

Lady Kilpatrick had listened to this give-and-take with amazement. Sir Tempest was to her Providence, plus a perennial bad temper.

‘Oh, how can you anger your dear father, Anne?’ she asked, holding up her joined hands, ‘you know what he is! And after all these beautiful lectures which you attended in London—so improving as some of them were, too!’

‘Yes, indeed, mamma,’ said Miss Anne, dutifully, ‘even I noticed that— why, you had as much as forty minutes’ good sleep out of the hour sometimes!’

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

CONCERNING SIR TEMPEST'S NEW FACTOR

My father was away on a distant property of Sir Tempest's, but I spent the morning of the next day with my mother and Bess. Then Anne and I walked across the meadow in the late afternoon. It was always dull at Grennoch just after lunch, and mostly we had to wait for tea, lest Sir Tempest should come in and we be called to account for our absence from that meal. For, without the least reason, the little bristly man was suspicious of us—or at least of his daughter. As for me he was always under the belief that I exercised a useful restraining influence upon Miss Anne—so that, in spite of the last days at Ravensnuik, his blindness was certainly still partial.

We were indeed two sweet maidens, walking demurely hand in hand. The young lambs sported. Over our heads, the innocent squirrels chattered. So, in both cases, did we. We also gathered posies as we went, finding out for the hundredth time— what nobody ever remembers for twelve months— that the wild rose is very pretty on the tree, but as a bouquet, wholly unsatisfactory. We found in addition to the hawthorn left in the sheltered places, plenty of sweet cicely, elder blossom, great purple mallows, and the dainty sweet violets. Presently

Miss Anne saw some Queen of the Meadow in a glade, just where the long grass began to play hide-and-seek with the woods of my father's plantations. She ran to seize it, and even as she did so, she stopped with her hand on the flower. She did not pluck it, but, instead, turning swiftly, beckoned me with her chin. Yes, it does not seem right, and if the Captain or I tried it now, we would certainly get crick in our necks. But then, and as Miss Anne did it, that sort of thing was pretty to see.

Naturally I ran. Lectures and London had not made me tired of the things of the woods. However, as I might have known, Anne had summoned me for far other purposes than that she might teach me to admire the beauties of nature. We went up through a green archway to a hill-top which had been kept clear of trees when the woods were planted. From it we looked away across the loch and the cultivated lands, with the peat-reek of the village rising blue from its whitewashed 'lums' between us and the far north hills.

Two men were there, walking the slope arm in arm. They were going away from us. In fact, when I got to Miss Anne, they were already descending the opposite side. I could only note that one was tall and well built, with squared shoulders and cleanly knit frame, while the other, who trotted by his side and seemed to guide him with a compulsive arm, was Sir Tempest himself.

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'Come, Clemmy,' whispered Miss Anne, 'I think there is a far finer view from up yonder!'

So doubtless there was. But that day at least Miss Anne did not see it—save as a grey haze of sky, a green haze of trees, and a blue haze of distance. If even so much! For in Miss Anne's opinion the proper study of Miss Anne was man, a sentiment which (as I was given to understand by one of the London lectures) a great poet got great praise for once putting into words.

But if he had known Miss Anne— why the thing was a mere commonplace.

We went. One of my father's assistant woodmen was dragging a chain out upon the open field, and he looked dour and sulky.

'What is the matter, Harry?' inquired Miss Anne. She spoke to every one with a certain brusque equality.

The taciturn youth indicated the tall young man in company with the Baronet.

'Him,' he said briefly.

'And what is the matter with him?' asked Miss Anne, whose freedom of speech with her 'inferiors' (perhaps from long association with one of them) was not all that her mother could have desired.

For reply Harry turned, and, ignoring his young mistress, addressed himself to me.

'Wait till your faither, Don MacTaggart, comes hame,' he said, bitterly, 'and maybe ye'll ken what's the maitter wi' yon new chap.'

He laughed a short chuckling laugh.

'Ay, an' sae will he,' he added, 'when the Man-wi'-the-Bill-huik gets after him—orderin' this and that like my Lord, and puttin' daftlike foolish notions in Sir Tempest's head!'

'Harry Johnston,' said Miss Anne, 'do you remember that you are speaking of my father?'

"Deed, it's no easy mindin'. Miss Anne. Ye favour ilk ither sae little. An' it werena that, savin' your gentility, ye hae baith a wee spice o' the deil in ye!'

'Harry!'

'Oh, mem,' cried Harry, looking into the clear blue wide-opened eyes of Miss Anne, and losing all his moroseness in a second, 'I'm no sayin' that I dinna think it is raither an improvement—that is, in moderation, and as yin nicht say, in the faymale sects!'

Leaving Harry Johnston with his chain we walked on through the aisles of the wood. It had been a late spring and some of the trees were hardly doing more than re-clothing themselves even yet—the dainty leaflets poising like green butterflies upon the grey satin of the ash-twigs.

Suddenly the wood opened out. We saw before us the broad sweep of the June country-side, lit up by the sun. We heard the shrill voice of Sir Tempest.

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'The dwelling-house had better be as you say,' he called out, 'but I am none so sure about the offices!'

The young man who stood beside him with his back to us pointed to something drawn on a sheet of paper. We could not hear his voice, but he spoke with earnestness and conviction.

'Father! Miss Anne in a high and clear tone.

'Oh, I do hope he is decent-looking!' she added in a low tone for my benefit. And there is reason to believe that she did not refer to Sir Tempest.

As if set out on one pivot like wooden toys, the two men turned, when the younger and taller, clad from head to foot in neat grey cloth, with leggings of pig-skin from knee to ankle, revealed himself as—Mr. Daniel Weir, Younger, of Venturefair!

'My new land-steward!' said Sir Tempest, graciously for him.

Hardly ever in my life had I seen Anne really put out— never before by a man. But Young Dan Weir did it. He stepped forward with his hat in one hand. 'Miss Kilpatrick, I am happy to meet you!' he said, bowing low.

He was actually calmer than she was. As for me, he shook hands with me also, and I acted exactly like one in the possession of another person's secret— that is, covertly and guiltily. Happily Sir Tempest saw nothing of this, all on fire to get at his cow-sheds and cart-houses.

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'Now, girls, do run away and play,' he bade us; 'you have been gathering flowers, I see! Off with you and gather more. Mr. Weir and I are busy!'

'Never mind, Anne,' I whispered, as I went, 'I'll find out all about it before we sleep. He is frightened of me — he dare not look me in the eye. Trust me, there is something underhand about the matter!'

'Oh,' moaned Miss Anne, 'I wish I had never made that lace cap— never gone down into that horrid place— to the Newhall kitchen on the night of the dance!'

'Tut,' said I, unsympathetically, 'you enjoyed it like a cow in a clover-field when you were there. Never turn your back on your mercies only because they are past and the bill has come in. That's the worst kind of ingratitude. If I were a minister I would preach about it!'

'Um-m-m!' said Miss Anne, spitefully, 'you would be a pretty minister!'

And at the word, as if we had called up spirits from the vasty deep, the Reverend Physgill McMachar jumped over a dyke and stood before us. He was counted a hard man, this Reverend Physgill by the parish of Whinnyliggate, but he liked a pretty girl as well as another—and if there were two of them, why, so much the better. Besides, he had not seen us for a considerable time, and a talk with us could be considered in the light of a pastoral duty.

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'This is indeed a pleasure,' he said, lifting his hat, 'Miss Anne Kilpatrick and—,'

'Don't pretend,' said the ruthless Miss Anne, 'you like Clemmy the best!'

The minister relaxed not a muscle of his face as he regarded Miss Anne.

'I trust my mind is sufficiently set on the things of the spirit to prevent such earthly things from having any effect upon me.'

'All the same it is true,' said the Incurable, 'you like Clemmy best. Oh, you are quite right—I don't blame you. For that matter so do I. And she was only saying the other moment that she wished she was a minister. Clemmy has a text that she wishes you to preach from.'

The tall hard man with the reddish whiskers and the granite face possessed in addition eyes so kindly that when they looked at you they were like something human looking out of a stone dyke. He actually smiled a little at Miss Anne.

'Ay,' he said, 'and what text might that be?'

'Don't turn your back on past pleasures when the bill comes in!' said Miss Anne, 'that is our Clemmy's text. She was just dividing it up when you came over the dyke like a daddy-long-legs!'

'I cannot give chapter and verse for that, I fear,' said the minister, declining the personal provocation with great quiet, 'and I am not acquainted with the young leddy's author. But yet—methinks, there is something like it too in Scripture,

if I mistake not. 'In the day of prosperity, be joyful,' saith the Preacher, 'and in the day of adversity consider. For God hath set the one over against the other.' This, I think, is what your young friend means!

Anne tossed her head scornfully.

'I might have known,' she said, 'of course you would stick up for Clemmy! I have no one to stick up for me.'

'There is your father,' said the minister, sententiously, 'and what could any young leddy wish for more than such a father?'

'Well,' returned Miss Anne, pertly, for she knew with whom she could take liberties, 'I can answer that. Sir Tempest is well, and very well. But I could imagine some one younger, and better-looking, and not my father! Oh, easily!'

Then I had a word to say.

'If I were you, sir,' I ventured the advice (Anne and her companion were licensed desperadoes), 'if I were you, Mr. McMachar, I would take to my heels and double-lock myself in the manse. That sounds just like yourself — younger, and better-looking, and not her father. Do not, I beseech you, stand there and trifle with fire, sir! Consider your danger!'

The tall, erect, solemn-faced bachelor, with the black clerical clothes and the humorous twinkle in his eye, held up his hands like one who surrenders at discretion.

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‘Oh, young leddies— young leddies,’ he cried, ‘do not make me forget my vocation. If ye carried matters farther—indeed and indeed I might even be led away so far as to laugh on the public road, and that within sight o’ a house (though to be sure it is only a toll-bar). Let not the sound of your minister’s mirth be as the crackling of thorns under a pot!’

At this the younger two of us crackled considerably— Anne leading, and I noways far behind. Mr. McMachar regarded us as a shepherd might look upon the frisking of lambs.

‘Ay, ay,’ he said with compassion and forbearance in his eyes, ‘deed it’s a great thing to have the lichtsome heart. You twa birkies mind me o’ when I was young, and lay doon amang the heather, thinkin’ to hear the fairies sing. But I telled ye what it wad be. Already ye cause me to be speakin’ clewers!’

‘Indeed, not so,’ said Miss Anne; ‘why, Mr. McMachar, you are but a young man grown old before your time, by living so long in that musty old manse by the waterside. Get a young lass that will run laughing from room to room, and open the shutters and let in the light and the wind from the hills.’

‘Hech—hech!’ said Mr. McMachar, ‘but wha is to open the windows o’ my heart? Tell me that, young lasses!’

He spoke solemnly, but it was in no such spirit that Miss Anne answered him.

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'Why, Clemmy there!' cried the wicked Miss Anne, 'she will open the whole side of the house if you like, and make your heart as airy as a cartshed! Can you do better?'

'Hech—hech!' sighed Mr. McMachar, 'your tongue is no weel guided. Miss Anne. Na, far frae that. Ye put things in a puir man's heid that will come between him and his prayers!'

'And a very good thing, too!' cried reckless Anne, 'indeed it is high time that a man like you should be thinking of this world—and the lass you should take to be a helpmate for you in it. If Providence had meant otherwise, it would have translated you to a parish Up Yonder, where you would have had a harp for a psalm-book, and instead of stout Roger, your Hieland pony, a pair of wings, and for parishioners the young-eyed cherubim! But as it is, Providence has planted you here in Whinnyliggate, and my father has given you an empty manse, wherein, says your own Book, it is not good for man to be alone!'

'Hech—hech,' said Mr. McMachar, now at his wits' end, 'ye speak daftly. Miss Anne. But I am far from alleging that there is not maitter in what you say. Miss Clemmy, tell your mither, and Elizabeth your sister that I have been intendin' to come down to see them some day this week!'

'Clemmy goes home on Friday afternoons now!' said the Mischief-maker. 'I'll see to that!'

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‘Hech—hech,’ said the minister, ‘young things— young things— to them muckle shall be forgiven! Ay, doubt it not—doubt it not!’

He was a good man trying to sow the seed on stubborn soil.

But, strange as it may appear, as well as unjust, Miss Anne did not approve of my going alone to unravel the mystery of the sudden appearance of Mr. Daniel Weir, installed in an office of authority, upon the Grennoch estates of Sir Tempest Eilpatrick.

‘No—no,’ she said, ‘honour among thieves! And after that painter— what was his name— Fairlies— no Gairlies, who is to trust you, Clemmy?’

I reminded Miss Anne (that if it came to that) it was she and not I who had proved the thief without honour upon that occasion. For I and not she had seen the artist first in the Back Pastures.

But you could not make Anne ashamed in that way. The quotation might be altered as to sex—at least so far as Miss Anne was concerned.

‘Thrice is she armed who hath her quarrel unjust.’

It is the simple and innocent among women who are defenceless— not of such was Miss Anne.

When I reminded her that she had already put on record her repentance for what had taken place in the kitchen of Newhall, and bemoaned her part in it, she only replied, ‘Oh, I dare say, but this is not Newhall— and I want to know!’

So it was arranged that we were to go together. It had to be so, indeed— perforce! For Miss Anne flatly declined to allow me to seek Dan Weir's explanation alone. In vain I pointed out that he did not care a farthing-piece for me, furthermore, that I—.'

'All very well,' she said; 'your intentions are doubtless packed in ice, but when you get begun, who is to say where you may stop. And as for man, he is like unto a toffee-drop. Whose throat he goes down, depends upon who takes the trouble to suck him.'

Anne's metaphors were certainly not always of the fine flower. At any rate, she and I set out to see if together we could worm the secret from Dan Weir— how he came to be there, what he was doing, how long he was going to stay, and especially if he, as well as Miss Anne, had been masquerading that night in the kitchen of Newhall.

I maintained that he had. A young man who after some months could meddle with plans and lay down the law to Sir Tempest must have been pretending when he was found, just a few weeks ago, as it were, in a kitchen at a servants' dance.

'Months, as you said before!' interrupted Anne, quite unnecessarily.

'Well, at any rate,' I retorted, 'there were a pair of you— that is evident! And he has come to Grennoch to pay you off!'

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But, curiously enough, Anne was equally unwilling to accept this hypothesis. Young Dan Weir had most assuredly been in earnest in the kitchen at Newhall. I asked her how she knew. She answered me by mumbling something about the cap and 'the beverage' — but whether the giving or the receiving of that ceremony I could not make out. Yet some circumstances connected therewith had remained in her memory as a proof of Young Dan's good faith.

Even then (so she said) she had been altogether callous in the matter. She cared nothing whatever now. She took up considerable time in impressing this fact upon me. It was solely for Dan Weir's sake that she was going out to argue with him—in order that she might divert from his purpose—whatever that purpose might be— this unfortunate young man. I suggested that in that case she might leave the whole conduct of affairs to me. But this she passed from without even the courtesy of a verbal answer. In vain I pointed out that what applied (of the Toffee Drop metaphor) to Alain Gairlies and some others, could not apply to a determined young man like Mr. Daniel Weir. He at least was no Toffee Drop.

'I do not care if he were a whole 'gundy' stick,' said Miss Anne. 'You are not going a foot without me. So now.'

Thus, amicably at variance, we set out. Neither of us trusted the other. I did not want Miss Anne to make a fool of herself. And she, when I put this to

her in these plain words, said that she would see to it that I did not make a fool of her. Of course, all these little feminine (the Captain would say feline) amenities which bulk so largely on paper, were wholly without prejudice. We set out with our arms about each other's waists. This is a good and affectionate habit, worth cultivating, and prevents unfair advantages.

First, we went over to my old home and talked to Bess — that is, to my sister. From her we found out that till the home-farm was built (if Sir Tempest did not tire of the expense long ere then) the new land-steward was to stay in the village, lodging in the house of Jamie Durham, the wheelwright, to the pleased delight of his daughter, Bell Durham, and the jealous wrath of David Kissock, his journeyman. This last had not been showing himself so anxiously affectionate as might have been expected of one in his position, but now the advent of a good-looking grown man had brought him up with a round turn. Davit would long ere this have committed assault and battery upon Mr. Weir, the new land-steward, but for the discouraging effect of once having seen Dan put down Sir Tempest's big Cunningham bull by the horns, when it ran at him one day that Davit was carrying a supplementary chain at the laying out of the new farm-steading.

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I thought Miss Anne would have been pleased to hear of this, but instead she only said, 'I always did think Bell Durham a forward minx!'

It was clearly impossible for us to go to the wheelwright's house. So much was evident. There only remained, therefore, to waylay the young man on his road home. I felt that Miss Anne's dignity might be compromised by such a proceeding, whereas mine was quite safe. The matter ought to be left to me. But Miss Anne pulled her hand out of my arm at the very first word. She even stamped her foot.

'Now, Clemmy,' she said, 'you do not care a button about the matter one way or the other. You only want to tease me—I know you!'

'But then,' I urged, 'you don't care either—you say so yourself! You only want to warn the young man. Now, I will tell you what you can do. Write your warning on a piece of paper, and I will wait for him by the heather gate and give it to him. That will do all you want, and preserve your dignity too!'

I think (but do not know) that Miss Anne would have liked to have been a free-spoken man for a few moments, in order to express herself with justice.

'Bother my dignity!' was, however, the best she could do.

But spite of all our Anne's most careful dispositions, it was, as usual. Fate that came out ahead.

I and not she saw Dan Weir. I and not she waited for him as he passed the heather gate on his way to the wheelwright's house in the village. Anne had other fish to fry, and the frying happened thus.

We went slowly, the sunset in our faces—or rather that which would be the sunset in an hour or so. When we reached the edge of the pine woods we looked over a great breadth of moorland, grey and brown and pale misty blue. Flecks of straw-coloured gold lay upon it, where the sunshine touched the bent of last year, withered and bleached upon the knolls. The heather was rusty and mottled, save where it had been burnt in the spring of the year. That showed evenly black as a funeral cloth.

There were plantations of pines scattered here and there over the face of the waste, their roots drinking up the moisture of the peat and their latest saplings climbing perilously up among the rubble of the hillsides. Beyond the heather-gate was a loch, which yet hardly surpassed the dignity of a pond. A 'Dhu-loch' was the right name of it—a dark, peaty, reed-bordered, dangerous 'slunk' of stagnant water, so surcharged with moss and the purple coom of the peat, that the wind, blow from what quarter soever it would, never stirred the sullen surface.

In the gap Anne and I stood awhile. I was wondering when Dan Weir would come striding through the wood over the pine-needles, to clear our difficulties with a word, when, suddenly, about a

hundred yards out, on the verge of the little loch, the figure of a man appeared. I am positive that he had not been there the moment before. Indeed, so unexpected was his advent, that Anne, who was not prone to such manifestations on account of so simple a circumstance as a man coming in sight, gave a little agitated scream.

When we saw him first the man was gazing, with what seemed a sad and discouraged manner, into the depths of the gloomy 'slunk.' But so thick and brown was the peaty brew that it was more than doubtful if he could see a single inch beneath the surface.

While we stood uncertain whether to remain and face the matter out, or turn and flee, the man wheeled slowly towards us.

'Why, it is Mr. Scudamore!' said Miss Anne, her hand instinctively touching mine.

The 'Drucken W. S.' came towards us, his hat in his hand, a quiet and not undignified sadness about his face, and yet a kind of assurance exhaling from him.

'Miss Anne,' he said, with a smiling bow, 'I have come to keep my tryst. There is also a heather-house here, I know. And this, I am informed, is called the heather-gate, while yonder, such as it is—is the pond upon the moor.'

He bowed very slightly to me, but continued to address himself exclusively to Miss Anne. I am not sure that that young lady found very much to

answer. I know I never opened my mouth. It seemed like a dream, to hear that quiet gentlemanly voice—humble and yet respectful of self, brave, courteous, and yet, somehow, utterly hopeless.

‘Might I speak with you a moment—alone, Miss Anne?’ he asked after a pause. ‘Had I not come so far and waited so long, I would not have asked it. But indeed I have something to say that concerns you and your family exclusively. I am exceedingly sorry that I should trouble this young lady in the least, but, indeed, no other course is open to me.’

‘Clemmy is one of us,’ said Anne, instinctively defending herself, but not with very great determination.

‘It concerns my promise to you,’ said Jim Scudamore, with a certain dignity which was even impressive.

Anne gave me a look which said, ‘Go, Clemmy, and I will tell you all about it afterwards.’

So I took myself off— the more readily that I saw, approaching through the green arches of the pines, Dan Weir. If I went now I would be just in time to meet him by the heather-gate.

It was a delight to me to imagine the divided mental state of Miss Anne as she listened to Jim Scudamore and, at the same moment, tried to fancy what Dan Weir was saying to me down there by the corner of the dyke. As I went forward to meet him, I took off my soft scoop of a hat and held it in my

hand. Miss Anne always said I looked best that way, and, if possible, I wanted to give her mind material to work upon. And I am sure that it worked with considerable rapidity and turmoil as she listened to Jim Scudamore. For better than any one else Miss Anne appreciated these little thoughtfulnesses on the part of another girl. They were so entirely in her own vein.

‘How was it, Dan Weir. Tell me.’

I spoke out the words plump and plain, and stood straight before him as if I expected an answer on the spot.

‘There is no secret,’ he said, smiling. ‘I was clever at school, especially at figures. My father has a little property—‘three-jumps-of-a-cat and a cow’s grass,’ as they say in the lirks of Pentland. The name of the place is Venturefair. It has been in the family a long while, I believe. Yes, some day I suppose it will be mine. Then I shall be a landed proprietor with a yearly rental of half-a-dozen five pound notes. My father makes his living by cattle dealing. Not proposing to follow his example, I went in every winter to Edinburgh, where I learned to be a surveyor, and of course I knew about land from the time I was so high. Where, then, is the mystery?’

‘But in that case you were pretending that night in the kitchen of Newhall,’ I said reproachfully. ‘Miss Anne is very angry with you— a laird’s son— among servants—speaking like the others!’

He laughed quietly.

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‘I do not think Miss Anne understands,’ he went on, placidly. ‘I had been brought up among these people all my life. I went to school with most of them. A man may be a peasant although he has a pedigree of a sort and a few scores of acres on the roll book of the shire. He may be a peasant, but, with a college within walking distance, he need not stay a peasant. It was, I remember, an off night with me, that of the Newhall dance. I was weary of the summer work on the farm, weary of my books—wearry of everything. It does a man good to meet with half-a-score of good, kindly, bright-faced lasses—like yourself. Miss Clementina—if only to look at them. And Will, the son of a neighbour farmer, who was to marry Eccie Porterfield, asked me to go with him. There you have it!’

‘But,’ I persisted, ‘if Miss Anne reported truly, you did not speak or behave as—as— you do now!’

‘Oh, no,’ he said, ‘I was for the night what I had been—a farm lad, and— I had no desire that my company should think I was setting myself above them.’

‘It was not honourable,’ I said, ‘it was deceitful.’

‘Very likely,’ he said, with a quiet twinkle, quickly repressed, ‘but, you see, that night deceit was not confined to below stairs even at Newhall!’

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'A fair hit!' I owned, laughing, and holding out my hand to him. 'No wonder you are a good fighter, Dan Weir!'

'It is my father, and not I, whom they call the fighter,' he said quickly. 'I—am a land-agent and surveyor. Would you like to see my certificates when I get them back from Sir Tempest?'

Meantime the man was looking over my shoulder in every direction, and naturally that nettled me. I knew very well what he was looking for.

'You are certainly a land-surveyor,' said I, with (I own) some spitefulness; 'well, then, survey that piece of ground up towards the pond yonder, and tell me what you think of it.'

I led him to the corner of the dyke—we had been standing in a little hollow—and showed him Miss Anne deep in converse with Jim Scudamore. From the distance the man looked tall, slight, and graceful, while Miss Anne's figure cut the sky-line of the level moor with an equal air of distinction. Thus looked at, they seemed made for one another.

As he gazed, the face of Sir Tempest's new land-steward darkened.

'Poor land?' I queried; 'yet I have seen something come out of less likely places.'

He did not answer me for a moment, and even then took no notice of my attempt to anger him.

'Who is the man?' he demanded.

'You are certainly a land-surveyor,' said I, 'I believe the gentleman to be Mr. James Scudamore,

of the firm of Scudamore, McMath & Scudamore, Writers to the Signet, in Edinburgh. You will probably have a good deal to do with them in your present situation. They have been the law-agents of the Kilpatrick family for a long time—I understand for several generations.’

‘Ah, Jim Scudamore—the fellow they call ‘The Drucken W. S.!’ he muttered between his clenched teeth. ‘Surely she does not know— why it was he who,’ and he pulled himself up upon the very brink of talebearing.

‘Doubtless Miss Anne is consulting him as her legal representative, on some matter of business!’ I said, ironically.

It was at this moment that Jim Scudamore took Miss Anne's hand. We saw them clear and nett against the sunset.

‘A matter of business!’ suddenly snorted (yes, that is the word!) the heir to the estates of Venturefair—the three cats' jumps and the cow's grass, according to his own vivid description—‘matter of business, indeed!’

Then, without even the poor courtesy of a ‘Good-night’ to me, he strode away back again the way he had come, his shoulders squared and his head high.

‘I think you have dropped some of the plans for the home-farm,’ I called after him. He did not answer, nor so much as glance behind him. But

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from the growl which came to me down wind, I judged that if Mr. Daniel Weir had had his prayer answered, the lines would at that moment have fallen to me in decidedly unpleasant places.

I had now some time to devote to Miss Anne and the information which Mr. Scudamore had come so far to impart to her. Why at the same time he was compelled to hold her hand in a fashion half fond, half-reverential, I do not know. Neither do I know why she allowed him. Since she had not seen Dan Weir, I judged it must have been for some reason connected with John Barnaby. Otherwise, I should have supposed, knowing Miss Anne, that she wished to make the land-surveyor jealous. But she did not need to trouble, I had done that for her.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

WHICH CONCERNS A HARD CASE AND A
HARDER

'Indeed!' said Miss Anne, indignantly, glad for once to feel herself blameless), 'I was 'up to' nothing of the kind, Clementina! And it shows what you must have been doing—and also what a mind you have, that you should even think such things!

'Yes, of course—it was about John Barnaby—as you might have known. He has been borrowing money on some horrid things—promises to pay after my father is dead—the wretch! And Mr. Scudamore has been trying to get them back. Oh, I was so sorry for him. Besides, my father ordered him from the door, and— brought us away the next day to be out of his reach. And he has come so far to deliver his message, and— he is trying so hard to do John Barnaby good.

'No, Clemmy, you need not say 'doubtless' like that with your nose in the air. It does not look pretty! He is, indeed. And he thinks so little of himself. He speaks so hopelessly, so sadly. Why, I nearly cried on the spot. Yes, perhaps it was then that he took my hand—I did not notice. How could I? It was heart-breaking to see a man like that—

brought so low, I mean. I think he has good in him. I am sure of it, if only he had some one to encourage him. At any rate, it is none of your business. He didn't hold your hand.

'No, indeed! — I forbid you to speak to me like that, Clemmy. I have always said that you have no more heart than a china nest-egg. Now I know it! Besides, my father had no business to behave as if I were unworthy of confidence. Well, I am, I know, if it comes to that. But he had no right to think it. It is an insult to a girl of my age.

'Yes, of course I am going to see him again! Do you think I am a fool? He is to bring John Barnaby's papers with him, and I am going to give all my jewels and things to him to sell—all that they won't notice, I mean—and all the money I can get together. I have some left—a good deal, in fact. It is not that I care a straw for that wretch John Barnaby. But I don't want him to disgrace my father or worry my mother if I can help it.

'Oh, yes—I know he will just go and make more promises— borrow more money. Still, at any rate, I will feel that I have done the best I could. And Mr. Scudamore is keeping him steady as much as he can.

'That is all. Now you tell me about Mr. Weir.'

I told her, but I do not think that the account, as signed, sealed and delivered, brought very great pleasure to Miss Anne. Still, she could not but feel it a sort of comfort that he had gone away angry. She

did not much care—or at least did not show that she did, about his certificates and his being at college, which I should have thought would have pleased her. But then girls are strange, especially Miss Anne. For me I go like a clock, ticking right on (or at least the Captain says my tongue does). But Miss Anne was like a clock which goes as easily back as forward, which stops and goes on of its own accord, which strikes without warning and always somewhere in the middle of the quarters—an interesting scientific study, perhaps, but by no means a trustworthy regulator of the affairs of a household.

What Anne seemed to feel most of all, was that Dan Weir, as well as herself, should have been playing a part in the kitchen at the House of Newhall.

‘And he never told me!’ she repeated, inconsequently. ‘I shall never, never, never forgive him.’

‘I quite agree with you, Miss Anne,’ I said. ‘I said the same thing!’

‘Don't ‘Miss Anne’ me—you are a viper, Clemmy!’ she cried vehemently. ‘For quite a quarter of an hour I could not see your heads. Then he came out and looked up at us! You brought him on purpose! Viper!’

‘Well, miss,’ I answered (a mode of address which always angered her), ‘if you can tell me a plan

by which you can be in two places at one time, I shall on a future occasion do my best to carry out your wishes. Perhaps if you were to give one hand to Mr. Scudamore to hold, and the other to,

'Hold your tongue, Clemmy,' she cried, 'I did no such thing. I explained fully how it came about. It was only when he was telling me about himself and when I— was so sorry for him.'

'Yes, they generally do, and you generally are!' I replied, speaking from a long experience of the young lady.

'Clemmy!'

'After that we did not speak for full five minutes. Then we kissed and were friends, because we were both hungry and had clear consciences, void of offence to one another or to any woman. Men, as aforesaid, could look out for themselves. As for Jim Scudamore, I could not understand Miss Anne a bit. I thought he was just trying to get away her money and pretty jewels.

But Miss Anne, of course, knew better. And when he came home, my father knew better too. There was a curious affinity between my father and Miss Anne. They always understood one another, owing to having, I think, the same kind of mind. Mine is, I think, coarser and commoner—shallower, too. But my father, Donald MacTaggart, could see right into people's hearts, and look them through and through. Then he talked to them and often made them behave in spite of themselves. Miss Anne

also could see into motives and what people had in their hearts—especially if they were young and well-looking men. But I do not think that she used her power quite so judiciously as my father did.

It was about this time that I began to long so greatly for him to come home. I was not like Miss Anne, but I could tell my father what I could not tell mother. Mother was always busy, you understand, and if you went in, she would set you to shelling peas or mending stockings in five minutes, going heartsomely off about her own affairs, with a trip-it-lightly in the sound of her footfall, as if she had still been the young girl whom Don MacTaggart married.

But my father—he would sit for an hour on a fallen tree in the woods, and look through the blue blown smoke of the hyacinths, through the upper green shade of the trees, down to the river running clear and brown below, and never utter a syllable. But he would listen as long as you liked, and then, when at last he spoke, it was not a word like that of common men. For he was no common man, old Don of the Bill-hook, my father.

Furthermore, to tell the truth, I was not wholly satisfied about Bess. She had grown different somehow, and was always restless when I went in to the cottage at the corner of the woods. Even to me she seemed lightheaded and fretful. As to myself I was bound to be an old maid. I saw that clearly enough. For Miss Anne monopolised every man that

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came within a mile of her. As long, therefore, as I stayed with her, it was useless for me to let my mind run after this one or that other.

Luckily, however, I was born with a level head, and could do, what most girls cannot—call in my thoughts and tie them up with a halter, at will—as a horse is tied in his stable. I dare say that I could have loved another man as well as the Captain—except for that same level head. But I was not going to love hopelessly without return, like the poet's people. No, I had saved a little money, and I wanted, if I married at all, to wed a man who would love me just for myself, and yet perhaps have a little in the bank himself to put alongside of my stocking-foot. That does no harm, that I can see. Miss Anne called it dreadful when I talked like that. I answered that I could fall in love as well as she, but that, if I set my heart on anybody, she would instantly leave her whole flock and come after my one ewe lamb. So I would wait till she was duly caught and laid by the heels. The which I did. Still, for all Miss Anne's sneers, I could love and do. Also, though with common eyes, I could see, even if I could not divine.

That is why I wanted my father to talk to. Besides he never spoke of what you said to him. Ah, nobody was like my father— never, no never!

It was the next day that Miss Anne met Mr. Daniel Weir the Younger. Yesterday she had been looking for him. Today the two of them were looking for each other. The difference is enormous, as every

one who knows anything about the matter will tell you.

Young Dan Weir, looking his handsomest, had business in the woods. He was not satisfied with the quality of that last roofing timber. He had therefore kept out of Sir Tempest's way, and had informed his chain-bearers that he would not that day require their services.

Anne on her part had taken a passion for wild roses— retaken it, I mean. For the day before she had thrown a whole skirt-full down on the grass, vowing that her fingers were all over pricks, and that she would never touch the nasty things again.

But today all this was forgotten. Wild roses were her only joy, and she was sure that she knew a bank where the wild thyme grew. Or if not the wild thyme (which, as I represented, does not favour woods) something equally delightful and as absolutely necessary.

No, I was not to come. If I could talk like that, I had no true love for flowers, which (I gathered) were the only solacement of Miss Anne's blighted existence.

'Anne,' I answered, of malice prepense, 'I will let you go alone and never follow you a step, if you will tell me the difference in colour between a Marsh-mallow and a Marsh-marigold.'

'Oh,' said she, throwing her hands up to her face with a little hopeless gesture, 'they often tell me

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that my eyes are dark purple, like one of them— but I never can remember which it is. That is always when they are seeing me home in the twilight. Let me see!’

I rebuked Miss Anne, telling her not to be frivolous, because if anything her eyes, blue in the daytime, became green, like those of cats, in the twilight.

‘You are colour-blind, Clemmy,’ she cried indignantly, ‘and if you don’t take that back, I will tell him that all your pretty hair comes off at night, and that you hang it over the back of a chair! There!’

‘Which ‘him’?’ said I, with a bold sneer.

‘All the hims,’ cried Anne, waving her hands abroad to embrace the entire world of things masculine. ‘None of them will ever come near you any more.’

‘They don’t as it is, and I don’t want them, I am sure,’ I said; ‘you flirt with every man you meet, and I have always told you I won’t have your leavings!’

‘Um-m-m-m!’ said Miss Anne, consideringly, ‘well, neither you shall, if I can help it!’

‘Why, Anne,’ I answered, ‘you surely cannot intend to marry them all? Why, they give seven years only for two!’

‘Bah,’ said Miss Anne, ‘there is always that place Miss Euphemia told us about (it must be true—for she could never have made it up!)— Thibet,

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wasn't it— where the girls have as many husbands as ever,'

'If you say another word, Miss Anne,' I cried, 'I will go straight up to Sir Tempest and tell him where you are going now!'

'But it would be so nice,' murmured Anne, artlessly, 'and useful too. Husbands have to do just what their wives tell them—in Thibet— Miss Euphemia said so, and I suppose she ought to know. There's *'One to hoe and one to mow, And one to carry the farmer's corn.'*

Thus in a burst of song she went out dancing and improvising, with a white apron over her dress (white aprons became her!), full of pockets made to hold the wild thyme and the roses and the heart of Young Dan Weir.

No wonder, with such a mistress and companion, that I was doomed to be an old maid. You see, the Captain did not meet her till too late. And then he vowed she was absurdly overrated and not fit to be compared to me. But that, I think, was said just to please his wife. It is always an effort for the Captain to be affectionate in words, and I noticed that on the occasion of this outburst he went out immediately and consoled himself with a pipe and a glass of grog.

The matter of Miss Anne's report was as follows, roughly cast into narrative form. The

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landscape portions I put in myself, from information received.

It happened by a delightful bank— not of wild thyme, but of daffodils dotted among blue sheets of wild hyacinths (as if a bit of the sky had melted and run down with all the stars still spangling it). Miss Anne had her lap full of flowers, but a curious deafness caused her to be oblivious of the manful stride which approached her, rasping rough-soled over the fallen trees, squeegeeing through the soggy morasses and hushing itself on the carpet of pine needles.

Suddenly— that is, to all appearances suddenly, Anne saw something overshadowing her, something with a general impression of knee-breeches and a white hat. She rose with a scream. Her flowers scattered themselves abroad in the most natural way. No one, who did not know Miss Anne very well indeed would ever have suspected that she had been sitting on that same spot for fully half an hour arranging that effect.

It was indeed a most convincing avalanche of flowers, and Mr. Daniel Weir, Younger of Venturefair—a very different man from Young Dan Weir— allowed himself to be completely convinced. He was also, as a matter of course, intensely apologetic. He would have been a monster if he had not. I would have been a monster. But then, you see, I am a woman, and had very good reason indeed for knowing Miss Anne.

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However, with Dan Weir, or practically with any man, all was right. Women have few advantages after marriage, so it is right that they should have all they can beg, borrow or steal before. And indeed they do have them.

‘Sir,’ said Miss Anne, indignation and blame tempered by a naturally sweet smile.

‘I beg your pardon— I am very sorry!’ said Mr. Daniel Weir, anxious and awkward.

‘You are the new land-steward, I believe,’ said Miss Anne, ignoring the past, or rather all the pasts.

Dan Weir nodded and stood before her, six foot of good-looking diffidence. She let her words sink in, and then, pointing with her hand, she said, ‘Well, if you can spare so long from your duties, please help me to gather up these flowers you made me spill.’

The land-steward started to obey with the air of an elephant doing tricks. Anne watched him a moment, and then, laughing a sudden laugh which cleared the air, she cried out, ‘Oh, you are so stupid. Let me do it. There! Now stand up and talk to me!’

There was not the least need for bringing my name into the business, but Miss Anne did.

‘You saw Clemmy yesterday?’ she asked him, in a careless yet firm tone— a sort of deny-me-if-you-dare way that Miss Anne had with her.

‘Oh, the young lady—your companion?’ said Mr. Weir, who in the intervals of surveying land and

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attending the classes at the college of Edinburgh, had acquired certain elements of diplomacy.

Miss Anne nodded and surveyed him scornfully. Was he going to bandy words with her?

'A pretty girl?' she insinuated, looking at her toe doing sums among the pine needles.

'I think so!' said Mr. Weir, with superfluous mendacity, but instinctively taking the right line with Miss Anne, that of defiance.

'A very pretty girl?'

'Yes!'

Anne gathered up her apron till the edges of it nearly touched her chin. 'Good-bye, then!' she said; 'I have no doubt that you will have many opportunities of meeting such a very pretty girl!'

'I hope so!' replied Daniel Weir, Younger of Venturefair.

Miss Anne strode away without looking back, and her chin so high in the air that she never so much as noticed a green bog into which she presently put her foot above the ankle. The sludge caught her as in a trap.

It was of course not at all a dangerous place, but she felt herself sinking in the green ooze. Her courage left her.

'Oh,' she cried, half involuntarily (a good deal for Anne), 'help me!'

Young Dan Weir, whose heart had already misgiven him, ran to the rescue. But by the time he got there, Miss Anne was Miss Anne again. She

repulsed his hand with disdain. Anne's disdain was always particularly fine.

'Do not touch me,' she said, fiercely. 'I forbid you. I would rather die first.'

And dropping her flowers in the soft green mud of the 'quakkin'-qua' she drew out her special lace handkerchief and began to cry into it. Such is the whole duty of women in the circumstances, and it stabbed into Young Dan Weir's heart like a knife.

He strode in to where she was, his greater weight driving him above the knees at every step, and lifting Miss Anne out from the subtle suction of the ooze, he carried her to the firm edge of the heather out of reach of danger.

'There,' she cried, dabbing her eyes, without showing any whit of gratitude, 'see what you have made me do!'

'What?—How?' stammered the land-steward, who had had no large experience of the woman of moods.

'Take me at once to my father!' said Anne, sternly. It is hardly necessary to add that she had not the least idea of going.

'Certainly,' said the literal young man.

And setting his arm about her, he would have borne her into the presence of Sir Tempest, as a child in arms is carried kicking to its nursery.

'I dare you to,' cried Anne, 'do not touch me. Put me down. I will not go to Sir Tempest. I know

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the way better than you. See—I have soiled my skirt in that horrid bog of yours— and you have made me lose all my flowers. And I wanted them so!’

In two or three huge strides Dan Weir was back in the bog, gathering up for the second time the flowers which, lying lightly on the top, he found all unharmed. He was some time about it, too, for the job was a difficult one. But at last he succeeded. He had them all in his arms, and to every appearance fresher than before.

Looking well to his going, he made his way out, and gazed about for Miss Anne Kilpatrick to give them to.

But that romantic young person had vanished. He had not seen her go. He had not heard her. The thing was impossible. Only—she was not.

Mr. Daniel Weir, standing there on the brink, and looking disconsolately around, decided that there were more dangerous and untrustworthy things in the world than ‘quakkin’-quas.’ And there is reason to believe that he referred to the sex which was not his own.

It was fated that Mr. Daniel Weir, land-steward to Sir Tempest Kilpatrick, Baronet, on his way through the woods with a bundle of flowers and ferns in his arms, culled with no great care or delicacy, should encounter a stern, grave-faced old man carrying a bill-hook over his shoulder.

Had it been possible, I should have been glad to have managed the encounter otherwise. But, as

has been stated before, things in real life generally happen crooked. Fate's office needs rearranging. When the head clerk and the despatcher take their luncheons together, the office boy may easily get hold of the wires. This certainly happens too often and should be seen to.

'Humph,' said my father, who resented that the ferns, which he loved to see setting his sturdy trees as in a frame, should be torn up by the roots in that fashion, 'where did you get those, and what are you doing here?'

Dan Weir the Younger was not accustomed to such a mode of address, and he walked off without answering. Don MacTaggart took his bill-hook from his shoulder. The young man advanced upon his way, but suddenly an edge of steel took him in the throat.

'I bade you stop!' said my father. 'Did you not hear?'

'Well,' said the younger man, coolly, 'I have stopped.

Now, tell me by what authority you have ventured to interfere with me!'

'I am head-forester to Sir Tempest, and have been forty years in charge of these woods— that gives some right, I think!'

'It does,' said Young Dan Weir; 'on the other hand I am Sir Tempest's land-steward. I entered on my duties four days ago!'

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Old Don took off his cap— not at all in salutation, but that the air might have free course about his brow. He wanted to think.

‘A land-steward—?’ he muttered; ‘and what micht that be?’

Dan Weir enlightened him.

‘Ay— ay,’ said the old man, striking his bill deep into a crumbling stump, ‘Sir Tempest is no so active as he was, and maybe needs a younger man to help him wi’ the farmers and their steadings— and this fyke o’ a home-farm that he has ta’en it into his head to build. But hark ye, young lad, your Yea-say and your Nay-say stops at the first plantation. In a’ the woods o’ Grennoch, neither stick nor strae, brecken nor gillyflooer, is yours to touch without the leave o’ Donald MacTaggart— that is, till the day that the clods rumble on the lid abune his heid, as they are like sune eneuch to do!’

In the young man's bosom anger had been succeeded by a kind of respect, and that again by cordial kindness during this long speech.

‘You may take it for granted, sir,’ he said quietly, ‘that I know my duties, and that I will not meddle with that which does not concern me. Least of all will I interfere with what I can see (for I am a practical man even in your business, though as yet of little experience) has been administered as few timber-lands have the good fortune to be in this country.’

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I am sure in my mind, though I do not know for certain, that at these words my father flushed with pleasure. Dan Weir had taken him in a tender spot. There were far more of these about the Man-with-the-Bill-hook than any one dreamed of.

‘And as to the plants and ferns,’ the young man added, before my father could speak again, ‘Miss Anne asked me to carry these home for her.’

Don MacTaggart stopped, smiling.

‘What— another!’ was what he said to himself.

But his face gave no token of this— nor did his keen grey eyes— nor yet, when he spoke, did his words convey any hint of his thoughts.

‘Where were ye colleged?’ he asked, looking the young man up and down.

‘At Edinburgh,’ said Dan Weir, soberly; ‘my father has a small farm not far from there.’

‘Ah,’ said Don of the Bill-hook, ‘and maybe ye met wi’ Miss Anne when ye were at the college in Edin-bra?’

‘No,’ said Dan Weir.

‘Ye will be a son o’ Auld Fechtin’ Dan, the dealer o’ Venturefair?’

‘I have heard my father so called,’ said Dan Weir, dryly.

‘Ay, man, ay—’ said my father, meditatively, ‘I hae met wi’ your faither—in the year Aught—when I was yet a Man of Wrath. It was on the road to Hawick Tryst. He wanted to ken whilk yin was the

better man. We stood to yin anither for near on to three hours— and we parted withoot bein' a pennypiece the wiser. I howp your faither has chosen the better pairt— hath he pitten aff the Auld Man and the lusts thereof?'

'I am not my father's judge,' said the young man, simply; 'he is a good man!'

In silence Don MacTaggart reached out his hand to the son of his ancient enemy.

'I was but tryin' ye,' he said; 'ye answered richt. Judge not that ye be not judged? And is he a strong man of his arms even to this day?'

Dan smiled a smile of quiet pride.

'His match is not in the three Lothians!'

The Man-with-the-Bill-hook meditated a while.

'Ay,' he said, 'ay— ye tell me sae? Ay— weel, if it werena for the Way of Peace that has garred a puir sinner overpass the works of darkness—if it werena for the scandal to an elder o' the kirk, tell your faither that Donald MacTaggart wad e'en gie a half year's wage to tak' his coat aff wi' him this day and— but what am I say in'? I am ashamed before the young—I am black-baised! Donald MacTaggart to be as a bull of Bashan trumpeting upon the mountains! I am become as them whose feet are swift to shed blood. Take away your floers, young man, and beware o' the waters of strife— for is it not written that anger resteth in the bosom of fools?'

And with that Don MacTaggart, deeply moved, but grave as ever, shouldered his bill-hook and disappeared among the trees of the wood.

But it would need a whole Iliad to describe the wrath of Sir Tempest and the tumultuary feelings of Miss Anne when, just as dinner was being announced, she was called away, attired in her best, to receive an armful of withered and bedraggled growths from a tall young man who, mired up to his arm-pits, had sent in word that he desired to see Miss Anne personally.

Amusement and a kind of admiration conjointly possessed her bosom when, in answer to Sir Tempest's brusque, 'Well, Mr. Weir, what is this— what is this?' she heard him reply, directly and simply, 'They are some flowers and ferns. Miss Anne bade me bring them!'

'Oh, Miss Anne bade you bring them, did she?' answered the Baronet; 'that is a different matter. Thank you Weir, and good-night to you!'

Then turning to the dining-room he added, as the door closed, 'Anne, you villain!'

But Miss Anne, who presided at table in her mother's absence, only answered, 'Father, do eat your soup. It is getting cold. And I will tell John Burgess to clear away that rubbish!'

But for all that she told John to put the rubbish in her own room.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

CONCERNING SOME PRODIGALS

It was a week or two after this when John Barnaby came home—that is, home to my father's house of Grennoch. There had been rumours of him before in the neighbourhood—how he had been seen on market nights in no estimable company, drinking away the debris of his sodden brains in some of the shy public-houses, which at that time were dabbed over the south of Scotland on lonely by-roads and away off on the muir-edges—devil's dens, most of them, where men who would not have been seen going honestly into a town change-house would sit soaking themselves day after day in bad ale and worse whiskey.

Of John Barnaby's company, the less said the better. I did not understand the shame of it then, and now my respect for Miss Anne and the family—not to speak of my respect for myself, keeps me silent.

At any rate, John Barnaby came to Grennoch, and soon all the world knew it. Of course he was in want of money—a bill had come due, or something. He felt the necessity of wheedling his mother, or perhaps he purposed in his dim clogged brain to terrorise his father with the thought of what would

happen to the carefully tended Kilpatrick estates when he, John Barnaby, should come into possession. At any rate, be the motive what it may, we at Grennoch were saddled with him, apparently for the entire summer.

There was nothing of the fallen angel in the appearance of John Barnaby, as there was about his friend Jim Scudamore. He was a tall, loose-jointed, pallid-faced youth with a thick squab nose, and a complexion of the colour of withered cabbage-leaves. He wandered the country with an empty gun over his arm and a dog slouching after him. But no one ever heard of his shooting anything, or that the dog was of any possible use to him, except to get in his way, and to be kicked out of it with a splutter of impotent wrath.

The heir-apparent even made love to me, after his fashion. Or rather he attempted it—once only. But the weight of my hand upon his ear, taking him at unawares, and as if I had once more been helping my father to fell trees in the woods, convinced Tempest John Barnaby, Younger of Grennoch, that the charms of his sister's companion had been extremely overrated. He hated me ever after that, as I think, and with all the weak persistence of such a loafing hobbledohoy, he set himself to be revenged.

I have said that I was not content about Bess.

Now, let not any reader of these histories run away with a hasty notion. Bess was a silly enough

girl, in all conscience. But so long as my father was about the woods all day, and I, coming and going with an eye upon the policing of things domestic, Bess would have needed to be a cleverer girl than she was to have come to much harm. At any rate, she did not. Though I admit that fate and the folly of womankind once came very near being too much for us. It happened thus.

It was about the time when Miss Anne took her first craze for botany. There was not a green spiky horsetail in the meadows nor a docken by the midden-stead that she did not want to know all about. Whether a bramble had its leaves ragged like a saw, or split like fingers was a vital affair to her. I am convinced that she nearly ruined Mr. Daniel Weir in buying expensive books with coloured plates, so that he would tell her all about them.

Now I am sure that I love flowers and all their kind, from the hyssop that springeth from the wall to the cedar that is in Lebanon—or, nearer at hand, from the gowan to the oak—ay, far more than Miss Anne with her manuals or even Solomon in all his glory of museums. But then I love to see them on the broad moors looking up to the sky which feeds them, or, better still, to meet them unexpectedly in the shy places of the woods—where they are to me like a friend who in a strange city suddenly holds out his hand and says, ‘You did not expect to see me here, did you?’

However, Miss Anne was taken up all the morning, and most of the forenoon, searching for spikelets and chick-weeds, in order that Dan Weir might tell her their names in the afternoon. Sometimes, too, merely to consult about John Barnaby and his affairs, she would meet Jim Scudamore up by the pond. But to do Anne justice, I do believe it was as she said, and that for once she did indeed go there for her brother's sake. As to reforming that prodigal it was no use telling her how hopelessly she was wasting her poor thimblefuls of water, in the hope of putting out the fires of Etna.

But at such times she always saw to it (or I had to do it for her) that her father was safe with the land-steward, tramping and pacing and rattling chains, or armed with many pegs and much cord, laying out the foundations of the 'home-farm.'

I was therefore left a good deal to myself, and read more than I had ever had time to do in all my life before. I was especially fond of a great wide barn which stood some distance away from the mansion-house of Grennoch —all, indeed, that had been left of the former baronial castle, which had been pulled down by Sir Tempest's father to make room for the new. The barn, being in fairly good preservation, was kept as a kind of store-place at the end of the orchard. It had two great doors, one of which opened out on a green and quiet enclosure, which had been the court-yard of the first House of Grennoch, while

the other, that towards the back, gave upon the trees of the orchard—in the spring a dappled blinking of changeful colour; in the summer a soft rustle of swaying leaves; in the autumn full of ruddy fruitage, and in the winter a place of silence and bare grey boughs. Naturally I did not go there much in the latter season. But now, in the middle glories of June, the old orchard enclosure wore its perfections thick upon it.

I read there much and often. The garden garth was large and at the farther end of it was a little door, of which the key hung upon a nail driven into the dresser-end of our cottage. It was here that my mother, behind a little screen of heather and fir-spales, had been given the right of growing her rigs of potatoes and her rows of cabbage and peas.

It was dreamy there. And, though an active person, I sometimes liked to dream. For instance even now, when the Captain goes out, and the door is open on the garden in the summer afternoon, when my cat Tib jumps up in my lap, and I want to ease my poor nose of its glasses nothing is better than to dream in the misty after-dinner glamour which comes over me. Seen through the brightness of the doorway, the Captain's ancient figure-heads and big foreign shells take on old shapes, and lo! I am young again, sitting in the barn and listening to the murmur of the leaves among the Grennoch apple-trees.

But one day, a Sabbath it was, and Miss Anne busy in the hall pressing flowers between the leaves of the great family Bible (where they would be entirely undisturbed), I sat there hearkening to the birds and the soft drowsy tussle of the upper leaves in the moderate-blowing wind.

Suddenly the lock clicked in the door at the farther end of the orchard-garden, near to our cottage. I looked up expecting my father to come in. This was what I hoped for, because I could not go down to the cottage that afternoon to see him, having promised Anne to take a walk with her when she was ready. But a talk with my father was always a joy.

But instead of the Man-with-the-Bill-hook, the two who entered through the door were my sister Bess in her Sunday gown and—John Barnaby. He had a flower in his coat and his hands were not, as usual, in his pockets. I almost stopped breathing. I certainly stopped thinking. I could not eavesdrop. But neither did I think it necessary—Bess being my only sister and inclined to be foolish—that I should shut my eyes or my ears. Also, of a long season, I had known John Barnaby.

This was what Bess told me after.

‘No, Clemmy, please—oh, dinna tell my faither! He fleechd on me to gang—ye dinna ken how he fleechd. And my mither bade me see how the potato shaws were comin' on. What ye heard and saw was

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a'— a' there ever was between us! I will swear it, if ye like. He never said a wrang word to me, but only that he loved me, and that when the auld man—his faither, was dead—I should be his wife. He promised to be a new man for my sake. And he didna touch the drink for twa weeks— never since I saw him the last time. It's that friend o' his that leads him astray—the man Scudamore— him that your Miss Anne gangs up to meet at the heather pond. Oh, ye ken —Clemmy. Ye needna pretend, and ye never say a word to her, I'll warrant.

'Tt was him that led the puir lad astray— learnin' him to gamble and sic-like. He telled me himsel'. And I was vexed for him. What for should I no be? A bad man— him— no, never! Juist ower easy led astray. He telled me that if ony o' them had cared for him, it wad hae been different. Nane had ever loved him—neither his faither nor his mither— and as for Miss Anne, she has hated him frae the time they played thegither on the lee amang the gowans. Naebody ever to love him, or to care whether he lived or died— naebody to gie him the word o' guid advice. Oh, Clemmy, I'll no' deny but I was sair vexed for him. He gies me the grip in the heart when he talks like that!

'But the word o' evil frae his lips— never— never! He promised me that if I wad come to the orchard wi' him— that is, if I wad let him come, he wad never touch the drink again. Ay, the tear was in his e'e when he telled me, ower and ower again, that

he had never a friend in the world—an it werena me!’

After all, there was something to be said for John Barnaby, and Bess had said it. I did not tell my father, who might have killed John Barnaby out of hand. I contented myself for the moment with laying Bess herself under the most solemn vows, and bidding my mother to have a particular eye to her younger daughter's outgoings and incomings.

John Barnaby I reserved for myself.

Both of us were lingering about the orchard door—I on the inside, he on the out. I unlocked the door by thrusting back the old-fashioned bolt of the lock, and beckoning him within. He only saw my hand and the fall of the wide white sleeve which we used to wear to our gowns in those days. Bess had worn one like it on Sunday. He came in quickly and eagerly—without suspicion.

I shut the door and stood with my back to it. Then, instead of philandering with Bess, I, Clementina MacTaggart, had some plain speech with John Barnaby. Bess's sister it was who told him his character, who unveiled to him his present intentions, and depicted his future prospects. As well as I was able to lay phrase to phrase, and to convey meaning by word of mouth, I held up John Barnaby to John Barnaby. I promised him that, if ever he spoke another word to my sister on any subject whatever, upon any pretext whatever, I

would not only go to Sir Tempest, who would turn him out of the house— but I would speak to my own father, who would not think twice about killing him, if he thought that he had reason.

The heir of Grennoch, thus cornered, proved no valiant. He stammered that he meant nothing. He had. It appeared, a vast respect for our family. Don MacTaggart had been more to him than all his own kith and kin— which I could well believe. He respected me— indeed he might say—admired. In fine I cowed him— for the time being, completely.

What would have come of it at long and last I do not know. Such things have an awkward way of breaking out again, when one thinks that they have been completely got under. They acquire a sort of fictitious interest in the eyes of the persons concerned, simply because they are forbidden, and so the affair resolves itself into a game of ‘Catch-as-catch-can.’

But that very night John Barnaby, long perilously balancing himself on the wheel of financial jeopardy, reached the nadir of his career.

He was arrested upon a charge of forging his father's name to a bill. In his own ancestral hall, just as the dapper Baronet and county magistrate, Sir Tempest Kilpatrick, came in from his ‘home-farm,’ he was crossed by a little funereal-looking man with long arms that reached to his knees. This individual of sinister mien presented him with a paper—a slip of paper, of the size of a book-marker,

and with some writing upon it. Yet men had been hanged for less.

'Is that your signature, may I ask, Sir Tempest?' said the little man.

The Baronet stared wonderingly. He could not conceive what the fellow could mean.

'Certainly not! Who has dared? The rascals—and on my Edinburgh bank, too?' he cried.

'I take it, then, that you formally disown that signature?' said the little ape-faced man, almost dancing with glee.

'Assuredly,' cried Sir Tempest, magnificent in wrath; 'I will never pay a farthing—a thousand pounds! Why, it is a manifest forgery!'

'So the holders of the bill thought—and the officials of the bank agreed with them,' said the little man. 'In that case, which I may say we had anticipated, I am under the painful necessity of arresting your son, Tempest John Barnaby Kilpatrick, for forgery!'

The fiery little Baronet stood a moment, as if smitten by a thunderbolt. His face became white. The paper shook in his hand. He remained long silent, turning the slip over and over in an uncertain sort of way, as if he hoped that some solution might suggest itself. The fire had all gone out of him. In the background John Barnaby had fallen in a writhing heap upon the floor, and two other men stood over him watching him.

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'No—no,' he cried, 'I did not—I did not. It was Scudamore. I swear it. He wrote all my papers. I knew nothing about it! I signed whatever he told me. My writing may be like my father's!'

Sir Tempest turned and regarded him steadily. Then he spoke to Miss Anne, who had been arranging her flowers in the great Bible.

'Go upstairs,' he ordered her, 'and see that you keep your mother quiet in her room. I must settle this.'

Then he turned to the officer of the law.

'I— have— been—mistaken!' he said, slowly forcing the words from his mouth, with a stern and steady determination not without its dignity. 'You hear me. I have been mistaken. I own the signature—I will pay.'

'And our expenses— those of my principals, I mean?'

'And your expenses. I will write you an order now on the Bank of Scotland! Only get out of my house— at once! I . . . would be . . . alone!'

John Barnaby stood before his father in the hall at Grennoch, awaiting judgment. Or rather sentence, for judgment had gone before. There was no pity on that stern little face. The eyes were hard. My father's face was hard often as granite, but you could always trust to the eyes. Even when rebuking sin, there was a something in Don MacTaggart's eyes that was not irrevocable. It was the sin and not the sinner that he hated.

But not so with Sir Tempest.

'I will never forgive you,' he began, 'either in this world or in the next! You are no son of mine. I will give you a hundred pounds a year, which my lawyers in Edinburgh shall have orders to pay quarterly. That shall be for your life. The title I cannot deprive you of, but the estates are mine to the last acre. You shall not have six square feet of my land to bury your disgraced body in. Take yourself off. There is twenty-five pounds. No, you shall not see your mother to whine to her—nor your sister to sponge upon her—nor any one at all. There is your quarter's money. Sign this receipt. There is a dog-whip in the corner by the bookcase. If you are not gone in five minutes, I will thrash you within an inch of your life for the pitiful forging hound that you are!'

So John Barnaby went out into the night, rabid as a mad dog—and about as dangerous.

The next day Sir Tempest set off to Edinburgh to alter all wills and deeds with regard to the disposal of his properties. But he left in the hands of his local man of business a certain paper, endorsed with his own name, but not written by him. And he informed him, as he had already informed his son, that in the event of a certain young man named Tempest John Barnaby Kilpatrick returning to the Grennoch or being seen within the parish precincts, the envelope was to be placed in the hands of the

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Procurator of the Crown, and the law permitted to take its course.

But of that there was no fear, for in the meantime John Barnaby had removed himself very far off indeed.

CHAPTER TWENTY

CONCERNING A LIBRARY ROMANCE

Then came for us all a blessed season of release. Summer and summer's joy within and without—peace and ease, and the hope in the heart that all would now be well. I think we minded it long after. At least I am sure that Dan Weir did.

It was strange how all about the House of Grennoch seemed to grow younger and more gladsome, when once the dead weight of John Barnaby's misdemeanors was removed from us. The thought that he was one day to succeed had lain heavy as lead upon all the countryside. But now, when it was known that Miss Anne was to be heir of all, a great and widespread, though naturally a quiet, joy fell upon the glens and moors of Whinnyliggate.

What Sir Tempest had done in Edinburgh was known to no man. Of course Anne never asked him, and the fierce little man kept his own counsel. The home-farm went briskly on. Everywhere was a clink of hammers driving nails into white pine, and the tingle of chisels ringing on hard whinstone—besides which there was a merry sound of Babel-builders taking pleasure in misunderstanding each other—

who when a slater shouted down for his dinner would send him up the basket at the end of the pulley-rope—empty— while below sat his comrades, devouring the contents with exaggerated expressions of delight. For of such is the wit of barn-builders and Babel-builders ever since upon the plain of Shinar, the first sun-dried brick was laid upon his fellow.

As for John Barnaby, he clicked no more keys in the lock of the garden-orchard by the barn. Jim Scudamore's tall and graceful figure ceased from drooping over the pond by the heather gate about the edge of dark, waiting for Miss Anne to talk to him about her brother. There was great peace upon the valley. The land-surveyor had become Sir Tempest's factor and confidential man of affairs. Dan Weir's athletic powers, his quick understanding, his practical energy and quiet serviceable-ness had won the heart of the little martinet. And after all these years of tyranny Sir Tempest actually stooped to take counsel from his new land-steward.

Botany became more than ever in vogue. Miss Anne represented to her father that if he possessed such beautiful woods, it was only right to know what they contained. Sir Tempest snapped out that it would be quite sufficient for him to know what trees were worth cutting down and what game worth shooting. The rest he would leave to her. If she wanted information on practical arboriculture, she had only to ask Donald MacTaggart.

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Miss Anne suggested that Mr. Weir knew a great deal about plants, and, furthermore, that she felt inclined to take lessons in that science.

'Well, no nonsense, mind, Anne,' said her father. 'I will not have him meddled with. He is too good and too simple for you. Let him alone!'

'I suppose,' she answered, turning up her nose, 'that it will not be considered meddling with his young affections if I ask him whether this plant is called Solomon's Seal or Grass of Parnassus?'

'I suppose not,' said the Baronet, 'so be off with you, minx—and remember, if you can, for once what your father tells you. I will not have my new factor spoiled for his work!'

'Now,' said I, when we got out of the presence, 'what good did you suppose you did by that? You have only put your father upon the track of your little game!'

'Little game, indeed!' she cried; 'how vulgar you are, Clemmy! What a bad mind! I have no 'little game,' madam. I am studying a science—seriously too!'

'Indeed,' said I, 'is it as bad as that?'

All the same I admit that Dan Weir came as a revelation to me that summer. He had always looked handsome. But now, perhaps from his position of authority, and from being so much with Sir Tempest and his visitors, who came to see the work at the new 'home-farm,' Dan Weir rapidly became

undistinguishable from any other quietly dressed gentleman. Men talked to him freely. Sir Tempest told all who came that his new factor's father was a small landowner in Midlothian, and that he had got Mr. Weir straight from college.

'But no frills and tuckers about him, my dear man, I do assure you—such as one would expect from a college-bred factor,' the little Baronet would declaim. 'You know how I hate it—high farming and all that! Enough to ruin any man in ten years—nothing fancy—nothing showy about Weir. But look at this system of running the mill with a very little water, stopping it at any point so that the machinery will not run empty. That is all his idea. He is invaluable, I tell you. And see how the sawmill outside is run by the surplus power!'

But certain of his visitors, who had heard of the botanising expeditions, were of opinion that Sir Tempest might one day have reason to change his opinions of his immaculate factor. There was, however, a very widely spread acknowledgment, especially among the younger men of the neighbourhood, that Miss Anne could take very good care of herself. Besides which, the tattling busybodies of both sexes were too much afraid of Sir Tempest to offer the Baronet so much as a word of caution. It is sometimes useful to have a reputation for a highly spiced temper.

As for me I had my father, and many were the long walks we took together in the silence of the

woods, after he had done his day's work—or even when Miss Anne was employed scientifically, and while he was going about his daily business. About this time I noticed that the minister came often to see him, often also to call upon my mother, much to that good lady's surprise, and indeed quite too often for the exceedingly secular tastes of my sister Bess.

It did not strike me for some time that, after all, it was possible that Miss Anne's foolish words had been sown on fruitful, if somewhat rugged, soil.

My father and Mr. McMachar had many discussions. In the midst of the sound and fury of which, if we were at the cottage, Bess and I would slip out on some pretext of looking for hens' eggs or feeding the chickens. But even then I did not question her about John Barnaby. I left it to herself to tell me what she choose, believing that there is no better way of making a young lass fond of a man than to be perpetually backbiting him in his absence.

As for Bess, she said nothing of the banished prodigal. There was, however, one Jamie Campbell, the son of a neighbouring farmer, who was coming about her. She would tell me, laughing, the latest news about his visits— all that he had said, what foolish things he did, how difficult he had found it to get away the night before—so that in the end my father, a man of plain word and plainer purposes, in order to start the bashful wooer had been obliged to

say to him, 'Kindly gang oot, James—I want to shut the door that I may worship with my family.'

Whereupon, most gratefully, the lad had taken his departure.

I could not tell whether or no this mirthful scorning was a good sign in Bess. Sometimes a girl will make fun of the devotion of one man to screen another feeling that lies deeper. But in Scotland at least, a feck of blythe lasses begin by laughing at the men they would afterwards lay down their lives for—or at least in whose company they spend these same lives, even to their latest hour. At any rate, I was glad that Bess had something besides the hens and the stocking-knitting to occupy her mind. An empty heart is the devil's best opportunity—a sentiment which, somehow, I seem to have met with differently expressed—in a hymn, perhaps, or in the Shorter Catechism.

If other subjects of conversation failed, Bess would try to tease me about the minister. Certainly the Reverend Physgill McMachar came oftener to my father's house than the stated visitations of the parochial clergy called for. Also, though this I did not tell to Bess (as calculated to unsettle her young mind), he had fallen into a habit of meeting my father and myself in the woods. Now, it was one of the most curious things about my father, that, stern and grave man as he was, he had a certain hidden sympathy with young people and their ways—especially when they were young lightsome maids

like Anne and myself, so that he never once thought of 'telling' upon us—as we used to say at school.

He could be remorseless as to what he considered the right. He would allow no paltering with the fundamentals of belief and life, but he allowed considerable liberty in practice. He had, as he often said, 'come out into a large place,' and certainly, with an eye upon us—as it were from a height—he gave Anne and myself (to Bess also, but in a lesser degree) the benefit of that liberty which had made him free.

Many were the arguments I listened to between my father and Mr. McMachar. There was nothing of the young grocer's journeyman about the minister of Whinnyliggate. At college he had been an excellent student, and he had kept up his learning, especially along the practical theological lines which were best fitted to please my father. But Donald MacTaggart was a Calvinist of Calvinists—more ultra than John Calvin himself. He would have ruled the city of Geneva with his bill-hook if he had had the chance—though I doubt whether he would have cut down the fagots for Servetus with that weapon.

On the other hand, Mr. Physgill McMachar was a 'Moderate'—not the pursy well-fed sort, full of tiends and with eyes that stand out with fatness, but rather the lean, argumentative, militant Moderate (there is no contradiction in terms to one who knows Scotland), to whom 'enthusiasm' and

'election' alike are anathema— but the first infinitely more so. He preached a 'cauld morality' with fire and fervour. He damned the evangelical majority of the day with the faintest of praises. Yet if any man lived by faith from day to day it was Physgill McMachar. In the first place, a whole crew of hungry relatives sucked the blood from him. In the second, if he went out with both a coat and an overcoat, he was sure to have given away one of these before he returned to the manse. So well was this known that farmers as far off as Barbeth, and herds and plough-hands to the uttermost verge of the Grennoch estates, upon seeing a well-habited tramp, would demand of him, with all the authority of a silver-buttoned policeman, 'whaur he got that coat.' Or, perhaps, better informed, would simply say, lifting a crowbar or other convenient weapon, 'That's our minister's coat! Here! Off wi' it on the spot—or I'll break the head o' ye!'

So Tibby Birch, the minister's servant of all work (of which, indeed, there was not much, because he would not allow his books to be dusted at all, and his study only once a month), was not at all surprised when— hours after having vainly questioned her master regarding his missing garment—she descended to find a stalwart man followed by a pair of shaggy collies at her back door.

'Hae,' he would say, 'here is your minister's ain tap-coat! It's a terrible case that ye can tak' nae better care o' him—at your age too, Tibby Birch!'

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'Let my age alane, Carsphairn Jock,' the girl would reply, 'and tell me whaur ye gat the minister's coat?'

'Aff the back o' a gaun body on the Cairn Edward road!' Carsphairn Jock would reply.

Whereupon Tibby Birch, uplifting her hands with a shriek of holy horror, would run for the tongs and take the article gingerly at arm's length.

'Sic a man—oh, sic a man!' she would cry; 'it's nae wonder if he is puir. He threepit to me the day that he had never ta'en it aff the peg— and that it maun hae been me that lossed it, wi' hingin' it on the claes line in the strong wind! Me to lose a coat like that! Oh, feech— I declare it smells o' a' the tinkler-fowk atween here and Little Dublin! I canna bide it in the same hoose as me.'

With which words Tibby Birch would give the article another final shake, and carrying it off to the peat-house, she would leave it there locked up in quarantine.

But when she came back she was still in the midst of her complaints.

'Then there will be the sulphur and the camphor balls —forbye a' the trouble o' lookin' the seams!' she complained, 'and very likely after a' he will hae gi'en it awa' again by next Sabbath. I declare some day he will gie it to somebody that will cairry it clean oot o' the pairish afore they are stoppit. And then he will see. But he is siccan a

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man, oor minister, he will never tak' ony woman's tellin'.'

'He should get married, Tibby,' said Carsphairn Jock. 'His wife, when he gets her, will gar him claw waur than a bit coat that a tinkler has had on his back.'

'Tak' yer ain prescription, Jock,' Tibby rejoined bitterly; 'certes, frae what I hear, there's few that has ony better richt. Weel may they say that the Session o' this pairish is doin' its duty but slackly, or ye wad hae been mairret lang syne, my man! Or aiblin—had to tak' the road wi' the Queen's shillin' in your pooch and a ramrod up your back, to the tune o' 'The Rogues' March,' played upon the fifes and drums!'

'Lord, what a tongue ye hae, Tibby. Does the minister caa' ye ben to help wi' his sermons?'

'Na, that he doesna,' cried Tibby Birch, 'and the deil's ain peety it is. Or, my faith, I wad gar the skins o' some o' you worthless vaigabonds flee aff in fypes!'

'Aweel, at ony rate, Tibby,' Carsphairn Jock would sum up the situation, 'ye canna deny that ye owe me something for fetchin' ye back your maister's guid coat!'

'Ow, ay,' said Tibby, 'that I will not deny! There's for ye, Jock. Tinkler's pay for tinkler's wark.'

And as Tibby banged the manse door, Carsphairn Jock retired rubbing his tingling cheek, going softly down the little avenue, lest he should

bring out the minister from his studying. On his way home he reflected with a kind of elation, Faith, Jock, ye micht do waur— a fine, heartsome, thoroughgaun lass is Tibby Birch, and has a way wi' her, too, that a man likes. Tibby wad never sit and glower at ye and greet like a calf for sowens. Certes, no—she wad clear yer hoose for ye in twa cracks o' your thumb—ay, and mak' ye brave and thankfu' to tak' the hill, and shelter yoursel' ahint the bieldiest dyke-back o' your acquaintance. Dod, Jock, but ye might do waur than think on Tibby!

The which accordingly he did.

Well, as I say, if there was any doubt in my mind that the minister was coming to see me, it was soon dissipated. He was not so fond of calling my father 'donnert Auld Calvinist,' or hearing the word of offence 'Moderate' retorted upon himself, that he should return to the charge every lawful day—that is, every day when I was in my father's company or in my mother's kitchen.

But this last I was compelled to put a stop to, owing to Bess's unseemly behaviour. For she would persist in looking through the door of the inner room, behind the minister's back— and then the mouths she made, the words she scrawled on the slate on which my father cast up his accounts, the significant tossings of her head and worst of all her artless inquiries at Mr. McMachar, if she would call in the wood-foresters to be catechised. But all the

same, the minister continued to come, and I could see that if I liked I might be Mistress McMachar—but that was folly. It was simply not to be thought of. My father would have liked it, doubtless, well enough. But after all, a girl cannot marry just that her father may have somebody to argue with about the Covenant of Works.

So I felt that I must put a stop to it. Mind you, I do not deny that I liked the minister. Ay, and though I was what I was—the daughter of Don MacTaggart, the Grennoch wood-forester, and Miss Anne's companion, I did not care what people would say. I had not that ill-breeding. Our folk were known and respected far and near, and I had gotten a good education—as good as Miss Anne herself. And in some ways, though I say it myself, I had profited by it more. For one thing Miss Anne could not spell—few very nice girls can, and no woman worth calling a woman ever knows the day of the month.

But—all the same I simply could not think of marrying him. I cannot tell why. I might have made him, with care, sufficiently good-looking—though of course not so taking to the eye as the Captain is even now. Still that might have passed. But—I just could not think upon it at all, and that is the real truth. Some like vinegar and some like honey, and some betwixt and between (which is gooseberry wine), but when it comes to marrying none can explain their likings or their mislikings. I liked the minister well enough, as I say, but I did not want to

wed him. So I desired to stop the affair before it went further, and to this end I took counsel with Miss Anne.

She sighed.

'I wish I could,' she murmured, her nostrils dilating as if she sniffed the battle from afar, 'but really I have plenty on my hands at present. Yet for your sake, Clemmy— you have always been kind and forbearing with me— never asking questions or anything—I will do what I can.'

'Small use in asking questions,' I retorted, 'when I have a pair of eyes in my head, and also a faculty for putting two and two together— not absolutely scientific. Miss Anne, but sufficient for the ordinary purposes of life. All the same, grateful or no, I want advice, not pistol practice, I thank you kindly. I will not have you flirt with Mr. McMachar.'

'Flirt!' she cried, pained-like, with a lift of reproachful eyes. She had not been understood—she had been wounded by the one nearest and dearest to her—that is, of her own sex. Miss Anne certainly did this sort of thing very well.

'Now,' said I, for I was not going to argue with her, 'tell me what I am to do to stop him. I will not give the good honest man up for you to amuse yourself with. I have seen enough of your cat-and-mouse play!'

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'Who may you be calling 'mouse'?' she cried. Then more reflectively she added, 'Well, if you will not try 'the expulsive power of a new affection'.'

'For shame, Miss Anne!'

'What say you to making a confidant of him—as to your hopeless passion for another?'

She looked up brightly, as if she had solved the problem triumphantly.

'But, Miss Anne,' I said, in considerable astonishment, 'you know as well as I do that I have no affection for one—let alone 'Another!'

'Oh,' she said, 'you can be wasting as much unrequited affection as ever you like upon Dan Weir. He won't mind!'

'Miss Anne.'

'No, indeed,' she said, brazenly, 'at least I can make it all right with him. I have great influence over him—at present. He often comes to me for advice—same as you do!'

'I do not doubt it!' I said, with stern gravity; 'you ought to be ashamed, Anne!'

'Ah,' she answered, lightly tossing up her lace to make it stick out the way she wanted it, 'I thought it was you who came to me for my advice?'

At this I was silent for a bit, and then I resolved to speak plainly to Anne. But not being ready with my words, she got in first. She finished fluffing out her lace, and then looked up at me maliciously.

'You did like Dan a little,' she said, 'so it will be no lie!'

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Well, perhaps I did—once for a very little. At least I cannot think of any other reason why I should have had a lump in my throat, or why I wanted to make a baby of myself on the spot. Now Anne had been watching me, and instantly clasped me about the neck with a quick little cry of penitence.

‘Oh, I did not know,’ she cried, ‘or I would not have said it for the world. I thought you never cared a button for any one!’

‘No more I do, Miss Anne,’ I said, trying to push her away; ‘I have no business to care.’

But she would not take away her arms.

‘I am sorry—so sorry,’ she murmured, over and over again.

However, I drew myself free. Because I would not have her think that, or go on believing it.

‘If you think for a moment that I am, or ever was in love with your Mr. Weir,’ I said, ‘you are mightily mistaken. It is only—only—that whenever there is any one— any one at all— you come, and they see you— and, of course—! But how can they help it. I do not blame them. I would myself!’

Here it came about, and perhaps it was as well, that I disgraced myself.

For Anne petted me, and made much of me, till to the sound of her crooning I dried my eyes. Then quite suddenly she changed her tone.

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'I have it,' she cried, 'I shall run off again— for good this time. I shall get married— really, I mean! And wholly for your sake, Clemmy! Yes, though I did think that I could have gone on very nicely for a year or two longer like this. Botany is so interesting. You have no idea. But I will do it for your sake— what I never would have done for any other— no, not even for a man. I will get married to somebody! It does not matter who. And then, Clemmy, I will never make you cry any more. YOU CAN HAVE ALL THE REST!'

And as she spoke she wiped the tears from my eyes with little (but scientific) dabs of her handkerchief. All the same I was not so sure if marriage would end everything for Miss Anne.

'But as to Mr. McMachar,' she continued, still murmuring pensively, 'you are quite sure that my idea about Dan will not do? It would be so convenient and satisfactory. He would not mind— no, nor I either. You could send the minister to Dan for confirmation. I should love to prime him with what to say! He could never imagine! No— well, you never will take good advice, nor acknowledge, till it is too late, what is for your good, Clemmy. Let me see— let me see!'

'I have it,' she said, jumping up and snapping her thumbs like a school urchin, with a loud suddenness, which was one of her many charms. (At least I suppose so— for it always made men smile, I could not do it myself, owing to a lack of power in my thumbs. But then all murderers have great

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strong thumbs, I told Miss Anne, so that it was nothing to be proud of. But this by the way.)

I have it. Sir Tempest is going away. We will get the minister to come and visit us—and he shall see you dusting the library. I will help! If that does not frighten him, nothing will. Clemmy, mark my words, that man will never marry!’

It is hardly my own desire that I should tell what happened to a good honest man in the library of Grennoch. But since I have prepared the way for the tale, and Miss Anne so carefully devised the trap, it is necessary to relate in what manner Mr. McMachar fell into it. Also, we both of us did it for his good. For if I had married him then, I should have led him a dance. The woman who can lead the Captain a dance is not born. But the minister was quite different. He was dry, by nature, and all tuned up like a fiddle—not solid, and sappy, and furnished with a good comfortable cushiony conceit of himself, like my man.

Well, at any rate, the minister came and we were ready to receive him. Miss Anne was on the sofa with her feet tucked up under her. Miss Anne could do anything you liked with her feet. I believe that, had she been put to it, she could have inserted them into her side-pockets or made a necklace of them, like the people in shows. It is needless to say that Sir Tempest was very far away indeed, and that my Lady Kilpatrick did not show her face in the

library oftener than once a year. Therefore we were entirely safe—which is a deal more than Mr. McMachar was.

Before he came, I had all the books off the shelves and tumbled in a great heap in the centre of the floor, mixed with candlesticks, and old boots, and with pieces of dirty carpet over all. Of course, being a reader, I knew the place of each, far better than did Sir Tempest himself. But the minister did not know that. I had also a big housemaid's yard-brush, some pounds of used tea leaves, and a swill-bucket borrowed from the stable. But my chief stronghold was a collection of dusters of incredible uncleanness and grime unprecedented. These had been carefully selected.

Anne was complaining vehemently when the minister was shown in.

'Oh, Clemmy,' she was crying loud enough to be heard in the passage, 'how can you make such a disturbance— I declare I can't see my hand. The whole atmosphere is full of dust. The floor swims with your nasty water. And my father's poor books! Oh, Mr. McMachar, you find us in such a mess. Pray excuse us! But it is all Clemmy's fault. She will do it. It is a perfect craze with her, and worst of all, it is growing upon her. There is never a room where there is a single book safe from her in all Grennoch. And as for written papers and things—she simply burns them out of the way! I believe now she can't help it!'

Mr. McMachar looked round for a seat. But all of them had been stacked carefully in a corner, with their legs shamelessly erected in the air.

‘Sit beside me!’ said Anne, making sympathetic room for him. ‘Sit on the sofa. Put your poor feet on a footstool. There is a nice big hassock just underneath. It used to be in church, but it was so comfortable that it made Clemmy go to sleep regularly during the sermon. So I had it brought away. Now— there— that is better. You can help me to rebuke Clemmy. It is really very dreadful— the poor books— what would Sir Tempest say?’

‘Nothing whatever,’ replied, through the dust clouds, ‘for what he does not know will never hurt him!’

And as I spoke, I went on slapping vigorously— banging the leaves and pushing the volumes back into the shelves anyhow—generally upside down. Never by any chance did I put two volumes of a set together. Folios and octavos, thick and thin, pamphlet and encyclopaedias, bound and unbound, all went pell-mell into the shelves, wherever an inch of space was to be found. Moreover, I slapped them all as if they were naughty children, and raised such a dust that I kept even Mr. McMachar coughing! And as for Miss Anne, what between rebuking me, choking, and restraining the desire to laugh, she really almost had a fit.

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But I continued my work of reconstructing that library, conscious that it was done for the good of the minister of the parish. The purpose was, therefore, almost a sacred one—or at least, considering my good intentions, it might be considered so. For the good man's eyes grew wider and wider. He dropped his stick, and picked it up again mechanically. He blew his nose like a trombone. He even ventured a remonstrance in words.

'But, Miss Clementina,' he cried, 'so much energy surely is bound to injure the books?'

'Oh, no,' cried I, working harder than ever, 'injure them—the idea! Why, this is nothing, nothing! You should see our spring and autumn cleanings, and especially the big one before Christmas. Then these old fusty fellows get something to think about. Then we trounce these Russia-bound fogies, I can tell you! Ouch!'

Here I dropped one plump on the floor, and the minister instinctively sprang to his feet. He was suffering acutely—you could see that by his countenance.

'You want to help me,' I cried, thrusting a duster into each hand. 'There—you shall! No, no—harder than that! Oh, you can't do it. You had better sit down! Books never can be cleaned that way!'

And I flapped about like a marine engine, harder and harder all the time, three hundred revolutions to the minute.

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'Miss Clemmy—Miss Clemmy, shouted in agony, 'do you know that you have just thrown a whole row of Elzevirs into the clothes' basket? I really cannot remain —'let me pick them out—!'

'Let them stay, I tell you!' I shouted, thrusting him back by main force; 'they have nasty old scurvy backs. Nobody in the house can read them, and Sir Tempest will never miss them! They can go to the maids in the kitchen to help light the fires!'

The minister stood erect. His hands feebly clawed the air. I think if he could have got his voice back in time he would have laid upon me the greater excommunication of the church. But dust and astonishment kept him silent, If not quiet.

'Oh, that is nothing— nothing! cried Anne, weeping — yes, positively and indecently weeping (which might have given us away, but that Mr. McMachar took it for emotion).

'Oh, I can't stay— I can't stay— I positively cannot!' he gasped. 'Oh to see everything thus sent to rack and ruin! Oh, Miss Clemmy, I did not think—I did not indeed! How could I? Oh, what a dreadful girl you must be to have in a house!'

And seizing his hat and overcoat, he fled, still coughing, down the stairs, leaving his stick behind him as a token of defeat.

Then I opened all the windows, and set the room to rights as it had been before. Nothing was any the worse, except that Miss Anne had laughed

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herself quite into a state of dissolution, and had to go to bed to restore her tone.

Even there she was a little hysterical at the completeness of our victory.

‘Oh, the spoils of the vanquished,’ she cried, waving Mr. McMachar's staff out of the bedclothes. ‘Oh, the dust— and the slop— and my father's books! Oh, if only Sir Tempest had come in when you gave the minister the duster, then you could have made believe that Mr. McMachar was at the bottom of the mess! Oh— and oh! And oh!’

‘Be quiet, Miss Anne,’ I said gravely, ‘things are very well as they are! Even you can't have everything you want.’

The end of a romance. I was never asked to become mistress of the manse of Whinnyliggate.

Strange—but true.

And to this day Bess has never been able to explain it.

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

CONCERNING THE KEYSTONE THAT WAS
REMOVED FROM ITS PLACE

In nature the sun does not set at noonday. It does not suddenly disappear without hope of return. Even in the days of Joshua it only stood still for a little while. But in life and in the affairs of men, it is otherwise. At Grennoch the home-farm was well-nigh finished. The machinery of threshing-mill and saw-mill occupied their due positions, though as yet not a notched wheel had ever turned upon his fellow. The great doors of the barns were set up, doors so large that they would permit a loaded harvest wain to enter under the span of the roof. Dan Weir was more continuously busy than ever. And, as if he had not enough to do, hardly a day passed but he was called away from his account-books, or requested to stay at home from his journeyings to the different farms on the estate, in order that he might show off the new machinery and the marvellous adjustments to the gentry of the neighbourhood— some of whom marvelled at Sir Tempest's extravagance, and the others wished that they had half the money to spend.

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Mount Tempest the place was to be called—though indeed it stood in a sheltered enough spot, as the proprietor pointed out with pride. No wind could beat upon it.

No water sap these stout granite foundations. It was built upon a rock. And so, one glorious day of the late autumn, Sir Tempest emerged from the doors of the barn, bright, alert, and bristling with his own peculiarly electric life. It made the fingers tingle even to shake hands with him. Half-a-dozen of his more distant acquaintances had come over to spy out the land. As usual Mr. Daniel Weir, the designer of all, had taken his meed of praise, and had come out first, shutting the great doors carefully upon the stored crop—the first that had ever lain upon these polished floors.

The fiery little Baronet strode a double score of yards away from the buildings, and turned to look back, the company of guests obediently following with murmurings of admiration.

‘There,’ he said, ‘did any of you ever see the like of that—in Galloway, ay, or in broad Scotland?’

As an echo returns, so from the long lines of new buildings was thrown back the chorused negative. Sir Tempest was right. Where among the sons of the well bom and the moneyed, was there to be foimd any like to Sir Tempest, who had found Grennoch of whinstone and would leave it of granite. Whereupon the little Baronet displayed his white waistcoat, and with thumbs in his arm-holes

sunned himself in the warmth of his own achievement.

But suddenly, in the midst of all, he called out sharply, 'Mr. Weir!'

From the cut-offs of the mill-dam sluice, where he was occupied, Dan Weir came forward quickly through the little crowd. His eyes followed the pointing hand.

His master seemed to be fighting for utterance.

'You have forgotten to shut the doors—the great doors—the great doors!'

'I have shut them, sir!' said Dan. And they were indeed shut in the plain sight of all—glistening clean-lined in chocolate and green, plank by heavy plank, painted vertically, according to Sir Tempest's own particular taste.

But the Baronet stood still, pointing with his hand, a look curious to see on his face.

'But I see them opening, I tell you,' he cried, 'go and shut them. Weir! It—it must be the wind . . . that is blowing from somewhere—somewhere beyond!'

But after one glance at his patron's face, Dan Weir looked no more at the barn doors of chocolate and green. He caught the little Baronet in his arms and carried him within the house. He laid him on his own bed. A minute more and the first groom was galloping for a doctor to Cairn Edward. But he might just as well have turned his horse at the avenue

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end. For, all suddenly, as a lamp that the wind blows out, as a candlestick that is removed from his place, this quick, fiery, impatient, vehemently righteous spirit was not.

It was what no one of us had ever for a moment thought of—least of all the man himself.

‘I am booked to outlast you all,’ he would say, half jesting, half earnestly, ‘I will see my great-grandchildren out of college, that is, if Anne there does her duty!’

Now the cry that went abroad over the land that day was sadder than that which had gone out for many a man of loftier pretensions to goodness. The man who in his heart thinketh and hath the power, straightway (very straightway) to go and do it, is not so common in any country. And to him, much is forgiven.

So there fell a sadness upon Grennoch, and far on the hills the herds put both hands to their mouths, to cry the news to each other across the gulfs of air.

My father in his woods knelt down to say a prayer. As for me I abode with Anne and her mother. Anne was brave. My lady dumb, gradually dissolving into a flow of silent tears, easy and copious—the better for her. She wondered who would now bring in her morning coffee. Anne promised, but Lady Kilpatrick did not seem greatly comforted. Sir Tempest had done it so long.

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It came with a strange stunning effect upon us all— the consciousness that never again would we hear the grind of those positive boot-heels on the gravel, or the quick switch of the riding whip cut impatiently across his leg. We could not bring ourselves to believe it all at once. At each moment we listened for the sharp order, the crisp tread on the stairs or across the hall, the quick bursting entrance, the keen palish face set in the bristle of white hairs, the twitching impatient mouth, the imperious eyes, the slow yielding humour of the smile— all that made Sir Tempest the pivot of men and things wherever he went, and to all of us in this history, almost the peg which held the universe together.

Yes, not less than that.

It was strange to us now to remember how little we had thought of his comings and goings— sometimes, indeed, only that we might get out of his way! But no one of us had ever imagined a world without him. My father had taken his own way about the trees mostly. Barely had he consulted his employer during forty years.

Yet, now he went about like a dog that had lost his master. He was seen as often as three times without his bill-hook, and once he carried it to church. But that was after the burial.

Of that I hardly like to tell. Yet I must, though briefly.

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I think that few of us expected John Barnaby to come to his father's funeral. Nevertheless, he arrived the night before, and immediately shut himself up in his chamber. He brought what he called a valet with him— a huge big hulk of a fellow with a broken nose and the thickened neck of a prize-fighter of the day.

The morning of Sir Tempest's funeral dawned, a clear autumnal day, with, in the air, that first gripping of frost which only just crisps the leaves, without turning them immediately red.

Of course there was an immense gathering, from every part of the county, but I abode with the women in the house, as was my duty. The necessity of composing her mother must have been a great help to Anne. I never knew her so brave and thoughtful— though all along I had known that under the lightness of her girlhood lay hidden the deep-rooted strength of the woman that was yet to be.

We watched them down the avenue—only the three of us left in the great drawing-room of Grennoch. For it was Lady Kilpatrick's wish that she should be left entirely alone. Even I would have gone out, but Miss Anne reached up a detaining hand, without taking her eyes from the nodding plumes which still, at such times, stand for heathenism throughout Scotland.

'Stay!' Anne said. And she continued to hold my hand.

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John Barnaby had come down from his room at the last moment, a little shaky, it is true, but to all appearance clothed and in his right mind. He did not ask to see his mother, nor did he speak with any one. But, clothed in black, crape-hatted and black-gloved, he took his place as chief mourner in the procession which was to conduct his father to the cemetery.

At the grave side, for the Kilpatricks did not bury in a vault, Mr. McMachar—very pale, they said, but quite master of himself—read a chapter and said a short and simple prayer. Then the cords were put into the hands of those to whom relationship or long service had given the right to lay the honoured dead in the grave.

John Barnaby stood at the top and he held his cord, as if deep in meditation long after the others had dropped theirs—each of them falling with a soft wisp of silken tassels down upon the coffin lid. Perhaps, thought many, the Prodigal had repented. He stood thus, no one daring to break in upon him till the first clods of earth rattled dully down on the coffin lid. ‘Ashes to ashes—dust to dust!’ said Mr. McMachar, under his breath.

Then, tossing the cord from him as far as possible, John Barnaby threw back his head and burst into peal after peal of horrid laughter.

In carriages and coaches, in gigs and wagonettes, according to their degree, the mourners

sought their homes. The farmers went back to take off their 'blacks'—standing by while their womenkind folded them and put them away in the Sabbath drawer. Some of these last said as they did so, 'So young and yet so wicked!' speaking like all the world of John Barnaby.

'A bad son,' others of the severer sort added, shaking their heads; 'God will reward him!'

'Drink!' suggested the men to each other, more ready than the women to find excuses for the erring in this direction. (For drink is a generally accepted excuse in Galloway for anything from window-breaking to manslaughter.)

'Did ye see yon falla that he had wi' him— him that met him with the gig at the kirk road end?' That would be the next question.

This was Spronk, the prize-fighter, whose very name was sufficient to condemn him, even if he had kept his head in a bag.

'Aweel,' said the farmers, who had heard something of the incident of the sheriff's officer and the slip of blue paper, 'it's a Guides blessin', at ony rate, that he has been cuttit aff wi' a shillin'—and that Miss Anne will be the new laird. They say she's juist terrible takkin' and gi'es a' the lads the back o' her hand. And wha has a better richt— a' the mair that there will be nocht pitten onto oor rents because o' that! Heeven send her a well-doin' man, and us as guid a landlord as— him— that's awa'!

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In the House of Grennoch I am sure that no one of us troubled our heads about the will of the dead man— at least not till next day, when John Barnaby staggered down the stairs with the drink of the night just dying out of him, his face grey and sodden, his eyes terrible to see. The prize-fighter had been exhorting him to remain in bed, and had indeed constrained him by force to do so for the greater part of the morning. But the prizefighter also had his temptations and, consequently, his limitations. He was, by this time, not in a position to restrain any one— not even himself. I could hear him, above stairs, laughing and stamping about in the very chamber in which Sir Tempest had lain dead. It had not even been arranged.

So about noon John Barnaby came into his mother's room, and Miss Anne turned to face him like a tigress defending her cubs.

‘Go away,’ she cried. ‘Have you not done enough harm that you must break our hearts as well? Do not dare to come near your mother. Remember what your dead father said to you. You have no business here!’

‘Oh, haven't I!’ cried John Barnaby, truculently. ‘I'll show you, miss, before I have done with, you. No right—I am Sir Tempest now—and all is mine— mine! Mine!’

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He laughed again that horrid grating laugh, with the ring of triumph, cruel, savage, mocking triumph in it.

'You know what my father did,' said Anne, 'and you know his reasons. Go away! You shall have double what my father promised, only go away— to leave us alone, my mother and me!'

John Barnaby laughed again, loud and long, till it ended in a hiccough—

'Oh,' he hooted, 'twice as much as the old man said— very good—very kind. Two hundred pounds to get rid of the only son and heir of all the Kilpatricks. Old man had his knife into me, eh, Anne? But I am a right Kilpatrick— I also 'mak siccar'— ha— ha— I 'mak siccar!'

'If you do not leave your mother alone,' cried Anne, now pale to the lips, 'I will send for the servants and have you put out!'

John Barnaby wagged his head with drunken gravity.

'No— no, you can't indeed, Anne,' he said; 'they must all go— lock, stock, and barrel! Fine new factor and all, Anne! Faith, I'll make a clean sweep! All of them been cheating the old man! They won't cheat me. They are not sharp enough for me—for Jim and Spronk and me. I'm master now, my Lady Anne, and I'll see to it that you marry Jim Scudamore, my new man of business! Or, by Heaven, you shan't have as much as will buy you glove-buttons, my pretty maid! And as to you— you

must go!' he shouted the last words, turning upon me with sudden fury. 'I owe you something!'

Anne commanded herself with a great effort. Her mother sat still in her chair, her handkerchief dry and folded in her hands, her eyes wide open as if stricken with a shock.

'You know, as well as I,' Anne said, trying to argue with her brother, 'that my father, for what you did, made another will, and left you only a certain sum. But after all you are my brother, and I would not be hard—in spite of the will.'

John Barnaby flapped his arms against his side and crowed like a cock, jumping on tiptoe as he did so.

'The will—' he cried, 'the will!—Ah, it is a great thing, a fine thing, the will! But find it—ah, find it. Produce it, Miss Anne!—Good, kind sister—produce it! Only till you do, pray remember—keep it in the background of your mind, that one Sir Tempest John Barnaby Kilpatrick, Baronet— that's me—is the owner of everything. What is the law you swear by? Jim knows the law, I bet! He told me all about it—good fellow Jim. See here— you marry Jim, Anne, and I'll let bygones be bygones! Honour, I will! Mother there too—good old sort, mother. I always said so. Have a drink, both of you! It will do you both good. Rather sudden, I know. Beastly thing— one minute—dependent on her 'ated rival the next!—

but you'll get over it, Anne — you'll get over it! Jim said I was to break it to you carefully— well, I have!

His voice, hitherto maintained in a kind of rollicking, rough good-fellowship, in spite of or because of his liquor, suddenly mounted some octaves into a discordant shriek as he turned upon me a second time.

'But you must go—d'ye hear me?' he cried; 'I won't have you about the place. Miss Pry! Jim will pay you your money and you can tramp! That's all I can do for you. You have been too long at Grennoch, anyway. I am going to cut down ten thousand pounds worth of wood, and I'll need your father. If he will be decent, he will find me decent—oh, blessedly decent. Nothing to complain of in Tempest John Barnaby Kilpatrick, twenty-second of that line and eleventh Baronet! Let him do his duty— your father—cut down the trees, get the money for me—but not pry! That's all I ask of him! Where are you going, Anne? You let mother alone! I want to speak to mother!'

But Miss Anne pushed furiously past him, carrying her mother along with her to her room, and I was left alone with the new Baronet. When the last swing of Anne's skirts was lost in the corridor, and the upper doors clashed behind her, John Barnaby threw himself back on the chair which had been his father's and laughed his horrid mocking laugh.

'Spronk,' he called between the peals, 'oh, Spronk!'

As quickly as I could I turned to follow Anne, but there in the doorway, balancing himself precariously with a hand on either lintel, stood the ex-prize-fighter.

'You call me?' he stammered thickly. His eyes were red and injected, and his breath came in wheezing puffs as from a pot when the steam begins to lift the lid. My retreat was cut off. John Barnaby, who had apparently forgotten me, cried out, 'It's all right, Spronk. I've frightened them. Anne is a little devil, but I'm Beelzebub, the prince of devils. No fear of Tempest J. B., Bart.! He can tame 'em! Anne will marry Jim right enough! My mother can stay on here—if she stops in her room, that is. If not, she can go to Ravensnuik. I'll cut down ten thousand pounds worth of wood. The girl at the lodge is prettier than ever. I wrote to her this morning, and she will be fond of me quick enough—fonder than ever—rich now—Baronet now, you see, Spronk!'

'Ay, and what about me, master?' said Spronk from the doorway. He was, I think, afraid to come further lest he should fall.

'Oh, you—you can have the old lady, if you like,' he said; 'better get waterproofs, though. She'll cry all over you. But she will keep you in socks and mittens, Spronk. Loads of socks, Spronk—chestfuls of mittens—bales and wagon-loads of socks. You'll be a rich man, Spronk—in the hosiery line—ever so

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much better than being a broken down 'pug', eh, Spronk!

'You give me the money as you promised!' interjected Spronk, with a perfectly audible curse at his patron for not keeping to the subject.

'You give me the money you promised, Master John,' he said, 'and I will find the girl for myself—never fear. Ah, missy,' he cried, suddenly turning his red eyes on me (up to this time they had both been strangely oblivious of my presence)—'Why, here you are! Just the very girl!— pretty, dark, with a spice of the devil— just my sort. Where did you come from, missy?'

John Barnaby looked at me malevolently.

'As you say— just the thing for you, Spronk!' he cried. 'I'll give you an extra hundred if you take her away— you are the man to tame her. 'Spice of the devil,' indeed!— her name is Legion, I warn you. All is correct, Spronk— the money, and the estate, the old lady's money, too—Anne for Jim Scudamore— this imp of sin for you—only take her out of the way! And after that - the other for me—eh, ha, ha, we have got it pretty well right, eh? We didn't think that all this would come to pass so soon, you and I, did we, when the old man pinched us about the thousand I got by only writing my own name on a piece of stamped paper, eh, Spronk?'

But Spronk was not listening. He was advancing towards me with his arms outspread, smiling. I have had some nightmares— monster

ogre, Rawhead-and-Bloody-bones out of the fairy-book— but there was never anything dreamed in dreams, written in ink, or drawn on paper one half so disgusting as Spronk's smile.

'Catch her— tame her, oh, the besom!' cried John Barnaby, who had selected his vocabulary from all parts; 'here, I will help you, Spronk! Tally-ho, there!'

As they narrowed in on me from both sides of the great apartment I began to feel as if in a horrid dream. The same dreadful knowledge came upon me—a certainty that at a certain point I should lose all power and drop nerveless into their clutches. But as I passed the fireplace something of inherited instinct, or skill, transmitted from my father, came to me. I was near the fender, and reaching down my hand I seized the poker as if it had been a bill-hook. Then I waited till I was near enough to deliver the right and left which my father used in what he calls 'scutching hedges.' John Barnaby went down laughing, hut his elbow joint would serve to remind him of his 'Tally-ho' for some few days. My back-hander to the right took Spronk on the thickness of his skull just above his ear. He stood swaying, his arms all abroad. As he did so I darted under his arm, as if I had been playing a game of prisoners' base. And as I ran down the stair, I heard the sound of a heavy fall. But I did not trouble myself about that matter.

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To shake off my fear before venturing out, I went directly to the kitchen. The servants were gathered there consulting. They had heard nothing of what had gone on above.

‘Oh, miss,’ said Rogers, the butler, a respectable man, ‘tell us what this will mean to us? Is it true that, after all, he is to be the master?’

I told them that that was far beyond me to say. ‘But we was given to understand different, miss,’ said Rogers; ‘it was as good as give out that Miss Anne was the heiress—Sir Tempest as good as said so himself!’

But I could not help them. I had no information. And they on their part could only tell me that Miss Anne had had her mare saddled quickly, and had gone off to Cairn Edward—they thought to send a telegraph message. Meantime, her mother was locked in her chamber and Miss Anne had the key. She would be back soon, she had said.

As John Barnaby was my mistress's brother and the son of my benefactor, I said nothing to any of the servants concerning what had occurred in the drawing-room —(only privately to Rogers) I whispered that I thought it might be as well to lose the key of the cellar.

‘You take it, miss!’ said Rogers, tendering it instantly, ‘and then I can say with a good conscience that I don't know where it is. Not that it matters. I would lie any day for the honour of the house, such

being my duty. But, you see, miss, he might order that fellow with the ugly mug to search me.'

'Well,' said I, going out of the back door, 'you can say to Miss Anne when she comes back that I am down at my father's cottage!'

'Oh, Miss Clemmy,' cried the cook, a great lusty woman with arms like rolling pins, 'dinna forsake us! We canna be doin' withoot ye—wi' siccan awesome fowk in the hoose— waur nor a when Hielantmen!'

'I will come back as soon as I can,' I replied soothingly; 'in the meantime, if there is any ringing of the bells above, go up two of you at a time. It will not be long before Miss Anne returns, and then we will decide what is to be done. Now I must go—I have something to say to my father!'

It was a clear afternoon in late September, with a netted haze of high wind-clouds infinite in the lift above, as if some solar spider had spun his silver gossamer about the world. I looked all round. There was no one anywhere at the back of the house— no one in the woodland path that led to the cottage. Nevertheless, a strange swift terror gripped me. I took my skirts in one hand and sped away as fast as my feet would carry me.

Half way home I heard something move in the undergrowth. It sounded like a man's footstep. With a quick cry of alarm I leaped aside with a single spring—for then I was built like a wild goat— and,

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barring petticoats, could 'lowp dykes' like one too. Never had my nerves been so unstrung as at the sight of these two drunken beasts closing in upon me.

But I heard a voice behind me, clear and quiet, calling my name. I looked over my shoulder, though without stopping my flight. And, through the mist of leaves, I could see that it was Dan Weir who stood there in the open glade.

I went back. He, if any one, had a right to know all I could tell him. I told him. A drunkard in possession of the Great House of Grennoch, half mad, assisted by a prize-fighter in the same condition—Lady Kilpatrick locked in her room—the servants terrified out of their lives—Miss Anne gone to town with a telegram. Such was my hasty summary.

I could see his face growing firmer and harder as I spoke. He squared his shoulders and drooped his body a little, as if he had been about to receive the assault of an adversary. It came upon me that instead of Mr. Daniel Weir, factor for the late Sir Tempest Kilpatrick, I saw before me Young Dan, the son of old Dan of Venturefair, cattle dealer and famous Man of Battles.

'I will go down there!' he said. 'I will wait for Miss Anne's return.'

Furthermore I thought it right I should tell him that there seemed to be a difficulty about the will—that it was now by no means so certain that Miss

Anne would succeed to the property. I told him also of John Barnaby's threats against himself, and added that Scudamore was, according to the new Baronet's present intent, to have the reversion of his offices and emoluments.

The young man seemed scarcely conscious of what I was saying.

'Her brother so swears,' I added, 'that if Anne does not marry Mr. Scudamore he will have her put out on the road— without a penny!'

Dan Weir sucked in his breath fiercely.

'Marry Scudamore,' he growled between his teeth, 'the Drucken W. S. No!' he said. Then after a long pause he repeated the same monosyllable, in a louder tone, 'No.' But I think, nevertheless, that his face brightened at the thought of Miss Anne's destitution. I knew why.

But Mr. Daniel Weir said nothing of what his own ultimate intentions were.

'Shall I convey you to the cottage?' he asked merely. 'No! Well, then, I will go to the Grennoch and see all safe till Miss Anne returns!'

So he went up to the house, and I to my father's cottage. I entered. Don McTaggart sat in the chimney comer in his old oak chair, polished by a thousand rubbings, sedentary and domestic.

Thomas Boston's 'Fourfold State' was on his knee— the Bible at his elbow, its rough calf-skin cover unopened. The bill-hook, which was his

inseparable companion, stood against the wall, the blade hidden in the crescent of rough yellow leather which he himself had made for it.

He merely lifted his head when I went in. I could hear my mother rattling among her pots and pans. But this she always did, and when my father called her a 'Martha,' she had her answer ready for him. 'Work is better than sleep,' she would say, 'and moreover, Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, at His coming, shall find watching!'

'Where is Bess?' I asked at once before I sat down.

'Outbye!' said my father briefly. He was tracing some line of thought.

'Bring her in!' said I— not that I usually order my father, but because that was the way we MacTaggarts spoke the one to the other— also because my father's voice, tuned to the spaces of the woods and the glens, reached ten tunes farther than mine would have done. So indeed he understood it. For he moved to the door, and called my sister loudly.

In a minute or two Bess came in, a little sullen, but with something on her face I had never seen there before —something very like concealed triumph. This touched me so nearly that I could not bear to look at her, and think on that drunken lout up at the House of Grennoch.

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'Who wants me?' she said. 'Oh, you are there, Clemmy! Well, I see you often enough. I need not have been called in for that.'

'Yes, there is need,' said I, 'great need. You had better sit down, Bess!'

And with my father seated in his great chair, nursing his 'Boston,' and elbow on the Bible, and my mother sitting by with her hands wrapped in her apron, I told the tale of John Barnaby and his allies Scudamore and Spronk.

My father groaned aloud when I spoke of the ten thousand pounds to be hewn out of the woods of Grennoch.

'Never—' he cried, 'never will I lay axe to it! I will break stones on the road first! Mair nor that, there is never ten thousand pounds worth of timber on the hale estate— no, not if he were to hew down every stick—ash-plant and thorn-buss! But the Lord will hew him doon first!— Yea the eye that mocketh at his father and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out.'

My father was silent for a while after this, like one in a vision.

'I see it,' he said, 'a long, long loch, and the water deep. The eye that mocked at his father—open but without knowledge—and—the ravens of the valley assembled to pyke it oot!'

Bess broke in here. Her toes had been tapping the floor impatiently for some time.

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'If that is all,' she said, 'I don't think it concerns me! I am going!'

'Sit down,' I bade her, somewhat fiercely. 'I fear it will concern you before I have done!' And so I told to my father and mother (all the time keeping between my sister Bess and the door) what had taken place that morning—the disgrace of the drunken prodigal, the scene with him and his henchman in the drawing-room. The right and left I had struck—the huddling fear of the servants—the absence of Miss Anne—the curse that had fallen so swift and complete upon the happy House of Grennoch.

Bess waxed steadily more unmanageable as she listened.

'All that has nothing whatever to do with me—if so be you mean it for me!' she said. 'You are always making trouble, Clementina. I suppose you think yourself better because Miss Anne takes notice of you!'

I turned upon her at the word, for I knew I had the mastery.

'Show us the letter you received this morning' I said suddenly.

'What letter?' said Bess, more sullenly than ever.

I had noted the position of her hand. She had it in her side pocket. 'That letter!' I cried, snatching her wrist suddenly upwards. The letter she had been holding in her hand jerked out. It fell on the floor.

Bess precipitated herself after it. But with the woodman's silent readiness, my father had set his foot upon it.

'Stand up, Elizabeth!' he said. 'I must enter into this matter. It concerns me!'

Bess stood up slowly, and as she did so, she gave me a look which told me that I had lost my sister—lost her, perhaps, and saved her at the same time. My father stooped to pick up the letter. Then adjusting his silver-rimmed spectacles, which lay on the broadside of the great Bible at his hand, he read aloud the document, gravely and without emotion.

'Dear Bessee' (wrote the new Baronet)—'I have made all right, and would come to see you at once—only it is better not, and indeed I am not feeling very well after the anxiety. But I want you to be ready and will send you money by Spronk for anything you may need. Thursday, I think, it will be, before I shall leave here. But this time not without my dearest Bessie, who stood up for me when every one else was against me. Now let them look out. I have got them down and mean to keep them so. Though I am sending you the money, it is only to keep in your pocket. There is no need to bring anything whatever, as we shall be married at once in Edinburgh. Jim Scudamore is seeing to the arrangements. He is going to marry my sister Anne, and we shall all be happy. If Anne will not have him, the worse for her. I will not give her a farthing. Make no difference, but

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go on with your work till Thursday night—when you can come to the heather gate about seven o'clock. Spronk, whom you can trust, will be waiting with a gig. Above all, say nothing to your sister. All will be provided for, my darling little wife, of whom I am longing to take care. I have kept all my promises for your sake— They would tell you tales about my laughing at the funeral. But I was not in drink. Only it was so funny—all of them were thinking that I was the Prodigal Son cut off with a shilling, and I knowing that the Prodigal was going to turn every man Jack of them out. I will not turn away your father, though— that is, if you can make him agree to help me, and get me money, as doubtless you can.

I bid you good-bye till Thursday, then. Don't be afraid of Spronk. He is an ugly fellow, but trustworthy. I pay him well to be so. 'Your true lover, Tempest John Babnaby Kilpatrick.'

My father slowly took off the silver-rimmed glasses, wiped them, and laid them down again on the great Bible. For a while he did not speak, but stood with his eyes on the handkerchief with which he had rubbed the spectacles. I remember it was dark blue with white spots, a common pattern but of a silken material, which I had bought him. Bess stood with eyes like burning coal— defiant, fierce, yet for all that handsomer than I had ever seen her. I declare I would not have known her, actually, for any kin of mine.

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‘It is all Clementina's fault,’ she cried; ‘she is jealous that I am to be my Lady, while she cannot even entrap a beggarly land-surveyor!’

I had looked for anger, and even something darker upon my father's face. But I was not prepared for what I did see—which was only great pity and a firm softness of resolve. I was afraid, first of all, that he had been taken in, as Bess had been, by John Barnaby's lying promises. But the young man had spread his honey too thick.

‘My bairn,’ said my father, laying his hand upon Bess's shoulder (who winced from the touch as if afraid he had been going to hurt her), ‘my bairn, twenty years have ye been a guid dochter to me and to this your mother. Will you forsake us for a prodigal, the wreck of a good man's son, wha has brocht his faither's grey hairs.’

‘He did not,’ cried Bess; ‘I tell you they were all against him— his father, his mother, his sister worse than all—only I believed in him—only I could help him! Yes, and I would though he had been turned from the door, not once but twenty times. And now, when he has come to his ain, he will do for me that which he promised.’

‘Ay, but will he?’ cried my father. ‘Ye think sae— my bairn, oh, my puir misguided bairn!’

‘I would believe him before any on God's earth!’ said Bess. And I admit that she looked fine as she

said it. Ah, if only the object had been more worthy of such a saying!

My father shook his head slowly. Then, looking up, he turned his eyes towards the bill-hook— his terrible weapon, nearly double the size of that which any other man could wield. 'At first I had thought,' he murmured, half to himself, 'I had thought—I hold it not wrong— even to shed blood in a righteous cause—even to take vengeance like to that notable slaying of Ephraim, when all day there was heard a crying of 'Sibboleth'— 'Sib-boleth'— by the passages of Jordan! Had the man done wrang to my bairn— by Him that rides forth by His name Jah I wad hae thocht nae ill to have hagged aff his head before the Lord with that bill-huik! But now, bairn, hearken ye to me. It may be that ye are in the grips o' that which is ower strong for ye. There are siccan things. Donald MacTaggart is nane that auld that he has forgotten. So, then, it behooves us that we save ye even frae yersel!' Gang ben there.'

He pointed with his finger to the little chamber which my mother and he had occupied ever since I could remember.

'There will ye abide, Elizabeth,' he said, 'till I shall have given in my demission to the unworthy son of the worthy father. Think it no shame that your father puts upon you. None shall know of it, save us four alone— one family on the earth and I trust also up yonder! We but save you from yourself! And I would to God that once and again there had

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been some one to do as much for me, your father, according to the flesh!’

Bess went in slowly as she was bidden, but on the threshold she turned.

‘I suppose I can have my letter now,’ she said, heavily.

‘No,’ said my father, with his first touch of anger at the girl’s obduracy; ‘I will take it myself to this— this man without honour— this Cain.’

‘I dare you to miscaa’ him!’ cried Bess, clenching her fists. And I declare for the moment I thought she would have flown at my father’s throat.

But to my astonishment Donald MacTaggart was not angered.

‘Elizabeth,’ he said quietly, ‘I call upon you to consider. If this man were honourable as you say, and wished you well, where is the reason why he should not do this thing openly and not in a corner? I, your father, am here. There sits your mother. But in one day he has insulted your sister, passed us over, and sent you— this invitation to flee your father’s house secretly by night!’

‘Give me my letter!’ said Bess, deaf to all argument or entreaty; ‘he could not be married openly because of his father’s being so lately dead. He says so, and I believe him. It is Clemmy there, and that Miss Anne of hers, who has done it all through jealousy. But he will put them both to the door—and, what is more, I shall be glad of it!’

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My father pointed silently to the chair by the window in the little brown bedroom.

'I myself will bring you what food you need. For the rest your mother will attend to you. You are her youngest, and to her but a bairn! You can have what books or work you want!'

'I want neither—I want my letter—cowards, thieves! Pah —I hate you all!' she cried.

She stamped her foot at me. Her hair escaped from its fastening, falling in a thick mass about her shoulders. Her eyes were dark and full, her lips red, her whole figure seemingly enlarged, and even— yes, I will say it—ennobled by anger—a strange, a very strange thing to see!

My father shut and locked the door. Then he put the key in his pocket and went out. Now, in all books I had ever read (and I had read many), my sympathies had always been with the maiden imprisoned for love's sake. But now I only wanted to slap Bess, and to make sure that the window was safe. But there was no fear on that score. The house in which we lived was a remnant of the old days of the sheriffs hereditary jurisdiction. It had been used in more recent times as a place of occasional confinement for poachers, pending their removal to the safety of the county gaol. The bars let into the wall outside were therefore amply sufficient for Bess.

My father evidently thought so, for he went out, fearlessly. He took no bill-hook, so I knew that he was not going to his work. But the letter— Bess's

letter for which she had pled so hard, was in his hand, neatly folded, in form like his monthly saw-mill accounts.

‘Where are you going, father?’ I asked. For indeed I was concerned for him.

He stood, tall and straight as ever, and for all his seventy years, the letter in his hand did not shake. He answered me in these words. I minded them long.

‘Even as did Hezekiah with the letter of Sennacherib, King of Assyria, which caused all the folk to tremble, and made even his own heart afraid, so will I do with the letter of this wicked man who hath been permitted to afflict us so sorely—I go to spread it before the Lord!’

And so saying he disappeared into the wood, where in a deep thicket, far retired, in a Holy of Holies of leaves and tall pine stems, who shall doubt that Donald MacTaggart saw The Light shine from between the Cherubim.

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

CONCERNING—THE REIGN OF MISRULE

John Barnaby a compound of King Log and King Stork, reigned in his father's stead, and many were the groans of the suffering people.

Miss Anne's use of the new device of the telegraph had only produced from Edinburgh a thin, lantern-jawed, melancholious young man—the McMath Junior of the great old firm of Messrs. Scudamore, McMath & Scudamore, Writers to the Signet. Now 'W. S.'-ing in Edinburgh, says one of its most amiable practitioners, 'produces a hungry look.' This is the effect of competition and consequent low diet. Strictly speaking, 'advocating' ought to do the like, but the effort to look pleasant, continued for some decades, issues in a certain wintry flicker of humour, like the ghost of a smile struggling not to be blown away by the east wind.

Mr. McMath Junior was received in the little parlour which Anne had chosen for herself and her mother, because upon occasion it could be completely isolated from the enemy's country. By this time I was back with Miss Anne again. For I had left Bess in stronger hands than mine. I found that Spronk and his friend had kept to their trenches ever since my departure. They had, however, almost

driven Rogers out of his mind by forcing the cellar door with a crowbar and a certain weapon of French manufacture, which Spronk said he kept for opening packing-cases. The name of this pleasant tool was 'pince-monseigneur.'

Mr. McMath began by informing Anne and her mother in a melancholy voice that the firm of Scudamore, McMath & Scudamore had no will of Sir Tempest Kilpatrick's in their safes. They were, however, doing all that was necessary, in connection with the Crown officials, to bring matters to a good and speedy issue—so that the succession of the new Baronet should not be in the least impeded.

'But,' broke in Miss Anne, 'Sir Tempest went up to Edinburgh only a few months ago in order to make quite new arrangements. Did not your firm draw out a new will for him then?'

Mr. McMath shook his head, pensively and a little reproachfully.

I wish indeed, for your sake. Miss Anne, that I could tell you that we did. But on that occasion Sir Tempest, breaking the custom of years—I may almost say of generations, did not honour us with his entire confidence. We were, to a certain extent, prepared for this. Sir Tempest not unnaturally supposed (quite erroneously) that a gentleman, still at least nominally a member of the firm, would have to be made privy to the matter. Indeed, I may admit to you that he discussed the business of the

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proposed will with my father. I have his authority for telling you as much. But it was not we who drew up the will— though I understand that Sir Tempest, on the very day that he left town, deposited a roll of papers at the office of our firm. At least, that is the impression of the clerk in charge. This, however, to our great regret, cannot now be found.’

‘Then you are responsible for their safe keeping,’ said Miss Anne.

‘Certainly,’ said Mr. McMath, ‘that is, if there exists in your hands or in those of the natural heir a list of contents signed, sealed and delivered. But, on the occasion in question, Sir Tempest was in a great hurry. He would not, though pressed to do so, wait to see my father, who had not yet arrived at the office.’

‘I take it, then, that this package has disappeared!’ said Miss Anne; ‘may I ask under what circumstances?’

Mr. McMath became visibly perturbed. He shifted his legs about and stared hard at the pattern on the carpet.

‘We do not exactly know the circumstances,’ he said, ‘anxious as we naturally are to arrive at the truth. Sir Tempest came in in a hurry, as I say. He left the packet with our senior clerk—a man of the utmost probity, with directions to deliver it to a member of the firm. Then the first member of the firm to come in naturally enough opened the packet in order to see that there was no message needing

immediate attention. But there was nothing in the roll except some papers and deeds concerning certain of the Ravensnuik farms upon which new steadings were to be erected. These are now in our possession. The supposed will was not at any time seen, either by our chief clerk or by the member of the firm to whom the package was handed over.'

'What member of your firm opened the packet?' queried Miss Anne.

Before answering, young Mr. McMath sucked in both cheeks as if he felt a sudden twinge of toothache.

'Mr. James Scudamore!' he said as if reluctantly.

Miu Anne's face grew very white, and upon this matter she asked no further questions.

There was an oppressive silence, broken at last by the hiwyer. 'Of course, my Lady,' he said, addressing Anne's mother, 'your portion as the widow of our late client is intact—and the income accruing therefrom wholly at your own disposal.'

'Ah,' fluttered Lady Kilpatrick, suddenly joining in the conversation which Anne had conducted up to this point, 'then there is no need to be so very particular. I always said that John Barnaby would turn out right after all—when once he had sown his wild oats. He was a good obedient child when he was in long clothes—and so pretty. And then if there is

my portion— is not that enough for us to live on, Anne? What do you say, sir?’

As she spoke she turned to Mr. Patrick McMath for confirmation.

‘With economy!’ said that correct young man, still interested in the pattern of the carpet.

The door had been left unlocked. It is difficult to kidnap a lawyer by locking the door upon him as soon as he enters the room. By the very nature of his profession he is suspicious, and his mind instantly begins to search for precedents. It finds them too— from Sawny Bean and Rob Roy to the Gowrie conspiracy and the pot of gold which King Jamie Baggy-breeches rode so far to find.

John Barnaby, therefore, made irruption into this consultation without difficulty.

‘Hullo, McMath!’ he cried, ‘you here? How is Goldilocks and the poodle? Have you found the will?’

‘I do not know to what you refer,’ said the young man. But, nevertheless, something made him blush hotly and the carpet became more interesting than ever.

‘Oh, the will— not the poodle and— the Other,’ cried John Barnaby. ‘The will, I mean! I know what you are here for. Anne sent for you! Am I cut off with a shilling? If I am, you will have to share your shillings with me, old man. I know too much!’

The flush faded from the young man's face at the covert threat, and the hungry, parchmentsy look

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returned. For a moment young Mr. McMath had been a man. He was once more a lawyer.

‘Sir Tempest,’ he said with dignity, ‘I am here at the request of the family— at your mother’s request, to explain the circumstances,’

‘Oh, yes, I know— under which the will was lost,’ cried John Barnaby; ‘the will that was to turn me out on the world with a beggarly hundred a year, paid quarterly. Well?’

‘I have just informed her Ladyship that no will whatever is in our possession,’ said Mr. McMath, ‘nor ever has been!’

‘Then,’ cried John Barnaby, ‘I may take it that I am master here!’

Mr. McMath bowed in a non-committal way.

‘So far as I know,’ he said, ‘you are in possession of the usual rights which belong to the eldest son of an unentailed estate.’

‘That is enough for me,’ said John Barnaby; ‘I shall know how to use them.’

The situation lost some of its brutality, if none of its acuteness, on the following morning, after Mr. McMath’s departure, when Jim Scudamore came down. Spronk met him by appointment at Cairn Edward, and on the journey to Grennoch he had evidently pumped the prizefighter dry. For his first act on his arrival was to proceed upstairs to the drawing-room, where John Barnaby had established himself. There, while drawing off his gloves, he read

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that young man such a lecture that he immediately evacuated all and whole of the front of the house, withdrawing to the East Wing, which was separated from the rest of the mansion by a curtain, a flight of stairs and a long corridor.

So from day to day we existed in the House of Grennoch as in an entrenched camp—the East Wing and the South Front having little to say to each other, and saying that little suspiciously.

Miss Anne kept out of Scudamore's way, though from our windows we could often see him walking solitary across the lawn, or lingering with a downcast air in one of the many far-reaching vistas of the woods. Mr. Daniel Weir, not yet dismissed (or, at least, not accepting his dismissal), went about his work as usual. He had rigged up a camp bed in one of the attics at the home farm and dwelt there, having for furniture one chair, a wooden table, and the strong box attached to his office. Dan Weir was resolved that when he was superseded his successor should find his house in order.

But the position was clearly untenable all round. And the first to see this was my father. 'A house divided against itself cannot stand,' he said. 'I am an old man. I have had a good wage all my life. We have spent but little. So I am in treaty for a house in the village, where we may settle for at least a time.'

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'But the village?' I asked, with a quick look at the inner door, within which Bess was still held prisoner.

He nodded, as one who would say, 'I have already thought of that.'

As indeed I might have known. For my father's thoughts went before, to make the ways plain for his feet.

'The house I have in my eye,' he said, 'is that which sits above the road with its back to the muir.'

'Below bridge?' I said, for I wanted the homelier atmosphere which prevailed there. And when he nodded, I added, 'Then, that is Captain Geddes's house—the one he built for his mother?'

'Yes,' said my father; 'Tom Geddes has done well. He has now got the command of a big sailing ship, and nothing will serve him but he must take his mother round the world. No, you did not know him—a good lump of a lad Tom. But he left hereabout before you were minding muckle except your dolls. It's a daftlike thing, but nothing else will serve him, and Marget (that's his mother) says that she will go—only on condition that he lets her see a whale. Marget's terrible set on seein' a whale!'

'Guid kens what for?' said my mother, who had come in; 'nesty blawin' swallowin' beasts. I wadna gang into the front yaird to see yin.'

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'No mother,' I answered, 'not unless it was chasing the chickens. Then you would go quickly enough.'

'Dear me,' cried my mother, startled, 'ye dinna mean to tell me that it might do that!'

'Well,' said my father, 'at any rate Marget Geddes is to go round the world with her son the Captain, and if he tells her that yonder is the verra whale that swallowed Jonah, Marget will believe him.'

Then he looked at the door which sheltered the rebel.

'It will be a matter of two year—or maybe three,' he said softly, cocking his eyebrows at me to see if I took the hint. I did. Bess had some slight chance of seeing foreign lands before she was very much older.

Now, at that time, of course, I had never seen the Captain. Nor did the good man know what a responsibility he was undertaking when he turned a not unwilling ear to his mother's statement that she did not want to be 'the only She-thing' on board that great four-poster o' a boat o' his,' and that she desired permission to bring with her as a companion— 'Donald MacTaggart's youngest lassie!'

Now men who have been long at sea count carefully the years they have been in command of a ship. They know day and date when they signed on as mate of the Polyanthus, when the Petrel was six weeks with a broken propeller in the Roaring

Forties. Thus they tell the grey hairs of their rough salt-water life, and know when grizzle and wrinkle arrived to them. They check their comrades' calendar with equal exactitude. But as to folk on shore, they do not expect them ever to grow older at all. After an absence of ten or fourteen years the Captain, I am sure, quite expected to find the same white-headed bairns puddling in the whinny gutter, the same awkward boys and tangle-headed girls trudging to the same school, the same cloths sticking in the broken window of Jock Maidmont's house (as to which last he had indeed some chance of not being disappointed). And so, when his mother wrote to him concerning 'Donald MacTaggart's youngest daughter,' he promptly ordered his mate, a big stalwart Clydebank man, to be sure to bring aboard some undressed dolls and swatches of pattern-cloth 'to be an employment for the bairn.' The Captain was, therefore, somewhat astonished when, at last, Bess was presented to him. The first mate also was, if possible, more astonished still. He instantly went and ordered some new clothes to be ready within twenty-four hours.

In the cottage at the corner of the wood my father had talked the matter over with Mr. Daniel Weir. Neither of them believed that they could stay. My father, so far as he was concerned, was sure of it. But naturally Dan Weir, anxious to remain near Miss Anne, looked at the matter in a somewhat

different light. He would hold on at Grennoch as long as he could, he said. He had not yet been able to see the new Baronet face to face. He would only take his discharge from him. After that he would turn over his books and cash to his successor in proper form. Till then it was his obvious duty—to stay as near as possible to Miss Anne.

The house servants went about in deadly fear, from Rogers and the plump-personed cook to the least of the boot-and-dog boys. They petitioned Dan Weir not to resign. Even the staid and circumspect Rogers offered to sleep in the pantry under the knifeboard, if only Dan Weir would come down and take his room in the Grennoch mansion house.

‘I tell ‘ee what, sir— ‘tis cruel,’ he exclaimed. ‘If it was not for Miss Anne the staff would resign in a body. For me, I would not stay a day, and cook she says the same. But Miss Anne is a lady, every inch of her. Ay—and I’ll tell ye, sir (here he dropped his voice), ‘there’ll be murder done—or worse—with the goings on that there is, if it is not put a stop to!’

‘But,’ said Mr. Weir, ‘I thought things were going better since Scudamore came down—the lawyer, you know!’

‘Well, ‘tis quieter, sir,’ said Rogers. ‘I’m not sayin’ but what ‘tis quieter, so far as the House is concerned, and Master John Barn—I mean young Sir Tempest. But that Spronk is a regular madman, that’s what ‘ee is, when he gets the drink. There’ll be murder done—or worse, Mr. Weir, as I tell ‘ee. That

there will. If so be you will not come down and sleep in my room. Why, I tell ye, sir, when one of the housemaids so much as breaks a plate, all the rest on 'em regular falls in a faint on the floor. It's wearin' on the staff, sir—that's what it is—it's wearin'!

Dan Weir, in the privacy of the garret of the home farm, tried some curious experiments. He did this after he had put himself through a double portion of his daily drill with dumb-bells and on the bars which he had rigged up for himself across two open beams. The experiments were connected with a swinging bag. They were conducted in silence, and Dan Weir made no remark till after half an hour. Then he said, 'This is all very well, but I wish I had just a couple of rounds with my father!'

That night the land-steward, though trembling on the verge of dismissal, stepped quietly down in the gloaming to the Great House of Grennoch. As he turned the East Wing, raucous cock-crowings, harsh laughs, the clash and jingle of broken glass informed him that the days were altered since the time when, not so long ago, the trim, erect figure of Sir Tempest might have been seen about the same hour, with a Testament in his hand, reading evening prayers to an attentive household.

As Dan Weir approached a figure was just losing itself in the shadows across the little bridge which spanned the dry grass-grown ditch of what had once been the moat of the original castle. Clean-

limbed, slightly stooping, graceful, Jim Scudamore moved off into the darkness— a fallen angel, truly— but by no means, even at that time, ‘the least-erected spirit that fell.’

A pang of something not jealousy, but rather a curious sort of anger, which needs to be somewhat delicately defined, swept over Dan Weir.

He could deserve her. Yes, in a way that was possible. At any rate, he could live and die for her. Now, this other was a bad man, and the companion of worse. Yet— there was a something about him which he had and Dan Weir of Venturefair could never attain to— something of which hardly death itself could deprive him. It was but a pang, and then the brave youth put the feeling aside. At all events, what he had to do was plain. He must protect Miss Anne. He must act as she bade him. He had prayed for the need to come, and here it was.

He might have been comforted had he known that in love and in the home (though not in society) it is the woman who takes the man's tone— not the woman who compels the man to take hers.

But Dan Weir did not know this, and he sat down disconsolately enough in Rogers' huge much-worn chair, sole derelict from a former dining-room suite, with a volume of Swift in his hand and a cup of coffee at his elbow. He declined alike the bottle of wine and the plate-chest blunderbuss, which the butler pressed upon him as the stated protector of the mansion.

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Just as he was composing himself to read, Rogers returned. 'Mr. Weir,' he said, 'if there should be any alarm during the night I shall be on the spot as soon as possible. And I will do my best to keep the women-folk from a-catchin' hold on you and sereamin'. They don't mean no harm, sir, by such-like. It's only when they are frightened-like, they forgets themselves and does it. But you might find it impedin! The fact is, they are all so terrified of that great brute, Spronk, him with the broken nose, they hardly knows what they're a-doin!'

'All right, Rogers,' said Dan Weir, quietly, over the edge of his book, 'tell the cook and the maids to keep to their rooms. I think they can be certain that they will be quite safe from Spronk or anybody else tonight.'

'Thank you, sir!' said Rogers, 'that will have a great effect on them— when they know you are downstairs. They have all heard about the bull!'

'What bull?' said Dan Weir, now genuinely astonished.

'Why, the Barbeth bull,' said Rogers, 'the one as you took by the horns and laid over on his back as easy as turning over a full barrow.'

The young man laughed.

'Well,' he said, 'this bull upstairs has no horns, but I think I can handle him all the same!'

'I should think you could, sir!' said the butler, with a glance of admiration at Dan Weir's physical

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development; 'begging your pardon, sir, but was you ever in the ring, sir?'

Dan moved uneasily, and the fingers of his left hand tapped the cover of 'The Tale of a Tub. '

'A ring,' he said, 'what sort of a ring?'

'Why,' said the butler, 'I don't mind tellin' ye that when I was in the North of England, afore I come here, I was more than a bit in with the fancy. Not that I put on the gloves myself, such not being my habit, but Lor' how I liked to see them stripped and peggin' at it. And a couple of years ago, when Sir Tempest— that was—took me with him to the Lothians, I see a young nipper of a fellow fight after Musselburgh races. I had a fiver on him, too. He favoured you a bit. And the way he went in at a fellow twice his size and thrashed his man in three rounds was worth going far to see. But, bless you, he could have done it with one hand. His father nursed him— a regular tough— you don't happen to know him —name of, let me see— I'll remember in a minute— a long name, something like Venables!'

'I think I must have been at college about that time,' said Dan Weir, hurriedly. 'Good-night, Rogers. No, thank you, no whiskey. I am going to read!'

Rogers went out, but at the back of the door he shook his head sagely. 'Read!' he said, 'bless the lad. I knowed him as soon as ever I set eyes on him. That's why I got him to come down. Why, if I could once see a proper set-to between him and that

broken-nosed foreign thief, I would put up a year's wages with any man— that I would.'

But even a butler cannot have all he wants, at the very moment he happens to want it, though 'it snoweth in his (master's) house of meat and drink.' The right of pit and gallows— that is, cellar and roasting-jack, does not extend to commanding feats of tourney and deeds of derring-do.

It was near the end of the third watch of the night when Dan Weir, with the best intention in the world as to improving his English, had grown a little sleepy and tired of the terrible Dean of Laracor and his polemic of vitriol, that the tumult in the East Wing began to hush itself. Perhaps, he ruminated, the revellers also were sleepy. Yet, if any plot had been hatched for the night, now was the time when they would carry it out. So much was certain. And the idea of three drunkards making irruption through a sleeping house, wherein (among others) lay my Lady Kilpatrick and her daughter, caused the muscles of the young land-steward's arms to draw slowly backward and forward under the smooth skin, like the pistons of an engine about to start.

He rose, stretched himself, yawned and looked out of the window. There was an old withered moon overhead— a leaden moon, like what the Captain once showed me through a telescope on Observatory Hill. It was for all the world like a turnip that the wintering sheep had eaten down to the frost-bitten

shell. I know, for, as it happened, I was looking at it too.

Behind him he heard a loud laugh and the sound of footsteps traversing the great staircase. Dan Weir drew himself erect. The air, sharply indrawn, whistled as his lungs suddenly filled. The railroad engine makes a sound like that when it throws down the white steam, hissing on the track before it moves.

Now then! Was it to be! Elation and a quiet, resolute hope dwelt in Young Dan Weir's bosom. Also he was conscious of that Scottish reliance in self, which knows beforehand that a man of a sturdy stock can make a possible best out of the most untoward circumstances.

The land-steward went to the door of the butler's pantry and looked out. After all, it might be some ordinary guest, troubled only with an itch for idiot adventure, which was sending him abroad at this time of the morning. Why wake an entire sleeping house for that?

So, with his hand on the baize-covered door, Dan Weir waited, as it were—on the pounce. Two men descended the stairs, Spronk, the ex-prize-fighter, came first. He carried a candle, dripping the grease as he went all over the stair carpet in a way that would have sent the real butler out of his mind if he had been at his pantry door. Followed him John Barnaby. The new master of Grennoch was very pale and went woodenly. His eyes were set in

his head, and his hair behind was still damp from the bucket of water which Spronk—who knew a few things about his trouble, had flung over him at the last moment, to surprise the blood back from the throbbing temples.

Spronk's pockets appeared to be stuffed—though with what Dan Weir could not make out. Behind the hall door the candle, stuck insufficiently in the grip of a candlestick much too small for it, toppled over, struck the floor and went out. The sour, stuffy air of night bore the sound of a curse from John Barnaby. But Spronk was nothing put out by the darkness. A man of his experience had no difficulty in entering or leaving a friend's house whether at midnight or midnight. He appeared simply to touch the great outer door, and lo! it flew noiselessly open. From his place of espial Dan Weir could see the dim greyish-green of the lawn borders and the slaty-purple of the gravel. The next moment the front door shut with a carefully modified click, and the two men went down the broad flight of steps which led from the house.

Dan Weir paused a moment, doubtfully, like a commander who takes counsel with himself whether it is wise to leave an enemy's force in his rear. No, he decided, at last. He had seen Scudamore leave the house, and he was certain that he had not returned.

The land-steward, reassured, passed out by the little side-door, of which Rogers had given him the

key—the same, indeed, by which the butler had admitted him into the House of Grennoch.

The two men were in front of him, walking steadily. Spronk appeared to be instilling into the mind of John Barnaby, willing enough for evil, but apparently for the present incapable of grasping details, how he was to proceed in certain eventualities. At last the prize-fighter, evidently not a man accustomed to the virtues of patience or self-control, took hold of his master and shook him vigorously, somewhat as you might shake the dirt off the roots of a turnip which you hold by the ‘shaws.’ This had a certain effect. Thus treated, John Barnaby seemed all at once to awake to a sense of the dangerous nature of the errand on which he was setting out.

‘Will she go quietly, think you?’ asked Spronk, when his superior appeared a little more able to answer him.

‘Go?’ spluttered John Barnaby; ‘you fool, did not I tell you that she would have run away with me herself, but that her father and her devil of a sister shut her up so that she could not see me? No doubt about the girl!’ he added, wagging his head complacently; ‘how could there be?’

‘No, indeed,’ snarled the prize-fighter, ‘as you say, how could there be—to look at you.’

‘I am a rich man, Spronk;’ by this time. John Barnaby was again maundering a little; ‘I have got

the title. I have the estates and the money, haven't I?'

'Ay!' said Spronk, with a curious thickening of the voice which struck a chill through Dan Weir, gliding silently behind them with the caution of a trained woodman; 'all true. Sir Tempest—only you will have to let me settle with Scudamore! He means mischief. He is so deucedly gentlemanly—gentlemanly!' He repeated the word with bitter scorn.

The path narrowed considerably at this point. Spronk pushed John Barnaby on before him, and the tracker in the bush behind, not three yards away, heard the prizefighter mutter to himself, 'And then he will have to settle with me.'

It was, I suppose, natural that when Dan Weir heard these two talking of a girl who was ready to run off with the Baronet, of a father and a sister holding that maiden in captivity, he should think of me, Clemmy MacTaggart, as the pining captive, and of my father and sister as my stern jailors. The Captain would have done just the same. I suppose in such things all men are like that — all, or nearly all. My father, however, not so.

Dan Weir argued somewhat thus. Clementina has been his sister's companion. Doubtless he has made love to her in the house— finding opportunity during his holidays. She is dazzled by the title. She

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thinks she can reform the wretch— and so on— according to the imagination of the hearts of girls.

Also to Dan Weir, with all his soul from the first moment of his coming to Grennoch, set on Miss Anne, my sister Bess was but a child.

From this point, however, I have no longer to depend on what I have been told. I saw— I heard— I was a part of these things.

Bess had set off that very day to Cairn Edward with my mother and Marget Geddes, the Captain's mother (only he was not the Captain to me then, nor for long after) to meet Tom Geddes himself. For Tom Geddes is what they called him then. Now, my father thought it better that Bess should be asked to make a pleasure excursion of it, undertaken for the sake of buying her a dress and other things of which she had need. Then Tom Geddes, having come to Cairn Edward for the purpose of escorting his mother, Marget was to give them all a cordial 'invite' to inspect her son's ship. My mother was never to lose Bess till she was safe on board the ship with its nose wet with the blue water. The scheme worked to a marvel. Bess was, of course, glad enough of the fresh air, and to see the shops, and all the fine things for which my father had drawn his purse-strings freely— pleased, too, I dare say, that when she ran away to be a Baronet's wife she should have something decent to stand up to be married in. Poor Bess! But though she did not know it, a much richer Bess with the little tug taking the big four-master

down the river for the long voyage round the Horn—and our mother half-a-mile astern with her kerchief to her eyes! Bess sat in the cabin looking at a big picture book in which Tom Geddes was showing Marget and her the very whale that had swallowed Jonah.

‘And will I see that same identical whale?’ demanded Marget Geddes of her truthful son.

‘The very whale!’ returned her son, gravely. (Ah, how can I believe him now?)

‘Aweel, Tam,’ said his mother, with a sigh and a long glance at the brightly coloured German plate; ‘they maun be lang-leeved brutes, thae whales!’

It was at this point that Bess, for the first time in her life, felt the curious balancing sensation of the unstable element, and ran hastily up on deck. And as she gazed over the widening waters at the little speck which held her mother, Bess understood for the first time that she too had an equal chance with Marget Geddes of seeing the whale, which a respectable sea-captain affirmed to be the very sea-beast of Tarshish that had swallowed the most vulgarly celebrated of the prophets.

Bess, as she now reports, did not spring overboard. That I can believe. She also denies having cried, but I know that she must— if only for anger at being tricked. At any rate, she was a Scots maiden, even if somewhat light as to the head. So presently she sat down and calmly reviewed the situation.

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After a quarter of an hour she rose, and going up to a very good-looking young man in a blue coat with brass buttons, who was walking to and fro with his eyes rigorously fixed on the weather and the man at the wheel, she asked him what was the first town at which this boat would stop.

‘San Francisco, miss,’ answered, very respectfully, he of the brass buttons.

Bess being thus provided for, and the room which she occupied in the throes of a thorough going-over (which I meant to achieve on the morrow), I bade my father continue to sleep in the spare-room, while I took Bess's bed for the night in the little chamber over the kitchen. Without I had heard the wind blow up into that curious single sough of Good-night, which it always says to the woods on the stillest evenings. For hours the owls had hooted ‘Cue-Cue’ near and far in the long mist-filled trough of the night. An inquisitive sparrow, doubtless some rake-of-the-night, had entered, clearing the bars, to tap at the window with its bill. Three taps and then a pause! Then all over again the same. The regularity was curious. It seemed to me that I had heard something like that before. I had it— a piece of whalebone and a button with a cord attached to the button. That was the secret. It was meant as a summons for Bess. Not that the knowledge came to me all at once. I suppose, on the contrary, that I was beginning to doze, but at any rate the meaning of the message was not to be

mistaken. 'Tick'tack' tack' it said . . . 'Tick-tack-toe.' For all the world as in a child's game. I went to the window and peeped. Yes, there were two figures underneath— two men, their heads and shoulders clear against the sky, the rest of them invisible in the deep gloom of the woods, which stood banded all about in a semicircle of intense velvety blackness.

I slipped back and dressed hastily. The taps came quicker as if those outside were growing impatient.

'Open just a moment!' I heard the voice whisper hoarsely through the glass. Something of Miss Anne's recklessness came to me.

'Play their games with my sister, would they? Carry their drunken riotings to my father's door?' Well, I would give them something to think about. I slipped back the catch, and knowing that entrance was wholly prevented by the bars without, I pushed the window a little up and stood aside. I was not afraid. It was like a game played on the village green, where chance and luck counted for something, but skill for more.

'Who is there?' I whispered.

The less burly of the two figures stepped across the grass to the window.

'All ready,' said John Barnaby's thick voice, 'as quick as you can, darling. Scudamore is at the outer road gate with the horses. Is old MacTaggart asleep? Will you come?'

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Yes, MacTaggart was asleep! I would come.

‘Quick, then! No time to waste!’

It was true—exceedingly true, in both cases. Old MacTaggart was asleep, but—old MacTaggart could be awaked. Also, I would come! Only, being a young girl and unprotected, I could not be expected to come quite alone. Old MacTaggart should come with me.

I slipped to my father's side. He lay on his back, and I could just see faintly the fine clear-cut outline of his face, and the dim whiteness which was the shirt sleeves covering his great arms. He had his hands clasped behind his head, thrown far back. So he slept always.

Outside the lodge, John Barnaby and his ally continued the siege. Doubtless they interpreted the silence within Bess's room to mean that she was making ready and would presently appear at the front door. Spronk and John Barnaby went about the house to be ready to receive the runaway's kit.

There was, as I have said before, a level plot of grass in front of our cottage door, whereon in the long ago I used to weave daisy-chains for Bess. The porch was of wood, my father's handiwork, and the roses and hops clambered abundantly over all.

John Barnaby and Spronk stood a little to the side, blotted out for the moment in the broad shadow. The worm-eaten old moon glimmered mistily down and made the grass grey and marled.

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I opened the door, and as I did so, John Barnaby (I will say that for him) stepped forward eagerly.

For what purpose of assistance to Bess or moral support to his master I cannot tell, but at the same moment Spronk stepped forward on the other side.

'Bess!' said John Barnaby, hoarsely, holding out his hands. But out of the porch, from between the columns, there stepped a figure, tall, bony, erect, the moon shining on long locks, crisped and grey. The two men stood a moment horrified, as it were, turned to stone. From my place I could see the broad blade of steel, curved like the moon's sickle, gleam with a flat, luminous sheen, dull and without reflections.

The Baronet and the prize-fighter found themselves face to face with 'the Man-of-the-Bill-hook,' and it is nothing to the discredit of their courage to say that they wished themselves elsewhere.

My father, who had hastily clad himself in his leathern woodman's breeches and thrust his feet into his old-fashioned latched shoes mechanically pulled tighter his broad black waist-belt of shining leather, and struck the haft of his bill-hook on the ground with a dull thud.

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'Stand your ground, gentlemen,' he said; 'you, young Sir Tempest, and you, sir, wi' the broken nose! It will be better. Stand still. Even so!'

The two men remained motionless. I think Spronk made a movement of his right hand towards his pocket, but my father brought down the shining blade of his billhook with a swift easy rush, checking the edge upon the prize-fighter's very wrist, upon which it lay like a silver crescent.

'Bide,' he said; 'keep your hands weel up, my man, or' ye micht happen to want ane o' them sewed on!'

The great fellow took the warning sullenly. There was for that time no further trouble with him.

'Now, sirs,' said my father, 'you have come to see me, I doubt not. The hour is an unusual one, it is true—as also your manner of approaching my house. Does Sir Tempest Kilpatrick of Grennoch—such as there now is—slip like a thief, under cloud of night, to the window of his father's lifelong servant? What would he steal, that thief? Donald MacTaggart's daughter—Donald MacTaggart's honour! Surely never! Ah, John Barnaby Kilpatrick—if you were not your father's son! As it is, go your way, man. The judgment of Nathan the prophet be upon you—go your way. Into the hand of God I give you. But hear this—my child is far beyond your harmful thought or your evil leading. And if I mistake not (God has given me to see many things), ere she returns the grass of a second spring

will be green above your head! Few and evil, few and evil shall be the days of him that mocked at the open grave of his father!’

Then he turned to Spronk yet more fiercely. Both his hands grasped the handle of his bill, inclining it slightly over his shoulder, as if he meant to cut through a thick tangle of branches. I judge that Spronk's neck was in some slight danger at that time, and that the wary eye of the old prize-fighter knew it. For very slightly he widened the distance between his feet, and balanced himself upon his hams like a man ready to dodge a blow.

‘No,’ said Donald MacTaggart, shortly; ‘you are noways worth it, either of you— there lies your road! Take it and go!’

So, shouldering his bill-hook, he turned back into the house, locking it behind him. And, before he put the shining blade into its leathern sheath, he took a handkerchief and carefully wiped the night-dew from it.

‘I thank the Lord who hath kept me from bloodshed,’ he said; ‘yestreen I dreamed a dream, and in it I saw the bill-hook red to the haft.’

CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

CONCERNING THE DAYS OF JOHN BARNABY

All the evil that befell Grennoch in these days of the lordship of John Barnaby, there is now little use in recalling, save by a word or two. No one of any respectability went near the house. But the countryside was filled with the report of the debaucheries of Sir Tempest's heir. More than once he had even been summoned before the justices of the peace, his peers in the county, over whom his father had lorded it so long in an unchallenged superiority.

The old servants had gone. Rogers was in treaty for that snug Northumbrian inn, whose door looks so hospitable as you descend by Craster Towers towards the eastern sea. My father and my mother were settled in Tom Geddes's house, while that stout sea captain, with his own mother and my dear foolish Bess to keep him company on board his ship, was ploughing the main and looking for Jonah's whale in the interests of filial affection and the grain trade.

My father wandered often among the ruined woods of Grennoch, which he had watched so long, nurtured, wet-nursed and dry-nursed, swaddled and bandaged, hand-fed and guided, that they might go in the right way— and in the end yield a

good yearly income to Sir Tempest. From Tom Geddes's back window (that at which I write) the Man-with-the-Bill-hook could hear the ring of the woodmen's axes coming to him from three directions at a time. His beloved trees were crashing down as fast as steel and muscle could bring them.

My father did not weep because of this. It was not his way. Instead he would lay his head upon the open page of his Bible and send up a prayer. Yet I doubt whether he prayed for long life and prosperity to be upon John Barnaby Kilpatrick, Baronet, of Grennoch and Ravensnuik.

For the present, Miss Anne abode with us in Tom Geddes's house. Here, at least, she could be safe, none daring to make her afraid, under the protection of old Donald MacTaggart, whose eye was not dim nor his natural strength abated. After many complaints and a thousand uncertainties Lady Kilpatrick had elected to abide by her son, for whom, indeed, she had developed a strange fancy. And to do him justice, even in his wildest carouses, John Barnaby had the care that nothing evil should come near his mother. For the rest, Jim Scudamore, before any outbreak of more than ordinary violence, locked my Lady's door and put the key in his pocket, leaving her alone in her own wing with the single old domestic who still cleaved to her.

A strange place was Grennoch House in these days, as those who had glimpses of it have told me

since. There to the right, near the little chapel, was the deep gloomy quiet of Sir Tempest's study, openly profaned by Spronk and his associates— the late Baronet's folios of governmental blue books, his set of the proceedings of the Royal Highland Society, his quartos upon High Farming and Deep Soil Ploughing gutted to make pipe-lights, or often thrown about in mere idle wantonness. A soiled white satin slipper stood on the mantelpiece between his sedate Dent's First Empire clock and his Cary barometer. It served at once as a souvenir and as a match box.

It was well that the little fiery man, Sir Tempest the elder, lay so quiet in his resting-grave— well, that is, for his son and heir. The old servants, save only my Lady's woman, having departed, crew after short-lived crew were imported from London, succeeding each other in new regimes of waste and thievishness. Every week or two Spronk would roll up his shirt-sleeves and clear them all out, by orders of his master. Then others as bad or worse would take their places, and the ancient hall of Grennoch be yet more and more the plague spot and open shame of all the county.

Even on Sabbath, sitting quiet in the kirk with the minister's voice above us, coming sedate and measured as the ticking of a clock, declaring the brief life of men and warning them to prepare for eternity, there would come the sound of horses galloping— then harsh cries and ribald laughter. The people would draw a little nearer to each other,

and my father half rise from his seat. One day a voice without, which I knew well for that of John Barnaby, tried to imitate the nasal twang of the precentor raising the tune. Curiously enough, of all others it was the first psalm that he chose, and the folk sitting quiet in their pews trembled as they listened to the old sacramental tune of Coleshill going up in mockery:

‘That man hath perfect blessedness Who walketh not astray In counsel of ungodly men Nor stands in sinners way.’

But the voice of the minister, pausing scarcely a moment, pierced the unholy laughter in the porch outside with these words, ‘Be not deceived . . . God is not mocked. . . . For whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap.’

Whereupon my father nodded and sat down. And I heard him mutter as he did so, ‘Behold I am against thee, saith the Lord of Hosts.’

From that moment I seemed to know the end. For when two men like Mr. McMachar, the Moderate, and my father, the stone-grit Calvinist, were agreed concerning anything, I have noticed that the thing had a way of coming to pass. So, as I sat in the little whitewashed kirk and heard the ribald shouting die away down the road to Grennoch, I judged that it would not be well with John Barnaby and his crew.

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During these days Jim Scudamore walked about much by himself. He it was that took the direction of the woodcutters, and for that I presume he had his part in my father's excommunications. His voice was not heard among the noisy gang which John Barnaby led athwart the summer ways, rending the silences of the woods, as on the Sabbath he had profaned that of the other sanctuary built with hands.

No, not the least erected spirit that fell, but devil-doomed and devil-driven all the same, the 'Drucken W. S.' faced mostly alone the hopelessness of his own case. He must die the drunkard's death. So much was plain. Neither wisdom of men, which he had, nor love of woman (which perhaps he might have had), hardly even the power of God, could now keep his feet from the pit which he had digged for himself. Yet in the doomed man's eyes there lurked at times a strange gleam, as if in the midst of the hopelessness he saw the hope of a way, of an outgate, of an issue not wholly unworthy.

The soul of James Scudamore was fighting its final battle. Hell, which yawned wide for him, might yet be cheated. Like a man who emerges from the gallery of a coal pit and sees far above him the day shining in at the top of the shaft, James Scudamore saw a light. And that light was his love for Miss Anne.

Sometimes we would see him standing, Anne and I, oftenest in the evening, his cloak wrapped

about him, on a little knoll behind the Captain's house. He would remain there for hours, perfectly motionless— like Satan regarding Paradise, as I, who in these days loved my Milton, used to say. But Miss Anne, who cared no more for Milton than for the man in the moon (indeed, less if the Moon Man should happen to be good-looking), only remarked, 'Nonsense, he can stop it if he likes. What is the use of going about, looking like the shadow of death, and never doing anything? Let him behave himself, and make John Barnaby behave. He can if he will! Any man can— that is, if he is a man!'

Which, no doubt, was good honest sense, but somehow did not quite meet Jim Scudamore's case, and, besides, in due time Miss Anne saw reason to change her mind. For one thing, I am sure that at this time Anne's heart was bitterly regretting her late father's new factor, dismissed some months ago by John Barnaby. She did not say so. She did not complain. She hid the pain even from me, and with Miss Anne that was the worst sign of all.

Curiously enough my father understood her better than I. I do not know whether or not she had made a confidant of the Man-with-the-Bill-hook. Most likely not— at least not in words. For, as I have said more than once. there was a curious sympathy between old Donald MacTaggart and Miss Anne. I never could understand my father as Miss Anne could, nor did he ever quite understand me. Perhaps

he did not take the trouble, or, more likely, I, being such a matter-of-fact person, with so few side-tracks and blind alleys in my character, did not require understanding.

Still, in some things, I saw more than they imagined. I knew, for instance, why my father would so often walk with us to the great pond, in which the waters slept deep and black, overhung by the tall ashes. It was because the little heather house there had been Dan Weir's last work upon the estate. Sir Tempest (the old Sir Tempest, of course) had always given the Whinny curlers the privilege of playing their game upon that pond. Undisturbed by feeding brook or draining sluice the water froze early and firmly, but they had long wanted a place in which to keep their 'channel-stanes.' So Sir Tempest had ordered Dan Weir to make one, to be ready for the winter. But at his departure the shavings were not yet swept from the floor and the marks of his ready pencil were on the beams. Indeed, a little book of tables, some sort of calculations (like my husband's Logarithms), was lying forgotten in the corner. Anne opened the window and dragged it nearer with the handle of her umbrella. Then she put in her hand and tried to fish for it. But I had to hold her by the feet, to keep her from going in head first, before she managed to secure it.

Then, still panting with her exertion, she said, 'We will send it to him!' But for all that, I knew well that Dan Weir stood a good chance of doing without

his book of calculations as to the amount of timber in standing trees, and the rate of foresters' wages. Because, you see among other things, we were still quite ignorant of Dan Weir's address.

It was about this time that Miss Anne first confided to me that she had met Dan Weir before—long before the madcap visit to Newhall—in the earliest days before even I knew her. And she told me the story of her visit during the thunderstorm to the sheiling of the Home Farm of Ravensnuik.

She had never spoken of it to Dan Weir, nor had he ever mentioned it to her. But all the same she was sure that he had not forgotten.

I asked her how she knew.

'It looked out of his eyes sometimes,' she said.

She had known that he knew and remembered, from the moment that she recognised Dan Weir in the person of her father's man of business in the woods of Grennoch, with the busy little chanticleer of a man tippeting and crowing beside him. Then it was that she had begun to be afraid. And not without cause. The slow patience which had brought Dan Weir so far might well take him farther.

'And do you not want him to go farther, Miss Anne?' I demanded, suspiciously. But that she would not tell me.

Curious walks they were which we took about this time, and now I can make the Captain laugh by telling of them. But I do not laugh much myself. My

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father carried his bill-hook, and there was a darkling threat in his eyes as often as we heard afar off—or sometimes near at hand— through the green dusk of the woodlands or across the open glades, the shoutings and choruses of John Barnaby's crew.

Once or twice Jim Scudamore crossed us, always alone, his eyes on the distance. He never looked at Miss Anne, or gave the slightest sign of recognition) but on the contrary went his way like a man sleepwalking, a man fighting with an ill dream, who desired to wake but could not.

Then, at a certain little bit of woodland, all scattered over with bark and littered with twigs, my father would sit him down on a stump, his bill laid across his shoulder, his look on the sky. Whereupon, leaving me to my knitting, Miss Anne would wander restlessly about, gazing always on the ground. Sometimes she sighed. Sometimes she stooped and lifted a yellow aromatic pine chip with a figure or two on it from among the pine-needles. If her search proved successful, she would slip behind a tree, and I dare say—but I have no right to say what Miss Anne did with that pine chip. As for me, I never saw it again. Only as Sir Tempest's late factor was always figuring, Anne must have acquired during these months enough good kindling wood to last Tom Geddes's house a full twelvemonth!

And of Dan Weir, what?

At college again? No, he was now too old for that, and, besides, had lost the liking. At home with

his father? That he had tried, but the little croft of Venturefair, the rough company, the noisy intrusion of neighbours, drove him out. So he went across to the Home Farm, and learning from the grievie that they wanted a herd at the old sheiling up on the hills, he offered himself, and was instantly accepted, and that with joy.

'But you are a big man noo—a 'factor' they tell me,' objected the honest foreman, who had heard of John Barnaby's doings, and feared his advent upon his Ravensnuik properties; 'what do ye want wi' a herd's job?'

Dan laughed and took John Roy the grievie by the arm.

'I want peace,' he said; 'peace to think and to read. Send me up my provender every Wednesday and Saturday, lend me a pony to carry up my books, and I will betake me back to the sheil—ay, and be thankful for the chance!'

'Ye maun come doon whiles and help me wi' my accounts then, Dan,' said John Roy; 'the figures are an awesome trouble to me. I wad rayther mow a wet meadow frae dawn to sunset ilka day o' the week than add up the shillings and pence!'

Thus after many years was Dan Weir once more installed in the little hill sheiling with the stone table to eat from, while for an assistant he had a son of Talla's (dead in a good old age) that had followed him from his father's croft of Venturfair. There was

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much to be done. It was the busy time with the ewes, and a backward year. Dan had his hands full, and it was a good thing.

He had a book always in his pocket, but I fear me his studies made but little progress. Even as he regarded it the page would become green. Across the marshalled lines of type would drift a vision of the woodland spaces of Grennoch, the liliated ponds, the deep pine shadows, and —the image of a girl who was— that is, who had been . . . much interested in botany.

He saw a lithe figure dance across the open sun-flecked spaces, between the low daisies and the tall fox-gloves. He heard the winds sigh lightly about her, and the murmur of the Grennoch Water over its pebbles near the stepping-stones. He saw her, if he let the day-dream take its course, stand high upon the great central stone, and waft him a kiss from her finger tips, daringly. She had once—only once, done that.

Then suddenly the crying of his ewes to their lambs would sound muffled and Sabbath-like in his ears. The younglings' shrill treble, the scuffling sound of the multitude of little black trotters, never all at rest at one time, the mother-call, trumpet clear, which sank into pleasurable content as the suckling, running headlong, sought and nosed the over-full udder—all these drowsed off into silence. And, lo! Dan Weir dreamed of that far-off time when in the great storm he had stood on that very hilltop,

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hand in hand with the girl of his boyish heart. Ay, there —even there, and nowhere else, by the door of the bothy, was the very stone which they had occupied together. He sat down and tried to imagine that little gold head, overrun with blowing ringlets, lying lightly upon his shoulder. It was a failure. Dan Weir was just as successful in calling up the past as the others have been who had tried the game.

Meanwhile, in the clearing by the heather house, my father gazed at the sky. I continued to knit at my stocking, pulling the thread mechanically out of my apron-pocket every half minute, while a score of yards away Miss Anne dreamed her dream over a pine chip which contained the following delightful and love-like sentiment: $v = 0.75\}$

$v = 0.85\} x x R^*H.$

CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

CONCERNING LILY ROOTS

Strangely enough, though Donald MacTaggart was cast down from his high estate, and the timber-merchant and the ruthless executioner reigned in his stead, the Man-with-the-Bill-hook went about the woodlands which he had ruled so long like a lord within his park wall. None said him nay. Only he kept wide of the quickly spreading areas of desolation, which his eyes could not bide to look upon. For the rest, he went as freely through the Grennoch grounds as ever he had done in old Sir Tempest's day. So that the village folk delighted to tell how, once meeting Donald MacTaggart face to face, John Barnaby had, with the old instinct of an often-chastised childhood, 'come off the grass' along the avenue edge, and motioned his troop to do the same. He even made the old man an awkward and shamefaced salutation, so that Don MacTaggart had strode through the gala of bedecking plumes and painted faces, his bill-hook over his shoulder, stern as old Time himself, or that other yet grimer reaper whose scythe is never rusty. And such was the awe of the old man's presence that the light laughter was smothered till the woodland paths had hidden him, when the riot burst out anew in scoff and question and insult.

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'A dismissed servant!' John Barnaby said in explanation.

'No,' corrected Jim Scudamore; 'no—not a dismissed servant—you dismissed that man because he was your master, and you knew it!'

The fame of John Barnaby's mad exploits went out far and wide. In his saner and haler youth he had possessed a certain sort of dare-devil agility, a liking for 'sport,' which had first led him into the circles which Spronk ornamented. So now to please the carrion brood which came from far and near to prey upon him and exploit the Kilpatrick estates, and in especial to win the mercenary applause of the womenkind they brought in their train, John Barnaby would attempt all manner of mad and foolish tricks. The country folk told how for a wager he had climbed to the topmost summit of the flag-staff of Grennoch and tied there a lady's kerchief; how on another occasion he had killed two horses riding to Drumfern within the hour, riding, they said, as if the furies were after him—which, indeed, was likely enough the case.

So far as we in the village were informed, Jim Scudamore took no part in these extravagances. He was not among the joyous rout that swept the summer woods and waked the echoes of the hills with choruses of city songs, or shouted tipsy toasts when the half-cowed, half-insolent house-servants

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spread the luncheon cloths in some summer glade or upon some pastoral bank.

At the same time, James Scudamore took no pains to stop anything. He it was who ordered the provisioning of the great undisciplined barracks which John Barnaby had made of Grennoch. He saw to it that the wine did not run out. He did nothing to curb the hideous waste which went on both in dining-room and servants' hall. He kept what order could be kept amongst that unruly pack of menials. There was something they could not put into words about James Scudamore, which made the boldest of them afraid.

'He would stick at nothing if you roused him,' they said. 'Look at his eye. A man might swing for you—with an eye like that!'

Yet all this he did with such a reckless hand that there were not wanting those who averred that Lawyer Scudamore was bleeding his friend to death, and that once drained to the white, the Drucken W. S.' would not be sorry to see his comrade in debauchery betake himself off to the shades.

But Jim Scudamore, whatever might be his wishes as to the duration of his friend's life, had no designs upon his money. As to that he was scrupulously honest. Afterwards, indeed, a statement of account to the uttermost farthing was discovered, and the record of payments was more instructive than improving. I have heard the Captain laughing over some of the items as reported to him

by an eye-witness, and I discovered then what strange things men laugh at—ay, even the best of them.

As to his pupil's future— who knows what was passing in the mind of James Scudamore? At least he was giving John Barnaby plenty of rope, and it is possible that some sense of belated loyalty towards the girl he had wronged made him not unwilling that John Barnaby should hang himself with it.

It was, as usual, chance that brought us some revelation of the state of mind of the 'Drucken W. S.' It was still early in the year— that is, for Scotland. The pastures were red and grey from the spring ploughing, and, doubtless, on his uplands away to the north Dan Weir was busy with his untimely lambs, amid the swirl of snow flurries and with the whistle of the easterly winds off the firth in his ears.

Since we came to live in the village, we all went often to the manse. Sometimes my father went with us, but oftener we two girls went alone— none thinking any ill. For Mr. McMachar was a kened man, and had lived all his life there. Besides, the heart of every man, woman and child, above bridge and below alike, beat kindly toward Miss Anne. Ordinary laws did not bind her. She might have dropped her Bible in the kirk and not a woman would ever have turned her head. I think she might even have smiled at a sacrament, and yet escaped having it made a session matter.

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So one night, over by eight of the clock— late March or early April it was, and with a chill in the air that took you by the nose on coming out of the warm manse parlour—Miss Anne and I were setting our faces, frost-nipped noses and all, in the direction of home— that is to say, of Tom Geddes's house.

The minister, honest man, was getting on his boots in the kitchen to see us on our way. It was so still that one could hear him puffing as he bent over to get the strings tied. For Mr. McMachar was none so slim as he had been when as a young probationer he had come to Whinny to preach his trials.

Mr. McMachar had insisted on accompanying us, bless him. He could not marry me— that was plain, for was I not an unhallowed wench not to be trusted with a duster in a decent book-lover's house? But for this he bore no malice. Probably he thought that, being a woman, I could not help it. At any rate, he would see me home, and Miss Anne with me. Indeed, Miss Anne it was who always took his arm, and I think (for even ministers are but men) that the good gentleman was not averse to the feeling of that little gloved hand a span above his wrist. I noticed that he did not put on his boots half so willingly when, in full winter, Anne had brought her muff to put both her hands in!

Well, this preparation ministerial being finished, we stepped briskly out, a grain or two of coarse snow, half hail, half sleet, whipping our

faces. Before us and beneath, the lights of the village burned redly in the rows of narrow windows. The smithy, ever a cheerful place, glowed like a lighthouse, and, besides the ruddy illumination, sent forth into the night the keen tingle of hammers falling on anvils— first thudding dull on the soft hot iron, then rmg-a-rmg-orrmg on the anvil to knock the flakes off the hammer face. Oh, Whinny was a pleasant place in these days, and is, indeed, unto this day. Though work is scarcer now, and the street is so still that the whole town turns out if a red farm cart rattles down with the driver sitting on the shafts.

We were walking three abreast. All the world may do as much in the long single street of Whinny, which is broad and wind-swept and solitary by day and night, year in and year out. At the corner of the well road, a figure stepped forward from the shade of the trees, tall, slightly bowed, and— yes, there is no other word—elegant— yes, even in the darkness elegant.

Jim Scudamore! I think all of us, except the minister, drew our breaths sharply in. I know I did.

‘Good-night to you, sir,’ said Mr. McMachar, fumbling in his coat-tails; ‘I have forgotten my glasses, and the night is so dark I declare I hardly ken to whom I have the honour of speaking.’

‘It does not matter, sir,’ said Scudamore, still barring our way. ‘I am a member of the firm of her

father's lawyers in Edinburgh—I have a word to say to Miss Anne Kilpatrick—that is, if it is her will, concerning something that she ought to know.'

'And from what I ken of Miss Anne,' said the minister, 'the young lady will be very willing to listen—the morn's morning!'

'But,' persisted Scudamore, 'tomorrow may be too late. I must speak to Miss Anne tonight!'

'Speak on then, my friend,' quoth the minister, nothing abashed or astonished; 'we are all of Miss Anne's faction here.'

'But,' the young man hesitated, 'I fear I must speak with the lady alone. It is a private matter.'

'It is after eight of the clock,' said Mr. McMachar; 'and it is my duty to convoy the twa young lasses to their beds. Besides whilk, sir, I have not the honour of your pairsonal acquaintance!'

But Miss Anne was curious, as in her position what young lass would not have been.

'If Mr. Scudamore and I were to walk on a little ahead,' she said, 'that would enable him to say what he has to say to me without difficulty—I presume something concerning my brother, or my mother. And you, sir, could follow with Clemmy.'

It seemed good to the excellent minister of the parish that it should be arranged so, and he and I accordingly lagged a little to let Miss Anne and Scudamore get out of earshot. Mr. McMachar was very particular about this—I not so very.

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As it was, however, thanks to these scruples, I could not hear anything at all, and there was Mr. McMachar nearly talking me deaf about the Council of Trent, while all the time I was lengthening my ears an inch every five minutes with trying to overhear Jim Scudamore and Miss Anne in private consultation as lawyer and client.

This, of course, was only the natural Eveishness of woman, because I knew well enough that Miss Anne could not possibly go to sleep without telling me all about it. And, indeed, so it turned out.

At the door of the Captain's house (that in which I write) Mr. Scudamore turned till he had his back towards us, completely hiding Miss Anne. Against the pale glimmer of the whitewashed wall of the house I could see his head bowed low. He was kissing her hand, and my appreciation of the situation was not marred by the fact that Mr. McMachar, in sublime and characteristic unconsciousness of current events, was expounding the difference between the Profession of the Tridentine Faith and the 'so-called' Creed of Pius the Fourth.

'Now,' he said, 'I will go on to explain simply, and as to one not fully acquainted with theological technicalities the points of disagreement between these two—dear me, Miss Anne, what is the matter? Where is your companion—Mr.—ah—Scudamore—'

your legal councillor, if I may so express it? My dear girl— has he said anything offensive to you? You are not crying— no? The rascal—if it were so—not even my sacred office should keep me from inflicting upon him a condign chastisement. But then all lawyers are rascals!

‘No, no—,’ sobbed Miss Anne, hastening to save my further aspersions upon an honourable profession; ‘it was nothing. I am easily upset— that is all. You must pardon me. He was speaking to me of my mother—of my poor brother.’

‘Ah,’ said the minister, touching Miss Anne gently on the shoulder with his hand in token of sympathy, ‘I understand—I understand! Yes—yes—yes!’

All the same, I question if he did.

For here is the report verbatim, set down immediately thereafter, of the interview as given to me by Miss Anne that same night. She was sitting on the edge of her bed, nursing her knees between her clasped hands as she told me. It was her favourite position.

‘Well, Clemmy, he was nice— but oh, all the same, he nearly broke my heart. No, not about my brother. I do not care the snap of my thumb about John Barnaby. I never did. John Barnaby never gave me the chance. He always was a beast to me. But this man is different.’

‘Why,’ said I, ‘because he is not your brother?’

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'Partly,' admitted Anne, who was nothing if not frank; 'still more because he loves me. You cannot think how he loves me.'

'Um-m-m!' said I. 'Mr. James Scudamore has a strange way of manifesting his love. Why, from what the lawyer from Edinburgh said— young Mr. McMath— there is no doubt at all that it was he who had access to the will your father made when he turned your brother out of the house. You owe him the loss of that—of the estates—of everything!'

'Oh, no—no—no!' Anne was emphatic, 'he did not. He never saw the will. They only laid the blame on him because they wished to get him out of the firm. The thief was some messenger or clerk whom Spronk bribed. Mr. Scudamore has just told me all about it!'

'Why, what had the man Spronk to do with it?' I demanded.

'He was caretaker,' said Miss Anne—a thoroughgoing partisan when roused— 'and he could watch all the letters and papers that were put on the tables of old Mr. McMath and of his son. Neither of them ever saw the will. So much is true, but then neither did Mr. Scudamore. It was quite untrue that the packet of papers was ever put into his hands. Spronk was the man who swore to that part of it— that is, he and the head clerk, who has doubtless been well bribed, perhaps by John Barnaby, perhaps by the McMaths themselves.'

LOVES OF MISS ANNE

'And Mr. Scudamore told you all this?' I asked; 'he expected you to believe it?'

'Of course he did,' cried Miss Anne, vehemently; 'and I do believe it. It is true every word. He loves me. He has loved me ever since he saw me. But oh, so hopelessly and so sadly. He made me cry. And he speaks so dreadfully about himself. He is not fit to be any woman's husband now, he says.'

'That, at least, is pretty near the truth,' I put in, as it were, edgeways.

'How cruel you can be, Clemmy,' said Anne; 'you have got a bad mind. I always told you so. Mr. Scudamore says that some one must have destroyed the will. He is sure of it!'

'So am I!' I snapped. For I was not going to take all that Jim Scudamore liked to say for gospel.

Anne promptly unclasped her knees and turned to lay her head down upon her pillow.

'That just settles it,' she said; 'I shall not tell you a single word more, and there is lots—so interesting too—especially the end!'

And the perverse monkey pretended to go to sleep.

I saw that I had made a mistake, so I endeavoured to retrace my steps. After all, what did it matter what I thought—or as to that, what any one thought of Mr. James Scudamore W. S.? He was a doomed man, condemned by a sentence from which there was no appeal and no reprieve.

‘Anne,’ I said, bending over her pillow, ‘you know you want to tell me, and that you will wake me up in the middle of my beauty sleep to do it, if you do not go on now.’

‘Serve you right!’ said Miss Anne.

‘I am sorry. I take it all back. Mr. Scudamore is fit to wear an aureole.’

‘Well, I am not sure that you are so very wrong, though I know you mean to be nasty,’ she cried, sitting up abruptly and demonstrating with her hand; ‘if people can have their hell over on earth, I do think he has suffered enough even for that. But don’t laugh at him, Clemmy. Or one day, I warn you, you will be sorry.’

I kissed her, and for the time being laughed no more.

‘Well, Clemmy,’ she continued, with a pacified sigh (she loved to make confidences), I am sorry for him— yes, I am. I mean it. Of course, I could not love him (here she sighed a second time), because— you know— well, you do know. There is no need to talk about that. And in any case I could not love him, even if—even if—. No, I would only have made him unhappy, and he me. But he says that it will not be for long. And he asked me not to think hardly of him, when— when— he was gone?’

‘Gone?’ I repeated, completely mystified.

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'Yes, gone,' said Miss Anne, the tears welling up in her eyes; 'The doctors say that he has an internal disease of which he can never get better!'

At this point I take credit to myself. I merely kept silence and nodded. But what it cost me, no one would believe. For the world knew very well what was the incurable disease which troubled the 'Drucken W. S.' But I did not speak. I wanted to hear the rest.

'Yes,' said Miss Anne, wiping her eyes with that corner of the pillow-slip which happened to be most convenience 'and he spoke so beautifully. Yes, Clemmy— even of you. I never heard anything like it. He has noble sentiments, at least! (I thought 'at least' was good.) He wants to do what is right. He has good intentions. It is only the carrying of them out that troubles him. And he wants to do something great for me— something I shall never forget before he 'goes to his account.' Yes, these were the terrible words he used, Clemmy. They make me shiver even now just to think of them. And he made me promise that if he did anything at all for my sake— if it were only just to die, I would pray for him afterwards. And I promised. Oh, I know what you will say, that it is wrong to pray for the dead— but then I don't pray very often or very long, so I may just take the risk as well as not—don't you think so? And it was such a little thing to promise to a man who is going to die. I think I could have promised him much more than that— he made me

cry so. But that was all he asked. He was so very noble!’

‘I think,’ I said, ‘What it was a very good thing for . . . a certain friend of ours who shall be nameless—that Mr. McMachar and I were so near!’

‘Oh, no,’ cried Miss Anne; ‘that is different—quite, quite different. But Mr. Scudamore did make me so sorry for him. I wanted to help him if I could. But a girl can do so little!’

‘Was letting him kiss your hand part of the helping?’ I inquired, innocently.

Anne glanced up sharply at me. I was very grave.

‘Yes, it was,’ she said, frankly; ‘It was not much, but it was the best I could think of at the time. You see—you and Mr. McMachar were too near!’

‘Ah,’ cried I, ‘it is clear, young lady, that you must not be let out alone. It is a dangerous thing to give way to an importunate tendency to console undesirable young men!’

‘Clemmy,’ said Anne, ‘you do not understand, after all—or you will not. Mr. Scudamore is a gentleman!’

‘Very likely,’ said I; ‘but all the same, I judge you were safer in the herd's shell on the Hill of Ravensnuik that night of the storm—even though the shepherd was only a—!’

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‘Was what?’ cried Miss Anne. ‘I dare you to say that he is not a gentleman! I never met so true a gentleman as Dan Weir!’

‘Stick to that, Miss Anne,’ I retorted; ‘one at a time, if you please! And leave Mr. Scudamore to find consolation where he has so long sought it, if all tales be true.’

‘Clemmy, for shame!’ cried Miss Anne; ‘I am sorry I told you a single word. You have a heart like a lump of pig iron. I do not know, exactly, what pig iron is— but, anyway, it sounds just like what your heart is!’

And with that she turned over, and, in spite of all her sympathies, went tranquilly to sleep. While I, on the contrary, with my heart of pig iron, lay long awake, pondering on the strange case of James Scudamore, and whether, indeed, there were any truth at all in his statement of it. Long before I slept, however, I had decided that there was not. As usual, the man had simply lied to cover his wrong-doing.

Nevertheless, Anne was right, and I wrong. She had seen the clearer. And the events which proved it happened sooner than any could have anticipated.

The year had begun to open up towards another summer, and still there was no improvement in the shameless disarray of the House of Grennoch. Twice Anne had gone to visit her mother under my father's escort, but on both occasions the old servant had been instructed to say that my Lady did not wish to see one who had

placed herself in an attitude of opposition to her beloved son John Barnaby.

After the second rebuff I think Anne was easier in her mind. Though, indeed, Anne was not one to trouble her head long about anything— that is, except in what concerned Dan Weir. That young man's strange straightforwardness had somehow taken hold of her, and I seldom came in but I surprised her with a curious far-away look in her eyes, the signification of which I knew. Sometimes even in the midst of a sentence she would lose the thread of her talk, and lo, in a moment the look would be there. I did not tease her about that.

She loved more than ever to go up to the heather house, perhaps because Dan Weir had built it— because it was his last piece of work on the estate, or maybe for some other reason to me unknown. And my father, who was lost without something to do, was just as ready to accompany her. Often I did not go with them. For my mother had a way of requiring my assistance at the very moment when these two were going out which was sometimes awkward. Once I jested her about it.

'Mother,' I said, 'one would think you were wanting to make a match of it between these two. You are always planning for them to take their walks alone together, for all the world like lad and lass.'

'Hoots, havers, Clemmy!' said my mother, placidly. 'I will listen to nae sic nonsense. I am an

auld woman, and I like to leeve in peace. And this I ken, that they are baith o' them easier to dae wi' in the hoose for takkin' a bit dauner in yin anither's company.'

So from that day my mother's shrewd dictum became a matter of faith and practice, and even when I went with them into the woods, I had a way of busying me with my knitting and letting Miss Anne and my father wander off by themselves.

Certes Miss Anne heard strange talk these days, and one night she surprised me by asking for a large print Bible. She wanted to 'read it like an ordinary book,' she said.

'I never thought of the Bible as a book to read, but just for ministers to take texts out of and things,' she explained; 'that is, not till your father began to talk to me about it!'

So it happened that, sole of the three, I was witness of a strange event that happened up at the pond by the heather house which Dan Weir had built. A dull, gloomy place it was, and save for the bright new chalet with its comfortable varnished seats, by no means a place of joyous rendezvous. I never could understand the fascination it had for Miss Anne, but then, so far as I was concerned, Dan Weir might have left inscribed chips by cartloads among my feet, and I should never have stooped to pick up one.

This day we three had walked out as usual, my mother giving me a look which meant that I was to

send Anne and my father off for their accustomed walk. She was a clever woman in her way, my mother, and her fifty years of life with my father had taught her the way to manage him. For, I dare say he was sometimes trying enough, especially since he began to go about with nothing to do, and with the sight before his eyes of all his life's work going to rack and ruin. Mostly, as I say, we turned up towards the heather house, because in that direction there were no trees of any value for timber, and my father could meditate more undisturbed there than elsewhere.

Anne had a basket over her arm, I remember, and she went forth with the avowed intention of gathering primroses. My father carried his bill-hook, its blade silver-bright as ever, and its ashen haft polished almost black with the passage of his hand.

As for me, I had my knitting.

It was the primrose time of the year. Every bank was starred with their low-set fresh faces. They made a bloom on the brae as you cast your eyes upward from underneath. And when you passed that way they breathed upon you the very breath of spring.

So down I sat me in the heather house and knitted— click-clicky the needles going by themselves. My father and Miss Anne wandered off, the old man leaning upon the shaft of his bill-hook, as he gazed away down some dark aisle of the wood,

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Anne interrupting him every moment with some bright question, or crossing the even roll of his monologue with some frivolous objection, such as he would have suffered only from her.

I could see them even when they were a long way off, her lithe body bending sideways as she reached out to pull the flowers. Now and then she would kneel down to get at some stubborn plant. (She was covering our rock-ery by her way of it—only it took a long time, because botany was so much less interesting this year!) And as she did so she kept looking up at my father's face, which was turned tolerantly and paternally down towards her.

The Great House of Grennoch lay away below to the left. I could see the reek of its many chimneys. There seemed more smoke than usual, somehow, denoting, I thought, a larger influx of visitors. Perhaps we had done well to take the higher road. And I consoled myself with the thought that John Barnaby's route took him but seldom to the pond by the heather house, and next and chiefly, that my father was within call.

It was a drowsy noontide, very warm for the time of year. And what with the dimpling sun-glare from off the water and the confined air of the heather house, I think I must have dropped asleep. At all events, I did not notice the lapse of time, and when I sat up suddenly, as at some unexpected noise, lo! my stocking had slipped from my fingers to

the ground and only the ball of wool in my pocket remained to me.

But the pool in front was no longer lonely. Opposite me I could see a crowd of gayly dressed people, and there came to me the hum of talk with that foolish empty laugh which always irritated me so much, cutting in every now and then, making all my nerves quiver as if a nail had been drawn along a slate from the bottom to top.

John Barnaby and his crew, for all the world! Hastily I gathered up my things, meditating flight. Where were my father and Miss Anne? They must have wandered off while I was drowsing. I could not see them at all. But, indeed, there was little time to think of my father and Miss Anne. The party on the opposite shore of the pond claimed all my attention. They were not more than a hundred yards away, near a little ruined boat-house, with the contents of which they seemed to be amusing themselves. Consequently I could see very well.

Prominent in the midst of his guests was John Barnaby himself, attired in a greyish-purple suit—jacket and knickerbockers, a large white neckerchief in the latest fashion, a light blue waistcoat, and booted to the knee. From the midst of his jovial crowd he was calling out to some one—Spronk, I think, to help him out with the boats. I knew these boats. Never in my time had any one of them been water-worthy. The winter rains had lain soaking in

them till it was sucked up by the winds of spring. Many summer suns had beaten down upon the grey and rotten planks till every seam was open. Indeed, the entire flotilla was 'gizeded,' like a long abandoned washing tub.

Nevertheless, I could hear John Barnaby call out in his most rollicking key, 'Come along, fellows! We will show the girls that we can sail the seas as well as ride the land.'

'Tut—tut,' said a voice, contemptuously; 'there is not one of these old horse-buckets of yours that would float a yard.'

'The better fun,' cried John Barnaby; 'I tell you what— you are afraid. Loch Dow— you funk it! I will lay you an even hundred that I will cross the pond in any one of these you choose! There's for you!'

Cheers and laughter followed. John Barnaby had obviously his claque among his following, ready to egg him on to any mad feat.

'Spoken like a sportsman,' they cried; 'Loch Dow, you can't get out of that! Sir Tempest is game!'

'I do not wish to get out of it in the least,' said the slight young man, with a moustache pointed upwards in a foreign fashion, who had been spoken of as Loch Dow, probably because that was the name of his estate. 'I say, Done with him! A cool hundred, and let him cross in the canoe. He will certainly be cooler before he gets across.'

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'Not fair— not fair!' cried the spokesman of the rabble. 'A canvas canoe is not a boat. It is not made of wood. All boats should be made of wood!'

'Are there no iron boats sailing the seas?' said Loch Dow; 'it is that or nothing! A hundred pounds with any of you that Sir Tempest does not cross the pond in the canoe!'

'I will do it!' cried John Barnaby. 'A Kilpatrick never said die. Who's afraid? Not Tempest John Barnaby. Stand back there!'

'Take care,' cried a new voice from my side of the water; 'the pond is deep there—deeper than you think. I have tried it in the punt and nearly drowned myself. Besides, these lily roots are dangerous. Don't be a fool, Kilpatrick!'

'Fool yourself, Scudamore!' shouted back the emancipated John Barnaby, evidently angry at the interruption; 'because you are afraid, that's no reason why I should be. I tell you I have crossed this pond on a plank a thousand times before ever you were heard of.'

The canoe was an ancient collapsable affair, which the young man's father had bought that it might be put on a cart and taken to some of his upland lochs in which there were islands difficult to visit. Sir Tempest had some theory about the birds that nested there, and for a season or two it had been his hobby to have this boat carried up to the moors, and then with infinite precautions paddle

himself over in the ramshackle coracle, one of his gamekeepers holding on meanwhile to the cord which trailed from the stern in case the leaky tub should begin to sink. Sir Tempest returned just as wise as he set out, but, after the manner of his kind, that did not prevent him reading a paper on the subject to the local Ornithological Society. But the freak speedily wore itself out, and the canoe passed the rest of its days harmlessly rotting in the abandoned boat-house. Naturally its condition had not improved with the years. Nevertheless, John Barnaby, a light weight and gifted with a certain skill, managed to push it off, encouraged by cries from the full chorus of his followers. Had he gone straight across, all might have been well. But he must needs attempt to stand up, in order apparently to cut a more gallant figure in paddling.

He had just reached the edge of the lily beds and the canoe was almost exactly in the middle of the pond when there was a sudden shriek from the onlookers. I noticed a quick balancing movement of John Barnaby's paddle and then a splash. The crank craft had turned over, and the young Baronet was struggling in the sullen oily water.

'He cannot swim!' 'Yes, I tell you, he can!' 'It is not deep.' 'He is all right!'

Many voices shouted loud admonitions.

'Strike out!' 'Stick to the canoe! It will keep you from sinking!' 'Run for a ladder!'

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Everywhere there was a clamour and a confused running hither and thither, but in a moment it was seen that John Barnaby, though attempting to strike out, had somehow got himself entangled. He had leaped into the canoe booted and spurred as he was. Through the little diamond panes of the windows at the sides of the heather house I could see Jim Scudamore running. He was taking off his coat as he did so.

I do not know whether he suspected that I was there or not. But, as he always knew where my mistress was, and what she was doing, I rather suppose that he did.

At any rate, he glanced within, and seeing me, he said hurriedly, 'If anything happens, tell Miss Anne that I kept my word. I did what I could for her sake. I can at least clear her way.'

Then hurriedly divesting himself of his boots, Scudamore pushed out towards his friend. John Barnaby had sunk again. He was becoming more and more entangled among the lily stems. Doubtless, too, his spurs embarrassed him. But a great cry of relief went up from the uncertain throng on the opposite bank.

'There goes Scudamore!' 'It is all right now!' 'He will save him if anybody can!'

In such a case people are so glad when somebody else takes the responsibility of salvage.

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What came next I could not very well make out. All was a wild tumult, a crying of oaths, a screaming of treble voices.

I had risen to my feet, and I dare say I too screamed aloud. At least afterwards I remembered to have heard, strange and far off, as if it belonged to some one else, the sound of my own voice in my ears.

Scudamore had reached John Barnaby. He was clasping him. There appeared to be something of a struggle.

The fat black water broke in oily waves on the peaty margin. The dark green lily leaves, not yet tipped with yellow or white, dragged at their submerged cables. The popular theory afterwards, supported by a cloud of witnesses, was that John Barnaby, losing his presence of mind by the sudden immersion, clasped his benefactor too tightly about the neck, and that Scudamore had to strike his friend in order to release himself. It may be so. All I know is that with my own eyes I saw Scudamore raise his hand to strike—once, twice, and three times. Then both went down together, and though the black water bubbled oozily for some moments, neither ever came up again alive.

Two hours afterwards the bodies were recovered, still clasped tightly together. But the foresters declared that they had to cut away the lily stems, so tightly had Jim Scudamore's right hand grasped them close to the roots in his dying agony.

I saw both young men lie side by side on the bank. I could not tear myself away. The features of John Barnaby were distorted by a great anger, but on the face of James Scudamore abode only peace, and (if I did not deceive myself) a slight ironical smile, as if at the vanity of all things earthly.

Of course there ensued a great to-do. All the local papers were full of the magnificent act of heroism— ‘the friend who gave his life that he might save his friend,’ and so forth. But my father stood and mused upon the bank, his brows knitted, deep in thought. He had taken Miss Anne home by a long roundabout way, fortunately in complete ignorance of all that was happening at the heather house. They had moved off, thinking that I would do the like, as soon as they had heard the first sounds of the approach of the Grennoch House rabble through the woods.

I can see him yet, his finger on his chin, his eyes half closed. ‘Ah,’ said Donald MacTaggart, ‘it is very well. But, you see, I know this pond and these lilies yonder. I judge no man. It may be that Scudamore meant to save him. But it is strange—strange that John Barnaby should have been found undermost, while, above him, holding hard by the roots of the water-lilies, was the man who went in to fetch him out!’

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‘But, father,’ I suggested, ‘they may have got entangled- the weeds— the lily stalks—doubtless that explains it!’

‘Doubtless—doubtless,’ said the Man-with-the-Bill-hook; ‘but all the same I will tell you a stranger thing still, which only I and the foresters know— a fact that will not be mentioned when the Fiscal comes from St. Cuthbertstown to make his inquiry. The water there is not more than four and a half feet deep! It is not easy to drown there even with the best intentions. Yet that is where two men lost their lives— in four-and-a-half feet of water! Can you explain to me why neither of them thought of standing up on his feet?’

I did not answer. But in my heart it seemed to me that I knew very well why one at least of them did not. And as for the other—Jim Scudamore—perhaps his last message to Miss Anne shed some light on the matter.

‘If anything happens,’ he had said to me in the heather house, ‘tell Miss Anne that I have kept my word. I have done what I could—for her sake. I can, at least, clear her way!’

Well, he had certainly done so—cleared it at once of himself and of her brother. Miss Anne was now, subject to her mother's jointure, undisputed heiress to the Kilpatrick estates, and that owing entirely to Jim Scudamore— his crime or his misfortune, who shall say which? But, rightly or wrongly, to blame or not to blame, I have never to

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this day delivered to Miss Anne the last message of the 'Drucken W. S.' God is Jim Scudmore's judge, and neither she nor I.'

CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE

CONCERNING THE FIRES OF BELTANE

Up yonder in his hermitage, at the sheiling of the Hill of Ravensnuik, there abode, in ignorance of all these things, Mr. Daniel Weir, late factor on the estates of Grennoch— now once more, in the bitterness of his heart, a mere shepherd of sheep.

All he had struggled for had, for the time being, failed him. He had lost hope. His world, which he had made with such pains, had burst like a soap-bubble. He had had (so he told himself) no intentions of winning Miss Anne. But at least he would have been daily beside her. More than once had they clasped hands in the woody places—on her part with no more reluctance and as much frankness as of old when on that far-off night of storm they had been but boy and girl together.

For the present Dan Weir had no heart to try for another situation as factor. Places of that sort are difficult to find. And besides, if he could not be with her, or at least near her, what was the use of it all? He had been meant for nothing better than a herd upon the hills of sheep, and as such he must live and die. It served him right for trying to escape out of his proper world. Yet, on the whole, he was less unhappy than he could have expected.

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The sheep, their comings and goings, their curiously simple habits, so familiar to him, yet ever new—the face of the moorland, always the same, yet never twice alike—these served him instead of other studies. He must, he thought, make up his mind to remain lonely upon his mountain top until he died.

The sheil of Ravensnuik was, for the present at least, at his disposition. The foreman or 'grieve' at the Home Farm was anxious to be friendly. But if he lost that place, Dan Weir knew that there were plenty of others. He had saved some money—so much, indeed, that he might even have 'gone shares' in a small sheep-farm somewhere in the neighbourhood. For he was well reputed of as both a capable and a careful herd, who could send out a larger proportion of good marketable lambs than any other man between Maw Moss and Solway shore.

Nevertheless, he longed as before for the Wednesday and Saturday packets. Dan Weir read few papers. His books sufficed him. He received no letters, but, filtering through the anxious grieve at the Home Farm, and the reticent Mr. McMath in his Edinburgh office, there came to the hill-top legends of the doings of the new baronet of Grennoch.

They were not such as to give the ex-factor much comfort—save, that is, in one particular. Miss Anne—his Miss Anne (he might surely call her so up there on the Hill of Sheep, with none but the

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ewes and the whaup to hear him) had gone to live in the house of Captain Tom Geddes, under the wing of the Man-with-the-Bill-hook!

Often for a moment he would dream of casting his plaid about his shoulders, taking staff in hand, and striding away south-by-westward. But the ancient loyalty of the shepherd to his flock, to the bearing ewes and the tender lambs, held him. Not twice would he be found wanting. All the more that now there was no rugged faithful Kilter, no sharp-witted clear-eyed Talla to watch faithfully during his absence. The dogs he had, even the one he had brought with him from his father's house at Venturefair, were mere 'strags' — yelping, useless brutes, he called them—no more like the dogs of old time than— he was like the boy who had sat all night not daring to move, because there was a straw-golden wisp of hair on his shoulder and a soft breath that moved caressingly on his neck.

Ah, why had he begun to think of that? There was no peace in that memory.

It was the Eve of St. John, the night of the Beltane fires on all the southern hills. The herds have mostly given them over in these enlightened days, but many a time have I gone— Miss Anne, too— up the hills to jump through the great blazes on the eve of the longest day— at the noon of the shortest night in all the year. That is St. John's Eve.

It had not struck Dan Weir to prepare a beacon for that night. He had had other things to think

about. For his heart was sore and heavy within him. And, moreover, what had he to do with feasts and fasts. His world was done. There remained only his duty. But that day it happened that the herd boy brought up from the Home Farm, along with Dan's usual provend for the next four days, jars of tar and oil swinging at the pony's saddle, and one balancing the other on either side.

'What may these be for?' Dan Weir had asked.

'The grieve bade me tell ye that ye had better light a fire on the beacon the night—' said the lad; 'it brings guid luck to be like other folk!'

Dan smiled, and went on with his questionings. But the boy was no Daft Davie. No, there was no very particular news. Alec Smith had caught a ged sax feet long in the loch, and it had fourteen puddocks intill't! That was all he knew.

This was the most interesting item of his budget of news, but Dan Weir was not interested in pike with fourteen puddocks in their stomachs—even if, as the farm lad added immediately, 'sax o' them were living and loupit until the water when Alec cuttit them oot!'

The messenger, eager to be gone and without waiting even to bait or rest his pony, leaped into the saddle and took his way down the mountain, leaving Dan once more alone. Then it was that he regretted his 'cracks' with Daft Davie— long since defunct,

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and lying in all the odour of sanctity in Edam kirkyard with this inscription over him:

Here in this place lies DAVID SEGGIE, not so wise as some, but not so wicked as many, who used half his wits better than most people use the whole of theirs. He started one of the last in the race of life, But the Minister of this Parish, who pays for this monument would be noways surprised if, at the end of the journey, he whom they called DAFT DAVIE arrived first at the Gate of Heaven.

As was natural, people came from far to read and copy so notable an inscription. The grieve down at the Home Farm had supplied Dan with a copy, as the most recent novelty of the neighbourhood. More than one minister had preached a sermon upon it. But in spite of his remarkable epitaph, Dan regretted Daft Davie's gossip more than all his other good qualities.

However, since there was nothing else to be done, and the twilight approached, Dan set about building his Beltane beacon. He had plenty of material ready to his hand, for the season had been an open one and little of the fuel he had collected, comparatively speaking, had been used. Once well into his task, as usual, the young man, though sore of heart, grew interested. The mere movement of his mighty muscles as he carried and arranged the peats and dry trunks set him in a heat.

The shortest night of the year promised to be very short indeed. At nine the west was one glow of

rich orange red— the fine weather colour, thought Dan, weather-wise upon these moorlands. The sky was clear of clouds to the zenith. Even at ten o' the clock there was little sign of the fall of twilight. A northeriy night, truly, thought Dan! Even in Galloway it was hardly ever as light as this!

Ah, there went the first! The herd on Minchmuir had set his fire a-going. Ettrick Fell, King's Side, Lang Barrow— they were not long behind. But Dan, a connoisseur in such matters, waited for the darker gloaming. He wanted his flame to show. He stayed for Tinto, which, directly in the line for Grennoch, many and many a league away, was tardy in showing his light. That in some sort would be to Dan Weir a message from her.

Half-past-ten— and now the shades were gathering soft and purplish in the valleys. But the tops of the hills were clear, and twinkled, each with its Beltane star.

The Star of Baal, the ministers said, preaching against the observance. All of them, that is, except Mr. McMachar, who declared that he always enjoyed the sight, and would like nothing better than once more to be young enough to take a running leap through the flames.

'A heathen festival, I tell you,' cried my father; 'an accursed thing— passing the children through the fire.'

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'Ah, we are gye teuch (tough) bairns, Donald, you and me!' quoth Mr. McMachar, clapping my father on the shoulder, 'and as for 'heathen festival,' Beltane is nae mair heathen than the New Year's Eve itself, that ye set so mickle store by.'

But up on his hill no speculations, theological or otherwise, disturbed Dan Weir. He lit his match when he judged that it was dark enough, set it to the windward side, and lo! the clear streak of yellow fire ran this way and that among the dry bent, crept inward, then upward, and so with a great burst of light flamed suddenly from the top, and Ravensnuik beacon was sending its message abroad—telling that in the heart of the summer year one herd the more was awake and alert, doing his duty and mindful of his fellows doing theirs.

As the flame crackled Dan stepped back, his eyes watering and smarting from the acrid wood smoke. He had some little content in his work, and in addition he had the full expectation of being allowed to enjoy it alone.

But no, sudden as the appearing of a ghost—clad in a light gown, and with a shawl about its head, a figure was standing at the farther side of the Beltane blaze.

For a moment Dan thought that the old wives tales were true—that this was really a spirit, come to visit him disembodied, returned to the breathing earth upon this night of witches and fairies.

And it was like her, as he remembered her on the night of the thunderstorm!

No wonder his heart gave a great stound. The thought came across him that she was dead— and that he, up there on his mountain side, did not know it. He did not know anything. What a fool! Why had he not stayed in the village, even if he could have found no better work there than that of breaking stones upon the highway?

His lips parted and words came therefrom almost without his knowledge.

‘Anne! Anne! My Miss Anne!’

The figure came slowly towards him, dark against the firelight. Then, as the leaping flame illuminated the face, the shawl fell back. Two white hands, showing bare to the elbow in wide sleeves of the simple print gown, were held out to him. The lips smiled.

‘Have you kept a corner of the old frieze cloak for me?’ a voice said softly.

Mr. Daniel Weir, late factor, college bred and above all superstitious, stood thunderstruck, his eyes strained in his head, gasping:

‘Anne—Anne,’ he cried, ‘is it you? What are you doing here?’

‘You would not come to me,’ she said, smiling with the same still witchery upon him, ‘so I had to come to you. I had not forgotten the way!’

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'It is really yourself—in the flesh?' said Dan, still doubtfully.

'Why, who else?' laughed Miss Anne; 'unless you would have preferred Clemmy?'

'But—Anne!'

'Oh, I know, it is not—regular,' she laughed; 'that is why I had a nice light made up here with the beacon for a candle-stick, that you and I might see each other by. And by and bye the lads will be coming up to dance about the Beltane blaze. But not yet a while. I sent them to Newhall first. I wanted to talk to you. I have much to say. But bring the cloak. I want to sit down— just as before. If I remember rightly, it was you who gave your orders the last time. It is my turn now.'

Obediently he brought the cloak, and the old stone seat was there as of yore by the wall of the sheiling. In a moment the cloak was spread out.

'It went this way, I think,' said Anne, turning her head to try the effect; 'no, that wing is in the way. There— that is better. What was it you said?'

But it was only poor Dan, still not willing to take the moment's good which the equal gods send (like the rain) upon the just and upon the unjust, moaning out, 'Anne, Anne, I love you! I love you! But oh, what will it be up here when you go away again? Why did you come— only to torment my heart?'

'Did I?' said Anne, nestling her head where it had been on the night of the storm, when so long ago they waited for the morning. 'I thought to come

just to remind your heart! Why have you never spoken to me of that time, Dan?’

She had never called him that before.

‘I—I thought you would not wish to be reminded of it!’ said Dan Weir.

‘Wish it—silly!’ cried Miss Anne, shifting her head a little to make it still more comfortable; ‘now tell me!’

‘There is nothing to tell,’ stammered Dan; ‘I have always loved you. I educated myself for that. I tried for the place as your father’s factor because of that. I had never forgotten—not for a moment. It was the night together on the hill in the storm—that did it! You knew.’

‘Yes, I knew,’ cried Anne; ‘and what is more I knew that you knew, and Clemmy knew that I knew that you knew—and so on till your brain turns!’

‘But I am poor, Anne,’ he said; ‘I came up here to be out of the way—till I could muster up courage to seek another place.’

‘I too am poor!’ said Miss Anne, comfortably, adding under her breath the words, ‘without you, Dan!’

Dan did not hear. He was on the trail of his idea.

‘Yes, I know—I heard,’ he said, softly; ‘and (do not be angry) that somehow made me happier. You have been living in the village with Donald MacTaggart.’

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‘And Clemmy!’ said Miss Anne, peacefully; ‘do not forget Clemmy!’

‘And I thought,’ Dan went on, ‘I thought— but I have no right to say what I thought—.’

‘All the same, I would say it!’ counselled Miss Anne. By this time she had found the corner, which through all her after life she claimed as her own. She was very content, a little drowsy, and, knowing the end from the beginning, was very willing that the conversation should drift.

‘I thought,’ went on Dan Weir, slowly forcing the words up, each pent with a lifetime of meaning, ‘I was fool enough to imagine that if you were poor, very poor—.’

‘I am! I am!’ said Miss Anne, like a duchess confessing herself a ‘miserable sinner’ in her family chapel — with as much accent of sincerity, that is.

‘And I thought that if some day—some day—I got a very good place— there are such— worth (the sum was an immense one to Dan) a thousand or fifteen hundred a year, perhaps you might— I mean—we might— that is, if you loved me—.’

‘I do not think you explain very well, Dan,’ complained Miss Anne— ‘not, that is, for a man with a university education. Why, a poor little ignorant thing like me could do it ever so much better. Listen, Dan! No, don't move. I won't be kissed— not yet! For shame, sir, here at night, in a lonely place like this with nobody near to protect me. I will tell the parish minister. Listen, Dan, I am so poor—so poor— that I

would be miserable in a palace without you— that is the right thing to say, isn't it? At least I saw it in a stupid novel the other day! Keep quiet, Dan Weir, and listen! This is true. I would be happy in the sheiling here with you— just with you! All the same you are horrid, Dan, to make me run after you, and say such things out loud. But if you will be a hermit on a hill-top, why, you must take the consequences!'

'Anne — Anne — Anne — it is true! You love me.'

'Why,' cried Anne, from her place, 'what a stupid thing is man— worse than in a novel! Would I be here if I did not? Oh, do keep still, and let my head rest. Why can't you keep still? How many years is it since it lay here before?'

Then there was a little silence. Only the crackling of the Beltane fires close by on the Beacon Head broke the great stillness. The sky was very far away, all grey above and lemon yellow beneath— which has nothing to do with the story, but lets one see how quiet it was— that is, one who knows. For grey and lemon are windless colours— the colours of the hill silences. Also love is mostly silent.

Then Anne it was who first broke the spell that had fallen upon them.

'There,' she said, with obvious connection; 'that will do. Be sensible. Listen. I have found a place for you— to look after an estate such as you speak of— a large estate that has been suffered to go

to rack and ruin. It will be a difficult job, they say. But the pay is good, and you could have Donald MacTaggart to help you. I have already asked him. He is a stand-by, at any rate. But I must warn you, Dan, that if you accept, there is one very serious drawback which you must take along with the care of the estate!

‘Oh, I will put up with anything—anything,’ cried the young man, eagerly; ‘I am not afraid! If only I have a hope!’

‘But this drawback is very, very serious,’ persisted Miss Anne; ‘you do not know.’

‘No matter,’ cried Dan, ‘I will take it. I would not hesitate a moment. What is the drawback which I must take over along with the factorship?’

‘Me,’ whispered Miss Anne in his ear.

The fire had died low when the grieve and the farm lads came up to find their young mistress, and convoy her down to Ravensnuik. And when they did arrive, they found her still with her head on the frieze overcoat. She rose and spoke to them.

This is Miss Anne's speech on St. John's Eve, delivered in the dying light of the Beltane Beacon:

‘I wish you to know that this gentleman, Mr. Daniel Weir, has consented to resume the position he held under my father, and to look after and administer the estates of Grennoch and Ravensnuik. So you must all obey him. Promise me!’

She laughed a little low in her throat.

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‘Speak out,’ she said, seeing that astonishment even more than shyness kept them silent; ‘Do not be afraid. The fact is, I have just been promising to obey him myself.’

She took Dan Weir's hand to say good-night, and as she drew down his face to kiss him before them all, she whispered, ‘And also to honour and to love.’

Yet, in spite of all, this last night of the old world and first of the new, Dan Weir abode alone by his sheep, because they were his charge. Not twice would he be unfaithful, even for the sake of Miss Anne.

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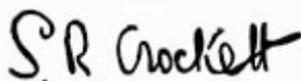
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'Mayhap that is the best fortune of all – to be loved by a few greatly and constantly, rather than to be loudly applauded and immediately forgotten by the many.'

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S.R. Crockett". The letters are cursive and somewhat stylized, with the "S" and "R" being particularly prominent.

