

The Complete Crockett

The Galloway Raiders

digital edition

New British fiction



LOVE IN
PERNICKETY TOWN

S.R.CROCKETT

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

First Published by Hodder & Stoughton in 1911.

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 unlikely subject of this novel is Mesmeric Evangelism. Told in the first person by a Crockett alter-ego Adrian Ross it is on one level a light love story and on another level something else entirely.

Reston Rigg, the villain of the piece, has come back from the East. Influenced by mysticism he employs this through adapting Evangelical revivalist tent meetings to his particular style. There is a long history of mesmerism and tent revivalism (both of them still go on today) and Crockett combines the two into an exotic, dangerous combination of religiously inspired hypnotism. The influence Reston Rigg has over people, particularly impressionable young women, is immense. He is finally exposed as little more than a dangerous circus act, but his brand of Mesmeric Evangelism offers a great challenge to the lives of all those in the novel. His greatest danger is, perhaps, his self-belief. Crockett, through his narrator, observes: *'He was without care, for he never a moment doubted of himself. He was of the breed of big, bold, lusty men, coarse of grain and hewn in the rough, who cannot imagine that they can fail in anything, and in consequence generally do succeed. For the best method of succeeding is to be quite sure you are going to.'*

As an example of End of Empire fiction, the language and social norms may offend the modern reader's sensibilities and what are now culturally inappropriate language and descriptions are included in this work. Reston Rigg is served by a man born a slave, whose dialect is presented as of its time. But then, attitudes to women as being more easily influenced and 'weak' of mind may be

similarly offensive to many modern women. However, the novel does draw a clear picture of a time and its attitudes. It may well make modern readers uncomfortable – as it should. For modern readers, however, the responsibility is surely to contextualise and learn from history. The past cannot be changed. Our responsibility is to the present and future. Crockett was a respectable man with respectable values in the context of his time. He certainly did not share the views of all his characters, and his writing allows readers to think through such difficulties due to the humorous way he exposes the hypocrisy of many of the attitudes we might consider at least blinkered and at worst offensive. One can read *Pernicketty Town* and see the dangers of the kind of colonial attitudes proffered by the likes of Reston Rigg clearly outlined.

This is no apology for colonialism, racism or misogyny. But one cannot airbrush out history and learn anything. Even as we might condemn, we need to understand shameful attitudes rather than fear they will hold power simply by being read. The challenge is to adopt a critical perspective and employ it appropriately in context.

Crockett's own attitude to religion is laid out – *'Now there is religion in the very air of Scotland – that is, in all its lonesome places.'* He sees God not in the churches or tents but in the very nature all around. And this gives us an idea of his view of the people and attitudes of the Pernicketties.

Pernicketty Town itself is a conflation of many Scottish towns from Crockett's own experience. Set in his fictional Cheviotshire, on the Scottish side of the border, it is perhaps not surprising that he employed his tactics of 'mixing those babies up' (*An*

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Adventurer in Spain) when he describes it. He takes the worst traits of small town life, the gossiping, the closed-mindedness, the smugness, and melds them together to provide some humour to his tale. The change in society and the tensions between 'Incomers' and 'Auld Originals' is explored as backdrop to the main challenge which is of this new, dangerous, evangelical mesmerism to the traditional religious and social practices of the country.

Adrian Ross's initial dilemma is which of three girls he will fall in love with. This is a recurring trope in Crockett's fiction, perhaps reflective of his own youth. But one should not read too much into it – after all, the job of a fiction writer is to take truth and bend it, stretch it, extemporise on it, not simply reflect it back to the reader. Still, more than once Crockett himself fell in love with a young woman who had a couple of sisters... and eventually married one.

This novel can be challenging in many ways. Yet throughout it keeps a light tone, and cannot be taken altogether seriously. Yes it is of its time, and as such is an interesting take on Scottish society and its issues, foibles and dangers, immediately before the First World War. Engage with it in an appropriate spirit and there is much to be gained from reading it.

Cally Phillips

March 2022

PART ONE
ADRIAN ROSS'S NARRATIVE

CHAPTER ONE

THE HEAD'S DAUGHTERS

I begin in the ancient manner.

It was a clear, wind-scoured, distinctly frosty, but as distinctly leafless morning in later spring when Adrian Ross, in common with all my fellow-citizens of 'the good town of Longtown,' awoke to the startling intelligence that the past night had brought within our borders a new editor of our local journal, a new head master to our High School, and the deliverance of Gipsy Sue from the county jail after serving her one hundred and sixty-fifth sentence on the usual charge. These were great events, except the last, which was normal. [The good town of Longtown' is a phrase consecrated by immemorial usage on election platforms and in the local papers. The place-name is pronounced Lóngtoun, which does away with the awkward duplication of sound.]

For a year I had been classical master at the Longtown High School, and Miss Saunders, the good woman with whom I lodged, was in possession of all three items of news when I got downstairs to crack my breakfast egg, before starting off to see if the janitor had unrolled the maps and washed his face in readiness to receive the new Head.

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'Yes, sir - Mr. Ross, you may believe me,' said my landlady, a tall, rather distinguished-looking woman, who had once seen the Emperor of the French and expected you to remember the fact, 'they have come, and, what's more, that's the editor-chap you hear just now snoring like to lift off the roof! . . .',

'What,' I cried, 'is he to be a lodger here - with us - in this house?'

Miss Saunders bridled and held her head a trifle higher than usual.

'And I hope, Mr. Ross, that you are not insinuating that the daughter of a distinguished naval officer, though only of warrant rank - I will never conceal the fact, of which I am proud - is not fit to entertain the best newspaper writer in the land?'

'Certainly not,' I agreed, 'not if he were *The Times* himself. (He must have a dull job of it, saying WE through a speaking-trumpet day after day!) I was thinking of something else - something more personal and selfish, Miss Saunders.'

'Well, what is it?'

'Why, that now, with another and more important boarder, parlour and all that, you will not have time to - to - in fact - cast a friendly eye over my shirts and clothes generally. There will be as many buttons lacking in the former as there are superfluous holes in the latter!'

'Laddie,' said my landlady, lifting a warning finger, 'do not begin your "formers" and "latters" to me at my time of life! Speak sense, if sense be in any school-master, which I much doubt. Did not I receive from your revered mother a Mission? (Miss Saunders always pronounced this word as if it

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began with several capital letters.) And it will be a clay-cold day, and me deep under the sod, before I let you, young man, go out to your school-teaching without a good look-over - which is what I promised your sainted mother to do - her being anxious on her dying bed - not even when you are in a hurry to get away, so as to meet Miss Lizbeth Douglas by accident at the corner - you seeing the feather in her hat, ridiculous considering her position, bobbing over the wall of MacCormick's brewery!

This speech contained so many and complicated libels that I had not the time to confound them - except, that is, mentally, which I did most cordially. I preferred to ask for further information as to the editor upstairs. You cannot learn much from simply hearing a man snore overhead.

'Well, Mr. Adrian' - the name was the bane of my life - next, that is, after the fifth-form boys; it sounded so like play-acting, and Miss Saunders intoned it like a chant. 'Mr. A-a-drian, he is a London swell, and when he talks to you, you have to follow every word so as to make out what he say. He is a big, fine-looking fellow, Like the late Emperor of the French, but with only a long moustache, no imperial. Better not let that Miss Douglas of yours see him!'

'And the Head Master - any news of him?' I asked. For after all, this touched me more nearly than even an editor in the house.

'Little have I heard about him, young man,' said Miss Saunders in an offended tone. 'Do you think I have nothing else to do than to stand about the streets and market-places gossiping with the senseless, idle good-for-nothings who abound there?'

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This flowed with a fine indignation. But all the same Miss Sheba Saunders did manage to know and repeat to her intimates all the gossip of the little county town. Yet she did it with an innocence and hearty curiosity that was certainly devoid of all malice. No spreader of news was more generally beloved in Longtown.

After I had absolved Sheba Saunders from gadding in market-places and lagging on her neighbours' thresholds, she was pleased to continue.

Your Head Master, Mr. Cassells, came with four wagon-loads of books, and his three daughters had two trunks apiece. There does not seem to be much furniture in the house so far. The girls laugh a good deal and make fun of their father - which, in Longtown, is not counted seemly with so learned a man.'

'Thank you,' I said; 'it is time to be off!'

'Turn round, Mr. Adrian. There, just as I expected - your waistcoat is sticking up above the collar of your coat quite an inch and a quarter. After all I have said to you, and me having made a promise to your mother on her - eh, what's that? Pull up your trousers a little. Ah, I knew it. For the hundredth time - *will* you pull your socks over your - your leg underwear and not versy-vicy? Now - you are decent at last, and don't think that I will take my eye off you for a round dozen London editors. Off with you and meet your Miss Douglas!'

* * * * *

In spite of meeting Miss Douglas (who was by no means 'mine,' as my landlady asserted), I entered

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the school that day with some misgivings. Our old Head had generally dozed the time away in his comfortable chair, with a few draft time-tables scattered about and a pencil ready to his hand if any one should open the door unexpectedly. He had not worried us much, but the school (though naturally a little slack as to discipline) had not, so said the inspectors, moved much the worse for that. To whom this was owing I shall not say here. At any rate, we had always got the maximum Government grant, and a report that made us shine like stars in the *Cheviotshire Advertiser and Mercury*, which was our local paper.

I had hardly got the pupil-teachers on the move with the class copybooks, and verified the work of the janitor as to unrolling of maps and refilling ink-pots, when the hour of the Chief's first visit drew near. All at once I heard in the junior classrooms above the sound, quite unexpected and wholly inexplicable on any hypothesis of discipline - of laughing voices, stifled screams, scurrying footsteps, and - could it be within the sacred precincts of Longtown High School? - the vivid pit-a-pat, bounce, and smack of boys playing leap-frog over desks.

Now even when acting Head I did not often punish - at least not in any official or orthodox way. I found a few hearty slaps with the open palm, or an odd but well-placed propulsion with the toe of my boot, to be at once more effective, besides being good practice at football. Moreover, the boys never bore the least ill-will.

But on this occasion, and having cast a final eye over the preparations of the entire staff for the reception of the new Head Master, I grew so angry with the young rascals who were making hay of all

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my orderly and decent ceremonial, that I took the supplest cane from the rack of office (where a locked row of them abode under glass like an exhibit in a museum) and stole on tiptoe upstairs.

As I went I bit my lip - for I was angry and sinned not. The young rascals! For once I would fairly skin them alive! There was Robson junior of the Lower Third, and I knew the voice of Kid, called 'The Treasure' - because, so far as his masters were concerned, he was anything but that - being so habit and repute in wickedness that in addition to a first stinging up with the Switchy One, I meant to give him a thousand lines of Virgil, which would stop his leave for a week at least. For though extremely active with his legs and lively at games, his fingers grew leaden-weighted so soon as there was a Latin line to be copied.

With infinite precaution I opened the door. I saw before me, racing along the desks and leaping a double row lightly, with, as it seemed, but the tips of the fingers of one hand touching the ridge in the middle, three girls - two fair and one dark, all apparently about the same age.

Then it came upon me, these were the daughters of the Head Master. I knew that in a moment, and it did not take much longer for me to fall hopelessly in love with the whole three at a time. My heart moved easily and rapidly in those days, and in it there was always room for one more

I tried to drop my cane, but there was nowhere to hide it, so I stood there, fixed like a dummy, till the pother ceased and the girls became aware of my presence. Whereupon they stopped, partly owing to astonishment and partly because they were out of breath.

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The girls stood lined up with mock humility, their chins in the air, their hands flat by their sides, waiting to be spoken to. But the mischief was, I did not know what to say. I stood there like a gawk, the abominable cane in one hand, while I pulled feverishly at my moustache with the other.

'Please, sir' said the dark one.

'Yes, sir!' chimed in the tall, fair, demure one.

'We won't do it again!' said the little curly-headed person, adding to her neighbour on the left hand, 'Will we, Junie?'

'No, we won't; don't whip us! Ple-ee-se!' they chorused. And then quite suddenly they laughed, and breaking away they challenged, 'Of course he won't, because he can't catch us. Try, if you dare.'

Now I was young and not in the habit of being dared by young women; so throwing my cane, as it were, to the owls and the bats, I gave prompt chase, and being acquainted with the side passes of the forms, as well as gymnastically fit, I was not long in trapping the tall, dark girl by the waist. I was on the point of claiming the reward accorded by immemorial right on such occasions when a door opened in the wall, known as the Head Master's door, and within it stood a tall, severe, soldierly looking man, at sight of whom I nearly dropped through the floor.

The Head!

And I was standing there with one of his daughters, whose name I did not even know, in an attitude which must have made it seem as if I held the young lady in my arms. It was only for a moment, of course, and then the girls flitted off like birds, not in the least intimidated by the entrance of their father, nor apparently finding anything

abnormal in the situation. I felt it distinctly mean that they should have left me to explain. But in the hurry of the moment I could only think of Stanley meeting Livingstone in the centre of Africa, so I said, 'Dr. Cassells, I presume!'

The two explorers were probably less astonished that we were. But Dr. Cassells had been carefully drilled, for he only bowed in his turn and responded in far-away pensive tones, 'You are the late acting Head Master, Mr. - ah, Adrian - Adrian Ross, senior classical master in this Academy.'

He cast the vague eye of the thinker upon me and I was moved to add, 'Everything below is ready for your reception - '

'No Town Council or School Board delegates or anything of that kind?' he demanded hastily, making a half-turn towards the door into his house. I reassured him.

'Nothing at all of that kind,' I said; 'only the staff.'

'Ah well,' he sighed sadly; 'I put myself in your hands. Get it over as soon as possible. I dislike presentations - almost as much as my daughters - by the way, I think you must have met them before. Did I not observe - ?'

Here his foot slipped on the infamous cane, which I had thrown behind me, and, getting out a double eye-glass, he thoughtfully surveyed it.

'Ah,' he said, drawing back a little as from a poisonous snake; 'what is this?'

I intimated that it was a cane, and that though I rarely used such a thing myself, it was the badge of office and necessary prerogative of the Head Master.

'Ah,' said Dr. Cassells again. 'I see - a humble but perhaps in the meantime necessary relic of the barbarous ages.'

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I explained that as things were in Longtown, and while the youth of Longtown remained in their present state of original sin, mingled with much actual transgression, such incentives to good behaviour were not only useful, but necessary.

'We shall see - we shall see,' said Dr. Cassells mildly. 'I have not so far found the use of corporal chastisement of great use in the rearing of the young - either in the school or - in the family!'

Within myself I agreed, so far at least as the family was concerned. The three young witches who had leaped so daintily over the hacked and inky desks of No. 4 classroom, and tripped off so opportunely so as to leave me in the lurch, had certainly not been brought up (like the horse and mule) with bit and bridle. No wonder their father put on his eyeglasses to see what sort of thing a cane might be.

I was glad because of the girls. Their immunity had certainly made for righteousness, or at least for charm in youthful masculine eyes. I asked no more.

All the same I had misgivings as to the success of Dr. Erasmus Cassell's methods in the High School of Longtown. So that night I ordered a punching-bag, a new Sandow chamber gymnasium, a vibratory masseur (mechanical), and ordered parallel bars and trapezes to be set up in the disused shed attached to my landlady's house.

If the Head Master of Longtown Academy had a personal aversion to enforcing discipline, his senior assistant had none in the world, and I resolved that there should be no falling off in this respect in the matter of our report.

Rather the reverse.

CHAPTER TWO

BLACK-BUT-COMEPLY

Next day was a Tuesday. I had forgotten to look out for Miss Lizbeth Douglas that morning; the plume of her hat, which she wore large and, as it were, equatorial, passed unnoticed above the whitewashed wall of Mr. William MacCormick's adjacent brewery.

But the reason was that the time-tables were to be revised, as the whole work of the school for the year was to be remodelled in accordance with the new principles of the Head, imported by him from the private school in Sussex, where with enormous success he had taught backward and difficult boys of the professional and middle classes.

Dr. Cassells was a Longtown boy. He had been a Grammar School boy in the days long before the Education Act of Lord Young had, as was natural, made all things new. He had been the only son of his mother, and she a widow. He was poor, ill-nourished, unpopular.

But when once he had escaped from the numbing lash of a cruel master in the lower forms, he soon proved himself the most brilliant boy by far that the Grammar School (famous for such) had ever produced. He took the great Cheviotshire Bursary, and the Town Council seriously considered the question of doing something for him. They considered the matter so long, however, with so many adjournments, committees, and reports, that

the lad had taken his degree before the matter was concluded. Indeed, there were still a dozen amendments, not counting objections to minutes, and objections to objections, points of order, and such-like, to be taken, when Erasmus Cassells, having won a famous Glasgow scholarship, was already half-way through Oxford and reading hard for honours. He got them - a double first - and still the Town Council talked on, till one day, Erasmus having been appointed tutor to certain Royal Highnesses, and being compelled to travel, sent a present of books to the Longtown Public Library, which the single bookseller in the town valued at fifty pounds, sterling money of the realm.

Then even the Town Council saw the folly of its ways and dropped the subject. So thus it happened that Erasmus Cassells, D.C.L., LL.D., was never the object of public charity. However, the matter was thoroughly threshed out, and every one who knows a northern town council is fully informed as to the meaning of that expression.

I think that by and by Erasmus became tired of his extremely successful school for the mental and moral training of backward boys. Or perhaps he felt vaguely - it must have been vaguely - that his family of daughters was growing up. At any rate, he sold out his rights in the High Horsfield College, and after a season in London, devoted (so far as he was personally concerned) wholly to the reading-room of the British Museum, he accepted, rather in haste and without sufficient knowledge, the situation of Head Master in his old Grammar School, now grown into a County Institution, and governed by a set of men in general much more difficult and backward than any boy specimens he had dealt with within

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the College walls at High Horsfield, in the pleasant green county of Sussex.

I felt that I could help him with these things. I knew the men, their good points as well as their narrowness and bigotry. I foresaw how they would play with fault-finding, not because there was any fault to find, but for the sake of keeping themselves before the public as pushing tradesmen, rate-saving citizens, with no absurd old-fashioned ideas as to the value of a liberal education - in fact practical, no-nonsense men, with religion and politics suited to the needs of the locality in which they had set up their various offices and trading-booths.

Such I knew our governors to be, but Dr. Erasmus did not know. It had been otherwise in his time, when all things were arranged in amity between the parish minister, the chief heritor, and the master over a glass of toddy. Dr. Erasmus was aware, theoretically, that there was a difference.

As to the rest, I was ready and willing to enlighten him. I might also, possibly, make further acquaintance with the three girls and learn their names. For the moment I called them to myself 'Black-but-Comely,' 'Fair-and-Stately,' and 'Trip-it-Lightly.' I could not in the least divine which was the eldest. They might have been 'trins' for all that one could judge by appearances.

But of one thing I was sure - I liked Black-but-Comely best, though I will not conceal the fact that this was by no means the general opinion even of the staff of the High School - still less of the typical young townsmen of Longtown in Cheviotshire.

The girls were thought to be an 'agreeable addition' to the winter society of Longtown. This was specially the view of the new editor of the

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Cheviotshire, fresh culled from Fleet Street.

Fathers and brothers contemplated with varying but real pleasure the blooming appearance of the 'Rector's pew' - its old name - and on Sundays in the parish church they thought within themselves that as the late Head had been the most confirmed of bachelors, Charlie Pearson had been right when he said, 'It would have been a long time before old Billiard Ball gave us anything like that to look at when the sermon was drumly.'

And indeed the Reverend Dr. McGirvie's sermons were allowed by his staunchest friends to be 'drumly' - 'drumly' as the first rush of a river in flood, but without its speed. Sleep would have been a blessed relief, but, alas, even that was reserved for the riper in years and the very young children. Happily constituted people between the ages of five and five-and-twenty simply cannot go to sleep during the dullest of sermons. But they take it out in fidgeting. So the rising generation 'sitting under' Dr. McGirvie's hour-long homilies certainly wore the pew cushions to rags. If they sat, as many did, upon bare boards, they of the male sex wondered what it could be that so soon polished the seat and knees of their Sunday trousers. The suffering, however, was in a good cause. As for the young women, they sat stiller - their minds anywhere but upon the words that fell from the preacher's lips, but their bodies fixed to a proper and decent attention. For even when going to the gallows (as any good collection of trials will abundantly prove) a woman takes heed to her appearance.

The mothers' point of view, if they had daughters somewhat of the same age, was rather different. You see, there were not enough young men in Longtown

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to go round, even as it was, supposing that every trousered thing immediately took to himself a wife. And the introduction into the town of a Rector of the High School with a family of three fair daughters was generally set down to the discredit of the Committee of Direction. Several matrons even went the length of prophesying that at the next election some who should be nameless would lose their seats on the Board, for so disarranging the vital statistics of the parish.

The girls themselves, however, were in general much more generous. True there were exceptions - Seraphina Tavish, for instance, whose ear-piercing yells when solo-singing in the church choir had compelled only the deafest elders to sit in the official pew (which abutted upon the elevated pound in front of the pulpit which contained the singers).

'A girl like Seraphina Tavish is enough to scare all the boys within twenty miles,' was the comment of Mabel Rivers. 'Why, even our old dog Tray tilts his nose and hymns the solemn stars whenever he hears her begin practising!'

But the main stream of the girls was friendly. They bore no malice, and if the Rector's daughters - this again was a token of liking - did not 'treat them as beneath them,' they would see that the proper young men did the proper thing by the Misses Cassells. In fact they would generally 'be decent,' and, so far as the word is usable of girls in their mutual relations, behave like Christians to the three strangers.

CHAPTER THREE

MY LANDLADY MISS SHEBA

There was a very obvious reason why Longtown, the county seat of Cheviotshire, should be called Pernicketty Town.

Miss Sheba Saunders, my disinterested landlady (a classical master in the county high school gets only £130 a year, and an undefined and problematical rise every two years), uses bold and vigorous language on this subject, of which I get the benefit when I take, as is my custom, my meals in the kitchen - a bright place with scoured 'dressers' and shining plates of willow-pattern delft.

'Yes, as you were saying, Mister Ross,' she would begin - for she never spoke first at these repasts, knowing, as she said, 'her place,' but once started there was no further trouble. You asked a question and Miss Sheba Saunders, a pearl among landladies, would do the rest. 'As you were saying, Mr. Ross, the place is well named. Pernicketty Town - the very thing! Talk about being fitted like a glove. But no, you are wrong' (I had offered no remark), 'it's not the old maids that are the worst Pernicketties - far from that. It's the retired tradesfolk - the men specially, and the 'packies' that have made their money in England and come home to spend it in black-and-white painted houses with verandahs and aprons of garden in front, with luggage labels tied to every rose stem and cabbage stalk. So special and pernicketty they all are to the very puddock-stools.

'Aye, they are the worst - but there are others not far behind. The women who are so hot at home that

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they are bound to be running out to their tea-fights and sewing-parties four or five times a week, and nobody at home except a bit lass of fourteen, that is supposed to be doing the work of the house, including the washing, but really is sitting with her slipper heels singeing on the kitchen stove, reading *The Marquis and the Maid-of-All-Work* in the Standard Novelette series - thirty pages, double columns, for a halfpenny! And do I blame the lassie? No! Not if her mistress is a Pernicketty and never thinks that a bairn that has passed the sixth standard at the Board School may have other things to think about than cleaning up the back kitchen!

Certainly Miss Sheba Saunders was what is called an old maid. Though when you saw her at work and moving about the house, which she managed to keep as neat as a new pin with the minimum of apparent effort, you could not have told it on her.

But her horror was of Pernicketty-dom, and the people whom she called the Pernicketties sharpened her tongue and her wit. The town itself she loved. For she had been born there, and, as she often said, her father before her.

But there had always been something uncommon about the Saunderses. They were natural born Frondeurs. At least, no great lady of the Fronde could have attacked the established order of things in and about Longtown more fiercely than Miss Sheba Saunders. She represented an earlier civilization - perhaps even more exactly, a later and more advanced barbarism.

So, while I was yet a recent comer and eager for information, Sheba Saunders look me under her wing, without in the least allowing her lessons to

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interfere with her domestic duties. Her favourite time was when peeling potatoes.

‘It’s like this,’ she would say, dropping into her recounting tone, just as some ministers take on a falsetto when preaching. ‘There’s the mere wreck and débris of the auld families that Cheviotshire was once so proud of - well-to-do, spending the winter in Longtown, except maybe for a month in Edinburgh - the Darton-Gordons, the Glendonwyns of that ilk, the auld Admiral’s folk at Balmagowan. What are left? Just two or three that come for a day or two as the guests of their own shooting tenants - estates dwindled to the family burying-ground, and that little better than a tangle of weeds - all the rest in the hands of trustees - the trail of Dalrymple, Harriman, and Outlyer, Writers to the Signet, over the whole (or near-by) of the auld landed proprietors of Scotland.

‘Mostly it’s a pity of the ancient names. There are whiles among the younger of them a strapping lad or two. But off he goes to the Cape or joins the Nor’-West Mounted Police, and there’s an end of him - except maybe for a bairn or twa on the pairish to be paid for out o’ the rates, just to keep folk in mind of the guid auld times. But generally the heirs have only enough brains to arrange another loan, and so land the estate deeper in debt than they found it. Never an American heiress would look at them. A single look at their spindle shanks and peaky faces would fright the daughter of a patent-medicine man.

‘But there are the rich incomes in Cheviotshire - aye, there’s a heap o’ them. They have bought wide lands to the profit of Dalrymple, Harriman, and Outlyer. They have settled down to forget the Grassmarket and the smell of the tar on the

Archangel Dock. We have jute lords, paper lords, tobacco lords, but especially spirit lords. They have elbowed and striven, coming in to possess the land, and acting much like those nice kindly Israelites when, from Dan unto Beersheba, they took what wasna theirs, and made mince-meat of the Canaanites except for whiles marrying their daughters, if it were worth their while and the distillery smell was over-strong.

That sort are mostly our county gentry now, and they sit and try decent poachers in the same line of business as their grandfathers, and write J.P. and D.L. after their names.

'Aye, aye,' continued my informant; 'but we owe them something. It's them that keep the Longtown shops open. It's when their motor-machines stop before the door that Smith Brothers drops the pound he is doing up, forgets that the cash-box is unlocked, and is out on the street, standing bare-headed in the rain, in a tick-and-a-half of the clock.

It's neither you, though you are a learned man, or me (though Smith Brothers was an apprentice to my grandfather) that could keep him from leaving us to twirl our thumbs, to watch him bowing and smiling, the envy of every other shopkeeper on the High Street, while he takes the orders of Mrs. Glenlivat MacMutchin or Mrs. Stilton-Cheddar (of the great Creameries Company. the breath of which poisons the air for miles). Oh, I'm not saying but what Smith Brothers is right, and in his place we would do the same. He bows down to them. He runs for them. He gets his bald head drookit for them. He canvasses for them at elections, though his family connections and personal opinions have been on the other side for half a score of generations. But Smith

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Brothers is a prudent man and considers well on which side his bread is buttered. The Incomers are mighty and shall prevail. The Auld Originals of Cheviotshire are gone more hopelessly than the Lost Ten Tribes. One hears whiles about them. A sough goes through the land that "The Darton-Gordons, the Glendonwyns, the Weirs or Reidswire are coming back to their own," But after a while, it is just like the most part of the prophecies - it remains unfulfilled.'

Many other curious things also concerning my neighbours did Miss Shelia communicate to me. She had a tongue which, according to the speech of the neighbourhood, could 'clip clouts.' And she certainly used it for my benefit.

'For,' as she often said, 'I being an incomer could not be expected to understand so strange and unprecedented a district as Cheviotshire, and especially its principal town Longtown, all at once.' Indeed, Miss Sheba herself, who had made it the object of her closest studies during forty years (owned to), felt herself as yet only on the fringe of her subject.

Still there were things which could be understood, and she proceeded to enable me to do so. But at our very first confidential talk Miss Sheba had made sure of her ground.

'A good-looking lad like you, that comes here without any encumbrance, cannot be over-careful - '

Here of her own accord she interrupted the flow of her speech to look me squarely in the eye, as a cross-examining counsel fixes a doubtful witness. 'Ye are not married, I hope, Mr. Ross?'

'No,' I averred; 'not married!'

'It would have been a shame to your wife if ye

had, considering the darning of your sock heels and the state of your shirts when ye came here! But are ye engaged? It's not curiosity, and I have nothing to say again' what David in the Psalms calls "his sins and faults of youth." Faith, kenning the lad that David was even when he was no youth, it's easy to imagine what they were! But, tell me, are ye trysted, young man? for much depends on that in this town.'

'I have not given the thing a thought, Miss Sheba,' I answered truthfully enough. (If the Psalmist had prescription in the eyes of my good landlady, so assuredly had I.)

'I'll take your word for it - in the meantime, Mr. Ross.' Miss Sheba finished the potato-peeling, went to the kitchen sink, a sort of oblong leaden trough that Miss Sheba spent a good deal of her time scouring, scalding, and disinfecting. She turned the uncoated, slippery potato balls over in her hands, as if playing some game.

'But,' I added, stretching myself on the chair-bed for a good informative talk, for it was Saturday and I had no work to do, except a score or two of Latin proses, which could be looked at in the evening, 'what has that to do with me, Miss Sheba?'

If you were allowed to call your landlady Miss Sheba, you had penetrated considerably into her good graces. You had less liberty, certainly, but you were better looked after. Also, you were by no means permitted to 'make a fool of yourself.'

"Matters," says he; "matters"! Deil's in the laddie. But it matters just as much as if you took a ticket for Glasgow when you were bound for Edinburgh. Pernicketty Town is full of mothers with daughters to spare - nice, douce, agreeable young women, especially when their mother is deep in a game of

cards, or if she sails on the other tack, and forgets herself discussing the minister's last sermon.

'See, young man, there are such things as parties in winter at Longtown, particularly among the Pernicketties, and if it is suspected that you are an engaged man, as Hector or Cæsar or Hamlet says, not all the water in the Compensation Ponds could wash away that little blot. You would be left, out, sucking your thumb, while all the wild rips of lawyers' clerks and stuck-by-the-road medical students would be there, dancing the soles out of their shoon that are not yet paid for, and (unless in the case of their fathers' finding out and half breaking their backs) never will be.

'But as it is (and there being no conflicting evidence),' Miss Sheba went on, 'I will tell the minister's wife the morn's morning. She will be here as soon as she hears of your arrival to take note of my impressions. They call her "The Teapot with Two Spouts" – a most uncivil way of speaking of a minister's wife.

'And what for? Because whatever you put in one spout, good or bad, she pours out upon the parish with the other. She's better than the *Cheviotshire Advertiser and Mercury*. And her man – the parish minister – he is the Barnacle! Tiends are the rock on which his hope is founded, and he sticks close. But for all that they are fine decent folk, Dr. and Mistress McGirvie. And I'll never hear a word said against them in this house. So I warn you, young man. I belong to another denomination, like my ancestors before me; but that's neither here nor there. I have aye a warm side to the Auld Hoose.'

'And who are the other ministers?' I asked. For I knew that on such a subject Miss Sheba, if in the

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mood, could not fail to be rich. She was not, however, in the mood, for she snubbed me remorselessly.

'In His good time ye will ken,' she snapped; 'for I, Sheba Saunders, will see to it that you do your duty and in turn attend them all - except the Episcopian, that is for the motor-folk, and has neither art or part in this land of Knox and John Howie of Lochgoin, that chronicler of the elect. But the rest ye shall hear and, having weighed the matter, ye shall take your choice whom ye shall sit under. There's the Barnacle, if you want to sleep pleasantly in an atmosphere of dust in summer and mould in winter - a comfortable man, with a thorough-going wife that can, as the saying is, make or mar ye in Pernicketty Town.

'On the whole, for the sake of your worldly advancement I would advise the Barnacle. Mrs. McGirvie has no daughters of her own, and is a motherly body. Besides, though a shining light among the Pernicketties, she is no ways pernicketty herself. I would advise the Barnacle, if only for his wife's sake. She would give you good, unbiased advice.'

'But what is the matter with your own, Miss Sheba?' I asked.

'Oh, mine!' she cried, with a toss of her head; 'I'm a seeking woman myself, and maybe I might be wanting to be Mistress Somebody some day - that is, if I lost my wits and they did not get me away to the asylum fast enough. Besides, I have the evil of women more than usually unruly - I am referring to the tongue, Mr. Ross. I explain that, for I see that you are but ill grounded in your Bible - not like your predecessor, who as often as he was sober could reel

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you off Saint Paul, an epistle at a time!’

‘But tell me about the other ministers, Miss Sheba.’

‘Plague’s in the lad!’ She was at the bake-board now, and the ‘dunch-dunch’ of the heavily crushing rolling-pin employed in oat-cake making punctuated her sentences. ‘Ye think I have nothing else to do than to answer your fool questions?’

There was a pause; Miss Sheba was considering.

“The other ministers?” says he. Let me see. There’s the Prayer Meeting Minister, the Bible Class Minister and the Fiddling Minister. (He dances too, and is only attended by auctioneer folk from the market, and the lads of the Three Tumbler Club, and his kirk is only a chapel of ease, at any rate.) Then there’s the Bairnly Minister, so called because he always has an anecdote in his sermon about a little boy, which he tells with tears in his eyes, so that all the mothers flock to him and think of their own little Tommies – the very identical little Tommies they slapped for swinging the cat by the tail; the same little Tommies they will partially disrobe, in order the better to convince them that their best boots soaking wet jumping over Tweedie’s Burn is not a proper and Scottish way of keeping the Sabbath. But the Bairnly Minister is a Son of Deborah and is chaplain of their lodge, which helps to keep up the attendance at his kirk.

‘Except the new-comer they call the Birdy Minister, that’s the lot; and if you want the doctors, here they are. There’s the Society Doctor, who dresses for dinner – at somebody else’s house – every night. He knows queer stories and is the cure-all of the enriched squatters and motor-folk. He has one himself, and when he comes to your house (he

never comes to mine, I'll take my oath) he tells you that the slight, very slight, tremble of his hands is owing to driving his car; also that you might mistake the odour of petrol for that of wine and spirits, too liberally mixed. But his father's uncle was a genuine baronet, and as for himself, he was Chief Chronic for ten long years - Doyen of the Faculty of Lag Behinds and Pillar of Peterson's Pub, in Drummond Street, opposite the College. But now he has got through somehow and is in great request. Now he has the richest practice and does the least for it - except that he is always risking his life driving home in his car after dining out. But he has his good points too, the Society Doctor - though the less you have to do with him the better. And if ever I hear of you sitting down to a sinful game of cards with him or his like - ye will be good enough to look out for other lodgings, and that the speediest, Mr. Ross. For as sure as my name is Sheba Saunders, ye will find your bit boxies on the doorstep of this respectable house when you come back.

Then there's Auld Wife's Doctor, a real Pernicketty him, and his wife is as bad - by no means a kindly clash like the Barnacle's wife, but full of the bitterness of the waters of - what was the place that they put the branches in - oh, aye, Mara. And if I had my will of the Auld Wife's Doctor's wife, I wad let her have all the branches she needed, only stripped of leaves and cleanly laid on. This poor weak arm would be made strong for the purpose, as it were, providentially.'

'You speak with feeling, Miss Saunders!'

'Aye, do I not? I should think so, indeed!' My landlady raised her voice. 'Mrs. Howie is by way of being very unworldly and pious, when she is not

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engaged in flaying her neighbours alive; and once she had the insolence - I can scarcely get the words out - to hint in a testimony meeting that I, Sheba Saunders, was not only a worldly woman (where maybe she was not far wrong), but that I was over-friendly with my young-men lodgers - like yourself, as it were, Mr. Ross!

Rage altered the still handsome features of Miss Sheba, and the rolling-pin almost thumped a way through the solid wood of the bake-board.

‘As if,’ she resumed in a voice of scorn, ‘she would have a decent woman like myself’, with a tongue of her own and a gift of expression, do nothing but sit and girn at her cat all the blessed day. The idea! Oh, the besom! I’ll be even with her some day, if I have to face her, and make her prove her words - aye, were it the Last Day and the Great White Throne set up! It’s no Sheba Saunders that would be feared. I’m no a woman to call any decent body names, but I’m thinking that the Principalities and Powers would hear something that time, whatever!’

This was the first time I had seen Miss Sheba, as she said herself, ‘roused,’ and she owned presently that perhaps she had gone too far. There were good points about the Auld Wife’s Doctor’s wife, after all.

Indeed, however fierce my landlady might be in dashing a pen-picture of a celebrity of Pernicketty Town, she always, about five minutes after, made the same discovery. They were, perhaps, not quite so black as she, like David in his haste, had painted them. After all, they had their good points, and what more had any of us?

Miss Sheba made no great profession of religion, but when it came to practising it she had few equals and no superiors.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE FORERUNNER

The Forerunner was a startling surprise to Pernicketty Town - called on the maps Longtown - county seat, populous centre, and source of all authority of Cheviotshire. Many people do not know where Cheviotshire is, but that is an easy thing to tell them. It is bounded on the north by the unnavigable and unmanageable River Drum. On the east it extends to the spumy tides of the Glaswegian Firth, a jutting estuary of which cuts it nearly in two. To the south a spur of the green Cheviots bars the horizon, and the county is named after them, as if it were a French department.

As to the west, it will leave the imagination more free if we are not compelled to state how far in that direction Cheviotshire extends.

It has one large town, Longtown. Here are a good many factories, chiefly of agricultural implements, also tanneries, and there is an iron foundry near the railway-station. Hosiery is also made there, and the sheep to furnish the wool for the rather 'winter weight' fabrics can be seen from the mill windows gravely eating a swathe straight uphill - on their way to become mutton chops and underwear.

The population counts about twenty thousand. It enjoys all the comforts of civilization, including a new and hygienic county jail, a market, as in towns purely English, and water laid on in every house, after much opposition from the proprietors.

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It thought itself (with some cause) one of the most religious towns in the world. Grown and bearded men went to church by scores, and heard every week that the wrath of Heaven was about to descend upon them and their ancient city, which was own sister to Sodom and Gomorrah, to Tyre and Sidon, as well as to several other cities of antiquity of which the less said the better. But they had listened to this often and so patiently, that mostly they let it slip past. At any rate, the denunciations of an hour ago made no difference to their enjoyment of their Sunday dinners.

They might commit themselves to the extent of certifying that 'the minister was in fine trim the day!'

But they would go no further, for fear that wife or mother would support the claims of Longtown to be the most godless, dead, Gospel-hardened spot in creation. They did not in the least believe it. Neither did their womenfolk. Neither, be it whispered, did the ministers. The people liked to be abused from the pulpit, so abuse was supplied to them according to the ordinary rules of political economy.

Yet at that very moment, the fiercest of all (in the pulpit), the Reverend Thomas Conley, who had ladled out wholesale threatenings and slaughter to his congregation, had undone the second lowest button of his waistcoat, and was asking for another helping of 'that good gravy.' For, when all was said and done, he was a kindly family man, and beyond expression docile indoors.

Now what astonished this little church-going, workaday town, with its multifarious mission meetings, committees, Sons of Deborah (a temperance organization of the secret-society type), was to find itself suddenly confronted by the fact

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that there was some one among them who believed every word of what they had so long listened to with cotton-woolly ears.

The marvel called himself the Forerunner, and his business in Pernicketty Town was to prepare the way for the coming of Reston Rigg, the great Mesmeric Religious Revolutionary.

Reston Rigg was, according to the Forerunner, stirring the dead and doomed cities to their deepest depths. There was no doubt, to say the least of it, that he was making a more than considerable noise in the country. What if his methods were new? What if he condemned all previous visiting evangelists as utterly as mere placed ministers - men who had no real apostolic gifts? They could sing. They could preach. But they had no magnetic gift. They could pray, but their prayers got tangled among appeals for a good collection. It was different, the Forerunner declared, with his Master - 'The Master.' He would take nothing, though, like the apostles, he did not despise a bare sustenance. If (as had been the case) a rich and grateful lady had given him two thousand a year, a motor-car, with driver and all running expenses paid, was that his doing? Could he refuse what was so obviously for the good cause? Certainly not. But he would have no collections at his meetings, and all gifts had to be sent to him anonymously, and would be kept a secret between the Master and - well, One whose Name was never off his lips.

Now, whatever the faults of the Presbyterian system and of the several churches and preachers in Longtown may have been, the name of God was always used reverently when used at all. The very carters, prodigal enough with condemnation to the

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eternal fires, when they swore, halted, slurred over, and skipped That Name.

But the Forerunner boldly proclaimed the rights of Reston Rigg to daily and hourly personal communion with the Most High. To hear him talk you would have thought that the 'Master' carried God in his pocket, as a watch is attached to a watch-chain.

This shocked Longtown, especially when they saw the placards that the Forerunner put up affectionately with his own hands. But the Forerunner took small heed. There were no evangelists, mesmeric or otherwise, but Reston Rigg, and he, Saul Adam, was his prophet. Saul had tried to get lodgings with Miss Sheba Saunders, but that keen-spirited and sharp-tongued lady had cast him forth for blasphemy. He spoke things concerning his Master - things not to be so much as named in Longtown. Yet was Miss Sheba, as we shall see, the least pernicketty of all the aborigines of Pernicketty Town.

The Forerunner then asked for and obtained the shelter of a cart-shed from a kindly baker, whose blameless life naturally led him to consider himself the most wicked and abandoned of men. Some flour sacks, well dusted, for bedclothes, the straw litter for the baker's pair of van horses to lie upon, a few light-footed, swift-darting rats for company, and Saul Adam slept as soundly and with as good a conscience as in Miss Saunders's best cumceiled chamber and on the clean-sheeted, spring-mattressed beds which were the pride of her heart.

For the Forerunner obeyed the greater call. Life and lands, luxury and the gold of earth, had they been within his reach, he would, in all sincerity,

have scorned. He was the Forerunner. He was nothing, but - he prepared the way, and he read and reread the chapters which deal with the life and work of John the Baptist. He did not venture, openly, to continue the comparison, but he was very conscious that he was not fit to unloose the latches of Reston Rigg's patent-leather Oxford shoes.

Saul Adam had a full week to spend in Longtown, and to the Forerunner it proved a difficult and lonely time. For one thing, his principal, immersed in higher matters, had forgotten to send him on any cash.

Next, the Reverend Thomas Conley, generally so eager to lend his church to every wandering preacher and stray missionary with a message, held aloof. For he was a shrewd man, Mr. Conley, and had discovered that by assiduously frequenting the meetings, he could accustom the wounded birds to return to the nest after the departure of the evangelist to carry his message 'to other cities also.'

But after a few minutes with the Forerunner, to whom he had been introduced by his wife (struck by his boyish curls and blue eyes, always bright and eager), he gathered that Reston Rigg, the Master, the great Mesmeric Evangelist, refused to allow the least division of labour. No minister, especially, must have art or part in his processes of attracting and stirring. They had, indeed (such was the opinion of his Master, faithfully repeated by his Servant), as much or more need to be 'revivified' and to 'receive the power' than the meanest of their congregations.

Saul Adam was a faithful Forerunner, and left no stone unturned to make the coming Reston Rigg the talk, not only of Longtown, but also of the southern half of Cheviotshire. Men working down by the Old

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Dock or hunkered along the walls of the factories discussed him over their dinner-pails. The ministers who were on friendly terms with each other united to arrange plans of defence. The ground was secured for a great marquee - it was far too large to be called a tent. A despatch had been received at the railway-station, communicated by the booking clerk of No. 4 shed, that a special 'lie' was to be cleared in the goods yard for the travelling apparatus of Reston Rigg. There was even talk of a special train.

To the boys all this promised something of the nature of a circus. The elder girls listened with beating hearts to the tale of how handsome was Reston Rigg, and the wonders that he had wrought wherever he had gone. They did a little sum in simple proportion. They could see for themselves how good to look upon was the Forerunner. They heard what Saul Adam said about his 'Master, 'and so it was easy to imagine how moving upon their spirits would prove the voice of one tall and fair as an angel, gifted with a tongue that dropped alternate honey and fire, and endowed with gifts little short of miraculous.

As for me, I confess that, without the knowledge of my landlady, I attended several of his meetings, to hear what he called 'his Testimony.' There was one in the Corn Exchange, a building which was usually only opened on Mondays, being the Longtown market-day. But the boyish air and eager eyes of the Forerunner had worked a miracle on Mrs. Sarah Jimson, be auctioneer's wife, who, in right of her position, kept the keys. Her husband's Cattle Mart was next door.

The Forerunner told his story

I was a wreck, physically, morally, and

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spiritually, when Reston Rigg got hold of me. Young as I appear to be, I was even then old in sin!’

The youthful skin and bright, curling hair indeed belied the words, but the eyes vouched for the fact that the Forerunner believed them with all his heart.

‘An outcast from my father’s dwelling, I lived wickedly and precariously on money sent me under cover by a good aunt - blessed be all women for her sake! I was a medical student in Edinburgh - they said the wickedest in all that great and wicked city. Thrice in my first year I had seen the inside of the common jail for breaking street lamps and battering in the doors of theatres. I have lain drunk in the gutter, the scorn of the passer-by, till the police gathered me up like a bundle of wet rags. The money supplied for my examinations - examinations which I never passed - I wasted in haunts of iniquity. Folly and forgetfulness were meat and drink to me. I was so low that, at least, I had no fall to fear.

‘But there came a moment when in spite of myself I was lifted from the mire. I was set upon my feet. At first I was too bewildered to give thanks. Yet what wonder that I should follow the man who saved me to the ends of the earth? He laid his hand upon me and the evil passions - the demons which had tormented me - fled before his touch. I should be an ingrate if I refused to give this testimony wherever my voice be heard. And to that he added another precious benefit. He took me by the hand, as Paul took Luke and Peter took John Mark. He made me his Goer-Before, the Preparer of his Way, and in some humble sense his companion.’

There was no doubting the sincerity of the speaker. The mixed audience in the Longtown Corn

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Exchange, week-long loafers about the auction marts and the Market Hill, engineers from the Southern Counties agricultural implement works, and tanners from Tugg and Shearwell's, besides all the multitude of women, who, like the Athenians, were ever desirous of any new thing, listened spellbound. Even the negligent professional scoffer, elbow carelessly laid on window-sill, if he did not exactly remain to pray, at least abstained from winking at his fellow. They tasted sincerity, in the place where of all others they least expected to recognize it - in the words of the advance agent of an advertising revivalist.

So I betook me home that night, and with guileful tenderness spoke to Miss Sheba Saunders of the young university student, whatever mistakes he might have made in the past, having to lay his head among the straw of the baker's stable. I pictured him shivering beneath his flour bags, yet with a soul that mounted rejoicingly upwards, soaring above the green, wet roofs, above the smoking chimneys of the Longtown factories, to knock finally at the door of the Eternal.

I put this to my landlady in such a fashion as to make it seem almost a reproach that he had been sent away from hers. Miss Sheba was of a tender nature, though her tongue often did injustice to the secret intents of her heart. So to ease her conscience she immediately treated me as though I were entirely responsible for the expulsion of the Forerunner - a matter with which, naturally, I had nothing to do. She furthermore charged me with the duty of bringing him back, since my causeless brutality had been the cause of his being driven from the door - perhaps to relapse into yet more

terrible crime. She quoted scripture, and urged repentance upon *me*. After all, she said, men were as hard to one another - as women were to women. But if I really wished to purge my crime (oh, I need not think to deny it!), I must go directly and fetch him. Meantime Miss Sheba would get the little room behind the private parlour ready.

She vindicated her position in the following speech:

'It's not for that Reston Rigg, the hypocrite he calls "his Master," that I am putting myself about - I don't know *him*, and I shall have to see him first before I can judge - '

'But, Miss Sheba, you call him a hypocrite, and at first you judged that this young man was not fit - '

'Well now, are you going to go or not? There's McRobert upstairs who would not be sorry to do as much for me if I gave him the chance - an accommodating man, Mr. McRobert.'

Now McRobert was my choice aversion. He was a traveller in tobacco, and thought himself rarely facetious. His idea of humour was to imitate in my presence the contortions of an urchin being flogged. If I had not been in Miss Sheba's house, there were times when I would have induced contortions on my own account. I had not kept up my Sandow treatment for nothing.

So, at the mere sound of McRobert's name, I declared that I was ready to start on my mission.

'Bring him straight here, now, mind you,' commanded Miss Sheba threateningly, as if I would have made him take a rest at every public-house by the way.

Thus, like the returned prodigal, or rather like Paul brought out of the prison by the magistrates,

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Mr. Saul Adam entered with honour into the family circle of Solway House, a private and very select house of comfort and entertainment, presided over by that lady on autocratic principles, compared to which the Czardom of All the Russias might be called a Free Republic.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESTON RIGG, MESMERIC EVANGELIST

With well-thought-out precision Reston Rigg adverted on a Saturday, at the hour when the mills and shops of Longtown were letting out their crowds of homeward-bound men and women. He came in a splendid motor-car - blue and gold, representing purity and peace, the gift of the lady aforesaid. He would have come in an aeroplane if he could, but the art was not then sufficiently far advanced, and the truly good man takes care of his life. It was a valuable life, and so far as Reston Rigg was concerned, certainly he could not be replaced.

He stepped calmly out in the very centre of the market-place and in a loud voice proclaimed, 'The Word of the Lord is among you! Peace be on this city, on the men thereof, on the women, and on the little children!'

It seems incredible, but he raised his right hand to heaven as he spoke, and those who saw his white cuff go back vouched for the fact that they saw also the glitter of a golden band circling his wrist like a girl's bracelet. This was certainly something uncanny.

The folk of Longtown were not easily moved. They may have been Gospel-hardened, but they certainly did not rush into anything hastily. So the men who came to their shop-doors to listen to the taking possession of the town by the New Revivalist smiled a little grimly crosswise at each other, though the fact that he was the possessor of a blue and gold motor-car, with a real chauffeur, rather disconcerted

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them. They connected motor-cars with people who paid large monthly bills without question, and would never demean themselves by 'writing to the Stores.' This last was the unpardonable sin in Longtown, and a black list of those who committed it had been made out by the goods clerk at the station. These never found anything they wanted at the Longtown shops.

But it was otherwise among the women and children who, at that hour of the day, were returning from their marketing - always a great undertaking among the working population of Longtown. Mothers attended by Jane Anns, and sometimes very senior sisters accompanied (owing to domestic events which cast their shadows before) by juniors released from school, gazed open mouthed at the pageant, the like of which had never been seen in Longtown.

'Keep your head shut, Mary! Hear what he has to say!'

'Stand on the side-walk, I tell you, out of reach of them wheels!'

'I say, Jane Ann - '

'Well, what is it, then, nuisance?'

'Lizbeth, stop gawkin' at them engineer apprentices - greasy good-for-nothings that they are! think I don't see ye, Lizbeth? Wait till I get you home. You listen to what the good man is saying!'

The good man was not saying anything in particular. He was used to such scenes. He had re-entered the blue and gold motor-car, in which he sat in lonely splendour, a tall, dark man, handsome, with the points of his dense moustache turned fiercely upwards, outdoing even those of a familiar model in the fierce militarism of their crook. Yet there was something in the direction of his black

eyes as if each were focused upon one and the same point. It could not be called a squint. For he could look abroad directly enough upon the casual hither and thither of the market-square, with the vague abstraction of a philosopher. In his time, so they said, he had been stoned and cast out of towns which he had gone far to enlighten. There was no doubt that his methods, in Presbyterian and over-churched Scotland, given over to antique modes and the literal interpretation of Holy Writ, gained him at least some active enemies, if at the same time multitudes of friends.

At any rate, Reston Rigg, Mesmeric Evangelist, was a new and possibly a great force.

Jane Ann and her mother were now both equally interested. Jane Ann so fully forgot the apprentice lads from the Southern Counties agricultural implements works, that she laid down her basket, and her chief admirer, Sam Rutter, overturned it with a kick of his foot in passing; while Goaly Chambers, second favourite, gathered from about the big glass doors of the market fragrant cabbage-leaves and all the general debris of the week, which he placed carefully within, covering everything with a white cloth. For in such simple manner does heart speak to heart in the larger (but not too large) towns of Scotland. In cities, manners are other and less pastoral.

Now, in the long run, Jane Ann would certainly receive a 'good slap' from her mother for letting her market-basket be thus defiled. But at that moment Mrs. Kinstrey was as incapable of thinking of future beef and greens, or singed sheep's head, as her daughter of giving due care and attention to her marketing-basket.

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What was going on in the square held their attention. Even the severe eye of the Barnacle Minister, the Reverend Doctor McGirvie, of the parish church, awakened no pulse of shame in Jane Ann's mother. She was not an elder. She was not even a man; and it would be a sore and pitiful day when the right to a reasonable curiosity was denied to a woman, 'a daughter of Eve,' as the Doctor loved to call the sex in his public ministrations.

So in honour of the new wonder-worker, and of his gold and pale blue motor-car, with the Forerunner blowing a golden trump on the front seat, both Jane Ann and her mother forgot what were to each the main objects of life - the engineer apprentices to Jane Ann (they were so manly, and when clean played so famously in the 'soccer' football team on Saturday afternoons), and to her mother the crown of the week, the Sunday's dinner, at which all the family would be united.

The show was indeed imposing. The marquee had arrived and was duly set up by uniformed helpers (provided for by the excellent donor of the motor-car), while not far away, in a retired little plantation, there was a caravan - oh, not a gipsy caravan that one dared not so much as put a nose into - but an elaborately simple, though comfortably large travelling-wagon, or rather house on wheels. Pale blue and hyper-gilded it stood. A separate portable kitchen, with the fire already lighted, was established at one end, and a black man of venerable aspect moved about in attendance upon mysterious stew-pots and other nests of fragrantest odours.

I think it was the black man who sealed the credit of the Mesmeric Evangelist in Longtown. True, the

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Forerunner had prepared the way, doing his task nobly. So much no one could deny. And now that the 'Master' was come, did he not gladly lay aside his functions, and putting the 'golden trump' to his lips (it was silver gilt, but no matter), blow upon it the stirring marching tunes which the Master set to his own words? And so they proceeded slowly, the crowd making way for them, up the High Street, across Hamilton Place, to the little green nook at the back of the great Monday marts, where in a grove of pines the caravan had been installed, somewhat withdrawn from the vulgar gaze by the goodwill of Sarah Jimson, the auctioneer's buxom wife. She had done it, scarce for the sake of the cause (her husband was a three-tumbler man), but because she had looked into the blue eyes of Saul Adam, the Forerunner.

Her husband was of angry mood when he knew, but then his wife was accustomed to let him blow off steam freely, and then to take her own way without question.

And so it fell out upon the present occasion.

It was long before the Mesmeric Evangelist was disturbed in his tenancy of the little clump of fir trees behind the fort-like wall up which the urchins scrambled, scratching their knees and endangering their hands upon the triple defence of broken bottles along the top.

'I trust little to hotels - I dislike their discomfort even more than their sordid iniquity,' said Reston Rigg when he met his benefactress, Mrs. Tom Jimson, 'and I am obliged for your hospitality. I have not always experienced the like, I can assure you, dear lady. Too often I have been acquainted with cruelty and ingratitude.' And he bent upon her

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suddenly the strange effect of his two black eyes, fixing them on the spot in her forehead midway. And immediately through her comfortable flesh ran a tremor. She half regretted that she had offered the pine wood so near her dwelling to the mysterious Mesmeric Revivalist.

Her husband had flung off in a passion when he heard of it, telling her that he would not be home till late, which was his ordinary manner of working off his temper. The next morning he would have forgotten all about it, and Sarah Jimson was familiar with the use of bicarbonate of soda and the various fruit-salt cures prescribed by experts in such cases. She knew that Tom would be all right by dinner-time to-morrow.

Nevertheless she had all to-day to herself. She had no wish to spend it all alone, so with a sincere desire to be of use, she asked the Master if she could be of any further service to him. She had also a secret longing to see the inside of the marvellous blue and gold wagon, with its double bogie wheels, to enable the huge body to swing round curves. Sarah seemed to divine far-off the strange world of purity and sacredness in which the Mesmeric Evangelist dwelt.

But, as usual in such cases, Reston Rigg fought shy. He knew that to deny a thing to a woman is to make her take a more consuming interest in the denier - so great, indeed, that the thing denied becomes merely secondary, or is even altogether forgotten.

He was right. That night Sarah Jimson thought about the tall dark-moustached man in his narrow blue and gold prophet's chamber, the star-studded ornamentation of polished wood immediately above

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him - the clatter of the rain on the roof of the caravan lulling him to sleep, or the roar of the wind among the pines startling him at his prayers. Tom was very late indeed. But more real to her than her husband, overtaken at the 'Three Tumblers,' was this lonely man with the wondrous ideals, over whom the angels watched, whose name was filling the little town. Indeed, Longtown was eloquent, either to praise or to blame. The majority, indeed, was still hostile. They were men, and naturally suspicious of another man. But a faithful and expectant following was growing up about the mystic and mesmeric religionary, and at the head of this band marched, golden trumpet to his lips, Forerunner Fame, in the person of Saul Adam.

He had no doubts. He knew. Was he not the living memorial? His very earnestness presaged other victories. His soul was the true evidence that within the ark abode not mere wood and stone, but the very word graven by the finger of God. The Mysterious Urim and Thummim existed, for he had touched them and was whole, While in his eyes there shone at times as much the Shekinah glory as may cling to a man, now cleansed but lately sunk in iniquity.

CHAPTER SIX

SEA TWILIGHT

Of course, after my adventure in No. 4 classroom with the three daughters of the Head, I was not long in finding out their names. I made this my special business. Indeed, for some days I had no other, and it was on this account that I saw so little of the first appearance of the famous and alarming Reston Rigg in Longtown.

Here in brief are the results of my scrutiny of the registers. It was one of the most telling arguments urged by the Pernicketties against Dr. Erasmus Cassells, that not only had he a foreign-sounding name himself, but that he had given others as bad to his daughters - names taken from heathen gods and popish objects of worship. Yet he had been at a loss, poor man. The imaginative nomenclature of his grandmother's days had gone out of fashion for babies, and so after thinking how he detested all the ordinary Jessies, Phemies, and Thomasinas that encumbered every schoolmaster's roll-book, he trenched the question simply but to his mind sufficiently, by naming them after the months in which they had first made their appearance. His wife had been too meek and too delicate to make any objections. Erasmus was always right.

So I found that my 'Black-but-Comely,' who had been my first prisoner in the game of romp in No. 4 classroom, had been duly registered and baptized by the name of January Cassells. She was the middle of the three sisters in age as in stature.

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Tall-and-Stately, with the grave grey eyes, the masses of golden hair with the wide rich swirl like a stormlaid cornfield, was Miss June; while, last of all, the merry little person, Baby of the Cassells household, carried along with the impertinent smile and the tangle of light curls, the appropriate name of May.

She was the only one wholly satisfied. The others had introduced improvements in nomenclature, or at least seemed to them to be so. Black-but-Comely answered to the Dutch and masculine name of Jan, and to that alone - though 'You,' 'You-You,' and 'Ary' had all been tried as contractions. As for Miss June, she generally signed herself Juno, for the reason that to a young person so tall and in every way remarkable the sound of her proper name seemed almost an impertinence, and from a stranger a provocation to undesirable intimacy.

In private, however, I must say that there was not much to choose between them as to mirthfulness, and a common and healthy gift of not taking things seriously. May was perhaps a shade more kittenish than her elder sister Jan, while the senior of the three, Miss Juno, wore sometimes an air of indulgent reproof as she gazed upon the babyish conduct of her sisters - at least in the presence of men. But I have reason to believe that a good deal of this was artfully and of malice prepense assumed.

At any rate, as I have said, I very promptly and at first sight (a few days before the coming of the Fateful Evangelist to the town) fell in love with all three of them.

This seems complicated, but when I thought over the matter, I felt sure that Jan alone was mistress of my heart. I loved Jan in the night watches, but

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when I was with the tall Miss June (I had begged for that privilege of calling her so), or when May smiled mischievously up in my face or laughed at some masculine clumsiness with a sound clear as that of clinking money - well, to my shame, I was prone to forget about black-haired Jan, whom I had held for a moment panting in my arms after her wild race across the hacked and ink-stained desks of No. 4. I knew just as little what the three Cassells girls thought about me.

Little by little I grew to be considered, first as A and then as THE friend of the family. In a hundred ways I strove to make myself indispensable to the Doctor. I relieved him of a great deal of the drudgery of school-mastering - time-tables, exercises to correct, reports to send out - and so left him the more free to exercise his really remarkable influence upon the scholars of the Longtown and Cheviotshire High School. But in the house he was little in evidence, abiding among his books, mainly interested in producing a series of translations which would open to the unlearned the full spirit of the classics, without being useful to the laziest boy who ever had a yellow-paper 'Kelly's Key' under his Virgil.

I had long possessed and studied these yellow books, Bohn's also, as every master ought to do. I always carefully dissected each of their renderings before a lesson, thereby gaining great renown in class by being able to spot, not only the 'cribbers,' but the exact source of their glibness in translation, a glibness only equalled by their extreme costiveness when asked to parse and construe.

It seemed to me an impossible thing that this trio of girls, made for the joys of youth and living, should

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care to be present in the marquee on the evening that the Mesmeric Evangelist opened his mission in Longtown.

It was through the Forerunner that this came about. One night, as usual, I had taken the girls, all three of them, a walk down through the fields behind the town. The path was all butterfly-fingered with May-flower, and at the roots of the hedges clusters of pale lavender violets hid themselves away, the sweetest scented things in the world, except perhaps Jan's breath when I had held her that moment in my arms.

We had fallen a little silent, which was by no means our wont. At least only June usually kept quiet, and her very quietude, like her name, was full-blooded and warm. She should have been Augusta and not June, had the matter been given the earlier consideration it deserved.

We were making for the Dutchman's Point, a promontory from which we could look right out to the tiny spark of the Solway Reef Lighthouse, steadily dotting and dashing its warning across the most dangerous narrow seas anywhere about the coasts of Britain. Here also we could follow the windings of the shore, the bee-haunted braes of Tudor with dark Ben Tudor behind them - always brown or purple with heather, or white with snow, according to the time of year.

There was one point where we always let Jan run on a little ahead. It was her right. The smooth waters of the Dutchman's Lake spread away to the south. Farther out was the sparkling blue line of the distant main channel, while all about a multitude of birds sang among branches which grew right down to the salt water edge.

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Impulsive Jan had taken her skirts in one hand and run on, as indeed she did always. But of a sudden she stopped, and moving her unengaged hand backwards, signalled us not to approach any nearer.

She herself remained, as if spellbound. So fearing some danger, I advanced with care, and there, on a little green hill of sprouting heather, at the side of the beach, his face to the setting sun, knelt the Forerunner.

He was praying, and his upturned face was all sunlit and transfigured. The red of sunset sparkled and gleamed in his hair as on gold-dust, not with an equal illumination, but rather with a broad general effect of light, heightened by a shining point here and there, like the half-embedded facet of a nugget.

We went away very silent, all the four of us. Jan was the only one who had heard a word of what the young man had said; but she did not tell us; while, with the reticence and shamefacedness of intruders upon some holy place, we did not ask, but followed each other silently home, back through the woods and dewy pastures.

As we entered the town, we saw the great marquee being lit up. In the dusk of the red-roofed town lying already half asleep in the valley, between the turquoise of the river mist and the copper of the distant sky, this bright cupola, golden and lamp-starred, rose above us on the Market Hill like a vision.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE FIRST SOLOIST

'No,' said Miss Sheba, 'ye are not at all the laddie ye used to be! Mercy on me, no! Whiles I would have your boots brushed and you set down to your books by seven of the clock p.m. But now here ye are, bold as brass, asking for a latch-key, no less. And who is to see after you the Lord He knows. I am doing my duty but ill by giving it you. For did I not receive a Mission from your sainted mother to

watch over ye? But what with running after lasses, attending uncovenanted tent meetings, and suchlike, I fear ye are little better than a disgrace. My decent father would rather have taken you with him to the "Three Tumbler Club." He had his failings, honest man, but he aye kept within bounds, and

often would he say that the Club at the "Royal" kepted him from worse temptations. He meant the hizzies. For it is a kened thing that when a young man begins with *them*, there's no more to be hoped for from him. Consider Solomon in all his glory!

I considered, but said that I could see no close application to the present case - unless, since she herself had been named Sheba, her father had been no wiser than Solomon, in his day and generation, though possibly with fewer opportunities.

At this Miss Saunders flew up into a sudden passion of filial indignation. I knew not, it seemed, the first sillabub of what I was talking about. I had never seen or known Half-Pay Lieutenant Duncan Saunders, R. N., who had served his country at the

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glorious battle of Navarino, and, owing to the necessities of early marriage, taken to market-gardening shortly afterwards.

‘He never missed a Sunday at church for fifty years,’ said his daughter, turning to me with the porridge “spurtle” quivering threateningly in one hand, ‘but he did not hold with Mesmeric Revivalists, nor anything out of the old way. He stood for decency and order, and if he had been in health and strength yon man with the twisted moustache would have been tarred and feathered and ridden out of town upon a “stang”! Aye, that would he! Duncan Saunders might be a past president of the “Three Tumbler Club” at the Royal Hotel, but he was an honest man and a power in the town. He could never do with impostors! And many were the fine lads who thought as he did.’

This was severe upon Reston Rigg, at whom, by way of the Forerunner, she indirectly aimed her fire.

However, Miss Sheba but bayed the moon. She was not really angry with me, only a little jealous, as one might be with a Mission from my mother to look after me, who yet felt herself not by any means too old to do a little looking after on her own account.

Oh, by no means in the way of love, but at least Miss Sheba was a good-looking, almost handsome, woman, in spite of her grey hairs - early grey - for she was not much more than forty - a mere girl according to the age measurements in Cheviotshire, where a full company of centenarians had once been gathered without any great trouble, exercised in saluting, and presented to the King. I think she had a certain motherly tenderness for me, mingled with the influence of an elder sister. In short, Miss Sheba might have been the youngest of my aunts, if I had

had any. In this mixed but exigent character she kept a continual eye upon me, reading me sharp lectures upon manners and morals, entrances and exits, and especially concerning the certain destination of young men who ask for latch-keys.

But one thing I did not know about my landlady. She dressed herself in her oldest garments, put on the poke-bonnet of a peasant woman of the country (kept for garden work in summer), and followed me to the great marquee on the Market Hill. She followed gingerly in the rear, and when I went in by one entrance with the three girls, Miss Sheba stole in by another. If any recognized her, they knew enough of her family history to understand why she did not wish to be seen. Her father had been a great Three Tumbler man. It seemed natural enough, therefore, to Longtown respectability, that she should be seeking grace.

At first I feared that the Head might object to his daughters being so much about with me. But May, the youngest, being always stated first favourite, offered bring the matter before her father - for my satisfaction, that is, by no means for theirs. The reference to authority was brief.

'Father,' said May Cassells, bursting in all ready for a walk and kissing recklessly the bald spot on the rectorial crown, 'we are going out - June, Jan, and II!'

'Ah?' said the Doctor mildly, yielding his attention a little regretfully even to his favourite daughter. 'And whither, pray, might your foolish feet be tending? You are not, I presume, venturing forth at this hour without a suitable escort?'

'Oh no, father dear, not by any means,' cried May, rumpling his hair over his brow in a manner which

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was only permitted even to her in right of babyhood. 'Mr. Adrian is coming with us. We are *all* going, and he is going to look after us. He makes us behave, I can tell you, even Jan!'

'Then I wish I had his gift, missie,' said her father. 'He must be a wonderful young man. But I was just thinking of sending for him. There are two examination papers to be made out and a score of themes to be corrected. Mr. Ross might be willing to help me. Tell him I am exceedingly pressed with work of another sort!'

It was in May's mind to remark how frequently that happened when there were examination papers to draw up or correct, but she felt the moment inopportune. What she wanted, *and* expected, was not long in coming.

'Well,' said her father, 'go along with you. See and remember your position - and mine. Remember not to compromise the young man with any of your follies. He occupies a situation of trust and considerable responsibility in the County High School. He may aspire yet higher - yes, yes, a young man of attainments far above the average, a good linguist - and, by the way, May, will you give him these papers to look over for me? He can return them any time - to-morrow - suitably corrected and marked. Good night, child! No, pray don't trouble the others to come in. I am busy, and one of you is enough - quite enough! Close the door carefully behind you, and do not forget to give the papers to Mr. Ross!'

Our emissary returned in high spirits, gave a spirited imitation of the Rector's paternal anxiety, and though the bundle of papers which I thrust into my breast-pocket meant two hours' hard work that

night before I got to bed, that strange breath that blew through my life ever since the Cassells girls had come into it soon chased away the feeling of depressed glumness which the work of examining papers always causes to a professional.

It was in vain that I used to imagine myself happy alone with my books and my studies. Miss Sheba meant something, of course, and being a woman, helped me greatly. For I am of those for whom there is no help in man. My spirit and intelligence, indeed, were content to work solitary, and seemed sufficient for themselves. But there had always been an emptiness in my heart since the death of my mother. I would say to myself, when I saw my comrades passing, not unaccompanied, to the little theatre or to the frequent concerts of Longtown, 'Ah, I will be a head master with a London degree (for I had passed my matriculation two years before) when you are still working away on sixty-a-year assistantships.' This was easy. But for all that, when I saw them bend closer to say something in the ear of their companion, who looked smilingly across at the green-shaded lamp in my window at Miss Sheba's, the triumphant feeling would give way, in spite of all my resolves. For my fattier, as his sole legacy, had left me a craving in my soul for the comforting and companionship of women. Yet in Longtown I passed for a man's man, and rarely went into mixed society. But the laughter of the junior masters as they passed along seemed to say, 'You will grow old without love and without laughter. Your life is being pressed dry like a flower between the leaves of your eternal books. You are lonely. Men do not interest you, and presently girls will have nothing to do with one so dull and hide-hound.'

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Thus I had come, while still working hard at my books, to understand that even the foolishness of my comrades' love adventures was better worth than my own solitary existence.

As in a flash, I foresaw that what shall one day trouble us most will not be the ebbing miseries of old age, nor the deceitfulness of riches, but the remembrance of the happiness we might have had for the taking, but which we let slip.

From my first sight of the three girls at the School House I resolved to make no more mistakes of this kind. I knew not at first which to choose - let alone which would have me. But indeed I was just then so happy that I hardly cared for choice. I was content to be the friend of all three - of radiantly dusky Jan, of grave June, and of May of the mirthful mouth.

Indeed, the favour they accorded me was the greater in that it was quite exceptional. None of the younger masters, even Mansfield, our Cambridge man and Beau Brummell, made any running with the Rectors' girls. Bright, simple, and friendly with me, they froze up 'the pushers,' as they called them. So I was envied and, I fancy, hated - which pleased me next best after the girls' friendliness.

* * * * *

In spite of all this excellent advertisement, it took a good time for the Mesmeric Revivalist to make any impression upon the people of Longtown. He denounced them in words of fire. He waved his arms abroad. He invited them to come forward and acknowledge themselves the greatest sinners in the world. But of his special powers he gave no

evidence.

It was evident, he said, that a malign influence lurked somewhere. However, he could wait. Reston Rigg declared that he had never known a town upon which the devil had so strong a grip as upon Longtown. The citizens were not without a sense of humour of the grim kind, and 'Devil Town,' for at least a week, almost ousted Pernicketty Town from its place of pride. The Restonians, as the few convinced followers of the Newest Revivalism were called, sighed over the hardness of heart of their fellow-townsmen. But they were wrong.

The truth was that the ministers had been saying things quite as emphatic and promissory as to the future of the inhabitants - and with a great deal more of Calvinistic logic to back them. So it was little wonder that, so long as he confined himself to speech without any wonder-working display of his mesmeric gifts, Reston Rigg made little progress in Longtown.

The hopes of the faithful were deferred, and the regular ministry, allied for once with the auctioneer and the Three Tumbler Club, rejoiced. The Assyrian had come down like a wolf, it is true, but the flock within the various Longtown folds had proved unexpectedly horny.

It was on Market Monday that the Mesmeric Evangelist first, astonished the town and restored the sick hearts of his followers. It had been a day of much and considerable merriment. Trade had been brisk. There had been hiring of labourers in the market-place and in front of the Town Hall. Many good wives had made their summer provision. Between the hours of ten in the morning and four or five in the afternoon the population of the town had

been quite doubled.

Meanwhile in the little blue and gold caravan, hidden among the pines at the back of the auction mart, other business was being transacted. All day it had rung with the bellow of Tom Jimson, as batch after batch of cattle and sheep was cleared off to English buyers. (There being no need and no time for Tom to cry up the merits of his disposable goods. Prices ruled high, and all things went merrily.) Under the pines, then, their ears taking in the grateful hush, but yet speaking low, lest they should be overheard, the Mesmeric Evangelist and his sole confidante took counsel together.

No, not the Forerunner - the first soloist, Miss Hester Vane. The Mesmeric Revivalist showed a grave and almost martial face to all the world, but he unbent even to humility before his first soloist. She was a girl with a clearly cut pale face, a short curled lip on which there lingered a trace of irony singular at twenty-four. She was a girl of no illusions, and though attached professionally to the great business of the Mesmeric Wonder-worker, she did not in the least participate in the enthusiasm he created.

'Well, have you written your weekly sheet of lies to Lady Benthorn?' She uttered the words listlessly. She sat on a folding chair with her head resting against the cushion which was really the under side of the closed wash-basin. Her hands were behind her head, her fingers loosely netted. One neatly booted foot was laid over the other, and the whole pose of the girl indicated weariness, ennui, and something also of hardly concealed contempt.

The master of the caravan sat on a shelf-seat which folded up when not wanted. There was no

trace of the bed. During the daytime it was held in place against the side of the caravan by another clever, labour-saving device, so that room was made for a pretty tea-table, on which stood the silver tea-equipage with spirit lamp complete, given along with the caravan by Lady Benthorn of Bournemouth. the banker's rich widow and chief supporter of the Mesmeric Revival.

'I have not lied, Hester,' said Reston Rigg. 'I have told as much of the truth as is good for Lady Elizabeth to hear. More than that, I have included twenty pages written by Mr. Adam.'

The girl laughed a little, perhaps nervously, perhaps scornfully. 'That is only lying at one remove. You have hypnotized him. He sees what you want him to see, and he writes it down.'

'I have used such poor gifts as the Almighty has given me.'

'Bah,' said the girl, waving him away with her hand as if he had been a puff of cigarette smoke, 'you forget, Reston, that once - for a little while - oh, for so short a time - I too saw as you saw - spoke what you bade. I believed in you. I made you a god. Ah!'

She raised her hands a little way from her lap, and with a short, contemptuous sigh let them fall again as if in pity of her own folly.

'Then,' said Reston Rigg, frowning from under thick black eyebrows down upon her, while one hand played restlessly with the crooks of his Wilhelmian moustache, 'if it is as you say, why do you remain?'

'To save the others!' said Miss Hester Vane. The words fell from her lips with a snap, but she subsided immediately into her usual listlessness.

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'Besides,' she said, 'there is the Forerunner. I have to watch over *his* innocence. And in addition, Reston Rigg, if it were not for my being here, there are a great many things that might happen - the Blundel-sands business - the trouble at St. Anne's. We might have them all over again. But not while I am here to be a guardian to you, Reston.' She stopped a moment and then repeated thoughtfully, 'No, not while I am here.'

'And why, pray?' said the Mesmeric One, rising so suddenly that the spring seat clacked against the side of the car. He stood over her, lowering and threatening.

'Why?' he cried. 'I dare you to say!'

She lifted her thin hand to compel silence - to impose it, rather. 'Hush, there is that auctioneer's wife prowling about somewhere outside! But I will tell you why, Reston Rigg. *You are afraid of me.* That is why!'

He laughed, but not with any true ring of mirth.

'Afraid of you! Why should. I be?' he began. 'I could wring - '

And he made a threatening gesture with his powerful hands. He was a tall, strongly built man.

His head almost touched the roof.

'You forget,' she said, sinking back nonchalantly into her chair, and letting the long, lissom fingers of her right hand droop over the arm, 'I have been through all that. Yes, to weariness. You cannot even mesmerize me now. You cannot make me love you. You cannot even make me hate you. I am that most terrible thing for a man like you, I am an absolute non-conductor of your influence - an unbeliever in the palace of the High Priest.'

'What are you, then?' he raged, clenching his

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hands.

'I am your first soloist,' the girl said quietly. 'Please hand me the hymn-book there, and we will make out the programme for this evening.'

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE CLERICAL CLUB

Up to the present I had had a pretty good reputation in Longtown, as a studious young man, much trusted by the School Board and the Committee of Management. I had given lectures, and was understood to be preparing for an important degree examination in London. Then I would be 'somebody.' So at least it was understood. Only my youth was against me for immediate promotion, which fault would mend of itself, and indeed, since the three Cassells girls came to the School House, I was in no hurry to leave. Besides, I was supposed not to 'bother my head about the lasses,' as they said in Pernicketty Town, a belief which had been largely fomented by the heated denials of Miss Sheba when such a thing was hinted concerning me. So that even my friendship with the Rector's daughters did not alarm people. There was always safety in numbers, and Jan, Juno, and May Cassells had been abroad. So Longtown, for once charitable, had settled that I must be wishing to improve my French and German. The girls were 'dabs' at these languages.

The explanation suited me, and I don't think that the girls when they heard of it (for I told them) specially objected. At this time they were always amused with everything at Pernicketty Town, and I had to coach them carefully. For having mostly lived in big, unfriendly towns where one does not know one's next-door neighbour, they were at first apt to

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tread on the good pernicketty toes of the citizenesses.

Of course I could not know, except vaguely by sight, the lords and ladies of the motor and county set. It took about twenty years to get 'into the county' in Cheviotshire, and forty to be quite sure of it. That is in an ordinary way. But if you married into one of the penniless pedigreed families, then you could almost at once shake off the scent of the paternal cheese, the ink of the official desk. You became 'that young Sinclair of King's Seat who married Lily Glendonwyn, you know,' or 'Logan of Leathes, a brother-in-law of the Lord Lieutenant.' But mostly only great spirituous kings were rich enough to take this short and easy way of acquiring patents of nobility.

The town shopkeepers, of course, were ready to receive me - the high and the low alike - though in the case of members of the School Board a certain patronage might be traced. The High School Committee-man in the shop was glad to take my order for a pound of butter, but in his own house he somehow treated me as being in his service.

'See and deserve your screw, my mannie, and perhaps next time the question comes up I will vote you an augmentation.' So at least they seemed to say.

But of all people in this capital of Cheviotshire I think I got on best with the ministers. They all liked me, and I must say I liked them. Longtown was not a fighting place of sects. There had never been even a contested election for the School Board, and this chiefly because (with one temporary exception) the ministers had arranged among themselves to keep out of it.

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There was, they said, no need for them to descend into the arena. If the special interests of their churches needed to be supported, they could get their fighting done by proxy. Had they not lawyers in all of their congregations? And what good were these except for this? So the town lawyers, with some of the upper crust of shopkeepers, a pushing journeyman tailor ("to keep down the rates"), and a silent farmer or two representing the 'landward' interest, made up the School Board. It was on the whole a good school Board, weighty and able to bear criticism. The quarrels and mutual abuse of the various members generally occupied about two columns of the *Advertiser and Mercury*. After the battle the fiercest champions went out to our local nine-hole course, and the results of their 'foursomes' could be found on another page under the heading of "Longtown Golf Results."

But the greatest privilege of my life was being admitted to an exceedingly informal Clerical Club that met weekly in different manses of the town, the members of which, with regard to each other, used great hospitality and yet greater plainness of speech.

I say this informal membership was a great honour. But generally after a while I escaped from the high aridity of their debates by taking refuge with their wives and sisters, who, having the arrangement of the forthcoming feast, were glad of my help before and sympathy afterwards.

Still there were occasions when I stayed, especially since I had begun to be known as the cavalier of the Cassells sisters. For the women used to put leading questions, and sometimes teased me openly. The men never did.

Even the 'Bairnly Minister.' whom quite

mistakenly I dreaded most (because he had a sister he could well have done without), did not dream of attacking me upon a question so delicate. This was the more remarkable, for the unmarried among themselves came in for most merciless chaff on the part of their married fellows of the cloth. The Doctor was the doyen at this game, and spared neither the Fiddling Minister, Mr. Gay, nor the Bairnly Bachelor, who wore silver spectacles and was supposed exceedingly to beware of the widows.

The Fiddling Minister retorted as became his name and his *quoad sacra* church. He even carried war into the enemy's camp, and retailed and commented upon the delights of the man who is single, and for whom life is one grand chapel of ease. The last comer, the young minister of the Second Union Kirk, at this period supported him vigorously.

These solemn conclaves were mostly held in the parish manse, a big, square house, embedded in the trees of a peasant orchard, into which white-painted, and grey-granite headstones looked without the least unpleasant reminder for the ministers and their familiars. Those who work day and night among the raw stuff or mortality are not to be put out by so small a thing as a few gravestones.

It was at the Doctor's, therefore, that I called that celebrated Monday evening when I knew that the Clerical Club would be deep in their discussion of Mesmeric Evangelism. I knew generally what would be the sense of the meeting, but I had not suspected before the naked and unashamed way in which men who for years had dealt with spiritual things on their practical side could thresh such a matter out among themselves.

There were five ministers present, of whom four

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have already been described. These were our host, Dr. McGirvie, called the Barnacle; Gavin Gay, of the Chapel of Ease, a blithe and sturdy bachelor; Conley, of the First Union Church, distinguished for Bible-classes and a Past Grand Master of the Sons of Deborah; Frank Elder, the 'Birdy Minister,' according to the popular nomenclature, a young naturalist of much acuteness and value, who regarded the works of God not only on the Sabbath, but on the other six days of the week as well, and on all the seven found them very good.

He was the youngest of the band, was in private called the 'laddie,' and being more of my own age, I found him so congenial that I generally 'sat under him' in the Second Union Church of Longtown.

The 'Bairnly Minister,' the Rev. T. T. MacMeekin, with his gentle air and silvery spectacles, was a Congregationalist - though, as the Doctor said, when he accused him of 'Brownism' and other sins theologic (of which I had no personal knowledge), 'if only the creature would get married, and replenish the earth with little Tommies, instead of for ever preaching about them, we would overlook his Brownism.' To which he would reply, with a gentle irony mellowing his silver spectacles, that everybody had not the Doctor's luck in choosing a wife. He was always afraid that the thing might turn out badly, when it was too late.

To which the Doctor's habitual retort was that if MacMeekin did not hurry up it would soon be too late to mend, and he would go to heaven with his duty only half done.

These men when all present made up the excellent number of five, to whose councils, and specially to those of their womenfolk, I was admitted

as an authority upon the classics, a young man with an agreeable lightness of humour, and sufficiently pleasing to the ladies as to be able to keep them quiet in the parlour. But, instead of five, there might have been six, which, indeed, was the foundation number.

The Clerical Club had offered its membership, upon his first coming to Longtown, to the Reverend Cyrillus Broderick, of the Church of the Holy Apostolate. His predecessor had joined with the rest, and in argument had joyously given back buffet for buffet. But Cyrillus Broderick was young and narrow-minded - he called it being conscientious. His sort of Jew could have no dealings with the Samaritans - which did not in the least affect the five Samaritans, but left him a good deal on the outside of things.

Besides, Cyrillus insisted that his good honest name of Broderick should be pronounced Brodérick. 'I am one of the Brodéricks of Brighthelmstone,' he would say. 'I pronounce these names as my fathers did. I always wear silver-buckled shoes for the same reason.'

He spoke with a curious dogged determination of the 'London and Brighthelmstone Railway' (for Brighthelmstone meant just Brighton), and on the only occasion when he visited the Clerical Club he brought a little book with him, and insisted that the discussions should always be opened by a reading of prayers from his text-book.

To this the Doctor agreed, for he was a courteous Barnacle, and considerate to the stranger within his gates. But he made the very natural condition that the Rev. Cyrillus Brodérick should be willing at the next meeting to join in the prayers of the other

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brethren, who took the duty according to the order of their names on the roll.

'That I cannot subscribe to,' said Mr. Brodérick Brighthelmstone, Missioner Priest of the Church of the Apostolate. 'I do not and cannot admit that you have the least right either to preach, to pray, or to administer sacraments. You are not priests, you have no ordination from the Holy Apostles, and I refuse even to discuss so obvious a proposition.'

'It appears that we are much as other men,' said the Doctor mildly. 'Well, I am glad to hear it. It suits our folk better. But dinna run away like that, laddie; the tea will be on the table in five minutes, and if Mistress McGirvie be still to the fore, I'll warrant that ye will have no fault to find with *that!*'

Mr. Brodérick of Brighthelmstone remained, 'because,' he said, 'he would not offend a lady,' but he never came back. He could have neither act nor part in such doings. These men who called themselves ministers were, after all, only schismatic laymen, and the only priest he would have anything to do with was the good Father Macgillicuddy, who would have no dealings with *him* - on the ground that he, Mr. Brodérick, falsely asserted himself to be a priest - a crime which his good friends of the democratic and national churches had not committed.

But, after all, such a hedgehog of scruples and exclusiveness as the Missioner Priest of the Church of the Holy Apostolate was better out of a society which prided itself upon vigour and plainness of speech, especially where each other's opinions and peculiarities were concerned. But this day it was the turn of the New Revivalism.

'It's my opinion,' began the Doctor, opening the

debate, 'that more harm than good comes out of these extremes. Besides, there are elements personal to the man of which I think the worst - all that advertisement. It smells of the circus business.'

The Reverend Thomas Conley was the Doctor's usual opponent, and he instantly took up the rights of the defence. Indeed, the Doctor would have been astonished and disappointed if he had agreed with him.

'I'll have to put it with more "fashion,"' he would have said to himself, 'if only to wake Conley up. Gracious me, I must be losing my grip!'

'Doctor,' said his adversary, 'remember your opinions a dozen years ago about the Salvation Army. Are you prepared to homologate all you then said about that organization?'

'Deil's in me if I mind *what* I said - no, nor you either,' cried the Doctor. 'But there's a heap of good water has run under the bridges since that time, and I dare say I was overly sore upon the creatures.'

'You called them "mountebanks" - short and sweet - do you maintain that?'

'Maybe I did - *maybe* I did,' said the contrite Doctor.

'And now I hear you are a subscriber.'

'Not exactly a subscriber,' broke in the good Barnacle, whose good deeds were constantly finding him out. 'I have maybe by an odd time helped them with a bit siller if it was a good year for corn, and the wife did not ken I had it about me!'

'It's the same thing,' said Mr. Conley; 'don't shuffle, Doctor. Ye are an averred subscriber to the Salvation Army, which in this very room ye called a pack of mountebanks! Now, sir, may it not be the same with this new reviving influence that has come

amongst us?’

‘No,’ said the Doctor. ‘If ever I subscribe to help yon man, it will be through the Prisoners’ Aid Society!’

‘For shame, Doctor! Where’s your charity?’ cried Mr. Conley.

The Doctor smiled sardonically.

‘You and I, Mr. Thomas Conley, have flocks to tend and lambs of the fold to feed - we cannot afford to be charitable to the wolf.’

‘But what proof have you, Doctor?’ the Minister of the First Union Kirk demanded, ‘that this Evangelist, “Mesmeric” though it pleases him to call himself, is a wolf?’

‘In sheep’s clothing, or hardly that,’ exclaimed the Doctor. ‘Can ye fancy Himsel’ coming down to preach the Good Word - even to work miracles - in a motor-car, arrayed as for a circus - ’

‘I’ve been in Palestine,’ said the ready Conley, ‘and the roads there are not fitted for motor-cars, even if they had been invented. They are better suited for the pattering feet of donkeys. So I doubt not that the Master, when He had need, took “a colt, the foal of an ass” - and the best that He could find. Ye might as well say that ye would not go to the General Assembly in a third-class Caledonian compartment, because there were no railways in His day.’

‘We will keep this argument on the moral plane, if you please,’ said the Doctor, a little sharply pinched by this unexpected *ad hominem*.

‘I took the plane you chose yourself, Doctor,’ returned Conley; ‘but, indeed, all I hold is that we ought to defer judgment till we have some evidence. The man seems to be both sincere and disinterested, so far as I have heard. He has no collections at his

meetings - '

'But he takes subscriptions in his caravan!' cried the Doctor.

'And pray where did you get the money for your last Sunday-school treat, Doctor? Did I not hear you tell how Sam Tugg, of Tugg and Shearwell, came to your door with a couple of ten-pound notes, one night when you were nearly giving the whole thing up? Now, were you a wolf because of that?'

The Doctor was unruffled by Mr. Conley's style of argument. He passed it over as unworthy of reply.

'There's gain behind it somewhere,' he went on. 'The motor-car, the circus business, the travelling soloists, the advertising, even the lighting have all got to be paid for.'

And the good Doctor, who hated to find fault with his neighbour, but who by nature and training was ill-affected to unlicensed evangelists, shook his head with conviction.

The Fiddling Minister, whose opinion of such things was in strict accordance with that of Gallio on a former occasion, sat drumming his finger-tips on the table. He was pattering 'The Campbells are coming,' and every time that his ecclesiastical chief, the Doctor, looked his way, the movement slowed and softened to 'Put me in my little bed.' But the Doctor passed him by, and took the mild-eyed, silent Congregationalist who sat next in order.

'Mr. MacMeekin,' he asked, 'what do you think of this mesmeric revivalism?'

The gentle eyes beamed vaguely through the wide silver rims of a pair of extraordinarily out-sized spectacles, and the most peaceful voice in the world answered like honey dropping from the honeycomb, '*I think it's a work of the devil!*'

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Everybody gasped.

To the Doctor's philippics we were well accustomed. We had been hardened to the pelting *tu quoque* style of Mr. Conley, of the First Union Kirk. But a judgment so sweeping from the lips of our Gentle Bachelor astonished us almost as much as if he had joined the Three Tumbler Club and sworn at us out of the club-room window at the Royal.

We all waited for the explanation which was bound to come, and there was silence so deep that we could hear the clicking of Mrs. McGirvie's knitting-needles in the parlour and the voice of Manse Janet shooing the hens from her back door. I had never been able to disentangle these sounds before, owing to the continuous confused noise of wordy battle, but I heard them both then.

'Gentlemen' said the little Congregationalist, 'when I was very young - no, it is not about "Little Tommy" I am going to tell. There never was a little Tommy. I only wish there had been. I was in business in a town not very far from Glasgow - rather a successful business too. I was married - '

'Married?' cried the Doctor, throwing himself back in his chair till it creaked, 'and you have let Longtown - and you have let *us* - '

'Yes,' said the voice of the Bairnly Minister, 'I let you all think so. It was no matter. It was all over in a year, and though I am not an old man, yet I am a man stricken. Once I had a wife. She died and left me with a little child. So I know more about children than you seem to think. I love them, and perhaps am tempted to speak too often concerning them. I am well named the Bairnly Minister.'

The Doctor reached out a hand to the Congregationalist preacher and said, 'Man, give God

thanks! You are more fortunate than I. I never had a child.'

'I would I could think so,' said the preacher wistfully. 'But I reared her - it was a little girl. I did my best after her mother's death to be father and mother too. But there is something that no man can give. She lacked the peculiar odour of a quiet spirit. Perhaps I was rough with her - men are often given that way - without knowing it.'

He looked round the circle, peering into our faces, spying us out one by one, but I give these five men the credit that no man's smile escaped him even at the idea of the brutality of the Bairnly Minister.

'I called her Ella, after her mother,' he went on, 'and when she grew up she was beautiful - to me, at least. Nay, more, she found favour in the eyes of the young men - proper young men too, of my own and kindred congregations. But she would have none of them.'

'Then - ' he paused a long while, so long that the Doctor began, 'Perhaps you ought not - if you would rather not - '

'Yes,' said the little Congregationalist, 'I owe it to you good friends, and I will.'

'Well,' said the Doctor, 'you know us by this time.'

There came a young man, a revivalist, to the town - much as this one has come now and, as there was not the same peace among the brethren in that place (nor, indeed, in all the West Country) as there is here, he found no place in which to speak, till out of pity I gave him my little iron church. And at first I thought all was well. He spoke earnestly. There were conversions, and at the penitents' bench, a new thing in those days, girls wept nightly and cried for mercy. But this young man - I need not tell his

name, it was probably assumed - fairly bewitched the women. He seemed to cast a spell over them. His words aroused in them that which had better have slept. It became the mere wantonness of witchcraft. It was the devil. Last of all, on his closing night I went home, to find my girl, my only child, gone - and a letter on the table signed "Ella."

'Her also he had bewitched. She had fled with him. Afterwards, from London, she sent me word that they were married. I do not know. She was a truthful girl when she was mine. But I am sure that she would have lied for him. I would give the rest of my life to know that what, she said was true. That, with other things I heard of afterwards, is why I say that this sort of hysterical mesmerism, hypnotism they call it now - the subverting of the will of one being to that of another - is wrong and of the devil!'

Gentlemen,' said the Doctor, when he had finished, 'we will shake hands with our friend and see to it that what he has told us does not go beyond the four walls of this room.'

Nor has it, till the present telling, when the need of silence is past, and those who remain wish it to be so.

CHAPTER NINE

THE POWER

It was later in the evening of the very same day that the great meeting in the marquee took place, which first startled and then fully aroused Longtown to the new power and peril that had come among us.

The meeting of the ministers in the afternoon had been, even taking into account the academic defence of Mr. Conley as *advocatus diaboli*, firmly and entirely hostile. They had promised not to reveal the clinching argument of the little Congregationalist. But though Mr. Conley pointed out that every profession has its black sheep, and instanced certain sad occasions when even a General Assembly of the Kirk has had to proceed to depose one of its members, he could not awaken any confidence in the Mesmeric Evangelist as a possible child of light, visiting them like a comet from unknown and extra-orthodox space.

But then, though the influence of ministers remains great in Cheviotshire, yet there is manifested also the tendency of all freeborn Scots to accept no opinion upon authority. So on that Monday night a large part of all the various congregations in the town flocked to the big tent on the Market Hill to see for themselves. Their wives and daughters went with thrills of hope - the curious feminine hope that somewhere and somehow they would experience an actual and tangible change, which would do away with all doubts and fears, all worldly weakness and human frailties, and render them, like the Forerunner,

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miracles of grace - like him too, sure of present safety and future glory.

Such aspirations were of the highest and therefore the most widely powerful in that Southern Scotland, where, in spite of the scum of indifference and worldliness which deceives the casual visitor from the south, the well springs of the heart remain deeply though secretly religious.

Longtown, in spite of the ministers, was moved.

By seven o'clock groups of three or four were already making their way in the direction of the Market Hill. For the most part these sauntered carelessly up by-streets, as if merely bent on taking the evening air on the higher slopes, in fact, as if they did not know where they were going, The Market Hill happened to be before them, that was all, and the open doors of the great marquee. So rather than make themselves foolish by turning back, they continued their promenade - and went in.

Again, there were solitary figures, well wrapped in mufflers and with unaccustomed cloth caps too small for them, which slid along by the back of the brewery, skirted the vague, odoriferous pits of the tanneries, slunk along the back 'ash-path' lane that leads from the foundry, and so, finally, watching a chance, glided through a convenient canvas door and hid themselves behind the boardings which shut out the private portion near the orchestra from the public gaze.

These furtive figures were mostly elders and deacons, who knew that they were going contrary to the wish of the ministers they 'sat under.' They need not have troubled, however. For almost the only two men who walked steadily and purposefully up the High Street, entering by the front door (after

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accepting a tract and programme from the uniformed chauffeur), were the two leading ministers of the town, the Doctor himself, and his chief friend and dearest antagonist, the Reverend Thomas Conley. They came as men determined to spy out the land boldly - inquisitors rather than spies.

'It's very well for them,' said Smith Brothers to his fellow-elder J. J. Greatorix, head forester at Cheddar Towers, 'but if either of us were to do the like, the Doctor would preach at us every Sabbath for a month and look strait at the elders' pew all the time.'

J. J. Greatorix, a tall man with a studied carelessness of garb and a beard kept purposely bristly and incult to distinguish him from a mere gamekeeper - who copied the dress and manners of his masters - replied that there was no getting evens with the Doctor, and that, on the whole, though *he* might stand in the tent door plain for all men to see, they, his elders, were a deal better where they were.

'As likely as not,' said the wary forester, 'he has just come here to spot us. But if we lie close he cannot see through that plantation of lights along the floor. They are right between us and him, and though, if he were a cat, he could see through the dark, neither man nor cat can see through a perfect shrubbery of gas-jets.'

These were the foot-lights, which, in the most business-like way in the world, Reston Rigg had ordered to be attached and prepared for this particular evening, when for the first time he meant to reveal his special gifts to the folk of Longtown.

I would rather not describe the meeting. Indeed, I am not sure that I can do so and yet escape the charge of irreverence. But I will try briefly to get the

general effect.

There was a waiting time before the Master showed himself. He was too good an engineer of success to be on the stage when, so to speak, the curtain went up. Out of the space between the barrier and the footlights the Forerunner thrilled and shrilled upon his silver-gilt trumpet. He came forward into the circle of light, a slim, boyish figure in a black jacket suit, his cuffs and shirt-collar no longer doubtful (he had had the care of Miss Sheba). Here he pronounced an impassioned address. Then on both sides the choir of singers ranged themselves, some half-dozen, 'followers' whom Reston Rigg had brought with him - girls mostly - and a close phalanx of young people locally recruited. On the right, nearest to the audience, her face turned slightly downward, but the lights from the gas-jets enlarging her great sombre eyes and emphasizing the weariness of her expression, sat the First Soloist, Miss Hester Vane, whose name appeared in capitals upon the bills, like herself slim and tall. She seemed, however, to disinterest herself altogether from the lights, the waiting hush, the thrilling periods of Saul Adam and the blasts which he blew on his silver-gilt cornet.

In front of the aisle that led to the main entrance, and accessible from all parts of the great tent, was a kind of semicircular altar-rail, with a broad step in front of it - a glorified 'Penitents' Bench' - and both the rail and the raised step were covered with red cloth.

It chanced that we were somewhat late that evening - my fault, for I had waited rather long at the meeting of the Clerical Club. So the four of us, Jan Cassells, Juno, May, and myself, were further to

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the front than ever we had sat before, and indeed altogether more conspicuous than I could have wished.

We found places to the right, full in the light of the starred jets of the big roof chandeliers. We had good seats, covered with blue, and though the interspace was a little narrow for my long legs, we were comfortable enough. Then the concealed orchestra plays a rock-me-to-sleep tune, warm and comfortable as an old-fashioned Negro hymn before the music-halls got hold of them - passionate too and pleading, but I could not say for what or for whom.

Then arose the tall, pale girl, Reston Rigg's First Soloist. I cannot vouch for the exactitude of the words. Her eyes were vague and she made no gesture as she sang. It was almost as if the voice came from some fair sleeper - so little did she seem to be touched herself. A strange silence settled down upon the audience as it listened to the mystery of the ancient song. It was not a hymn. It was not a recitation. She seemed rather as if the Shulamite herself were calling in an agony of hopeless longing.

'By night, by night I sought him,
Him whom my soul loveth.
In the fount of gardens, in the garden enclosed,
I sought him - but I found him not.
I found him not!

'In the city streets - in the broad, broad ways,
I followed him whom my soul loveth.
The watchmen found me, mocked me :
Crying, 'Have ye found him -
Him whom your soul loveth?'

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I had passed them but a little way,
Lost them, forgotten them:
When I found him - him whom my soul loveth,
I held him - I would not let him go!
I would not let him go!

‘And lo, the winter was past,
The rain over and gone;
The singing of birds was come.
For now my beloved is mine and I am his,
*Till the day break and the shadows flee,
Till the shadows flee utterly away!*’

As the pale girl sang of the Shulamite, I felt the thrill run round the packed audience. They had heard the words read (or most of them) - read too in the hushed silence of days of High Communion, before the white cloths spread as in the upper chamber belonging to ‘such a man’ in the city Jerusalem. But this passionate utterance, the throbbing, languorous music, seemed the first true expression they had ever heard of the thought of the Singer of Singers and the Song which is Solomon’s.

This, at least, was nothing visionary, but a thing lived and known - vivid as the love which is the spring of life. The cheeks of the young flushed. I could hear Jan’s quickened breathing, and the eyes of my other neighbour June were dreamy and far away. May I could not see. She was leaning back, hiding her face in her hands.

The elder folk did not quite know what to make of it. The words were from the Bible, they knew. But still, somehow, they were vaguely uneasy. In the main entrance the two ministers stood like twin

pillars, the Doctor burly and square-shouldered, a frown on his brow as he peered out underneath his thick eyebrows, which kept moving up and down irregularly - the Reverend Thomas Conley, every inch of his two-yard-long figure drawn stiffly erect, thin of body, thin of face, thin of lip, not a movement or an emotion anywhere, standing sentinel in the path of duty, stony and inscrutable.

And then came Heston Rigg. He appeared suddenly, and stood up before us simple, grave, clad plainly in black and grey. It seemed to the waiting people that the moment before he had not been there. Then in the twinkling of an eye he filled the stage.

For a stage it was. If all the world be one - how much more was the little brilliantly lighted platform of the Mesmeric Evangelist's tent on the Longtown Market Hill! Yet somehow I think the people were for the moment vaguely astonished, even disappointed. Had he come in a blast of rending thunder and sulphurous fumes, he might have fulfilled the prophecies of obdurate elders. If he had been wafted down upon wings of aerial blue and gold, tinged with the hues of the rainbow, he might have equalled the anticipations of the younger women.

But instead he was only tall, sober, serious - nor was a certain dignity lacking.

He began to speak in a low voice, and even from the first I could see his eyes roving hither and thither about the house, halting a moment as they fell now on one and now on another. They passed me without a hitch. only to stop sharply at the sight of Jan's eager parted lips, June's heaving breast, and the shadowy face of May Cassells. Then on and on the intent gaze roved again, noting and marking

down.

I did not notice what he was saying at first. I was only conscious that Never had I seen any human being whom I disliked so much.

Of course I had seen him before, but only from the farthest edge of the canvas tent, and then his words had seemed to me commonplace, his methods well-worn. Now I had returned because, for some cause known to themselves, the girls had wished it so.

To-night, however, all was different. Even I could not escape the fascination of those piercing eyes and the compelling power of that tense voice, low and restrained, but, as one felt, with vast stores of will and energy behind every sentence.

The first words I remember hearing clearly were these, 'I stand in the multitude of the elders and I cry, You that are young, *"come out from among them!"* Lay aside all preconceived ideas of sin and salvation. Submit your wills to the message. There is but one way, and as the messenger of God I proclaim it!

I have been through the deepest waters. They have not gone over my soul. I have sounded the abysses. I have seen the Almighty face to face. From Him I received a mission to proclaim the Way. As Paul was born an apostle out of due time - so I, Reston Rigg, first of sinners, last of evangelists. And to me has been committed a power like to none ever confided to any servant before. I, alone among men, can go out into the highways and hedges and *compel* them to come in!

I have compelled you! How many of you wanted to come here to-night? How many of you scoffed? Oh, I know there are some hopeless souls who yet

resist the grace. I do not reproach them. Their hearts are as iron. But I laugh at no man when his soul is heavy. I preach rather to the spirits who are in prison.

'Who is in prison? Whose soul is bound? He or she who desires and dares not? Because of what? Because of the fear of men!

'Happily I can compel even such to come forward in the sight of all, to this scarlet and crimson altar, where thousands before them have found happiness. I will pick them out of this audience in spite of themselves. My eyes shall meet theirs, and they shall read the command "Obey or perish!" They will obey.'

He paused for a long minute, and then a sort of sobbing hush fluttered in the air; an influence was abroad against which every fibre of my nature protested. Yet even I could not rise and go out. It was impossible, because I knew very well that the three girls would not have followed me.

'Come!' said Reston Rigg again, speaking softly in the silence, 'all who have a sin upon their souls. There is a young man here' (his eyes encountered those of the Forerunner) 'who has made himself great at the expense of his Master. Let him come forward and confess!'

And with a cry the clear-faced youth dropped his trumpet and fell on his knees.

'It is true, Master. It is true. I have sinned and I knew it not!'

The interruption was so sudden, so unexpected, that the good folk looked at each other, suspecting collusion.

'Come,' murmured Reston Rigg, stretching out his right hand, and his eyes wandered here and there

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over the meeting of folk whom he now felt himself able to move at his will.

His hands described curves, as though to draw the wounded birds into his net. The lights darkened till the vast tent was in shadow, and all that stood out of the gloom was only the scarlet Altar of the Penitents and the forceful figure of Reston Rigg, Mesmeric Evangelist.

'Come!'

There was a great silence. It seemed to be raining mystic influence. Even the palms of my hands tingled, but spiritually I was not touched at all - except, that is, to a dull rebellion and smouldering masculine anger.

What the more finely organized women must have been feeling of that potent spell can only be suspected by what came after.

'Come!'

And with a rustle of skirts and a frightened moan a woman was seen to force her way up the side aisle. She had not been near - perhaps she had been afraid to approach - a fine, well-dressed, jovial woman, but now with white cheek and trembling lip, the tears raining down her cheeks, she fell rather than knelt on the red Altar of the Penitents.

It was Sarah Jimson, the wife of the auctioneer and the president of the Three Tumbler Club!

I heard the sigh spread and go round. Women sobbed. A young man from one of the manufactories strode forward, striking off his comrades who strove to arrest him. More women, a stream of girls, and on the red altar-rail a row of agitated heads.

Reston Rigg was calm. He had been quite sure of his power.

The Spirit is working - the fire that maketh alive.

LOVE IN PERNICKETTY TOWN

I have the power. See, I have compelled these - I will compel yet more. Come, you are about to perish. God's servant will bless you in the laying on of hands. Come - in a little it may be too late!

'Too late - too late!' sang out suddenly the sad and weary voice. *'Ye cannot enter now!'*

I heard a rustle at my side, faint as a bird taking flight, and lo, in a moment there was a vacant seat and Jan Cassells was kneeling on the red carpet beside the Forerunner, her head between her hands.

CHAPTER TEN

THE ENLISTMENT OF MISS SHEBA

Nothing in all my previous life had ever struck me so deeply, swiftly, and staggeringly as this disaster. My new heavens and new earth seemed to be crashing into fragments about me. There was no time to think. I must act. Yet what might not happen if I left the other two girls even for a moment alone?

An idea came to me. Of the three Cassells girls June once the eldest and the most responsible. This was not, of course, saying much, but I thought it might be enough to serve in the circumstances. At least there was no time to evolve another plan.

'June,' I whispered, 'look after your sister, will you? Don't let May do anything rash!'

And without waiting for an answer, I rose and hurried to the bench on which Jan was kneeling. I could not take her by the arm, in the face of all that crowd of people, and as soon as I had moved I saw, as it were, the shadow of Reston Rigg bearing down upon me.

There was really no vacant place, but I dropped on my knees nevertheless, forcing my way rudely, I fear, between Jan and the Forerunner. He looked up and a smile of rejoicing, like that of the angels at a sinner's return, passed over his face.

I had not time to undeceive him. I only whispered in Jan's ear, 'For your sisters' sake, for your father's sake, for the sake of all the future, do not stay a moment - come with me!'

I doubt if she even heard me. At least she made

no sign.

'For my sake, Jan!' I went on. 'Think - I am in charge of you - you will make me lose your father's confidence - perhaps even my position!'

At that she lifted her head and gazed at me, dazed but somewhat contemptuous; certainly it was a mean argument, but it was my last card.

'Yes,' I said, emboldened; 'I shall have to leave Longtown unless you come back with me instantly!'

'I will,' she said; 'but I shall hate you. You make me lose my soul!'

'Come,' said I, 'on my head be it. You *must* come!'

I rose and stood full in the gangway while Jan went swiftly back to her place, as if she had only been there for a moment in prayer.

Then I stood confronting the black angers chasing each other across the face of Reston Rigg. It was a battle of looks. But his mesmerism had no effect upon me, though I could see that he did his best to bend me to his will. But I was not conquered, and as I turned away, fearful perhaps that the incident might prove hurtful to his prestige, he diverted his eyes from me towards the rest of the kneelers and, stretching out his hands, cried, 'Blessed is he who, when he putteth his hand to the plough, looketh not back!'

But as I followed the three girls out of the tent by the nearest exit, my heart was sick within me. I knew that the matter was far from finished. I had the girls to tranquillize, the Rector to face, the malicious gossip of the town to render harmless - which last was the hardest of all. For not in vain did I dwell in Pernicketty Town - in it and yet not of it.

On the way the girls said little till I brought them to the School House door. Jan wept into her

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handkerchief, while June and I walked one on either side. June had one arm about her sister.

'I will not ask you to come in and see my father to-night,' said June, as the door opened and the accustomed quiet of the dimly lit hall I knew so well swallowed up the two younger girls. I saw Jan, a bowed silhouette, glide upstairs in the direction of her room. June lingered, for the first time in her life.

She bent towards me to speak low in my ear. I felt the warmth of her breath and the stirring of the little curls that made a golden spray under her hat-brim.

'Thank you,' she whispered. 'You were splendid. I shall never forget - nor the others afterwards - when they understand - *as I do!*'

And with a smile and proud, frank gesture of comradeship she held out both her hands. I clasped them and murmured, 'Thank you, June; thank you!'

The next moment the door was shut, and I heard among the poplars the long sighing of the wind. All trees sigh and whisper, but the poplar has the longest sigh. Only it needs a good wall of them, as so often in France, to hear them well. Their rustle is so light, their foliage so feathery, that a single one does no more than tinkle dry metallic leaves. Then I turned sharply and, closing the big iron doors behind me, went slowly down the street.

Slowly, because I needed to think things well out, I sauntered down by the quays - all deserted, save for the fixed light at the jetty point, and an errant lantern of some night watchman mousing about among casks and cases on the quay.

Then I looked towards the town, and there I saw two lights, one pulsing and one steady. The first came from the iron furnaces of the Southern Counties Company The steady golden glow could

only be Reston Rigg's great marquee on the hill.

A brusque revolt came over me. I would have to fight that man, yet I was not sure of the weapons he might be able to use. And besides, owing to the atmosphere of religious reverence in which I had been brought up, I could not rid myself of the idea that in some way I might be warring against an instrument of the Almighty.

Yet I had looked into the man's eyes and judged him false. I had won the first trial of strength, but I was by no means so sure of the second. I stood still a moment to gaze at the golden dome set high on the Market Hill, and then I turned suddenly and plunged into the woods of the Isle by the path which the girls and I had trodden the night we had seen the Forerunner at prayer.

A new thought came to me. Only Jan had *heard* him. It might be the Forerunner, and not Reston Rigg, whose power had made her do this folly.

The very idea lifted a load, but lo, something else leaped angrily in my heart, and I cannot say that in the end I was much comforted - being, I suppose, jealous.

I wandered with my hands behind me to the Dutchman's Lake, and paused awhile at the spot where Jan used to run on ahead.

Then I turned back.

I wandered in paths narrow as my two feet placed together - the dewy hawthorn leaves and lilac blossom brushing my cheeks, and the tall meadow-sweet bending under my hand and springing lissomly away in the marshy places. I seemed a thousand miles distant from all mesmerists, contagious excitements, and the strange, incomprehensible nature of girls.

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Yet in spite of myself I spied up every dim alleyway under the arches of the boughs, expecting, I knew not what. A round of the sky showed up, soapy blue as the water, like Miss Sheba's wash-tub when she is 'heavy-handed' with the blue-bag.

Miss Sheba - ah!

Yes, come to think of it, why had I not gone to her at once? She was a proper woman of counsel. She knew Longtown, its ways, its people. What the Pernicketties would say, was not hid from her. The opinion of the mothers' meetings, of the School Board, of the High School Committee, of all and sundry in their several spheres of life - were open 'large pica' books to her.

I hastened my steps, and as I approached Solway House, coming upward from the woods of the Dutchman's Isle, I was surprised to see a figure, poke-bonneted and swathed, glide mysteriously in at the garden door and disappear.

But I remembered that every week Miss Sheba had a woman in to help her with the washing, and that it was her habit to add supper, bed, and a bottle of ale to the wage in order that the great endeavour might begin at Miss Sheba's hour (3 a.m.), and not at that at which the 'helper' might think it proper to appear, her mouth tilled with excuses. 'Money well spent,' said Miss Sheba. So I was convinced that this was the explanation, and was in no way surprised when, on opening the front door with my dearly bought latch-key - emblem of man's depravity - I saw the door of Miss Sheba's sitting-room left wide open, and the lady herself seated knitting, a book open on a little table before her. She was not really using the book, because she had not on her reading spectacles.

LOVE IN PERNICKETTY TOWN

Therefore she was expecting some one. It could not be the washerwoman, for then Miss Sheba would have been in the kitchen. The next moment I understood.

She was waiting for me. I was 'in for it,' as they say succinctly in Longtown.

But as I had come back for the very purpose of seeing her and asking her advice, I must not wait for any reproach, but proceed to take the initiative at once.

'Miss Sheba,' I said, 'I have come to ask your advice.'

She looked up from her knitting, and if I had not known that such feelings were far from the martial, almost dragonnading spirit of Miss Sheba, upon my word, I should have said that she had been crying. But the next moment I felt that I had done her an injustice. She looked up at me, and her eyes, instead of being clouded with tears, fairly blazed. I never saw her look so handsome.

'Advice,' she snapped; 'what good is advice to a fool? It is as sport to a fool to do mischief. "Advice," quoth he; advice he has had, and I, Sheba Saunders, gave it him! And now he comes asking more advice, letting himself in with a latch-key, like a thief in the night.'

I might have represented with some justice that night thieves are but rarely presented with latch-keys by their victims, But I refrained, for I knew that Miss Sheba was in no mood to play upon words and similitudes.

She eyed me severely, but I could see that her hands were trembling.

'You will be given the road at the Academy - not that you will care, for doubtless ye will be taking

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your hizzies with you. It's little you think of them that has cared for your socks, aye, and turned you out every morning, clean as a new pin, when ye of your own guiding would have been a shame and a disgrace to the High School.'

She tried hard to master a kind of shivering, which might have been suppressed anger or a desire to sob. Still I was resolved to do my best.

'Miss Sheba,' I said steadily, 'I have no one else to consult, and as you have always been good to me - better far than I deserved - I came directly to you. I wish to tell you what has happened.'

'I know what has happened,' she interrupted bitterly. 'Think you not that the noise of it is all over the town by this time?'

I remembered the hour or so I had wandered along the paths of the Isle Wood, and I thought that certainly the unruly member of Pernickettyville had wagged even faster than usual, for Miss Sheba to be so quickly informed. But the explanation flashed upon me. 'The washerwoman - for a wager!' For I bethought me of the figure I had seen stealing in by the garden entrance as I came from the Dutchman's Lake.

'Well, Miss Sheba,' I said, 'nothing very dreadful really happened, except that Miss January Cassells was in my company at the time, along with her two sisters - but with their father's permission' (I hastened to add his, for I saw the wrath gathering in her eyes).

'With their father's permission!' she replied, with much scorn. 'Have I not known Erasmus Cassells his life? And he would let you run off with the whole hatching, if only ye would leave him an extra hour alone with his books. There was a time - '

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And here Miss Sheba checked herself and abruptly changed the subject. Nevertheless when she resumed it was in a softer mood.

'Well, what advice have you to ask of an old, worthless, done woman?'

'You are nothing of the kind, Miss Sheba,' I said, a step nearer to her; 'you are growing younger and handsomer every day.'

'Off there!' she cried, as she would have done to an importunate beggar at the gate. 'None of your Edinburgh Rock toffy for me, young man. Keep that "flairdy" for your light-headed hizzies. At her age Sheba Saunders has no need of such-like.'

Then she added :

'But if you have anything to say to me, out with it and be done.'

Whereupon I told her everything - the meeting at the Clerical Club - the little Congregationalist's story only excluded - our going late to the meeting, and the strange influence of the appeal. I told her about Sarah Jimson, of the others who followed; lastly I told her of Jan Cassells, and by what means I had induced her to return to her place. She listened with a sort of grim pleasure, as if mentally checking my statements and comparing them with an unseen original document. Then quite suddenly she lifted her face and looked at me straight with challenge in her eye.

'So it's *her!*' she said.

I denied, but fear without carrying the least conviction to my inquisitor. I affirmed and reaffirmed that Jan Cassells was nothing to me, nor I to Jan Cassells.

'Aye, I was thinking as much,' she said, with very tight lips. Then, with a glitter of feminine malice in

her eye, she added, 'Ye might at least have picked the best-looking of the three when you were about it!'

I tried to turn it off jestingly.

'As no choice has yet been made, Miss Sheba, I should be glad to know which you consider the prettiest, and to profit by your opinion.'

'That's what never man did yet!' she exclaimed. 'Once I was well enough to look upon myself. But at least I never was a fool. And ye will run after the one that takes your fancy - aye though the pace she sets ye be the deil's gallop!'

Presently, however, she was moved to milder counsels.

'Maybe ye showed more sense - that is, for the lassie that was under your charge - than could have been looked for in a rambling scapegrace with a latch-key warm in his trousers pocket. But ye are in a pickle of trouble, whatever. There's the Rector - that's your business, my laddie, and I'm doubtsome that the affair will not rest there. From what I have seen of Miss January - she sits opposite in the kirk - I would wager that *she* is not the sort to forgive you the affront!'

'But there was no affront, Miss Sheba,' I hurried my words to assure her; 'indeed, to all appearance she only kneeled a moment in front of the rails on the red cloth, and then went back to her place. I did as much myself!'

'So I was hearing,' said Miss Sheba. 'And if whiles your folly makes me wish that I had never received a Mission from your sainted mother, I shall mind me of that action. For it runs in my head that ye will be hearing of it a good many times during the next few days, my laddie!'

LOVE IN PERNICKETTY TOWN

'Thank you,' I said; 'that I am prepared for. Indeed, I care little about what Pernicketty and the Pernicketties may say about me. But there's Miss Jan and the Rector - I want you to tell the chatterers how it happened - '

'What - me - Miss Sheba Saunders, to become a gossip and a Pernicketty at my age! Faith, laddie, ye are none blate!'

'I know it is difficult,' I said; 'but you have the habit of the place. You are looked up to here, and the folk think a lot of what you say. If you forsake us now - '

'Peace be,' interrupted Miss Sheba. 'Who was speaking of "forsaking"? Bless the callant, that's a fine big Bible word, and should be used with reverence and as seldom as may be. Gracious, it's like telling a lass that ye - no, old as I am I cannot get my Lowland tongue round the word. - that -- that ye are fond of her. But maybe ye have told your - Miss Jan' (this with an accent of scorn, highly artificial) 'as much already?'

'No,' said I; 'but I would have told her so a hundred times if it could have prevented this!'

Miss Shelia for the first time leaned back in her seat and crossed one foot over the other. She looked at me through her pince-nez with careful scrutiny. Then she took it off and looked at me that way. Finally she nodded her head shortly and approvingly.

'We will make a man of you yet,' she said. 'I'm seeing that. There's something in that speech of yours that minded me of my father - rest his soul, honest man. And maybe, deep in this wizened auld ticking apple that does Sheba Saunders for a heart, there is a preference for the Old Adam - But here

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comes the New - shut the door and bide still!’

We heard the outer door open and Saul Adam, the Forerunner, pass on to his bedroom.

‘Poor lad, poor lad,’ said Miss Saunders, indicating the direction of his chamber with a toss of her head. ‘Now he will be at the praying for the most of the night - I doubt it not - praying and bewailing for he kens not what. In my opinion, it’s as well to ken what you are repenting for - not that you, Mr. A-a-adrian, will ever be at a loss in that direction. But as I was saying, and as my father used to say before me, the best plants of grace are those that have most of the auld earthly Adam sap in them. I cannot be doing with your soft early sprouts, burned brown and useless by the first frost; and there are worse things, when all is said and done, than a pass-key

- !

‘Miss Sheba!’ I cried in perfect astonishment.

She held up her hand.

‘Aye,’ she added, ‘and a landlady that is not wanting words, and is willing to sit up for you - as I have the firm intention of doing every night of my life, young man! That is, as long as you remain under the humble, but I hope not wholly unworthy roof of Solway House.’

At this I smiled a little wryly, for I now knew my fate. Still, since it had to be so, there was nothing for it but to make a confidante in some sort of Miss Sheba. So I told her of the longing that came into my heart, when I was working so long and so steadily at my degree work, and saw other young men going off for evening walks or even to the little theatre with this or that girl - perhaps some one who had smiled at me - ‘Yes, I was lonely,’ I repeated.

‘Lonely!’ cried Miss Sheba; ‘and with me in the

house!'

She sat silent a little and, to tell the truth, I dared not continue. It was so easy, apparently, to run against the spiky hedge of Miss Sheba's many scruples.

'Well, well,' she said after a while, her fingers picking at the little black silk and lace apron she wore, 'what more can an old woman expect?'

She broke off short, rose, wheeled round, and bringing her palms together in the smart smack with which she frightened stray dogs and cats off the flower-beds, she cried, 'Faith, if that clock has not stopped again!' Yet I could hear it ticking on as usual even as she was speaking. But Miss Sheba apparently did not, for she took down the key from its hook, unstopped the winding end by drawing out a piece of paper (placed there by her late father, a careful man), solemnly wound up the tall clock, and put it on two minutes automatically, making an advance of seventeen in all. Then having done all this with her back turned to me, she blew her nose in a maidenly and furtive fashion, and turning a smiling face to me, she said, 'Now off to your bed, or ye will be treading on some more of a silly old woman's corns. Besides, do you think that Sheba Saunders has not a good pair of eyes in her head - glasses or no glasses? She can see most things without being told, when it comes to a matter of lasses and lads!'

'Then you will help me, Miss Sheba?' I went on, with the pertinacity of the young and inexperienced, who cannot see when their case is won and it is time to throw themselves upon the clemency of the court.

'Help you, laddie?' she said. 'If it be Pernicketty Town that is bothering you, I think Sheba Saunders

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can vouch for the folk she had the luck to be born among. I may have a visit or two to pay to-morrow - it's just possible - and I will put the facts of the case before some influential members of the different mothers' meetings and mission sewing-parties - dear, good, talkative ladies, but all of whom, for one reason or another, cannot afford to disoblige Shelia Saunders!

At these words I caught the old maid in my arms, pinioning her hands to her sides.

'Miss Sheba,' I cried, 'listen. I love you - I live you - I love you!'

And each time I said the words I stooped and kissed her.

Then I fled, but not quick enough to escape chastisement of a swift and ready palm. But I was well content as I left her arranging her ruffled cap, and declaring that of all the - ! And all the - ! And finally that if she had not been as stupid as a three-day old gosling, she might have known what came of giving young men pass-keys!

Furthermore, I was to deliver up the aforesaid key again the very next day or - she paused, searching for an adequate climax. I halted a moment in the doorway and supplied it with appropriately tragic gesture:

'Cassio, I love thee

But never more be officer of mine!'

And with that I fled to my room - for good this time - leaving Miss Sheba brimful of injurious words, seeking at once for speech and for the double eyeglass which, as usual, was hanging rakishly over her shoulder by its yard-long chain.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

PERSILLA

Most of the next day I found myself extremely busy. I had slept little. For after going upstairs, as I hung up my coat, I remembered the Head's papers were still to set and the themes to correct. Perhaps it was as well, for the dull mechanic exercise kept me from thinking, and as soon as they were done I flung myself on my bed only half dressed, drawing the coverlet about my knees.

Indeed Miss Sheba found me thus in the broad light of morning, the papers scattered all about, the lamp low, and the blue correcting-pencil still in my hand. The sight mellowed her, for she went out without speaking and in ten minutes was up again with the unusual attention of a cup of early tea.

Not a word was said about the incidents of the night before. Miss Sheba drew aside the curtains, opened the window very wide to freshen the paraffin-tainted air, and then went out, telling me to take a bath and dress quickly. She would, she added, 'give me a cry' when breakfast was ready in the kitchen. If 'that Editor' came hammering at the bathroom door, I was to take no notice, but let him wait. This was wholly unlike any phrase of Miss Sheba's character that I had yet see. But I could only be grateful without venturing to say anything about it. Apparently the subject was buried, but I saw Miss Sheba making haste with her morning's

work - giving it, what she called shamelessly and smilingly 'a lick and a promise.'

I was half-way to the High School before it struck me that I had seen none of the usual solemn preparations for washing. Yet what had become of the washer-woman of the night before? This problem I put aside to think over. Generally you could smell washing-day at Solway House before you turned the Isle Road corner, and though even then Miss Sheba's meals were always served with the same dainty decorum, you were not encouraged to discourse at large.

First of all there came my hour with the pupil-teachers, Miss Douglas among them. But she, since the advent of the Rector's girls, had but seldom looked my way, and had deposed the lofty plumes from the hat which, seen over the brewery wall, had filled with bitterness the morning soul of Miss Sheba.

The Chief did not come in at this hour. Finding me serviceable, he was quite willing to continue his literary translations for other sixty minutes. So I had time to put the papers, duly corrected and reported on, together with the examination papers, on his desk exactly where his eye would fall upon them. Otherwise they might remain there untouched and unthought of all day. So to make sure, I clamped them down on the great silver presentation ink-bottle with a marble paper-weight.

At the same time I did not look forward to the inevitable interview. I scented the angry parent a mile off, and would rather have kept out of the way of the first burst of his anger. But I could not escape. At a quarter to nine the path of duty led me there with the pupil-teachers' report for the week,

and at nine with the solemn summons which it was my duty to deliver every morning to Dr. Erasmus.

'Sir, the school is waiting for you.'

He held 'the usual opening religious services,' according to the rules of the Committee. That is, he gave out a hymn which Miss Wavertree, senior lady assistant in the girls' department, accompanied on a miniature organ. Then he read a prayer of his own composition - a surprising prayer, without a single text in it, which dealt with the soul of man and child as objects of extreme value, only to be improved by cultivation and self-restraint.

When I found Dr. Cassells this particular Tuesday morning, his face had a gravity and even pain upon it which made me fear the worst.

I had been explaining Milton to the class of pupil-teachers for an hour, so I said to myself, 'The storm-cloud over the Caspian, Adrian, my boy! He knows - he has heard; for a bushel of nuts you are going to catch it!'

Which, after all, was fair; for many a time I had not 'caught it' when I did deserve it. This time, though innocent in act and intent, there was nothing which I could urge why the thunder-bolt should not fall.

I expected to be forbidden ever to cross his door again. He might, considering the nature and importance of my services, consent to keep me on at the High School. But May's merry laughter, the grave, sweet wisdom and rich, golden-flecked hair of June Cassells, and Jan, vivid, tempestuous, passionate, uncertain Jan - I should never be able to do anything more for them.

The Rector was obviously excited, and I am bound to admit that he had some reason - that is, looking

at my conduct from the popular point of view.

But I was never more surprised in my life (as the Editor said every morning when he opened a conversation of any sort) than when the Rector, instead of slaying me without a question, rose and approached me, holding out his hand.

I placed mine in his with some diffidence. His other hand was behind him as usual, hitching up a little way the tails of his frock-coat. But who was to say whether or not the outraged father might not be grasping a pistol in that unseen hand?

‘Sir,’ said Dr. Erasmus, with great and unexpected warmth, shaking my hand from side to side with the pendulum action which always took a stranger by surprise, and disarmed even Government inspectors direct from Oxford - ‘sir, I thank you. I cannot be sufficiently grateful to you for what you have done.’

Instantly I felt good all over, though I remained outwardly modest.

‘It was nothing, Doctor, I assure you. I only did my duty.’

‘Ah,’ said the Doctor, lifting his eyes upwards in the gently protesting manner he had, ‘there are many who would not have dreamed of doing so much - for one, sir, who is almost a stranger - though I trust the day will come - ’

He hesitated and dropped my hand quite suddenly, so that I held it for a time outstretched in front of me before remembering what to do with it.

I was in ecstasy. I saw myself invited to take all my meals at the School House. How I should laugh with May, take sweet counsel with June, and manage the affairs of Jan quite at my ease.

The Doctor fumbled among his papers. The

invitation did not come. Presently I could see that he was wondering what I was there for, and vaguely hoping somehow to get rid of me. So I resolved to jog his too quickly expended enthusiasm.

'What I did, sir,' I said, 'was the least that any man could have done - '

'It was very well done, indeed,' responded the Doctor, with a smile, but without the first enthusiasm that had marked his greeting as I entered.

'I am only sorry,' I added, 'that the affair occurred at all. If I could have foreseen I should have prevented it entirely - that is, Miss June and I - I ought to have done so.'

Then he was surprised indeed.

'June - Miss June?' he said, blinking at me. 'What had my daughter to do with the themes which you must have spent so much valuable time correcting, and the really admirable examination papers for the two upper forms you drew up at the same time?'

* * * * *

I think that for a full minute I must have stopped where I was and simply gaped. The beautiful dream faded. He did not know. The man had never heard! He was simply thanking me for correcting his wretched papers. For that he had wrung my hand - for that he had hinted at greater friendship - possibilities - ah, how unrealized and how unrealizable!

But Erasmus Cassells was so simply and so transparently innocent that I could not be angry with him, though I had it all to do over again. For the moment, because it was on the stroke of nine, I

could only falter, 'Sir, I fear it is time. The bell has stopped ringing. It is nine o'clock and the school is waiting for you.'

A shadow of worry crossed his brow.

'Do you think - ah - that *you* couldn't - not for this once?'

'I am afraid not, sir,' I said gravely, for I was well used to that proposition. 'The other assistants would not like it, and besides - if you remember - you asked me never to leave the room till I took you with me; ever since the time when, after being called, you began thinking and sat down again at your desk!'

He sighed and passed his hand across his eyes, as if to clear away the cobwebs.

'It is a pity,' he murmured; 'I had a couplet in my mind - that is - all but a word, and these double rhymes are so very evasive.'

He threw his school gown over his shoulders. His mild and beautiful eyes, clear of all such secondary matters as daughters, and accepting as a mere necessary slavery the weight of his headship, tranquilly continued the pursuit of the beautifully elusive words and rhymes, and the delicacies of the ancient classics in which his soul delighted.

Meanwhile in the great hall all the school, parked in forms and in the charge of assistants and pupil-teachers, awaited his coming. Only the chief mathematical and English masters, with our drawing and musical freelances, were excused. As first assistant and late 'interim' I was almost compelled to be there - altogether compelled indeed, considering the nature and habits of Dr. Erasmus. He continually needed a prompter, and so for his own (and others') sake I was at his elbow.

'Have you got the prayer for Tuesday morning?'

said Dr. Erasmus, hitching his gown suddenly up. I had it. Indeed, I always carried copies of the complete set of ten, for morning and evening, in my breast-pocket. The Doctor lost the originals with just as much conscientiousness.

All that day I lay under the spell of the Unknown. I saw nothing of the girls. Not even June could I get a glimpse of. Late in the afternoon I demeaned myself to the shallow subterfuge of going to the back door and asking for a drink of water. And it was there that I made my first acquaintance with Persilla Potter. Persilla was maid-of-all-work in the Doctor's house. She need not have been, but nobody who respected themselves (so declared a succession of cooks) could put up with Persilla. Yet to male sight she was only a little crisp-haired, red-cheeked, flashing-eyed thing, with an apparently resistless capacity for occupying herself with half a dozen affairs at a time. She had followed the fortunes of the Cassells girls while abroad, with patient determination not to learn a word of any such fool languages.

'Mark it to Persilla Potter!' she had said when sent for the daily groceries, and the shopkeeper, low bowing, had charged the whole account to the family of the M. le Marquis de Persilla-Potta, in which form it had reached Miss June Cassells, paymistress of the forces.

Persilla could, I knew, be an agreeable little person. But when I asked for a drink of water she positively grinned in my face.

'There's a heap comes seeking drinks of water here that have good wells of their own.'

But along with the ill-concealed irony of the speech she gave me also a good tumbler of water.

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She even offered to flavour it with 'a drop of what the Doctor takes before he goes to bed,' but this I declined with many thanks.

'Well, call again,' said Persilla Potter cheerily.

'Ye're welcome. But mind and take no notice of me when I'm waiting at the table, for I'm liable to wink back.'

And that was all the information I got for my pains.

Still, I went through my tasks with dull regularity, my mind many leagues from my work, and every class that came under me as keenly aware of the fact (and as ready to take advantage of it) as only schoolboys can be.

Miss Sheba was out at dinner-hour. At Solway House she and I dined alone in the middle of the day, that is to say at one, for the Editor never left the office at that hour. So quite naturally I looked in the oven for the beefsteak pie which Miss Sheba had prepared for me. I found it, but I made only an indifferent meal till I lifted my plate and found underneath a strip of paper, in Miss Sheba's graceful, long Italian hand.

'Have seen six principal Pernics already (Tuesday noon). Have "sorted" them, and am off on the hunt for more!'

This sounded hopeful, for in Longtown "sorting" means "definitely arranging," or in the picturesque American phrase "fixing." Miss Sheba was "fixing" Longtown on my behalf - and Jan's.

But my coming interview with the Doctor halted and hindered me all day. I felt that in the interests of mere discipline I must get it over. I had been "cheeked" twice in class, And I had actually not noticed it till after - nay, worse, I had sat under a

flagrantly "Kelly" translation with the fat soul of an ox.

So I went into the Doctor's private room after four o'clock dismissal, determined not to come out of that door till I had cleared my conscience and known my fate.

Dr. Erasmus sighed at sight of me, but laid a retaining elbow on his papers to act as a paper-weight while he listened to me. The details of school-work wearied him unspeakably; but with an active, athletic, young first assistant to do the whipping, the Doctor got on well enough. Still, I could not help fearing what might happen if another less interested than I took my place.

'Ah,' he said, 'this is kind of you. No, there are no more papers to-night. I suppose the registers and all that - ?' he paused, vaguely interrogative.

Dr. Erasmus was not interested in 'the registers and all that.' However, I hastened to enlighten him as to my real object. He listened gravely, but without once forgetting to keep his elbow on the pile of proofs and translations. When I had finished my moving history he lifted his hand gently, sighed, and addressed me without one trace of the justly incensed father I had feared.

'I have always made it a rule never to interfere with, or even influence, the religious opinions of my daughters. I conduct them to the best fountains of authority on theological matters - men at once orthodox and devout. I then remain duly reverent as to body, but I fear often absent in the spirit. A judicious power of abstraction is a thing to be cultivated, Mr. Ross. I have often felt the benefit of the gift. There are so few things in this world really worth while, philosophically considered.'

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I was a little irritated at his tone after having entered with such noble and self-sacrificing thoughts.

‘Possibly,’ I said dryly; ‘but surely you, sir, will admit that the care of three beautiful daughters is one of the things philosophically worth while.’

He gazed at me in blankest amazement.

‘Bless me, are they beautiful?’ he cried. ‘I am inclined to think that you are allowing yourself to be deceived by mere sense impressions. Beautiful, young man! Did you ever have your eyes examined by a specialist? Have you never tried spectacles? Now I consider my daughters very good young women indeed, but quite incapable of the higher education or of consecutive thought. Even in the house, when anything has really to be done for my comfort, I have generally to fall back upon Persilla.’

‘Ah, Persilla!’ I said in astonishment.

‘Yes,’ he said, with a pensive elevation of voice; ‘I have often attempted to convince that girl - a treasure in the way of servants - that she cannot have been baptized Persilla, but she only replies that she was there and I was not. Also that Persilla is her name and no other! A strange girl, but useful in the small offices which we all require in order to nurture the fleshly coverture of our immortal spirits - you observe that I do not use the word soul.’

I did observe, and I also saw that, so far as Dr. Erasmus Cassells was concerned, his daughters might dree their own weirds in this world. His hand moved restlessly, and he fidgeted, which were tokens that he wanted to be left alone. Still I stood my ground.

‘Knelt at the altar-rails,’ he continued, with a glance at the clock. ‘Dear me, what a foolish thing to

do. So draughty - in a tent; so very draughty! Why, what are churches for? That is, if the spirit of woman is so narrow as not to be its own appropriate temple. But good night, Ross - see you again. I am at present busy - ah, dealing with a delicate point which will probably take me far into the night to get to my liking.'

So was I, but I felt that the 'delicate point' which faced me - what to do about Jan, and how to prevent any further meeting with Reston Rigg - was not of the sort which could ever be made comprehensible to her father.

When I got home, I found a note on the table which (said Miss Sheba) had been brought by a message-boy, 'that loon of Paxton's.' 'He wanted a penny for bringing it,' she went on; 'but I packed him off to them that sent him to seek for his pennies.'

And Miss Sheba stood sentry while I opened and read my thumbed epistle. I did not move away, because I knew that she could not read without her print-glasses. So I merely said with affected carelessness, 'It is a message from the School House. I am to go up there to-night.'

'Humph!' sniffed Miss Sheba, as she turned away in a huff. 'There's them that have done more and better for you than the School House - aye, and all within its walls.'

She was highly offended at my reticence, but I could not possibly let her see the note, concerning which, nevertheless, I had spoken only the truth. It had come from the School House, and it contained a summons thither, the first I had ever received.

These words were written on gilt-edged paper of small size and under the most obtrusive of 'true-

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love-knot' scrolls, all roses and forget-me-nots.

I have no engagement for to-night, Tuesday.
Come after eight - through Todd's Entry and along
the kitchen-garden wall. The door will be on the jar.

'(Signed) Yr. well-wisher,
'PERSILLA.'

Clearly I was sinking in the social scale.

CHAPTER TWELVE

I CLIMB IN SOME OTHER WAY

It was not without considerable difficulty that I made my peace with Miss Sheba, but - I made it. To her the School House seemed a terrible devouring monster, with an irresistible attraction for foolish young men. But Miss Sheba felt it was vain for her to strive against it directly.

She could therefore remain in the background and help to repair damages as, according to the tale of her adventures, she had done that day in Longtown with infinite cunning and discretion. If I could see that there was no more matter for gossip, and be sure that the thing went no farther - well, Miss Sheba thought that she had put things in a very good way. Of course she had stirred up one or two of the most generally hated and generally unpopular persons in Longtown to say what occurred to them. But then what they said would help to set everybody else on our side. Oh, she, Miss Sheba Saunders, was not born only with a pretty face and nothing to the back of it - like *some* she could mention.

When I told her of my interview with the Rector, it was with difficulty she could be restrained from going straight to his den to tell the Doctor what she thought of him.

'Poor things,' she exclaimed; 'poor young orphant things! Lord, Erasmus Cassells, but what would I not give to be at your tail with a good hazel rung! And to think - to think - '

But Miss Sheba did not tell me what it was that

she thought, so fiercely and conditionally.

She supplemented her exclamation only by the equally mysterious words, 'If only, Erasmus Cassells - oh, if only!'

And as she smacked the clenched fist of one hand into the hollowed-out palm of the other, I judged that Miss Sheba considered, for the moment, that she was braying as in a mortar the mild visage and philosophic head of Erasmus Cassells, Master of Arts, Doctor of Common Laws.

I escaped, for the reason that it was good for me so to do. And till after seven that night I argued with myself whether or not I should accept Persilla's invitation. Of course I ought not to, and having argued the matter out, that is perhaps the sole reason why I went. A dozen times I made up my mind to the contrary. I got out my books and sat down under the grim gaze of Miss Sheba, who presently brought me my alarm clock.

'Ye will be wanting to know the time,' she remarked bitingly.

I thanked her, but continued nevertheless with my version of the *Republic of Plato*, of which the Doctor had been good enough to say 'that in places, and though touched with the inequality of youth, it contained passages which were not unworthy - of himself.' And this, I knew, was praise from Sir Hubert Stanley indeed.

For my chief said more than my poor slack version deserved.

Curiously, also, what I thought about was not whether I was endangering my position with the Committee, or even with the Rector's daughters, but whether, after all, Persilla might not be laughing at me.

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At any rate, I must find out what was going on at the School House, and as the girls would not see me, and the Rector himself was worse than useless, I was, as one might say, reduced to falling back upon Persilla Potter. I was not sure that she knew my state of mind - well, I was not sure what she could know. I was not sure that there was anything to know. For no one of the girls fulfilled my ideal, though, taken together and, as it were, lumped into one, the combination would have been quite irresistible. I was in love with a maiden trinity.

Not that I proposed to reveal this division of my affections to Persilla. I held that it would be too complicated for her simple nature. Indeed, I am not sure whether, somewhere deep down, lurking shamefaced, I was not ready to make a couple of fingers of courtship (as the French say) to little sloe-eyed Persilla. So much, I suspected, would be expected of me by a young woman who doled her evenings out among seven aspirants, yet managed to keep the peace among them, so that never a word was said against her - a result to which Todd's Wynd and the hidden way through the vegetable garden, the oiled hinges of the back door and the practicable cupboard no doubt contributed, each according to his measure.

I do not know that I was at any time a prominent figure in Longtown. But that night, and as far as in me lay, I took no chances. A tweed cap, a dark grey jacket, lighter trousers, and tennis shoes appeared to be in keeping with the summer evening. Also I took a bundle of papers with me which I could ask Persilla to put upon my desk. At any rate, I was known to be always carrying papers to Dr. Cassells at all hours. What more natural then, than that I

should go straight to his study without disturbing the rest of the household? He was known to work late. Few had ever passed that double-windowed room at the corner so late that the lamp did not still burn on. Often he had not taken the trouble to pull down the blinds, so homeward-bound Longtowners could see, far into the small hours, the fine intellectual profile of their Academy's Rector bent resolutely to the comparison of texts, readings, and translations of unknown tongues. This absorption did not detract from his general popularity. He was looked upon with reverence by the working people, as well as by those who sent their children to the High School. There were, of course, a small band of 'commercial educationists' who thought that classical and mathematical teaching was wholly out of place in a modern world. But Scotland has not got over its traditional love of the 'humanities,' and still reveres 'the Latin and the Greek' as the straight road to all learning worth the name.

Moreover (what was still stronger influence with most), Erasmus Cassells was their very own - of their town and teaching, and the fact that no neighbouring head master, rector, or clergyman could approach him in the dignity of his degrees, or in the number and value of the books he had written, was a chief cause of Longtown's boasting when it found itself from home.

But I am keeping Persilla waiting. That young person was busy when I got to the back door. I suppose I was descending from my rank as first assistant at the Longtown High School. But, after all, I had never troubled about these distinctions in the western farming county from which I had come to Cheviotshire. I had a good excuse, and the

invitation of Persilla. So my conscience was easy.

Nor was Persilla any more abashed.

She was leaning far out of a little window and poking at the roof of a corrugated-iron shed or lean-to with a long-handled mop. She looked decidedly pretty, biting her lip in the twilight and thrusting her arms vigorously at some unseen object. The back court was wet, and the shards of a white washhand-basin appeared about my feet.

‘What are you doing, Persilla?’ I enquired, with solicitude.

‘Oh,’ she answered, looking down, ‘you need not speak so low. They are all on the other side of the house - nobody nearer than the Doctor at the corner. And he would not stir if the lightning - and the thunder - smacked the house in bits!’

‘Pick up that broken pottery, will ye?’ said Persilla. ‘And keep your patent leathers out of the slush - though it’s only good, clean water, after all. And oh, if you would get the ladder out of the back shed there - that one where the tubs are - yes, of course, the laundry - and climb up on the roof here and get me - that Object!’

‘Certainly, Persilla,’ I said; ‘but it was not to carry ladders and climb roofs that you sent for me?’

‘Oh no - but be quick, be quick! It was a green spider - an awful, horrid, green spider!’

This was mysterious, but in such cases I always did as I was told. It was now so dark, and I believed my disguise so perfect, that I would not be recognized even if one of the girls were by chance to come to the upper windows looking on the court. Afterwards I learned that Persilla could be trusted both to practise discretion herself and to exact it from others.

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She had given the matter prolonged and serious attention. So I went into the laundry - a real laundry, Persilla explained, with fixed tubs and a boiler and all, only as she could not get on with any upsetting laundress, most of the common, heavy washing was done 'out.'

I found the ladder. It was a short, insufficient affair, but easy enough to carry. With its aid I mounted perilously upon the roof, which gave forth a sound like distant thunder as it protested against my weight. Corrugated iron set at a steep slant does not make a good promenade at any time, and I felt that the knees of my school trousers were suffering. Besides, the stalking of green spiders in the dark had not been taught at the University.

'I don't see any, Persilla,' I whispered, after a long search.

'Any what?' said she from her window. she was hanging half out by this time.

'Green spiders,' I answered. 'But goodness, girl, take care. You will be out of that sash in a moment, and bring down the iron house and the ladder in - ' I paused for a metaphor.

'Oh, I know,' said Persilla, 'as the Doctor says after I have sorted his study, 'in inextricable confusion.' But I'll take care all right. You should have seen me cleaning windows in a fifth-story flat in Berlin, and me not speaking a word of the language.'

'But I don't see anything of an awful green spider,' I interrupted, for I wanted to finish.

'Silly!' she snapped at me sharply. 'Who said anything about *catching* green spiders? I don't want the horrid things. It's my toothbrush.'

'Your toothbrush, Persilla?'

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'Yes, Mister Ross,' said Persilla. 'Do you suppose, because I'm paid wages and waits behind your back at table, that I clean my teeth with the yard brush?'

Accordingly I grappled about and finally secured the object, stained red with cherry tooth-paste, and bearing witness, by its worn condition, to the success with which Persilla cared for the brilliancy of her locally celebrated smile.

'Have you got it?' she demanded. 'Then put the ladder back where you found it. Give the brush a good turn under the pump, for it's an article to have confidence in - '

'But the green spider - what has it to do with it?' I asked, rather bewildered.

'Get down, and mind your knees! The edge of that corrugation is just awful corrugated. I'll tell you about the green spider when you have put away that ladder. The policeman, Duncan McVeagh, might take you for a burglar - so come your ways into the kitchen.'

Presently, therefore, in the comfortable flicker of a pine-cone fire, and the silence of the big old Rectory house - for the Doctor's dwelling was part of the ancient and now superseded Grammar School of Longtown - she explained the mystery of the green spider.

'This was the way o't,' said Persilla. 'I was giving myself a bit of a redd-up - not special because *you* were coming - for there's aye somebody coming. I specify for that in my agreement. "The kitchen," says I, "after eight o'clock, *on condition* that it's clear by ten!" - oh, but the green spider? Well, you see, I do not mind a dozen policemen - one at a time. I am not feared of the provost - nor of you, least of all of the Rector himsel'. Indeed, it's only me that can

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send him to his bed, by going in and carrying off the lamp, leaving him only a bit candle-end that will not burn more than half an hour. And whiles I believe he thinks I'm a ghost, or maybe one of his Laitin goddesses (me being in a hurry and no stopping to dress up muckle). And one time he called me "cruel Diana," or something like that! Oh, ye need not be laughing. But I telled him that I would stop in no man's house to be called such names, and that he had better be awa' to bed and take care not to let the candle-grease drip on his trousers - nor knock over his tumbler with his coat-tails.'

'But the green spider - ?'

'Oh, *that!* Well, ye see, I am naturally feared of green spiders - and red, blue, and black ones for that matter - and yet, me being Scotch, I cannot bring myself to kill the deevils. So when I was going to wash my face, there was one on the water, and every time that I tried to guide it to the basin-side, so that it could walk decently out of the window, it fair turned upon me! And then when I got it quieted a wee I was steering it again in the right way, with the basin propped against the window-sill. I was only giein' it a bit canny shove with my toothbrush, when the beast made a rush at me up the handle, and in an instant would have been upon me! But I had great presence of mind. I just heaved basin and all out into the yard. So I was saved! The stramash ye heard, that was the basin. But my toothbrush stuck on the iron roof, and had it not been for you I believe I would never have had a wink of sleep this night - '

'Because of the green spider? Surely not!' I exclaimed.

'The green spider - what do I care for green

spiders - outside of the house, that is?’ said Persilla Potter. ‘No; it was because, me being the only lady-housekeeper in Longtown that uses such a thing, all the lads that come for orders from the butchers and bakers and general shops would have been clambering about the house like so many monkeys. And then whichever o’ them got it would have gone about the town telling everybody that I had given it to him as a token of affection. And as likely as not, for this is an awesome *tonguey* place, they would have ended by taking away a poor girl’s reputation!’

Having ended her explanations, Persilla made me a little courtesy and patted my head - a mingling of the ceremonious and familiar which gave her a curious charm.

‘You are different,’ she went on. ‘Lasses at service like me are good judges of who’s to be trusted - that is, if they are as muckle run after as me.’

I thanked Persilla for her opinion of me.

‘Oh, aye,’ she said, taking it coolly, ‘if it had not been that I had very good informations about you I would have put in my oar before this. You see I am none so blind as folk that always wear specs over their eyes and keep their noses in a book. I would not have permitted it.’

‘You would not have permitted *it!*’ I exclaimed, with some dignity. ‘May I enquire why, and what you would not have permitted, Miss Potter?’

‘All this running about and general foolishness,’ returned Persilla; ‘that’s what. And why, because I’m Persilla Potter, that has looked after these three young things for a gye long while now - in foreign countries and among nonsense-talking folk - wine-bibbers and sinners, as the Book says, that never supped porridge in their lives nor had a dish of good

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Scotch broth, so thick with vegetables that ye could eat it with a knife and fork. It's no wonder they are such perverse wretches.'

I asked who were the wretches that knew not good Scots broth.

'The Frenchies, and the Germans, and other folk that learn you languages, and music, and pianos, and all manner of wearisomeness. But maybe ye are liking such things yourself?'

I disclaimed the least sympathy with things perverse and foreign, and prevaricated as to my knowledge of foreign tongues, concerning which Persilla cross-examined me. I owned to the dead languages, for I had to earn my bread teaching them.

'Well, if they are dead, that's not so bad,' said Persilla. 'I would not mind an army of green spiders if they were dead. And if it brings you in siller. But folk have little to do with their money to be willing to pay for the like of that. And what does it all end in? Just the Rector's kind of folk - dungeons of learning. That's what they call him. And they are not far wrong, for a dungeon is dark and damp and has heaps of spiders about. *Feech!* Gie me a tidy bit cottage that I can clean every day, nook and corner; but your dungeons of learning - I've seen enough of them. Oh, aye, and the tricks and impudence of thae foreigneering music-teachers - Lord, how I had to keep an eye on them, the gesturin' pagans!'

So, like a decent Scot, I disclaimed all music-mastering tricks, and denied having even the smallest garret of 'lear,' not to speak of dungeons of it.

Persilla nodded her head to intimate that she knew as much about my qualifications as I did

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myself.

'Aye,' she said, 'and it is for that same that you are here this night, sitting canty by the wee bit bleeze. Ye are a lad of spirit; but, eh, mercy, ye need guiding! But Persilla Potter is willing to be a mother to ye!'

'Nonsense,' I said; 'a mother - you are not a day older than I am!'

Persilla gazed at me steadfastly, and I could see the excellent cherry-paste result, as she slowly smiled.

'Aye, I was some feared of that,' she repeated, still regarding me; 'after all, ye are like the rest. You maybe were thinking that it was because of my being "in love" with you that I sent you that letter. Men aye think that - when you ask them to come in by the back way, because ye are a servant with the kitchen for your only drawing-room, and after eight, because that is your hour for receiving callers.

'But don't ye flatter yourself, Mr. Head-Under-Teacher.'

And with a triumphant 'There's for you,' Persilla handed me a well-printed card, on which I read :

MISS PERSILLA POTTER

SCHOOL HOUSE CLOSE, LONGTOWN

AT HOME

8 TO 10 P.M. KITCHEN GARDEN ENTRANCE
BY TODD'S ENTRY

.....
R.S.V.P.

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'I got that printed in Glasgow,' said Persilla proudly. 'I made it all up myself - though the ladies' paste-boards in the silver plate upstairs helped me, I do not deny.'

'And the wee dots at the foot are for me to write in the name of the visitor and what night I expect them. Oh, it's a fine scheme and very high-toned, only they don't always know what R.S.V.P. means. I didn't myself till I looked on the last leaf of my sixpenny dictionary. But they worry at it and study - all of them that are worth the trouble, that is. Trust a man. And the favourite explanation is, 'Return soon - visit Persilla!'

'And bless you, laddie, that is just what they do. So it serves the purpose just as weel as the dictionary meaning!'

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

PERSILLA'S MORE SERIOUS MOODS

All this was interesting, and threw useful sidelights on the simple complexity of Persilla's character. But the hints of her power and consideration in the Cassells household, if not vain boastings, seemed to promise something else and better.

At any rate, she did not keep me waiting, but plunged into the matter nearest to my mind.

'You'll be wondering that ye have not heard from - *them!*'

It was no use fencing with Persilla's commanding directness, so I admitted that, after the kindness of the young ladies to me, I had indeed been astonished that I received no news of them.

Persilla nodded her head approvingly.

'It's you for the fine talk,' she said; "after the kindness of the young ladies to you," says you - I must keep that in mind. But, after all, it comes to the same thing, I dare say. Now you, being a man, are no doubt picturing that they are keeping Miss Jan away from you - "cruelly secreting her" - "harsh relatives" - and all that sort of thing. I have read in books about such-like. Oh yes, and I looked in the Key of Dreams, for I had dreamed of losing the kitchen-garden key the night before, and awoke in a cold sweat, me not knowing what to do, with you coming and all.'

'But how, Persilla - I do not understand. It was not you who had been cruelly secreted - '

'I should think not!' said Persilla, shocked at

my lack of logic; 'if I had, how could I have sent you that letter?'

I did not insist. Persilla must go her own way in the telling of a story.

'No, it was not "cruel relatives," nor "unjust imprisonment" - at least it was not Miss Jan that the Dream Book could have meant. For they are all as kind to her as can be - at least Miss June is - and Miss May too - and her father would be if he knew anything about it. No; and don't you think that they are keeping her away from you, like the Lady Rebecca in the highest Don John tower. For if she saw you she would not speak to you, but as like as not jump out of the window.'

'But why?' I asked incautiously.

'Oh, just that she hates you like poison - says you have spoiled her life. That's nonsense, of course; but it is mostly nonsense that she is talking now. She talks like a blue-streak, and cries - and cries. You never saw the like.'

'But I have never said or done anything - ' I began weakly.

Persilla shook her head with the air of a mental expert.

'Well, that's sometimes the very reason; but not in this case. Says you have made her lose her soul - weeps when she hears that fellow blowing his trumpet - I'd trumpet him! Why can't you stop him? He lives in your place - one of the Old Cat's Kittens!'

I could not stop just then to defend Miss Sheba's character from this entirely gratuitous attack. Persilla had her point of view and must not be interfered with. However, I put her right as to Saul Adam. He had nothing to do with it. It all came from my folly in consenting to go with the girls to the

meetings of the Mesmeric Evangelist.

'Ah,' said Persilla, 'then it is the other one - what has he been up to?'

'So far as I can see,' I answered, 'he has hypnotized Miss January - perhaps without intending it.'

'If I get him,' Persilla announced viciously, 'I'll hypnotize him intentionally with the poker. Or, I say, I could tell some of the journeymen and apprentices. They like me and would duck him off the quay at high water, show-wagon and all. Besides, I could speak to policeman McVeagh, and he would see that his mates of the Force did not interfere.'

'Persilla - you must do nothing of the kind. It would do Miss Jan no good and might lead to great harm.'

I knew my position was weak and opportunist beside the vigour of Persilla's proposals.

'Well then,' said Persilla regretfully, 'I will save it up for another day; but I would like one lick of the poker at him, just to be going on with. Reston Rigg, indeed! I'll dream about him to-night for certain, and then we shall see. That green spider was not sent for nothing, and as long as I did not kill him intentional, the curse won't fall on me.'

'I suppose,' very tentatively I made the suggestion, 'that I could not see - '

'Miss Jan? No. I should think not; and you ought, with your education, to have more sense than to ask.'

Yet I felt that I might have done good. For I had the usual confidence of a young and inexperienced youth, that matters can always be arranged by being talked over. Whereas in cases of intimate griefs and

mutual offences, silence and time are the only emollients and even their cure is seldom radical.

Persilla sat hugging one knee on a low stool by the fire. She was adding chips and pine-cones to the little flicker in the grate. She seemed to be trying by experiment how small she could keep it, dropping in only one clear-blazing cone or resinous chip at a time. These, which formed her evening illumination when she had visitors, were brought by her by the carter of the Valley Sawmill, as an admirer in other circles might present flowers to a lady. But Persilla was meditating with the deep serene abstraction which characterized her at such times.

Quite suddenly she said, 'Perhaps, though, I could arrange so that you could see Miss June - oh, not here' (she glanced at me, forestalling my objection). 'You will want to come and see Persilla again. But those papers you had in your hand? School exercises, aren't they? Now you go round to the front door, walk boldly up and pretend to knock. You won't need to, for the door will be open. Then you go right into the little front parlour, where I always keep you waiting when you come to see the Doctor. Stand by the window with the papers in your hand, and when Miss June comes, you be surprised to see her. I shall have gone to tell the Doctor. You see?'

It did not seem quite practical, and yet, after all, I had the entry to the house. I had done no wrong. I wanted to help all I could, and so, rightly or wrongly, I yielded to the constructive imagination of Persilla, an adept at such things. But though I did not see the means by which Persilla was to make Miss June come down to the little waiting-room, I trusted in the power of action she had in herself and her power of

suggesting it in others.

It was now dark, so I had some difficulty in making my way through the kitchen garden - or rather I would have had, if I had not received the assistance of Persilla's expert hand. At the gate, the key of which had been lost in dreams, she very frankly and innocently held up her face to be kissed, alleging as a reason: 'It is not for the thing itself, never you think it; but I should be disgraced if ever it was kened that a lad had come to see me and I had seen him to the door without his having the grace even to proffer a civeelity.'

So I was exceedingly civil, to save Persilla's point of honour, and really found nothing distasteful in the operation.

The next moment I was out in the dark of Todd's Wynd, but I had only to follow, touching the walls on either side, till I reached the street. I made a detour, and presently found myself walking boldly up the little poplar avenue to the front door. It opened noiselessly. There were the quiet hall and the stairs up which I had seen Jan and May vanish only the night before - it seemed long ages ago now. In the distance Persilla waved me into the parlour, and then said in her ordinary tones, as if answering a question, 'Yes, certainly, Mr. Ross. I will go and see if the Doctor can see you.'

She did not, however, speak very loud. A lamp was burning on the corner desk, and leaving the door open as instructed, I went and stood by the window as I had been bidden. It was a breezy night with big clouds driving up the firth, and it astonished me the more that, in spite of this fact, the window was wide open. Presently there came a gust, followed by a sudden banging of doors all over

the house. In a moment more I heard the rush of light footsteps hurrying down the stairs, the silken flutter of skirts, and a reproachful voice, 'Oh, Persilla, you have left that parlour window open again!'

I turned quickly, and there on the threshold, her gold-dust coils over her brow and tumbled anyhow upon the top of her head, stood June Cassells. Her face was pale from anxiety and want of sleep, and she repressed a little cry at seeing me standing there alone in the lamplight.

I felt rather mean (as indeed well I might) when I found myself obliged to say, 'Persilla put me in here. She has gone to tell your father. I have some papers.'

'Ah,' was all she said. Then entering quickly, she shut the door.

'Please close the window,' she said. And in a moment we were alone together under the light of the lamp, the mounting flame of which steadied as soon the window was shut.

Then I could not stand it any longer. So I blurted out 'I made an excuse, June. I wanted to see you - I know. I could not stop away, though I tried. Please forgive me.'

She made her little vague gesture with her hands, which she had learned abroad.

'After all, what does it matter?' was what it said.

Her pain and evident heart-sickness sank deep into me. Yet, for all that, there was something of a new nobility in her face that I had never seen before.

It never occurred to June Cassells to doubt that I had entered the house in the way indicated by the surface sense of my words. Indeed, so anxious was she about her sister, that I am not sure she even

listened. I was concerned in what had come upon the household, the disaster which in a day had changed her from an elder sister only slightly more responsible, to the grave sick-nurse and little nursing-mother.

She stood with her elbow on the desk by the lamp, and the rich yellow light flooded down on the heaped masses of her hair, causing as she moved her head first one and then another shining thread to stand out burnished from the coils and tresses of sombre gold.

This was a wholly different girl from the one I had chased with the others about the desks and passages of No. 4 classroom.

'I think the worst is past,' she said in a low voice, her eyes meeting mine frankly. 'But I do not know. It is all so strange. It is as if somehow he had changed our Jan - my sister - the girl you knew. It is no good telling my father. He would either make too much of it or too little.'

'But what caused Jan's illness? How did it begin?'

Before answering, June went to the door and opening it a little, listened.

She closed it, and came back with a sigh of unmistakable relief.

'No,' she said, 'I was mistaken. I thought I heard her voice. She is certainly quieter, and, please God, it will pass away and be forgotten. No, I do not think it was anything really religious - rather some crisis of nervous emotion. There was something uncanny abroad that night in the tent - an influence - I felt it myself. But I strengthened myself till presently it passed, and I hated the man who had made me feel it. I think that man must be bad, Adrian; or perhaps only juggling with powers he does not know the

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consequences of. At any rate, I am slower by nature - less nervous - '

'Can you tell me exactly what she has gone through?' I said. 'I have given some slight attention to these studies, and I have a friend in Edinburgh who has written a book on Hypnotic Suggestion.'

She weighed this and then decided.

'Well,' she began, still with her elbow on the desk, 'I will try. She was quiet at first, and lay in bed with closed lids. Then when I came to bid her good night I saw that her eyes were fixed and open. She stayed that way awhile, not taking the least notice of me. Her lips were moving and yet I heard no words. Then suddenly I heard Jan say quite clearly, "I must go to him. He will tell me what I am to do."

Then I said, "Jan, try to get to sleep and in the morning you will feel more yourself. You will see Adrian then. He did a noble thing for you to-night when you were excited - when we were all a little carried away, I think - unstrung, that is the word. But in the morning - "

'She broke in upon me harshly, in a voice that I hardly knew for Jan's: "Adrian" Adrian Ross - I shall hate him as long as eternity lasts. He has made me lose my soul.'

'And then in a low, hoarse whisper she went on to speak foolish things - such as that she was going to Reston Rigg to cast herself at his feet, and ask him to give her back her peace of mind - to make her peace with God.

'So it went on hour by hour till morning came, and none of us slept. How could we? But this afternoon she ceased to rave. I even got her to take some hot milk, and May and I have been able to relieve each other. She was asleep when I came

down, fearing that the clanking doors might awaken her. I knew that Persilla must have forgotten to close the window here. She has been nearly as upset as any of us, for she has had the task of keeping everything a secret from father.'

June Cassells stood a moment longer, silent, her eyes on the carpet, and then suddenly held out her hand.

'I must go,' she said, looking me squarely in the eye with her calm, direct gaze, now more than ever tranquillized by the sharing of responsibility. 'You can come to-morrow - no, better the day after, and I may have more to tell you. If anything happens that you should know, I will communicate.'

'But how am I to get it?' I asked, a little fearful of Miss Sheba's benevolent inquisitiveness.

For the first time June Cassells smiled.

'Oh,' she said, with a gentle inclination of her shapely head in the direction of the kitchen, 'have no fear. Persilla will manage all that.'

And so indeed Persilla was doing - in ways as yet unrevealed to her young mistress.

For just then that young woman opened the door, and said, 'Mr. Ross, if you please, the Doctor is waiting to see you.'

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE PRACTICABLE CUPBOARD

How, without Persilla, the days would have gone by, I dread to think even now. In the town the excitement had, if anything, increased. Multitudes nightly thronged the great marquee, which I could see spouting light on Market Hill every gloaming as I went and came to the School House back door, as usual by way of Todd's Wynd and the path between the plum trees and wall of the kitchen garden.

I represented to Persilla that by this persistency I must be seriously interfering with her receptions, but she only answered with her usual colloquial ease that if anybody did not like it they were at perfect liberty to 'lump it.' But I felt each night, as I made my way circuitously in the general direction of Todd's Lane, that I must be earning the hatred of at least six honest and honourable young men of the town - for indeed Persilla knew no others. I grew suspicious of the lingering regards of McVeagh, the night policeman. He hailed me still (for he was a friend of mine), but with less and less conviction.

'Weel, Mr. Ross, off again with your papers to see the Doctor?'

At last he grew so suspicious of my entering and leaving by the road which had apparently been oft trodden by him, that at last I judged it best to say, with a very serious countenance, 'One of the young ladies is not very well - nothing serious - but there is no use disturbing that side of the house, specially as they are keeping it from the Doctor. But don't say

anything.'

'Oh, that's it,' said McVeagh, heaving up his big body and tucking his white gloves into his belt. 'I was wondering what had comed over Miss Persilla; but I'll be mum enough. It's our trade.'

His face cleared as I added, 'I fancy she will have enough to do, looking after the Doctor besides the invalid, and also managing the house!'

'Hoch aye,' said McVeagh. 'She's a fine hand at managing, Persilla. She'll be in her element, I'm telling you.'

So, saluting, he strode contentedly away in the direction of the Market Hill.

Persilla was indeed in her element, though hardly as constable McVeagh had supposed.

'It's that fine to be mysterious,' she confided to me, 'and hae them all on the wonder what's wrang. But it's finer still to ken that you are really doing some good. And you and me is.'

I never corrected the grammar of Persilla, nor indeed anything that was hers. That would have spoiled the piquancy of her personality and the ever-fresh wash of her ideas.

After all, I did not see June on the night appointed. She sent an excuse by Persilla saying that she could not leave her sister. I was disappointed, more indeed than I cared to confess; but Persilla comforted me.

'It's for the best,' she said. 'I can tell you what you want to ken as well, if not better. I'm often that near to greetin' in the house, that the only cheeriness I get is to think o' the lads girning their teeth and as ye go by, wanting to murder you.'

'Well, I think I settled McVeagh,' I said, and told her.

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'Maybe,' said Persilla, hastily shoving me into the practicable cupboard as a knock came to the door; 'but there are others not so easy.'

Persilla opened the door wide, and in the short silence which followed I heard the *click-click* of the latch upon which Persilla kept her hand, ready to slam the stout panels remorselessly in the face of any unwelcome intruder. For in those days, when Persilla walked with high, defiant head among mysteries and stratagems, every intruder was unwelcome.

'Gracious goodness, Ebenezer Watson!' declaimed the clear young voice of Persilla. 'What are you doing here without an invitation? Or have you a package to deliver? If so, let's see haud o't!'

'I have neither,' responded the dogged voice of one of the most serious 'parties' in the Longtown matrimonial market - Eben Watson, carrier to Caerketton, the big English town over the border line, to which his blue-tilted cart waddled through innumerable little villages not yet reached by the railway and little likely to be so during his lifetime.

'I have neither,' repeated Ebenezer Watson, and I could hear the *dump-dump* of the stock of his whip upon the clean whinstone of the kitchen threshold. I want to know what you mean by using me this way, Persilla Potter, and not giving an honest man his answer to a straightforward question.

'What was it you might be asking?'

'I asked you to marry me, Persilla. Aye, for the twentieth time.'

'did you now?' said Persilla carelessly. 'And what would I be saying to that?'

'You said,' the answer came back, punctuated with the stout, emphatic tappings of the whip-

handle, 'that the answer was "No."'

'And what more plain answer do you want that that?'

'But after a while, says you, "At least not if I can help it." That's my hope, Persilla.'

'Well,' said Persilla, 'I'm helping it bravely. Likewise in the case of all others I have said the same thing to. Good night to ye, Ebenezer Watson.'

'Thank you, Persilla,' the voice came to me more faintly. 'I'll call again, Persilla!'

Persilla came back into the kitchen, and after careful examination of the closed shutters, signalled me out of the deep cupboard, from which I brought with me a faint odour of soap and cheese.

At that moment a bell tinkled in the passage and Persilla answered the summons upstairs.

'I'm wanted,' she whispered; 'but bide where you are. Nobody will come in. If a rap comes to the door, don't you answer.'

'No fear, Persilla,' said I.

And she fled upwards in a clean, swift trip of hurrying feet. I was left alone in the wide kitchen of the old School House, that had once been the refectory of the Fathers Cistercian in the old days of Abbey St. Mirrens. It was still vaulted and whitewashed. Its stone flags were of irreproachable cleanliness, but the big spaces were scantily enough occupied by the Doctor's kitchen and laundry furniture. The high, narrow windows were barred and shuttered. A little lamp burned on the matt whiteness of the 'dresser,' and above it I saw a few books in the corner of a shelf.

This was Persilla's private library. Evidently I would have some time to wait, for Persilla showed no signs of returning. So I rose to inspect. All books

attract me, as the smell of fish acts upon the common cat. But I had never before seen anything like Persilla's collection. Authors, editors, and publishers were alike unknown to me. There were even quite special mentions, instead of the mere name of a publishing firm at the foot of the title page :

'Printed for the Booksellers and Flying Stationers' - and mysterious advertisements dating from Fishmongers' Lane and Red Lion Court, which seemed to be the two favourite centres of diffusion.

Books in the proper sense there were none. But there were what appeared at first sight to be just plain piracies. However, in the announcements at the end these appeared as 'Abridgments at Popular Prices of the greatest works of Romance, Thrilling Adventure, Desperate Escapes, Crime and its Punishment, Humble Virtue and its Reward.'

This last section was represented in Persilla's collection by 'Pamela, by Richardson, price One Penny.' But apparently it had not had so many readers by a great deal as 'The Amorous Adventures of Mr. Tom Jones,' which was marked 'Out of Print,' with three triumphal (!!!) marks of exclamation.

There was also 'The Famous Count of Monte Cristo, his Rich Treasures, his Desperate Escapes from Prison, and his Marvellous Isle of Pleasure,' which was certainly, even taking only the title, calculated to stir any healthy imagination, and was dirt cheap at a penny.

'The School of Thieves, or Fagin the Jew, his Wicked Life and Miserable Death, by a Distinguished Author,' appeared to skirt even the latitudinarian boundary line of the Fishmongers' Lane morality or at least legality. For this work bore no other

intimation of origin than the vague 'Printed for the Flying Stationers, Credit Drapers, and General Trade.'

What the respectable body of credit drapers had to do with it I could not make out.

I found also 'The Scottish Chiefs,' 'Thaddeus of Warsaw,' 'The Mysteries of Udolpho' - all democratically levelled to one penny apiece. Indeed, there was a remarkable lack of the modern halfpenny novelette and generally of all publications of 'The Duke and Dancing Girl' type. There must have been something classic about Persilla's literary taste. She liked her romance hot and strong. She liked it short and to the point. Above all she liked it cheap. But her taste was noways depraved or even vulgar.

'The Best Songs of Robert Burns,' with, on the cover, a woodcut of the poet at the plough, and the Muse descending to crown him, with a smudged smile on her face calculated to make the bravest flee, was yet sufficiently well printed and had doubtless been chosen with a single eye to the uplifting of Persilla's melodious voice.

But though I dipped into some pages of the best of these with one ear on the stairs, it was in a little dog-eared collection, piled together in one corner of the shelf and protected from common view by a fall of white American cloth, that I found my best and richest nuggets.

Persilla peeped into the future. Persilla was her own prophetess. She thumbed the cards - for she possessed a real soothsayer's pack, adorned with mystic triangles, pothooks, disks, whorls (like what Persilla made on the blue whinstone floor every Saturday morning), And the amount of reading and

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rereading which Persilla had given to this selection put to shame the cleanly condition of 'Maria, Child of Misfortune,' the book that appeared to have been next most popular, despite the threatening line on the title page 'From the French.'

The little hedge-sparrow-blue covered book, with a gallantly draped Flora sowing roses over a dozen naked Cupids all swinging by floral chains to the white-bosomed clouds, was of course 'The Language of Flowers.' It contained an astonishing quantity of the smaller fry of herbs pressed to dusty powder between the leaves. Here and there was a date: '*Apl. 8th, Sandy.*' Persilla had received from some 'Sandy,' whose surname was known only to herself, a pansy of a very large variety - the flower itself no longer existent, save in a large stain of expressed juice. It had been a fine gardener's show variety, which points to a possible profession for Sandy, and to a creeper-grown cot which might have been Persilla's a little way down the avenue from the greenhouses of some neighbouring Cheviotshire mansion.

There were an astonishing number of initials at the mention 'Southern-wood or Wormwood,' also called '*Lads' Love.*' The meaning of this herb was given as 'Bitter partings.' But from the calm precision, even self-satisfaction of the book-keeping, it is probable that the bitterness had not been on the side of Persilla.

Then came four Dream Books, called respectively 'The Key of the Future,' 'The Lady's Dream Repository,' 'The Voice of Fate,' and 'The Secrets of the Unseen Unveiled, from unpublished manuscripts of Cornelius Agrippa, Thomas the Rhymer, King of Fairyland, and - *Lavater!*'

Equipped with this last I dipped into the future at

random. It informed me that I should succeed in the business I had on hand - which I was glad to hear, though I hardly knew myself what that business was. I found also that, being a blond young man of (comparatively) unblemished character, I should inevitably marry a dark girl - little, curly-haired, and of a mirthful disposition. Now this was somewhat less satisfactory, for the only person I knew answering to that description was Persilla herself!

But the various thumb-nail scratches under the prognostication showed clearly that the work had been consulted previously by many other blond young men, with more definite intentions. These had made the same plausible identification, and on the strength of it had doubtless pointed out to Persilla their (and her) manifest fate

I was to be married within a year - by which I knew I must receive an increase of salary. Eighteen beautiful children, the loss of an important sum of money (a thing which left me exceedingly light of heart), and the subsequent re-establishment of my fortunes by marrying (apparently bigamously) a rich widow - such was my fortune as revealed by the secrets of 'The Unseen Unveiled,' as used by Persilla and the usual company of her kitchen *salon*. I was still smiling over these marvels when I saw in the doorway at the foot of the stairs, muffled in a cloak and with the hood drawn tight about her head, Jan herself.

She stood a moment gazing at me, her face pale, drawn, and desperate. Then without a word or a cry she turned and sped upstairs again, leaving me chilled and fear-smitten. The moment before I had been jesting with Fate, and yet I had come there, all unthinking, in time to bar Jan's flight from her

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father's house into dangers which I hardly dared even to name myself.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

FLOOD TIDE IN THE TENT

When Persilla returned she was not in the least flustered. She knew nothing of Jan, and indeed declared boldly that I must have been dreaming. But all the same she darted upstairs in a hurry, and came down again with word that Miss Jan had been quietly sitting reading in the drawing-room, while Miss June and Persilla herself arranged the bedroom.

‘And Miss May?’ I asked still fearfully.

‘Oh, Miss May is writing something to her father’s dictation,’ said Persilla; ‘that is Miss Jan’s business generally. But she begged off to-night, pretending that she had a headache. And indeed it is no pretence, the poor thing - aye and a heartache too, for little is the sleep she has had ever since thae abominable brayings and trumpeting and magic began on the Market Hill. Before that, she was as wise-like a girl as ever I saw - except, that is, Miss June. And nobody could be quite like Miss June - though maybe you, being a poor silly man, may think different.’

I assured her that there was no doubt about the fact, also that when she left the kitchen she had better keep the door locked and the key in her pocket, if she did not wish a terrible mischief to befall the family of Cassells.

She promised readily enough, for Persilla was nowadays above taking a suggestion. Then, after thinking things over a little, she said that it would be best and least suspicious were I to go on to the

Doctor's room, so that Miss May might see me, and so be able to testify for what purpose I came to be in Persilla's kitchen premises.

'Not,' she added hastily, 'that I believe that she will say a word about it, if so be that she did see you. But it is aye best to err on the safe side - especially with young leddies that have only one lad between the three of them - and him keeping Persilla company by the ingle-nook as snug as Jock and Jenny.'

For this I rebuked Persilla. She must not, in my presence, speak thus of her young mistresses.

'And in wha-the-plague's presence wad I be speakin' that gait for, if not in yours?' exclaimed Persilla. 'Arles is arles, and I am no speaking about what ye pay me at the door into Todd's Lane. *That* is for the sake of my reputation, and to show there's a man about the premises. But make no mistake - it is never Persilla would be a dominie's wife, and when he came home at night, for all news to get only the sum total of the lickings he has gien the poor bairns that day.'

So in I went, all unannounced, to see the Doctor. He was marching up and down the floor dictating, running his fingers distractedly through his hair in the search for words, and entangling his amanuensis with such directions as, 'Put a note here - no, not at the side - at the bottom of the page. That's all wrong. What is the matter with the house these days, May? And why does not January come down to me as usual? Ah, Mr. Ross. Come, that's better. Sit you down - sit you down, Mr. Ross.'

May Cassells glanced at me from under her eyelashes, and though her demeanour was graver than usual, a little of her old gay humour peeped out

in the low-spoken appreciation. 'He never was so happy to see you in his life, Adrian - nor I either.'

'All right, May,' I muttered, as I passed behind her to get a more comfortable chair in which to settle myself for my duties. 'I will stick to it as long as he wants me.'

'Thank you,' she said, 'and good night - I dare say that I shall be of more real use upstairs.'

And I thought so too.

It was after ten before the Doctor let me off, and when I came out I was astonished to see that the lights had not been extinguished in the big marquee up on the Market Hill. I strolled that way. The main door was quite unguarded. I passed in and found myself, so it seemed to me, in the midst of a strange scene. The Forerunner and several scores of the young people of the town and suburbs - servant girls, mill workers, shop girls (for the 'living-in' system is not known in Longtown and consequently there is no locking-out hour) were kneeling in front of the red altar-cloth. The penitents were not now confined to one row, as they had been on the fatal Monday night. The line had grown into a phalanx.

A poised and weighty silence brooded everywhere as at an act of high communion. Reston Rigg had descended among his proselytes and was passing to and fro whispering, first to one kneeling figure and then to another. The rest of the audience sat spellbound, and as one after another of the converted, impressed by the tense excitement, rose and faltered a few words of public confession, more and more fluttered up altarwards, wounded birds upon whom the influence had fallen heavy, to drop helpless into the kneeling circle.

I have seen revivals before and since - honest

men, honest hearts - honest, and in some cases permanent changes of life. But this of Reston Rigg's was a thing by itself, and I had entered at the right moment to judge it - if not of its wrong and danger, these I knew already - but as to the arrangement and careful manipulation of the *mise-en-scène*.

This body of people had for several hours been under the spell of Reston Rigg, and however he came by his power, he certainly used it mightily. That spell of his was a very real thing indeed. Only I had come in from the clear outer air, where such things cannot live. I had come in without other preparation than that of seeing Jan Cassells stand wrapped about with her mantle in the stair doorway, then turn and flee at sight of me, her friend.

So now I saw what the others did not see - the signals that passed between Reston Rigg and his First Soloist, told by her transmitted to the orchestra and singers whom Reston Rigg had chosen and the First Soloist trained. She never looked at him, but from under her drooped eyelashes seemed to catch every point, and a line of a hymn was sung or low chords breathed from the fine American organ at which she sat - screened from the kneelers at the altar-rail, but well seen by me and quite close to the right hand of the Mesmeric Evangelist..

I shall not again describe the effect, which it is painful enough to me to recall. But it is necessary that I should make it clear that, for purposes unknown to me - perhaps the mere love of power, perhaps with some real far-back idea of somehow or other bringing good out of his strange gift - Reston Rigg had brought this whole audience under his spell, all, that is, except myself and the First

Soloist.

For as she looked up across the bowed heads of the hypnotic subjects of Reston Rigg's experiments, her eyes encountered mine. She knew the signs. Contempt and languor fell from her face like a mask momentarily slipped aside to mend a broken string. I cannot say that she smiled, but it is a fact that each of us knew that we two alone understood. There was comradeship and recognition in that exchange of glances. Yet she was faithful to her watch.

Without any preliminary she played a long run of notes, rising high, clear, and shrill into the treble, and breaking off short at its highest point. Reston Rigg ceased, and without a glance at his Soloist and Choir Leader, he raised his hands in blessing, stood so a full minute, and then disappeared behind the curtain.

The lights went up. The night, the low stars, and the winking gas-jets of the High Street looked in through the slashed black triangles of the marquee as the tent flaps were opened. The people rose to their feet, and the meeting was at an end. Those who had been kneeling in the phalanx up by the altar got up irregularly - one here, another there. They wandered uncertainly down the passages in which the lights were being put out, with dazed faces and tottering gait.

Often they looked back, and it seemed to me certain that the next night would find them back again to taste the perilous pleasure of that wizardry which they mistook for the Kingdom of God within them.

'The first disciples wrought miracles,' Reston Rigg had said. 'Then why not I, the last?'

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And they believed him. Were not they, some of them, his living miracles?

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

MY FIRST NIGHT IN THE PINE WOOD

I watched the vague faces of those who had been under Reston Rigg's mesmeric influence, the lingering looks that they cast behind as the lights of the big tent went out one after the other, till only the low-coned black mass stood out against the sky. I knew that it must come to a battle between Reston Rigg and myself - a battle for the soul of Jan Cassells - perhaps for other bodies and souls in Longtown, but primarily for that of Jan.

That caravan, settled so snugly in the pine wood behind the shut auction marts of Tom Jimson, was the camp of mine enemy - I, the stealthy redskin who must stalk him. Memories of boyhood stirred within me. Now I would do in earnest the scouting feats which had won me fame in the days when I captained a band of desperadoes at a certain institution at the head of Cotton Street in Cairn Edward Town, whence every Saturday we stole forth, armed to the teeth, to fall upon the band of the subtle chief Davie, the Spotted Leopard of Girthon, whose spuds were as those of the buffalo and his face like to the full moon.

As I went I meditated. Well, this forgotten boyishness might turn out to be a useful experience. At any rate, I determined to make a beginning. Now Jimson's Wood (as it was called by the boys of Longtown) was a kind of wide glade with heaped sandhills behind - tumbled ridges on which the binding grass and the blue sea-thistle flourished, while behind it there was only the flowing of broad

canals of brackish tidal water and wide sweeps of sand and marsh all the way to the Isle and the Dutchman's Lake. In Jimson's Hollow, therefore, with the tall pines *whoo*-ing away in the even wind overhead, the comfortable abiding-place of the great Mesmerist stood at anchor under the stars.

Generally it would have appeared to me a mean thing to watch another man's outgoings and incomings. But I comforted myself by the thought that my recklessness in frequenting Persilla had prevented Jan from leaving the house without being seen. It was not quite the time to ride any high chivalric horse with a man like Reston Rigg for an adversary. Inside the tent he had his power. Outside I had my eyes.

True, there was Miss Sheba to be thought of. But somehow a vague idea rose within me that in the dusk behind the orchestra I had glimpsed a draped figure like hers - a figure too which shifted, faded, and disappeared when I looked more closely. Possibly Miss Sheba was watching also.

Be that as it might, I took the Isle Road, came out on the sandy shore of the long promontory, skirted the sandhills, mounted into the pines from the back, glided silently over the tufty crest till I found a fallen tree on which I could stretch myself out luxuriously among tough resinous branches. Here I was perfectly hidden from the sight of any one beneath me, yet my head was within thirty yards of the lighted supper-room and the dull glow of the Negro cook's fire behind.

No, I would not have done the thing for myself. I would have marched straight up to the man and taken my chance. But it was for Jan, for the Doctor, for May, and for June that I had to take the

responsibility upon myself - that is, with only Persilla to help me. And at least this part of it was wholly mine.

The first thing I noticed was that Reston Rigg had no intention of dining alone. The little round table was set for three. In five minutes through the door of the lane which led between the two auction marts from the Market Hill came a noise of cheering. The enthusiasts had brought their hero home. And then, pathetic and yearning out of the unseen, the line of a well-known hymn rang out:

'God be with you till we meet again.'

This, as may be understood, did not soften me towards Reston Rigg, considering why I was there, and who (because of him) was lying sleepless and weary, or restlessly pacing up and down her bedroom at the School House. Indeed, I hated him the more - hated him because of the impressive reverence with which he took off his hat and stood bareheaded till the singing died away - hated him because he lifted up his hat in mock benediction, and then, carefully locking the gate, came alertly up the path, rubbing his hands like a man content and avid, who from far smells a well-earned supper.

But the Forerunner and the First Soloist, who constituted his general staff, followed behind, downcast, pensive, and silent .

Reston Rigg went in first, and disappeared from my view for a few moments behind a screen. Presently a head was being vehemently towelled, the shadows on the red blinds of the caravan revealing and distorting the gestures. I saw him next come to the door in a light blue jacket with silk facings and brandenburgs across the breast. The slight but evident make-up had vanished from his face. The

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arch of his eyebrows had disappeared, and the conquering upward crook of his moustache was moistly adroop.

'Where are you?' he called out to the two who had been walking up and down the little open space together. 'Why on earth did you not come in and see to things, Hester? And you, Adam, run round and find out what is keeping that lazy nigger!'

'I was talking to Saul,' said the First Soloist. 'We had the service to discuss. Also I had some advice to give him.'

Reston Rigg growled.

'Advise Saul as much as you like at a reasonable time, but not when you are keeping me waiting for supper. I am famished. I have had nothing to eat since two.'

The First Soloist did not answer, only moved towards the steps of the caravan in a leisurely, familiar way. Here, at the last moment, she stood aside and pushed, or so it seemed, Saul Adam in before her.

For some time after that I saw nothing except the quick movements of the old Negro, nor heard anything except scraps of conversation - easy, clear, and graceful in the voice of the First Soloist, gruff and complaining in that of Reston Rigg, while now and then a monosyllable told that Saul Adam was answering a question.

At this point I think I grew a little sleepy. The blackness of the world about me, the concentration of my attention on the bright spot of the encampment, and the glitter of the beautiful table service somehow isolated me. So that between natural sleepiness and the fascination of that big shining disk of light down in the glade, I was not far

from losing consciousness, when suddenly I was brought up entirely wide-awake, all my faculties on the tension, by a sound quite near me.

It occurred to me first that I had been shadowed in my turn by one of Reston Rigg's menials - the big chauffeur, for choice. I stirred lightly and the noise ceased immediately. I do not think I was afraid, but quite definitely I would have given a good deal to be sure just what was moving in the bushes behind me. There was not much undergrowth in Jimson's pine wood, but on the crest were clumps of scrub-oak, dwarf-hazel, sloe, and scroggy thorn which continued down to the water edge.

For a long time I could see nothing. Then, in the thickest of the cover, a little below me and well to the left, I could see a figure creeping. Presently it stood erect and I saw it was a woman. She was looking eagerly towards the glow of the camp beneath.

Suddenly fear leaped in my heart. Could this be Jan? I slid from the fallen tree and in another moment I would have laid my hand upon her arm. But a slight turn revealed the face and I stopped dead. It was Sarah Jimson, and there were tears trickling down her cheeks.

She pressed her hand on her heart with a movement I then saw for the first time, but which I am little likely to forget. The action was that of a man who determinedly restrains a restive, impatient steed.

I could see her bowing low, almost on all fours, to peer in at the door. I knew her well by sight - a handsome, sonsy woman, a little thickened in figure by a life of ease and lack of living interests, but now at the dangerous age, for a childless woman, of one

who has never known anything of the crown of life and feels that the years are passing.

Reston Rigg had fascinated her from the first. People smiled at her assiduity indeed, but without malice. They were amused when they thought of the big, jolly, drinking, roaring man who was at once her husband and the President of the Three Tumbler Club.

But it would have been a year's surprise to the whole town had it known that Sarah Jimson was on all fours among that dense coppice and scratchy tumble of wild growth, creeping and spying about the encampment of the Mesmeric Evangelist down in the hollow'

For me the thing was bad enough, but then I was only a man. My reputation would not suffer - not so much as by the discovery of my evening confabulations with Persilla or of the kiss that paid for her alliance at the door into Todd's Lane. But Sarah Jimson! That was another matter.

She was the wife of one of the richest men in the town. It had been a love match, and if Tom Jimson knew he would certainly try to kill Reston Rigg, and what he would do to the wife of whom he asked nothing, yet dressed more richly than any other woman in the town, was a thing which hardly bore thinking upon.

Indeed, all Cheviotshire knew that Tom Jimson was no man to trifle with. It was remembered how he had thrown Birt Fairbanks, the great horse-breeder and salesman, into the river near the Abbey Bridge only because, being a little 'sprung,' as they say in Longtown, he had called out from his gig, 'Sarah, you are a devil's sight too fine a woman to put up with Roaring Tom Jimson all your life!'

Mrs. Jimson was laying herself at the mercy of all the mischievous, wall-climbing, spying, adventurous boys in the town, and especially of those who were eternally along the shore after every tide, hunting for wreckage of all sorts, or merely stealing a boat to go out and fish for saith and ling, off the Black Point.

I knew three or four of my own pupils who would have followed her - nay, who might be following her now, without a leaf stirring or a dry branch snapping. There were, to go no further, Kid the Treasure, unequalled in rascality; Robson Minor of the Lower Third, a famous night-hawk; while older than they, but quite as ripe for mischief and less restricted as to hours of returning home, there were Davy Mitchell and Tom Shearer, two of our seniors, born in the town and knowing every soul within the bounds.

Also here was I, Adrian Ross, First Classical Assistant, so lost to all sense of the dignity of my office, that I was hiding and spying like the rascaldom whose ignorance pestered me at the foot of every class during my working hours. *I* was not afraid of them. On the contrary, I knew very well that if I could beat them at this game, I would stand higher in their respect than by writing Latin prose like the Doctor and professing every classical author mentioned in Smith's Dictionary.

Even if I failed they would still respect me, because 'I had the spirit' - a very heady phrase in Cheviotshire, which has lured many border lads to ruin, and a few, a very few, to honour and greatness.

At any rate, suppose that I were caught either going to Persilla's or up here among the pines, the school would keep the secret. It would respect me more, and I should have less trouble with my

classes than any other master in the place. It would merely be thought that I was 'after the Singing Girl.' I would get the reputation of a devil of a fellow, which never hurt anybody in Longtown, that is, unless you got high in place among the churches. Even then a faint floating savour of past 'wildness' did the ordinary office-bearer no harm, so be that he walked the chalk-line of the present with austere rectilinearity, and (save in the silence of his heart and when the dew was on the roof) never looked over his shoulder at the haloed past.

But in the meantime here was Sarah Jimson - 'Mrs. Tom' - standing trembling and with her handkerchief pressed to her face, a mysterious thing to explain. She sat down on the dry sand, her face towards the caravan, watching. And every time the voice of the First Soloist clone up the slope, or still more when her laugh rang scornful and clear, Sarah Jimson pressed her hand to her mouth sharply and, so far as I could see, bit on something crumpled up in it - her handkerchief, without doubt.

The First Soloist was trying over an anthem; the Forerunner occupied himself in writing out a poster for the master eye of Reston Rigg; but the great man himself leaned back lost in thought - all this among the débris of the meal. Then in came the Negro and began to clear away, but Reston Rigg continued to lean back with his eyes shut. His face grew deathly pale and his lips lost their colour and became uniform with his face. Presently the First Soloist, looking up from her music sheet, watched the face of the Mesmeric Evangelist for a while with a frown of bitter concentration. Then she reached out her hand for a flageolet, which she used to indicate how she meant to play certain passages on the big

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American organ. For in the service, almost I had written the entertainment, of the Mesmeric Evangelist nothing was left to chance. Every note and word which could possibly lead up to and reinforce the power was carefully rehearsed.

With her eyes on the death-white, aloof face of Reston Rigg, the First Soloist played once, twice, and thrice the same sharp rising scale of notes with which she had closed the *séance* in the marquee. The notes rose keen and sharp, ending almost in a shriek.

Reston Rigg opened his eyes slowly, recalled himself, and looked about him bewildered.

'Come, none of that,' I heard the First Soloist say loudly. 'You know what came of that the last time.'

It was wholly mysterious to me, but somehow Sarah Jimson's progress towards the lighted oblong of the caravan was checked. She turned, and without so much as an attempt at concealment, pushed a way back through the sloe and gorse bushes, tearing her rich dress - heavy brown silk it was - so thick that it would hardly rustle. I watched her as she went, hoping that she would go away altogether and leave the ground clear.

But on the crest I could see her pause, then stand awhile black against the sky. The next moment she had fallen on her knees with her face towards the sea and buried her face between her hands.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

CLASSROOM NO. 4

Miss Sheba was not visible that night when I got back to Solway, House, but the Editor and McRobert, the traveller in tobacco, were sitting up in the small common parlour in the basement, where alone Miss Sheba permitted smoking. They had a pack of cards and were playing bezique at sixpence the rubber of three. There were also glasses and a bottle flanked by several empty syphons.

'Ho,' cried McRobert; 'what is this, young man? Twelve o'clock struck, and the model and darling of Solway House, Miss Sheba's little pet lamb, going it by and large like a man about town.'

The Editor only smiled slightly, as if to mark the difference between an educated man and a fellow like McRobert.

'Best time to take the air,' he said. 'I often think of that on paper nights. when we have to wait to put the old sheet to bed.'

And they went on playing, while I, thoroughly tired, bade them hastily 'Good night' and went up to my room. I undressed and blew out the candle. I always slept with my blinds up and my window half open - no paltry six inches for me - so I stepped behind the dressing-glass in my pyjamas to make the last preparations. Care was necessary, for I had to do with a good deal less than the half if the south-west wind happened to be blowing strongly up the firth, otherwise I should have been whisked out of bed and the blankets out of the window.

As I stood looking down the street, close along by the wall there came a figure - the washerwoman as before. She felt in her side-pocket for a key and let herself in. I remembered that I had not seen Miss Sheba. Could this be she? If so, what was she doing out at this time of night? I listened. I thought even of going down to the kitchen on some pretext, finally made up my mind against it, and went to turn in.

Decidedly Longtown was becoming full of mysteries and romance. But what impressed me most unpleasantly of all my experiences was the ghastly face of Reston Rigg in his trance, and the keen notes with which the First Soloist recalled him out of it. I lay awake thinking. I could not make up my mind about Reston Rigg. Now he seemed the mere impostor. Now he was the great Evangelist with a Sinister Side. Again (but this not very often), I was deceiving myself and hating a good man because of emotional disturbances of the religious sort in Jan's heart, common to most young women of her age. Girls take to that sort of thing one time or another, some sooner, some later. It is an intermittent fever, but which yields to the stronger (if not higher) interests of marriage, maternity, and the cares of a family.

'The Sinister Side' (so in my young omniscience I dogmatized) lies not far round the corner from any of us. I was not conscious of the possession of such a thing myself. But then I knew myself to be exceptional.

It was also true that I had made some little love to all the three girls, with a spice left over for Persilla. But I knew very well that I was not doing any harm.

I came back to Reston Rigg and his Side Sinister. Yes, a great many things might be explained on that

hypothesis. But there was one fact difficult to explain - the position and influence of the First Soloist.

I rejected the obvious. I was neither censorious nor ill-natured, having need of much charity myself. Besides, I had looked into that girl's eyes, and through a world of sad experience there shone (I made sure of it) the goodness and purity of an angel - a weary angel, a rather hopeless angel, an angel found by accident in the wrong flock, but nit angel all the same.

I resolved to make the acquaintance of the weary angel, Hester Vane.

She was indeed, apart from her professional duties, a somewhat difficult person to approach, but I counted upon the Forerunner. I had indeed seen but little lately of Saul Adam. Involved in perplexity as I was, the simple robustness of his faith in his Master was an annoyance to me. But if it were possible for me to 'get to know' Hester Vane, that might clear up many things.

Next day was Saturday and a whole holiday. I would speak to Saul Adam in the afternoon after he came back from his open-air meeting in the Town Hall Squarer, at which he preached the Reston Rigg gospel as simply and sincerely as if he were a muezzin making sonorous proclamation of the Prophet's faith. I did not accompany him, for I knew what he would say. Reston Rigg did not go either. He remained in his encampment under Jimson's Pines. He was not the man to waste himself uselessly. He was doubtless refreshing himself by thought and study for the evening meeting - always an important one on Saturdays, wives considering the marquee on the Hill an admirable and inexpensive substitute for

the public-house bar-room on the weekly pay-night.

As was my custom, I started for the School House in the forenoon. Indeed, I went out immediately after breakfast. I had the keys which led to No.4 classroom, and I liked to work there at my examination subjects. And no wonder. Here was a pleasant, spacious silence, the swish of leaves outside in the Rector's garden, the noisy playground full of an unwonted cloistered quiet - for the big iron doors were locked from Friday evening till Monday morning. There is no more stimulating and suggestive place to work in than an empty, recently whitewashed classroom, in the summer season when you can have the windows open. The very smell of ink helps you. Study comes hasting along the unwonted tidiness of the scarred desks, and you sit with a cool ease upon benches rendered glossy by the eternal restlessness afflicting the sitting parts of boyish trousers.

Besides, through that door in the left-hand corner might come at any moment a visitor from the paradise within - June Cassells, May, Persilla, or even (that day I would put up with anything) the Doctor. Now and then I could hear sounds from the School House - very faint and to me unintelligible. But about eleven, just when I was sitting down after opening a roof skylight for the wasps and bees to escape through, the Rector came meandering in. Erasmus Cassells had a curious halting, butterfly gait, not only in walking, but also in a quaint way he had of flirting his hands. Except when writing, he could not keep these still any more than the boys their breeches. He had always a little of the manner of a Frenchman, something too of the changeling charm of John Stuart Blackie. Like him, also, he

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was too daintily elfish to make a good schoolmaster.

'At it already!' he cried, his hands lifting with the sudden waft of a wind-blown butterfly, and the sweetest of smiles irradiating and illuminating his face. I stood up to answer him, but presently he was marching up and down, deep in a monologue on the elements of originality in Virgil. He forgot himself for a longer space than he knew, so that I heard a voice call twice over, 'Father.' I turned about and saw June Cassells, in her plain black morning gown, with large collar and cuffs, peeping in at the door. I had time to interrogate her with a look as to how things were going.

She shook her head as she advanced to interrupt her father, who took no notice of her till her retaining hand was laid on his arm. He turned about.

'Eh, what's that?' he said, and glowered at her through his glasses as if he had seen a marvel.

'You had better come upstairs,' she said. 'I think Jan is not well.'

'Bless me!' quoth the Doctor. 'Did she not eat her breakfast?'

'Come, father!'

Fearing to intrude, I rose to go, but over her shoulder June motioned me to stay where I was.

'You may be of use,' she said. 'I shall come back'

* * * * *

She came. The door carefully shut, June Cassells sat down opposite me, her cheek upon her hand, the weighty loosened masses of her dull gold hair shadowing the blond warmth of her cheek and dusking the sadness of her eyes. She had grown

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older during these days, this elder sister of Jan's - almost with the look that usually comes to a woman after child-bearing.

Indeed, so I judged, her own soul it was which had been reborn. In saving others, she herself had been saved, as only Calvary pain can save any soul.

Presently she began to speak, her eyes wide, large of pupil, direct, fearless, never faltering from mine.

'There is no more need, Adrian,' she said, 'that I should hide anything from you. You saw the beginning of the evil that has come upon our poor Jan. It is a kind of possession, what you call a fixed idea - that - that' (here she hesitated) 'that in order to save her soul she must - *go to that man* - '

'To Reston Rigg?'

June let her eyelashes droop and only her bowed head signified the shame of assent.

'My sister - my father's daughter!' she murmured. She was speaking to herself, not to me. So I kept silence, knowing that in time she would continue.

It began that Monday night. She went up to the railing where the red cloth' (at the memory she put her hand over her eyes for a moment). 'You brought her away. It was well done for all our sakes, and I shall never forget it. Then I thought the matter was ended. It had only begun.

'Every night since, at a fixed hour, she hears the man calling her to come to him. She resists a little, turns her head to the wall, grips herself and prays. But there is something stronger than her will. After a little she turns again. Ah, if you could see her face - convulsed - her eyes glassy and fixed. 'He is waiting for me,' she cries. He is calling me. Let me go. Oh, I hate you - I hate you. You make me lose my soul. I shall die if you do not let me go to him. I

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shall come back soon - so very soon, but I must go now.'

'Her voice dies away in moans of weariness.

Then we speak gently to her, but stay very close, May and I - yes, and Persilla too. We could not keep it from her, but she is faithful. She has been with us long - long. We have proved her. Up till last night we have been able to keep it from my father.

'But about eleven o'clock in the evening - or between that and midnight - a crisis came. Jan lifted herself up in bed, and had we not been ready would have rushed out of the house. I was afraid people would have heard her on the street. Luckily the old, thick walls and the school yard shut us in. But very soon she grew far beyond our strength. She seemed stronger than a man. So I had to tell father that Jan was behaving strangely - some little touch of fever, I explained.

"All women are thus sometimes," he answered calmly, and began to tell me of my mother's early illnesses after their marriage, still most inexplicable to him.

'Nevertheless he came. Yes, he left his work and came, and at sight of him Jan quieted a little. She has always been his favourite, you see. They have worked together, for she is a better scholar than any of us. But whenever his back was turned, there she was writhing among our hands again, struggling and crying to be free, so that one of us had to sit by the window all night to keep her from doing herself harm.'

'And that one was you, June,' I said, looking at the shadowy circles of wakefulness about her eyes.

'I had the key of the door in my pocket,' she continued without taking any notice, yet tacitly at

the same time admitting my supposition was the only one possible.

For some time June, still looking straight into my eyes, her palm pressed against the delicate curve of her pale cheek, continued to give me the details of the cruel obsession that weighed like a nightmare upon the soul of her sister. As she spoke I was lost in thought. For it came to me suddenly that perhaps I held the key to all this.

I had witnessed the trance of Reston Rigg the night before. I had seen his eyes dull and fixed, almost as if dead. I did not know much about these things, but my friend Septimus Thomson, a graduate of the School of Nancy, now a lecturer in Edinburgh, knew the psychology of suggestion from attic to basement - aye, and to the caverns under - very deep and dark they are. He had told me many things, and besides, I had read his book, *The Philosophy of Suggestion in its Civil and Criminal Aspects*.

'I think I see a glimpse of light,' I said. 'Perhaps I ought not to tell you. It may be really nothing, still - '

June looked at me with wide pitiful eyes.

'If you know anything that can help Jan, I pray tell me at once.'

'I fear it is not anything that can help - in the meantime, at least,' I said; 'but we have got to understand this first. So far as I can see, the man Reston Rigg saw at once that your sister would make an exceptionally good subject for the display of his powers. He has to my knowledge completely destroyed the will of that fellow Saul Adam. He neither thinks his own thoughts nor speaks his own words. Reston Rigg can guide him by a look, or even, I believe, in absence, by projection of his will, his

peculiar power, as they can steer a torpedo by electricity. He has begun to experiment with Jan, partly because she is a pretty girl, and partly because, maybe, he would be glad to have another disciple as devoted and absolutely dependent upon him as I know the Forerunner to be.'

June Cassells shuddered as I spoke and her eyes sought mine wistfully. 'My sister!' she said. 'Can you do nothing? Oh, quickly!'

'I have a friend whom I might consult,' I answered. 'But I should need to go and see him. One cannot write such things. I could start to-day - at once.'

She stretched out her hand with a quick, impulsive movement.

'No,' she said; 'do not go! I - we may have need of you. We cannot spare you - father does not really understand.'

There was nothing for it, therefore, but to remain, and in the long run I was glad. It brought me not only a remarkable adventure, but an ally where I least expected to find one.

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE FLOWER PARLOUR

The next morning, which was Sunday, I was preparing for church when Persilla came in sight, walking quickly down the sidewalk towards Solway House. Miss Sheba, pulling on her gloves in the lobby, received her in grim disapproval, but brought the letter up to me. It was in the Doctor's handwriting.

'There!' she remarked austerely, and went out, slamming the door. She felt, I suppose, that I was too deeply involved in the toils for any assistance of hers, except such as consisted in still turning me out a 'credit to the house.'

'Dear Mr. Ross,' the note ran, 'I venture to trespass upon the good-will you manifest towards my family. it has been proven by a thousand acts of kindness. I learn that my daughter January, who, as you know, has been ailing for a few days - some obscure hysteria, as I judge - is under the delusion that somehow she has wronged you, and she desires to be assured that you cherish no ill-will towards her. Of course, it is a ridiculous supposition, but apparently she must be humoured. She is certainly very much upset and anxious. Otherwise I would not make, even at the suggestion of my wise eldest daughter, this further encroachment upon your time, which I know to be at present so valuable.

'June asks me to say that if you will accompany me home after church and lunch with us, she is of opinion that this will be the best way to avoid calling

public attention. In the circumstances you will understand how much we deprecate that.

Your friend,
'ERASMUS CASSELLS.'

I saw at once how it had come about. June must have spoken to her sister. Jan had recalled her unexpected meeting with me in the kitchen. She would gather from the circumstance that I was deep in the secret, and might want to find out how much I knew.

On the whole, I was glad at this turn of affairs. Such a state of mind was infinitely to be preferred to her former fixed idea. I fear I did not attend very much to the good Barnacle that day. But a church is always a choice place to think in; the peculiar peace of the sanctuary, the Sabbath hush of the churchyard, the whispering trees, the silent tombstones, the stillness on the houses, and the groups of fathers and children, the mother a little uneasy in her mind as to the locking of the door - these things fill the mind (or at least mine) with a sense of withdrawal, temporary but unique. The singing, readings, prayers, and the sermon - especially that of our good parish minister - occupy the surface attention. So whenever I have anything to be thought out, I find that the inner soul takes a freer and farther range there than is possible in the workaday world. I have always, especially during my years of deepest thought, been an assiduous church-goer. Even when the highest of messages failed to reach me, scarcely ever did I miss communing with what was highest within myself - which, after all, since I did not put it there, is the part of God which concerns me most.

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At any rate, I thought during that service of all that was difficult about me - of this anxious business in which I found myself engaged, of the evil one troubling our rather lightsome Eden, of Jan and May, and the wise June, of the anxious look in her eyes and the pale blue shadow her thick gold-dusty hair cast on the warm creaminess of her cheek.

I thought also of all that had happened and was happening in the spirit of Jan Cassells, since I had last spoken to her the night of the fatal meeting; of the spot where she had run ahead in the woods of the Isle, and stood suddenly with her hand pressed to her heart at sight of Saul Adam kneeling with his face towards the sunset.

There were indeed but few things I did not think of, except that, with the new interests and the threatening tragedy that had come into my life, seemed somehow wholly to have lost interest for me.

I was aware of the Doctor opposite. he sat alone in the big School House pew - close to the door, his elbow on the curve of the upright and his cheek upon his hand, in an attitude that reminded me of his eldest daughter. Just so had June sat and regarded me as I told her about the watch in the pines, and all that had passed the night I spent there. I was glad that I had not said a word of Sarah Jimson. That, at least, was not our affair. Though, in my heart of hearts, I knew that the infatuation of that commonplace and portly dame, rich in this world's goods and standing high in the respect of all, threw the strongest light on the power that was now warring against the peace of mind of our poor Jan.

Among other things, I tried to map out the line I was to take with Jan. But though the Doctor's letter had in some measure prepared me for a fresh

attitude on her part, I could not reconcile that imperious desire to make friends with what June and Persilla had told me previously - of her outbursts of hatred and anger at my very name.

All that suggested itself to me was that somehow or other Jan was trying to win me over, perhaps to set my suspicions to sleep, and that she might possibly be doing it at Reston Rigg's suggestion.

Well, be that as it might, nothing would please me better than to come to close quarters with that mesmeric gentleman.

Strange it was to walk so quietly back with the Rector's long, thin hand on my shoulder, swaying down towards me from his great height, his thin face nodding rhythmically to his expositions of the shortcomings and merits of Jowett's Plato, and other cognate matters which, in the eyes of Erasmus Cassells, were more important than shiploads of daughters. Not once did he mention Jan or her illness, or refer to the letter he had written me. The whole affair seemed to have passed utterly from his memory. So completely indeed that instinctively he faced about at the iron gate, button-holing me in his usual fashion for a last word before taking leave of me.

And I actually believe that he would have dismissed me altogether if it had not been for June, who, on the watch at a window above, descended with a swoop and, opening the gates wide, received us both and shut the iron barrier upon me, as if fearful lest I might escape.

'Come in quickly,' she whispered. 'She is waiting for you. Be gentle with her. She is very nervous still.'

I gave her a reproachful look. How could she think it could be otherwise? The Doctor's

expression, however, would have made me smile in any other circumstances. He looked at me, then at the gate, and again at June who was conducting me upstairs. Evidently he had already mislaid the fact that he had written a letter convoking me for that day - a letter which, I now saw, must have been suggested - almost dictated - by his daughters, even though the turning of the phrase was eminently Erasmian.

I will not deny that my heart beat faster as I went up to the parlour which the girls had selected and fitted up themselves for their morning room. It was fairly large for an old house, with thick walls and deep, low window recesses. Outside were climbing plants, hop, canary creeper, and a rambler rose, stretching their tendrils inwards as if conscious in their vegetable veins that it held all that was pleasant, gay, and young in that grim old house, in which the Rectors of Longtown Grammar School had lived and died since the days of Knox.

Then suddenly my heart leaped. Before me stood Jan in the doorway, the flowery oblong of the big creeper-filled window framing her. She was smiling a little palely, but with a suggestion of the old-time daring in her eyes. She held out her hand. The vivid colour came flushing back to her dusky cheek, and as she touched mine I saw her totter.

June, watching her, was at her elbow in a moment. She let go my hand rather quickly and dropped back into a chair with June close beside her. But she looked back at me over her shoulder and smiled.

'They have foolish ideas about me,' she said; 'these two think that I must be treated like a baby. Father does not mind, I hope you will be of father's

faction.'

June brought her a tumbler of soda-water, in which she had dropped a single teaspoonful of brandy, and over her till she drank it.

'They have been treating me like this all the time,' she said 'one would think this was an hospital and I a condemned criminal whom they were patching up for the gallows. I have read in the newspapers that the surgeons do such things. They must be kind men.'

I did not know how to answer this doubtful speech, so I merely said, 'You are better to-day. It is good of you to let me have a glimpse of you. I have been an outcast for so long - never a song, or a chat by the fire - '

My incomplete sentence was broken off sharply by Jan clapping her hands and exclaiming, 'There's Persilla!'

But whether she meant merely to signal the arrival of Persilla with the lunch in the dining-room or to remind me of having interrupted my 'chat' by Persilla's kitchen fire, I do not know. At any rate, I was glad to see her again quick-witted and even a little malicious. It was better than the bewitched creature described to me by June and Persilla.

But I could see that, in spite of the comparative lightsomeness of her mood, June was still watching her sister intently, and that Jan grew restless under the intentness of the observation.

'Here, Adrian,' she said, 'if I am an invalid, let me have at least the privileges of one. Give me your arm.'

This was pleasant enough, but even so I felt the change. Before, she would merely have taken it and then mocked at her sisters because she had carried

me off. I could feel the light flutter of her fingers on my arm and through my sleeve the heat in her palm. The girl was still quivering with suppressed excitement of one kind or another - either dislike severely reined in by desire to gain some end, or a return of her earlier liking for me - I could not determine which. Love and hate have sometimes the same symptoms, or at least women can make them seem the same. Only indifference is unmistakable. The more vivid passions overlap each other. They may be separate and sovereign states, but there is a debatable land between them - like that which separates Longtown from Caerketton.

Of the lunch there is not much to tell. Jan ate with a laborious pretence of hunger.

'They have kept me on bread and water, the wretches,' she said, smiling at me. 'Denounce them. But beware. Policeman McVeagh is on their side. He is a sweetheart of Persilla's, and Persilla takes sides with the enemy - after all I have done for that girl too, letting her do my share of the dusting every morning, so that I could get sooner to my practising.'

'To whom am I to apply, then?' I said, humouring her fancy.

'Why, to the Inspector. He is a good-looking unmarried man, and would, I think, consider the sequestration of a harmless female a most serious crime.'

Here the Doctor interrupted with a question about my examination, and for the remainder of the meal nothing else was talked of. I think every one was glad to escape - the Doctor especially so. For two long hours he had not seen his beloved books and papers.

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Now the strain must come, and at the prospect I saw the colour fade from the already pale cheek of June, and her eyes grow great and dusky under the shadowy hair. Clearly she also was anxious as to the outcome.

It was in the girls' morning room that I had my talk with Jan - perhaps, more exactly, that Jan had hers with me. She had sent for me with a clearly defined purpose. June left us after a little. May had already disappeared, but warned by a look which I surprised passing between them, I was certain neither had gone far.

Jan sat by the window-sill. It opened outward in the foreign manner, common enough, however, in the older Scottish type of gabled house built about the time of Queen Mary. She leaned forward to pluck a bloom of the rambler rose, that bubbled with blossom all along the front of the School House, like so much red champagne of Assmannshause. And during all the time that we talked, she never once stopped pulling out the petals, one by one, and showering them on the floor, till the carpet was flecked with rosy purple and her feet and the very buckles of her shoes were starred with bits of vagrant bloom.

'I ought to thank you for what you did for me that night,' she said, keeping her eyes steadily on the flower she was disarticulating with the care of a botanist.

'That was nothing,' I answered quickly. 'I think we had better not speak of that.'

'Ah,' she said; 'but we must talk of it. I have been unjust - angry. And' (here she suddenly raised her dark eyes, not wet with tears as I had expected, but blazing like stars) 'I have been most unjust to you,

Adrian.'

She gulped at the familiar proper name.

'But,' suddenly holding out her hands, both of them, 'I am sorry.'

I took her hot hands in mine and bade her believe that not for a moment had I ever thought of her but as my best and truest of friends.

'I know - I know!' she cried 'But I have been so to blame.'

'No, not to blame,' I said, 'only feverish, not yourself - '

The word seemed to sting her.

'No,' she said; 'not myself - not my own even. But for you I might have been Another's. I might have given myself to the Highest. The Love Divine might have entered into my soul. But you arrested me - I am a reed bruised - a stunted growth. Reston Rigg might only have been the link between the old foolish self that was my own and that new and nobler which was all to be given to the service of God. You stopped me. I waver between earth and heaven. I find no rest for the sole of my foot, and the man who brought me so far suddenly became powerful within me - over me!'

She spoke with furious articulation, all in a pour of words. I sat and listened. This was very different from what I had anticipated.

'And now, sir,' said Jan, turning upon me and burning me up with bright challenging eyes, 'since this is your work - your work - what are you going to do with me?'

If I had flattered myself that the agony was past, or that the soul of Jan Cassells would submit to any guiding of mine, that indignant voice and imperious regard would quickly have disillusioned me.

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Yet in a moment she had recovered herself and was smiling again.

'Forgive me - I forget,' she said, frankly holding out her hand and letting it remain in mine.

I forgave Jan. There was, indeed, nothing to forgive her for, except that she had been pleased to put upon my shoulders the blame which by rights was Reston Rigg's. There remained her strange question - what I was to do with her, and the sudden unjustified anger with which she had overwhelmed me.

I can see her now as she stood up before me, her head thrown a little forward, her raven's-wing hair over-shadowing her dark eyes with a kind of threatening gloom, not so much hostile as defiant; the vivid bow of her mouth, and the quick, short breathing that dilated the sensitive nostrils. In all her person was a smouldering fire which flamed up into words at a breath and sank again as suddenly into a watchful suspicion.

'Let me alone,' she went on a little hoarsely. 'I have not asked any service of you. You have done me the worst you can render. Now let me alone. Only stop watching and spying. I know you are about the house. I can feel you out there in the night, going round and round. By what right do you track me like this? I am not a chit of a girl. I am not responsible to you. You sacrificed my happiness because you were afraid of your place and your salary. Well, I did as you wanted me. Your reputation - Heaven save it for you! - has not suffered on account of me.'

There was something daunting in the girl's sudden outbursts of vehemence. All I had said - all the sorrow she herself had expressed - went for

nothing. She was as much under the spell as ever.

'Pursued night and day,' she went on, shuddering visibly. 'Tracked by the man who brought this upon me - imprisoned by my nearest friends - *friends*, such friends! If you and the others do not let me alone - I warn you that will happen for which you will be sorry.'

'But I have not hindered you in any way,' I ventured.

'You lie and you know it!' Jan cried, taking a step towards me, as if to throw herself upon me.

This was clearly a case for an heroic remedy.

'You are mistaken,' I said, as calmly as I could. 'I do not track you nor spy upon you. Little as you may believe it now, I am, and have ever tried to be, your faithful friend. I was in the kitchen the other night merely to ask how you were, and to find if there was anything I could do to serve you.'

Jan laughed contemptuously at my explanation, which was indeed lame enough, I admit.

The laugh stung me. I think I lost a little of my composure, but luckily I did not become angry.

'No,' I said; 'I have not spied upon you - nor shall I do it. But ' (here I looked her very straight in the eyes) 'there is one whom I think it no shame to watch - one whose actions and purposes are evil - '

'You mean Reston Rigg?'

'I mean Reston Rigg.'

Her expression changed instantly. It had been high, contemptuous, haughty only a moment before. Now something quite foreign leaped up into her eyes - as in Ephesus the conjured evil spirits leaped upon and tore the seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew.

It was clearly the possession, for lifting a stiletto-pointed ink-eraser from May's drawing-board, Jan

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struck sharply at me. I saw the glitter of the steel above her head. My arm went up by the mere instinct of defence which comes to a young man who has passed his life in public schools.

The next moment June had come between us. With astonishing quickness she wrested the weapon away from Jan, who immediately dropped into a chair and quietly swooned away, limp and white, all the energy of her fury gone in that one blow.

'Adrian, you are wounded!' said June, and put her hand under my arm. It was true. The blood was trickling freely down my cuff.

'It is nothing,' I said, smiling. 'See, I have stopped it. Attend to your sister.'

But she would not, and whipping a white silk scarf from her neck, she quickly found the wound. Luckily nothing was seriously damaged. The keen weapon had almost transfixed the forearm a couple of inches above the wrist. But as June bound it up, her bright hair falling all about her hidden face, I felt the tears dripping warm upon my hand.

LOVE IN PERNICKETTY TOWN

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE DUTCHMAN'S LAKE

It was the third week after the accident to my arm. The girls had become quite worn out, so at the instance of Dr. Bernard (known as 'The Doctor whom Nobody Pays') a nurse had been obtained for Jan. Miss Linton was a tall, fair girl, with a determined manner and a slight contradiction of the eyebrows, the result of much experience in nervous cases. She was thoroughly capable and Jan, after a few days of furious resistance, quieted all at once and became docile as a child.

She was sorry, she said, that she had been giving any trouble. She talked freely, even about her illness. She mentioned my name in a casual way, but without referring to the wound she had given me, or indeed seeming to remember that anything had happened to alter our friendly relations.

It was the first day of summer vacation, and I had given up any idea of leaving Longtown. I had no near relatives to visit. My examination was an excuse, and at any rate I infinitely preferred to remain in the town - where at least I might be of some help to the girls - incidentally also to the Doctor and Persilla.

It was, however, Persilla who, as usual, was the most help to me. I formed the habit of going each morning to my usual place of studious retreat in No.4 classroom. And Persilla, who had the key of all things in the School House, together with the liberty of press and cupboard, came regularly about half-past ten, bringing me a tall, cool tumbler of milk, with one of her thick, creamy scones, cut through

and buttered. I think Persilla worked a little harder in the morning that she might have this ten minutes of solid gossip with me, while I ate and drank of her bounty nor thought any shame. She perched on the edge of the desk opposite, as brightly pert and familiar as a robin on a nursery window-sill on Christmas morning.

‘Miss Jan is as sweet as sugar these last days,’ she would say; ‘but if I had the looking after her, I should keep my eyes wide open. The devil is not dead, or even very far away, so long as that Reston Rigg remains in Longtown. I wish you would let me speak to the prentices.’

This particular morning, however, she came with great news. Reston Rigg had gone to Caerketton to hold a meeting of First Fruits. That is, he had returned thither for a week to liven up the ardour of his disciples, which always cooled suddenly when once the magnetism of his presence was removed.

Accordingly the Forerunner was left in charge, and the meetings in the Big Tent went on in a quieter and more normal way. It was a breathing-space, while the enemy was seeking on other fields and in other cities whom he might devour. This at least was Persilla’s view as to the cause of Miss Jan’s change of mood, and certainly it coincided very much with my own.

In a lighter vein Persilla entertained me with accounts, mostly diverting and all highly coloured by her imagination, of the despair of her various aspirants. The parcels misdelivered by Eben Watson, the carrier, amused her; so too the diligence with which Constable McVeagh patrolled Todd’s Wynd to the exclusion of the more important streets of the town; and the eccentricity of the butcher’s

young man, who had twice brought mutton cutlets and sweetbreads instead of the honest family roast which Persilla had ordered.

'As if I did not see through him, the bandy-legged collop-cutter!' Persilla enunciated. But amid all her chatter Persilla always had an ear on the passage which led from the private rooms of the School House, and as soon as she heard a footstep or the far-off flutter of skirts - signs of approach far too faint for my untrained ear to catch - she would slip from the desk to the floor, backing towards the door in a respectful manner.

'Yes, sir - certainly, sir - I will remember your message,' she would say. 'I will tell the Doctor as soon as he comes down.'

For the Doctor, when there was no sacred not-to-be-avoided 'Nine o'clock, sir, and the school is waiting for you,' would sometimes sleep long, after his vigils of the night over his translations.

Then June Cassells, on the quest for Persilla (whose kitchen she had found empty), would look in at the door. There, after a directing word or two with Persilla (who eclipsed herself with something that was very like the ghost of a wink at me over June's shoulder), she would take up a position with her back to the ink-stained wooden skirting-boards and talk awhile in her turn. Poor girl, her ears also were on the inner noises of the house, and she never moved far away from the door. She had grown manifestly paler of late, and there was a wan, tired transparency about her eyes which showed nervous overstrain.

During the holidays I went back religiously to Miss Sheba's for dinner at one, and mostly also for tea at half-past four. The School House needed no

extra guest at the table in these uncertain days, when Persilla had to cook for two sets of people - Jan and Miss Linton upstairs, and the family in the dining-room. I judge that few (except the nurse, whose business it was to keep up her strength) had the courage of their appetites. The Doctor was more than ever withdrawn in his study. May hid her brightness under constant secretarial and domestic activity, ably seconding Persilla - the only assistant, indeed, whom because of her obedience that energetic and emphatic young person would have 'been bothered with about her.' She ordered her about like a scullery-maid.

As for June, she was constantly flitting from Jan's room to the kitchen, and from the kitchen to the dining-room, and so back again - so often, indeed, that it was no wonder she forgot her meals by the way, and grew paler and slimmer, till her tall body seemed oppressed by the stormy blond swirls of her hair.

One day, however, June had another story to tell. Her sister was so greatly better that it would be useless to keep Miss Linton beyond her time. The nurse had been a great anxiety in the house, needing quite as much attention as Jan herself. And, with the Scottish dislike of the stranger within her gates, June longed to 'have the house to herself.' I begged her first to make quite sure that Jan's recovery of health and spirits was permanent before dispensing with the nurse.

'I can care for her myself without upsetting the whole house,' said June; 'besides, I have to be very careful. Father takes no care of money, and so it falls mostly to me - '

Here she checked herself, then looking directly at

me, as if to weigh my worthiness, she added, 'The publishing of his books earns him much fame, of course, but they cost a great deal.'

June did not ask me to keep this to myself, as most in such a place as Longtown would have done, after making such a confidence. And for that I was grateful. Still, it was the first glimpse of the careful domesticities of the School House, and of other cares which also must have had their part in stealing the bloom from the cheeks of June Cassells.

Presently she too was called away, and then hour by hour all day long I heard the busy little world of the School House hum behind the closed door. I went to and returned from dinner. I brought what Miss Sheba called 'a piece' to serve me for tea, telling her that I meant to do a great deal of work that day, also that I might be late, the which I left her to interpret as she chose.

In the drowsiest of the afternoon, serene and golden without, as I sat with an idle pen in hand, abstracted from the text-books before me by the green sun-bathed, leaf-stirred garden world, the door opened very softly and Jan herself came in. She had the old joy of freedom in her eye. She held out her hand frankly as ever and sat to talk as if nothing had happened. There was no nervousness now in her manner, nor did I surprise that look of hatred I had seen so distinctly before. She was as easy and natural as in the first days, talking over and laughing at her illness.

'I cannot think,' she said, 'how I could have been so cruel and horrid to everybody - and to you most of all. June is never done singing your praises, and telling how good you have been to me - how patient when I was most abominable, and of all that you

have done for all of us.'

She sat and chatted on, while June looked smilingly in once or twice. Though the bandage was still on my arm and she might have seen the dressing about my wrist, she had apparently lost all recollection of having been angry with me - much less of having struck at me with a weapon.

Jan talked freely about everything with one exception, but that exception was significant. She uttered no word about, Reston Rigg, his person, his meetings, or his departure. Apparently he did not exist for her.

For the rest, she seemed perfectly heart-free, laughing and jesting, as in the old good days. Would I teach her to draw? She would love to paint in water-colours as I could. So too would June - dear June. What would she ever do without June she did not know. June had been - June was - oh, the world to her.'

A great deal is dark to me,' she said; 'but since I have been ill I can remember just three things clearly; that June has been an angel to me, you a very kind friend, and - but this is wicked - I am so glad that nursing woman is gone. I am sure that I shall not behave foolishly any more - not with June in the house, and' (she glanced at me with a swift under-lash glance, very different from June's calm gaze) 'you here hard at it in No.4, ready to be disturbed whenever I feel that you would be better of being roused from your books.'

'Give you pleasure!' she cried, parodying my tone; 'dear me, how stiff we have grown since I have been kept in my room! Of course you are willing - of course you will 'have pleasure'! Pleasure, indeed - I should think so. I dare you to say different. You

mean to stay here all the holidays - and you will be working all along in this nice, inky, whitewashy place. Well, that's agreed. I must come and talk to you every day or you will get musty and stale. That is the word, isn't it? You will never pass. See if we don't - June and I. Then we four will go our walks down through the woods of the Isle, and out to the Point - *no - not there!*

She stopped her flow of words abruptly. Something like a spasm of anguish passed over her face. Then she rallied, and with an effort continued in the same careless tone of half-tender badinage.

'I mean, it is so lonely there - sand-flats, sand-hills, loneliness, and all round the weary sea.'

'You do not like the Dutchman's Lake?' I spoke with considerable surprise. 'You used to - we went there almost every night.'

'I hate it!' she said very low, her breath quickening and her eyes growing big and dewy dark as the pupils dilated to the edge of the white.

I hastened to change the subject. But I could not help wondering what had made Jan Cassells hate so bitterly the Dutchman's Lake.

CHAPTER TWENTY

PERSILLA TEMPTED ME

The Dutchman's Lake was a tidal backwater. It had been used in the days of the free-trading smugglers as a safe place for the disembarking of cargoes of rum from Jamaica, for Hollands and pipes from the Low Countries, lace from episcopal Lille, and above all 'barraques' of cognac run from the French ports by way of the Isle of Man. It was then a most thriving business, and the little harbour of Longtown was often chosen because of this very tidal basin of the Dutchman's Lake. Here the smuggling luggers sank gently against the bank in a pleasant couch of mud as the tide ebbed firthward. At low water carts could be taken right to the ship's side, while at all times the Lake was too shallow to admit any of His Majesty's revenue cutters. They could only stand vaguely off waiting for the lugger to come out, which was always in the darkness of a stormy night, conned by some Captain Yawkins or Archie Grier - famous free-trading pilots. Then the 'king's-man' would fire ineffectual shots with guns that pitched among breaking surges, while any serious pursuit was too dangerous with the Red Craigs of Portwarren showing their teeth on one hand, and on the other the glistening treacherous whalebacks of the Barnbourie Sands.

Now, however, the Dutchman was more lonely. Once or twice artists had camped on its margin in the summer-time. For the woods thereabout were pleasant, and the place had no drawbacks except

the midges. But mostly one found there only a great hush, with across the bar the silhouette of some schooner or sloop working her way up with the tide, her masts just visible above the bank of misty green, which was the willows and alder bushes along the marsh.

It was Persilla who was responsible for my evening walks. Jan and her sisters went out together - in the afternoons mostly, the evening air being judged bad for her. Generally they went inland towards the Old Bridge of Castle Fergus, and on the slopes of green, under the ancient hawthorn trees, gnarled and crabbed, that trailed along the short grass, with bark worn smooth as polished stone by the rubbing of wool, the three girls sat down to knit and read.

These were, I gather, good quiet days, filled with the placable hum of the bee and the voice of the reader, May for choice. June Cassells worked, but mostly Jan did nothing, her eyes and thoughts far away and fingers lying restfully in her lap. It was judged good for her to stray thus under the sparse shade of the old-time Cheviotshire hawthorns, reposing her eyes on the wide green pastures spread underneath, and breathed on by the large cool airs that came from the blue hills to the west, where were only heather and the peat and crying of moorfowl.

But I took no part in these peaceful sessions. Persilla did not think it proper! Nor, I must add, did any of the girls invite me to join them - that is, not with any real cordiality. So meantime I sat and worked faithfully in the pale bluish light which filled classroom No. 4. I always had the blinds down on the side of the sun and windows wide open to the

east. So that, as in a frame, I saw the creeping plants, cultivated squares, and mixed greenery of the Rector's garden. There came pleasant glimpses too, interludes in severer study; Jan would pass across my field of vision, her hands behind her, her eyes vague and lost, a curious smile coming and going upon her face.

Then came a flying vision of May, her locks in disorder on her shoulders as she took advantage of a 'let-up' in her secretarial work to race a dozen times round the garden. She was gone again in a flash. Then very sedately June would appear, a gardening mattock of light weight on her shoulder, and begin to make war on the spring weeds among her flower-beds, or scratch the paths with a steel rake, or trim the box, or sometimes (and for a shorter time) with her sleeves rolled up, I would watch her snip off bits of parsley or cull the final herbs for the daily salad.

The first two, Jan and May, never appeared even remotely conscious that there was a window above them with an inattentive student upon whom the higher mathematics had momentarily lost their hold.

But June Cassells always nodded brightly, with smiling upward glance, to show that she at least had not forgotten. I do not deny - I watched for these times. Their recurrence, and the store I set by them, made me somehow feel, as never before, my loneliness and the vanity of much learning. The impression was temporary but severe.

However, there was always Persilla, who came many times a day, generally to twiddle with the clothes-line. Persilla was in a constant state of drying something on the rope, or bleaching some other thing on the green. She made a comely enough

picture in her blue-spotted chintz, her white apron high on her breast, her bodice well open at the neck, her sleeves turned up above her elbows, her nose also turned up - but that slightly only, as if the blackbird who lies in wait for maids at clothes-lines had snapped off only a tiny little bit, as it were, 'below bridge.'

Of course it goes without saying that Persilla always waved a hearty welcome to the studious prisoner. Persilla, if nobody was about, asked me how I did, and if the X's and O's were behaving themselves - her idea being that mathematics was a game which I played to amuse myself, one hand against the other. She even blew me playful kisses, specially if she thought that Eban Watson the carrier, or other earnest and eligible swain, could see her from the back door. And she would go off singing 'Come, lasses and lads,' 'Little Brown Jug,' or other ditty wholly inappropriate to the academic calm of an ancient grammar school, which had once been taught by the cloistered monks of Longborough in the days before Knox heaved up his spare Calvinistic shoulders, and brought the old things down with that crash which resounded through the world.

It was therefore almost of necessity Persilla who proposed the evening walks. She did not consult me on the subject. She merely commanded me to appear, after her arrangements had been made. She gave me to understand that this was what I was for.

One morning, instead of entertaining me with the ever-fresh record of her amorous misdemeanours, she darted into this new subject.

'You are to come to the gate of the Isle Wood the night,' she ordered. 'Be there waiting - ye hear me?'

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I'll be there too, and there will be Somebody else. It is not fitting that a respectable young woman like me should go about unaccompanied. The kitchen is different. It's my reception-room and admittance is by card. And then there's always the stairs, and a cry wad fetch down Miss June - less indeed, as ye ken - a window left open or the slamming of an odd door. But out in the woods, at gloaming time and along the darksome trees - faith, but Persilla Potter will venture with no young teacher laddie into any such resort. Teachers is all very well for bairns, but when a lass is grown up, they are no better than other folk - maybe worse. They ken more.'

'But, Persilla,' I said, 'can you not tell me what you want, here and now?'

'What, ye daft loon, and leave my baking - me with five girdle of oat-cake to see safe on the "baulks," besides the dinner to cook and the housework to do? Little do ye ken what you ask. It's never playing at "twirlies" on paper and polishing the school benches with *my* trousers that I could do the like.'

'But at what time and at which entrance into the Isle do you want me?' I demanded.

'Be you there in time,' said Persilla severely, 'not a moment later than half-after eight at the Sand Hill stile nearest to the Dutchman's Lake, and do have enough sense not to let the whole world see you on your road.'

Thus did Persilla once more tempt me to underhand courses.

As she went out she turned at the door for the inevitable feminine postscript.

'Mr. A-a-adrian Ross is requested not to forget this appointment, or he may miss hearing

something to his advantage.'

* * * * *

I was at the little stile leading into the deep woods of the Isle half an hour before the appointed time. I hate being late, anyway, and knew it would never do to keep a person so important as Persilla waiting. Besides, much is forgiven in the scholastic profession to him who carries out the two 'nevers' which make the teacher's First Table of the Decalogue. '*Never absent - never late!*' And of these two, the second is the greater. So naturally I was not late.

It was a clear evening in late July. The day had been hot, and the whitewashed walls of No. 4 classroom had shut me in all day. So I was main glad to be out. I snuffed up the clean, sweet, earthy feeling in the air, and with the sea-breeze there was springing up also a lingering scent of salt water. The peninsula of the Isle ran right to the Dutchman's Lake. Thence it curved round till the trees grew smaller, dwindling and spindling, till they became scrub, which ran along the outer side of the sand-hills, just beyond which were Jimson's Pines and the deserted camp of the Mesmeric Evangelist, presently absent in Caerketton.

Persilla had bidden me attract no attention, and I had succeeded. I sat on the crotch of a huge beech tree, dangling my feet and picking off shreds of shiny silken bark. I had not long to wait, for promptly, as the bell in the Barnacle's steeple struck the single 'dong' of the half-hour, I saw two figures coming towards the stile.

Behind them, but at a respectful distance,

followed another - humbly as a servant might follow royalty. The first two were girls - one tall and slim and the other little and quick in movement. In fact, there could not be the least doubt of it, here were Persilla, vixenish and vivacious, and, what could not be mistaken anywhere, the supple gait and admirable ease of June Cassells.

I went to meet them, and June appeared as astonished to see me as I was to find her there.

'I had no idea,' I began lamely enough.

'And no more had I,' said June, smiling. 'Persilla was so determined she would take me a walk - that we strolled this way without noticing. But it must be time to be turning back.'

'Not a bit of it,' said Persilla. 'Go you on, miss. I have some things to get first. Yonder is Eben the carrier. He will bring me back to meet you - aye, and be glad of the job. He is always hanging round, about as useful as an extra tail to a dog. But he brings us eggs and butter at a penny-halfpenny under town prices, so in a way it is worth while.'

June laughed, and without another word, with only her familiar little cock-sparrow flirt of the head, Persilla was gone, hailing Eben the carrier with a commanding wave of her umbrella, much as in a city one would call a cab.

For the first time I found myself walking alone with June Cassells - or indeed in such privacy with any of the three sisters. I was not sure whether or not to offer my arm, but finally decided to leave that to June's free will. I had no wish to risk a rebuff.

I think June's home anxieties, or perhaps the long, hot day, had tired her. At any rate, she seemed listless, and walked very slowly by my side along the green, mossy, seldom-trodden paths, on which our

feet made no sound. As I went on talking, however, she gradually brightened. She even smiled at some foolish stories of college, and ludicrous adventures when I had been left in charge of a small local paper in the west. Encouraged, I ventured upon yet more ancient and innocent tricks and gambols of schoolboy days, incidents of travel when I had been a tutor after leaving college, and so wandered over most part of the earth. I took care not to spare myself, and to dwell chiefly on how happy I was to have left the meaningless past behind, for the new life of being near my three girl friends and sharing their joys and sorrows - in so far, that is, as it might be permitted to me

June listened, and gradually as I kept up my stories, talking easily, laughing often, and never letting her get a moment for sad thoughts, I saw the mellow glow as of a rich sunshine come flushing up on my companion's face.

Then she sighed and, as if unconsciously, took my arm of her own accord.

'Go on,' she said; 'I love to hear you talk. Tell me more.'

And I told her more and ever more, heightening and softening to suit my listener, and thinking only of keeping her mind upon myself, and away from the troubles amid which she had spent that day and too many other days at the School House. I think I succeeded. After a while she began to lean heavier on my arm, even netting the fingers of both hands upon it, looking up and laughing often with the frank, free heart of the girl who had once raced among the desks of No. 4.

And soon the radiance of her face sent a real answering glow to my heart. Under the trees the

little breeze died away. As we went, it grew heavy and breathless about us. The fallen leaves, driven down by the storms of the earlier part of the month, sent up a rank, raw smell of dead wood and rotting foliage. But we were not far from the marsh, and that explained it.

Also there was a low-lying fog, but in the west the remains of sunset tinted the sky almost to the zenith with a pale yellow, like the under-side of a canary fed on saffron. Here and there in the open glades, rag-wood and thistle hung their heads flaccidly in the dank heat. It was not the best night on which to be down there among the lush green woods, but I made haste to come out on the level edge of the Dutchman's Lake, where at least we would get a breath of the sea ozone and the live waters that rushed back and forward in the gut of the firth.

So talking, we passed out of the deep shadows of the woods of the Isle. We found ourselves in a region of hazel and dwarf-oak mostly, with now and then a towering elm and Spanish chestnut. We skirted a dampish area from which the heat-haze rose thick and white. We kept (or rather I guided June) upon the drier sandy knolls to the left, till with a feeling of relief we felt our feet on the short, crisp heath, and yonder were the half-dozen droopy silver firs, from which I knew we should catch the first glimpse of the great salt pool

There it was, glimmering like grey silk shot with something warmer, which was the reflected glow of the sunset. No birds were about. The tide was full, and so still that there was not a single ripple on the wide mirror. The trees on the far side showed up dim and formless, mere blurs of smoky lilac. We sat down on the trunk of an upturned pine. The roots

had risen together, the earth and sods clinging solidly to them. They formed a large umbrella of shade, which screened us from the glare of the Lake, but we sat facing the breeze which began to ridge the surface in the direction of the narrow strait by which very soon the tide would empty itself into the firth.

The sandy soil sloped gradually down to the edge of the 'Dutchman.' But there was something about the whole place distinctly uncanny. The sand was not good sand, but rather slimy, and reflected a thousand lights, apparently from nowhere, like those on a dying mackerel or the refuse pool of a gasworks. The edge of the water looked dangerous and distant - more so still as the night began to dusk and the pale canary in the western sky darkened to slaty buff.

Suddenly June leaped to her feet.

'Take me away from here,' she said, with a shiver, which might even have been a shudder. 'I can quite understand why Jan dislikes this place.'

'And yet it is beautiful,' I said, and without asking permission I took her hand and placed it within mine. It was a little chill and trembled, so I kept it there till we had left the Dutchman's Lake far behind us. We were now keeping high up on the main ridge of heights, having the clean sweep of the Dryfe sands on one side. Further out was the line of the distant firth, and the hills of Cumberland standing up above the ground fog, very strong and solemn. On the other side we looked down on the nearer stragglers of the pine wood, where in the dell behind Jimson's marts, Reston Rigg had made his camp.

We had both grown a little silent. For me, I was

content to have June so near me, and the warmth of her young body, the shapeliness of her head and neck under the summer hat, and the great gold-dusky coils that seemed the very crown of a queen, I wondered how I could ever have thought any other girl beautiful, or so warmly, preciously near to me as June Cassells that night.

Presently we came out on the very crest. It was an open space, wholly denuded of trees, from which we could look down upon the town and back on the sea. Beneath were the twin arenas of the weekly market-day hammer - Jimson's marts, each a miniature Colosseum in its way. We paused, silent, and standing thus I indicated with my finger the progress of Will Gow, the lamp-lighter, up the High Street of Longtown as he ran from side to side. Of course we could not see Will himself, but he pricked his way with wonderful speed from side to side in points of light which were the gas-lamps. Lights too began to shine from the shopkeepers' windows. Polson, the Italian warehouseman, and Rigby, the English watchmaker, were well in front of all the others.

I was beginning to recite from my favourite Milton the lines which have always fascinated me:

*'Now came still evening on, and twilight gray
Had in her sober livery all things clad,'*

when June let go my arm with a frightened cry, stifled instantly before it had left her lips. She pointed down to the glade, and I could see a couple walking back and forward there in the dusk under the pines.

'Adrian,' said June in a hoarse whisper, 'oh, Adrian, that is Jan - Jan - and - that evil man's with

her!’

‘Nonsense!’ I said, holding June back, for she would have rushed headlong down the slope, the same up which Sarah Jimson had painfully climbed. ‘It is some one else - perhaps the Forerunner, walking with Hester Vane, the singer.’

But in my heart I knew I was not speaking the truth. That tall and heavily built figure, the dashing sombrero hat, black but defiant as Buffalo Bill’s, were manifest tokens of the presence of Reston Rigg. And as the two walked to and fro, talking easily and confidently, I made out the well-known blue-hooded mackintosh lined with scarlet in which Jan wrapped herself - the same she had worn the night I had surprised her trying to escape through Persilla’s kitchen. It was no use pretending any more.

And at the sight that blasted all our hopes June Cassells fell weeping on my shoulder.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THE ENEMY'S CAMP

'Come,' said June presently, raising her face, 'come, Adrian - quick! Let us save her!'

And though I doubted the wisdom of this hasty interference, I did not see what else I could do at the moment. At any rate, I would have it out with Reston Rigg.

Whether it was the noise of crackling boughs or our figures coming out black against the sky upon some ridge, I cannot tell. But when we reached the sand-hill pines above the encampment the girl's figure in the mackintosh had vanished, and there remained only Reston Rigg, big, heavy and saturnine, pacing up and down, his hands behind his back, apparently in deep meditation.

He turned upon us with a lowering brow, confronting us grimly defiant, his black eyes shining in the gloom with a kind of phosphorescent light. Yes, I own it, there was something impressive about the man - a doggedness about the mouth that was accentuated by the heavy moustache, a head like a Roman Cæsar's, rendered bizarre by the flamboyant blue-black twin curves of the moustache that barred his cheeks almost vertically.

Not a man to be trifled with - be he good or evil - this Reston Rigg.

'My sister - where is my sister?' gasped June, stopping in front of him, white and trembling.

Reston Rigg kept his hands behind him and looked at her steadfastly. He had recognized us from

the first. Of that I was certain. But he was firm and perfectly self-possessed, cool too, with a sort of insolence that sat not ill upon him - that is, if one could have forgotten his pretended mission.

'I am not your sister's keeper,' he said sneeringly; 'better ask that young man there. If I mistake not, it was he who took her by force from the altar of grace.'

'It was Cain the murderer who said that he was not his brother's keeper,' said June, striking swiftly; 'and if you have killed my sister's happiness, then God will judge between you and me.'

'Possibly,' said Reston Rigg; 'but I know nothing of your sister or her affairs.'

'You lie!' I cried, breaking in. 'You have just parted from her.'

'Sir!' He lifted his hand as if to strike, and then dropping it added, 'You may call yourself lucky that my mission here - the work given me to do - saves you from the chastisement which, as a mere man of the world, I should have counted it my duty to administer.'

'If there is any chastisement, I am the one to inflict it. I tell you we saw this lady's sister walking here with you a minute ago - where is she now?'

'You asked me that once before,' said Reston Rigg mockingly. 'Do you think I have hidden her? There is my travelling-car. It is not a palace, but such as it is you are welcome to examine it. The door is open. There is also a cook-house and a sleeping-shed for my Negro servant. Pass and look.'

He waved his hand towards the dark shadow of the caravan, in which a light was burning, as one could see through the red blinds. June left my side and darted forward. But her sister was not

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anywhere in the caravan. The silver knobs and fittings glistened as in a Pullman. The light from a lamp in the roof was soft and harmonious.

As we went behind, the stalwart old Negro, busy among his pots and stewpans, came out and saluted.

June gasped a question in a voice choked by fear and shame.

'Nobody here but Massa Reston - no, bless you, honey. Who should dere be?'

'My sister - I saw her!' urged June breathlessly. 'Only a moment ago she was here - with him.'

The old Negro shook his head pityingly.

'When this ole Jim was young - dat's me, honey - he often seen things that wasn't so. But Massa Reston, he cure Jim. Not see anything any more but only the grace of de Power, honey. Have you got the Power, chile? 'Tis precious powerful. Yes, sure. Git it, honey. Git it quick. And yo' sister - has she got de Power or is she only seeking?' He went on, his head poking shortsightedly among the kitchen dishes. 'Tell your sister to git de Power, honey, and then she will know better than to traipse round wid young men in the dark. Ha, ha!'

Then old Jim broke out in a shout of barbaric doggerel :

*'When Massa gits to samplin' ob
De Power, de Grace, de Word,
'Tis den you heah de tramplin' ob
De Armies ob de Lord.'*

* * * * *

'Well, are you satisfied?' demanded the clear,

emphatic voice of Reston Rigg behind us. If so, I would advise you to go home. My camp here is private, and all the approaches are locked. You have therefore, like robbers, come in some other way. But this time I will forgive your intrusion on account of the young lady's anxiety. I will unlock the gate and save you the long and most unsafe path through the woods. I only hope that one day you may perhaps understand and do justice to the motives which cause me to go about from city to city, asking neither fee nor reward. At present I cannot look for anything but hatred and misrepresentation. Nay, even that mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, shall lift up his heel against me.'

'We are not your familiar friends, thank God!' I said fiercely. 'We come seeking a young lady to whom you or your familiar friends have done a great injury.'

Reston Rigg regarded me with concentrated scorn.

'You chose your way - you tore her away from the altar with the miracle of grace half worked. Am I responsible for the consequences? That which she received doubtless still works within her, as in Paul when he abode in Damascus for three days in a terror of great darkness.'

He turned the key in the lock of the gate which led through the wall of Jimson's Mart enclosure.

'And yet,' he added, 'you cannot quench the Spirit. You may even have builded better than ye knew. The Power makes even the wrath of man to praise it. Go forth, ye blind - but be sure that the Light shall prevail.'

My heart burned within me to call him liar and hypocrite. But I will not pretend that, for that night

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at least, I could do more than obey the command of his pointing finger and go out into the darkness.

And before us, hiding the stars, stood up the pallid outline of the great tent, ghastly and imminent.

* * * * *

We walked homeward in silence, June and I, and lo, Persilla descended upon us at the corner of Market Street! She had doubtless been warned of our approach by some of her private police. If Persilla wanted to know anything in Longtown, she had only to move her little finger, and the entire corps of prentices was at her disposition. This duly incorporated body had the reputation of doing all the mischievous tricks which were carried out in the town. But by admirable and systematic scouting and posting of sentries their iniquities - never of a very serious order - saw the light of day only on the rarest occasions. At least their perpetrators remained unreprieved.

However she had managed it, here was Persilla directly in our path, her basket on her arm brimming over with parcels, her mouth full of chatter.

She had been too long, she said, but the merchants were so slow, and, at any rate, it was a blessing that it was done in time. I think she must have divined from the oppressive silence with which we received her that something serious must have happened. And to one of Persilla's experience and cast of mind there was but one thing which could have caused this disagreement between two people who had so lately gone forth in amity, as it were with

LOVE IN PERNICKETTY TOWN

Persilla's best 'Bless you, my children,' halving our brows.

We had fallen out by the way. So much was certain, and Persilla saw herself the appointed mediator. She was always devoted to Miss June, and, a matchmaker at heart, or rather being herself a stormy petrel in the matter, she desired that the path of true love in the case of others should run smooth. She would therefore do her best for June and myself, whose motives for taking evening strolls she misunderstood.

Consequently, to bring us together again, she took the way natural to a woman. She sided with the other woman against the supposed offender - which, though unnatural, is often efficacious.

'Eh, Miss June,' she said; 'but it's me that kens. Men are frail, silly creatures - the very best o' them. They are just not to be trusted within arm's length. But I will say that I *am* surprised at Mr. Adrian! He's a well-thought-of lad and comes of good kin. But whatever he has been sayin' to ye, Miss June, it's juist nocht to what Eben, and Sandy, and the other lads have whiles said to me. But, ye see, practice makes perfection. I have got never to heed them. Or if I do, it is only to fetch them something pretty solid on the side o' the jaw. Faith, I can make them jump. Ye will maybe hardly believe me, Miss June, but there's some o' them that even have had the face to offer to kiss me - aye, ye may look - me, Persilla Potter!

There's just no bounds to their impudences! But, after all, poor things, they think that by so doin' they are fulfilling their business of being men. And we, that are above such things, should even be a trifle kindly to the poor, weak, earthly bodies - not

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forgive them, ye ken, but just kind o' *tolerate* them!

It was evident that Persilla gauged my dealings with June Cassells by her own private yard-measure - the standard of, say, Todd's Wynd. But June paid little heed to her advice. She only walked on so as to get within the poplar avenue of the School House as soon as possible.

At this Persilla turned upon me with a very grave face indeed. She shook her head, and signalled to me that there was nothing more to be done at present.

As we went through the iron gate, Persilla fumbled with the handle to let June go on before us to the door. She clutched me by the sleeve.

'Whatever have you been doing or sayin' to Miss June that has putten her in such a state? Could ye not have tried it on me first, and then ye would have had an idea? Dinna run ram-stam at your sweet-hearting the next time. Tak' a trial shot at Persilla, and be guided by her. She will lead you in the right way, I'll warrant. But keep up your heart - Miss June will like ye the better for being a trifle bauld and forrit-some. There's never a lass worth her last who in her heart likes a blate wooer.'

With this comfort, excellent, if somewhat beside the present case, I turned to find the door open, the mild glow of light streaming from the lamp in the recess by the statue of Minerva; while there was Jan, knitting in hand, coming out of the little parlour rubbing her eyes and smiling.

'Why, what's the matter?' she called out at sight of us, speaking gaily and lightly. 'You look like a pair of ghosts. I think I must have been asleep.'

'Where have you been?' said June Cassells, her clear voice for once gritting hoarsely.

LOVE IN PERNICKETTY TOWN

'Why, sitting in the parlour window, looking out for you coming. What else? I tried to knit, but it was too much trouble - so I only sat still and watched the street and the shaking of the poplar leaves in the little puffs of wind. I think I went to sleep.'

'You have not been out of doors?'

'Of course not, June,' said Jan frankly. 'Why, if I had wanted to walk I should have gone with you and Persilla when you asked me.'

'You have not been - been - in the woods?'

'In the woods, June!' she laughed. 'Do you know, June, I think it must be you who have been to the woods. - and wool-gathering at that! What has Adrian been saying to you to turn your head like that?'

So with chatter and smiles she drew us into the parlour, helping her sister off with her 'things,' and insisting upon running to get a cup of black coffee for each of us. It would be the best thing for us on such a damp evening. Ugh! even the thought of being out on such a night gave her the creeps! And Jan shivered as she spoke.

When we heard her in the kitchen talking with Persilla about the coffee, June turned a look of enquiry at me - indeed, almost of piteous entreaty.

I answered it manfully in the sense in which she wished me to reply.

'We must have been mistaken,' I said; 'the light was certainly very bad.'

'Do you think so - do you really think so?'

'Yes,' I answered boldly. 'It shows how careful one ought to be. The First Soloist - Miss Vane, you know - is just of Jan's height and figure.'

June sighed a long sigh and her hand sought mine. She held it in cool, firm grasp, full of her

peculiarly friendly yet somehow impersonal quality.

'Thank you,' she said. 'I know you speak the truth. I can trust your judgment. And Jan has never yet told a lie. It must be as you say.'

'It is so,' I reassured her.

'Here is your coffee, you poor starving people,' cried the fresh voice of Jan from the doorway. 'What are you holding hands for? Fie, for shame! And with the lamp lit too. I shall certainly tell father - no, I mean the School Committee. This is quite irregular. What are woods and quiet streets for, and summer evenings, and the avenue of poplars even, and even the porch when you are waiting for some one to open the door? Oh shame, shame, you naughty people - despising your mercies like that!'

And at her words, June Cassells, completely assured about her sister, laughed and answered smilingly, 'We are only making a bargain, Adrian and I.'

'See that he keeps his part of it, then,' said Jan. 'Young men with pretty names are not to be trusted. At any rate, so I have been told. What was it about? Tell me.'

'Not now, dear,' said June, with large, tender eyes full upon her sister; eyes in which there was still the light of the stars we had left outside, shining through the dew of Jimson's pine woods.

'Not now. When then am I to know?'

'Someday,' said June tantalizingly.

'Oh, I know,' said Jan, with quick pique; 'along with a little bit of the bride's cake to put under my pillow!'

* * * * *

LOVE IN PERNICKETTY TOWN

But as I went out, I saw hanging on its peg in the hall the hooded blue mackintosh with the scarlet lining which Jan always wore in showery weather. I passed my hand along it. It was dripping with dew, and one of the pockets into which my fingers dropped accidentally was half filled with a debris of pine needles.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

FISHERMAN BOB'S

It was the next day that a new period began in my life. I found a new friend when and where I least expected it. It came about thus.

I happened to be up early - earlier than usual. For in the splendid summer days which we were then enjoying I often rose with the sun, or at least before he had sucked the dew off the little grassy borders and trimly clipped box hedges of Miss Sheba's walled garden.

Generally I went out to fill Miss Sheba's water-tank and do various other little offices, which had gradually come to be my contribution to that good dame's happiness and ease. She had, of course, frequently and abundantly forbidden me to touch a can of water - except in the evening for the purpose of watering her flowers - to lift a lump of coal, or to perform any household work whatsoever. These actions were, according to Miss Sheba, derogatory to the duties of a First Classical Assistant in a County High School. However, I troubled myself exceedingly little about her prescriptions, and if I got a chance at the boots I would carry them off and clean them in the little laundry attached to Solway House.

This rendered my landlady exceedingly angry - that is to all appearance - and she used to guard them jealously, even to the extent of hiding the brushes and box in some of her cupboards. But for all that, I rejoiced to astonish her by letting her find them, set out in a shining row, on the stone bench

in front of the back kitchen door, when she came out to tell me breakfast was ready. It was long before she could penetrate this mystery, the simple explanation being that I had obtained a neat blacking set for my own private use.

But this particular morning I found the Forerunner deep in meditation. He had risen early or, possibly, had not gone to bed at all. At any rate, when I came down with the shoe-blackening apparatus under my coat, so as to pass safely Miss Sheba's guns, I found him walking up and down the sanded garden walks, his broad Bagster Bible open in one hand and his lips moving in unspoken prayer.

He came towards me at once, as if he had been waiting for me.

'I am commissioned to tell you,' he said, 'that a friend will be waiting for you in the fisherman's cottage this afternoon.'

'Which fisherman? What friend?' I said, being much and naturally surprised.

'I am not permitted to say more than I *have* said,' he replied. 'A friend will be waiting to speak with you in the fisherman's cottage this afternoon. That is my message. Indeed, I am straining a point by saying so much without the express permission of my Master.'

'Ah,' was all I permitted myself to say aloud; but I thought very quickly within me, 'Then his precious master does not know anything of the friend at the fisherman's.'

I questioned Saul Adam, but it soon became obvious that he either would not or could not tell me any more. I had therefore to be content, and he went on collating texts in his Bagster's Bible, with the aid of a little blue marking-slip and some complicated system of cross-references which I could not

understand.

Evidently he was resolved to say no more, and I had enough sense not to press him. For any insistence might easily send him with his information direct to Reston Rigg.

Reston Rigg! The name suggested a trap, and though I had no fear of any treachery on the part of the Forerunner, I held it no overplus of precaution before leaving my room to slip a little Browning revolver into my pocket.

But the 'fisherman'? Who might he be? and where was his cottage?

That was a more difficult matter to settle. There were a good many fishermen in and about Longtown. But I remembered that most of the real sort lived along the port front, where their boats lay huddled together in a tangle of drying nets and a general atmosphere of saline tarriness.

The fisherman could hardly be one of these. There were also several fresh-water fishermen, great lords of the reel and line, of the float and live-bait, to whom also a little bit of poaching came nowise amiss. But these were generally loafers, who feared nothing in the world of keepers, night-watchers, river bailiffs, and ordinary police so much as they feared an honest day's work. They huddled together in a part of the town by themselves. It was called Little Dublin, and the boys of the burgher schools were not permitted to talk or to play with their peers of Little Dublin, whose company they accordingly affected on every possible occasion.

No; the fisherman of the Forerunner's message could not well be one of these.

There remained yet one other - Red Bob, the fisherman-lessee of the burgh stake-nets on the east

beach. His cottage was on the farther side of the sand-hills, almost opposite to the peninsula of the Isle. It stood in a curious shifting territory called the Sahara, protected from the east wind by high dunes, and with the pale, silvery zigzag of the stake-nets stretching far out on the sands towards the deeper channel. Salmon were taken there, also much other fish. And when I was studying biology, I had early made friends with Red Bob, in order to have the run of his catch of sea creatures for specimens. Yes, there was no doubt of it. Bob Havens's was the place. His wife, Lizbeth Havens, had formerly been a cook at Lady Stilton's, but had left to marry Bob because of his cottage, and perhaps a little for his six foot of stalwartness. At any rate, it would do nobody any harm to go and call on Bob. I was as safe there as in my own room at Miss Sheba's, and I thought guiltily of the Browning in my pocket - the hard lump it made was insulting to the excellent Lizbeth and the good things of her board and cupboard.

So I went upstairs and deposited the slim Browning in the locked drawer from which I had taken it. For Miss Sheba, as soon as she had set eyes on it, would have tossed the 'nesty thing' into the water-butt without a scruple.

Afternoons were good in Longtown. I shall never forget those of that long, idle summer season. There was the warm smell of the pavements, especially after being sprinkled by one of the showers that came drifting down the gentle green Cheviot slopes and dragged a comet-like, feathery tail across our smokeless three-o'clock 'lums.' Longtown chimneys did not begin to smoke till the hour of the good wives' 'cup of refresh' - which is to say their

afternoon tea, of quite other colour and force than the mildewy wash drunk in drawing-rooms.

Past dogs asleep in the dust I went, skirting cats curled in the sun, houses asleep, shops asleep, and shopkeepers drowsily tending that way; past boys of my own classes guiltily avoiding my eye with the consciousness of the holiday task not yet begun. I strode on till I reached the open beach above the 'broads,' on which the stake-nets quavered in the moist sand-heat like a flash of lightning carelessly flung.

I kept wide of the pines, approaching the cottage from the other side - that is, by the channelled and crenellated labyrinth of sand-dunes which shut off Red Bob's from the world of ordinary Longtown. On the top of the last creamy billow of sand I sat down upon some bind-grass, which was scantily pluming it here and there, and reaching out a hand, let the fine sand-grains run through my fingers. I was above and within a hundred yards of Bob Havens's cottage. A stone could almost be filled upon its red roof. But I would bide a moment and observe. It was quite certain that no soul could possibly have seen my approach. The quarter-mile of tumbled territory behind was enough to have hidden an army. So, having settled this, I put my hands in my pockets, stretched my legs, and lay back, with eyes half closed, to concentrate my attention upon what might be going on below.

'Good day to you, Mr. Adrian Ross,' said a pleasantly ironic voice quite near me, a voice too which I seemed to know. I started up instantly, but saw nothing except the lazy tide crawling over the steamy glister of the flats, pushing a *café-au-lait* lace-edge of scum before it. Seaward all the earth

and air were wide and empty. I looked behind, and there, on a little tuft of sword grass, smiling under a pink-trimmed marguerite sun-hut, was the First Soloist, Miss Hester Vane.

'I beg your pardon,' she said gently, with the slightest flushing of her pale cheek. 'I have had the discourtesy to watch you. But, I think, Mr. Ross, that you were doing something of the same for my benefit.'

I had instinctively taken off my hat and stood uncertain whether or not to shake hands. But Hester Vane solved my doubt by motioning me to a heather-tuft, exactly as a lady would have indicated a seat in her drawing-room.

'So you got my message?'

'From Saul Adam? I got it this morning, but I had no idea of - of the pleasure - '

'Ah, but will it be a pleasure? I am not sure,' she said. 'At any rate, I could think of no better way.'

And yet, now that I was alone with her, she seemed in no hurry to tell me what she wanted. This left me time to look well at the strange girl, who, beyond anybody in the world, knew Reston Rigg, his secrets, his power - and his weakness.

She took off her large hat and nursed it on her knees, leaning forward with her right hand supporting her cheek. I was thus at liberty to study that face, which, of all I had ever seen, was at once the most puzzling and, once seen, the most unforgettable.

'A weary angel' I have called her. She was not serenely beautiful like June, nor vivid like Jan. She had never known May's bird-like lightness and gaiety. But the spiritual paleness of her face, a complexion of the most perfect ivory (not warm like

June's), outlines more delicate than those of the classic models I had seen in statues, exquisite curves, every trait and feature fined down almost to transparency, yet without any suggestion of ill-health - such in one loaded sentence was Hester Vane. Except for the upward curl of her short upper lip, her expression was rather pensive than contemptuous. That is, in repose. I soon found, however, that you had only to mention a name to bring out a wholly different woman - a woman bitter, contemptuous, mordant in satire, ready for all adventures, even those fullest of risks to herself.

But for the moment I was content to wait for her to speak. I watched the wind-stirred lift of her hair, pale argentine with golden lights, as if the two metals had been mixed, yet young and uniform in hue and texture. What struck me chiefly was its wonderful lightness. The sea breeze seemed to blow through every part of it, without in the least disarranging its grace.

She sat so long thus, that I began to fear I had been sent for only to have my curiosity played with. But after a while she turned her slightly veiled, misty blue eyes upon me, and began without excuses or preliminaries, like one accustomed to deal with facts, and to treat of these facts 'with principals only,' as they say in the advertisements.

'I sent for you,' she said calmly, 'because you and I have need of each other. Of course this is in way a business matter. I do not pretend that our interests are identical. But our end is the same, and if you agree, I think we can work together.'

She spoke with the clear-cut neatness of a man proposing business conditions.

'If I understand you,' I answered, 'you are

interested in a matter which I have at heart, not for your own sake, but on account of Mr. Reston Rigg. May I ask if he sent you here?’

Instantly the girl’s face took on the look of bitterness of which I have spoken. She drew herself up proudly, almost indignantly.

‘I am not here on behalf of Reston Rigg,’ she said; ‘neither did he send me here. Neither is it in his power to send me anywhere, or to prevent me from doing anything I wish to do.’

‘Then I do not see - ’ I began, but Hester Vane cut me short.

‘You do not see why I should meddle with the affair,’ she said. ‘Well, I will tell you. I am Reston Rigg’s wife!’

I was struck dumb. I suppose I must have looked my incredulity, or at least so great a surprise that Hester Vane was obliged to continue.

‘Yes,’ she said, ‘you may take my word for it. I am not proud of the fact. Indeed, so great is my shame that, till now, I have hidden it from every one, even from those who have the best right to know. I tell you as a secret. If you like I will prove it; but I do not carry my marriage certificate on my sleeve, like the Prodigal Daughter returning to her village home. It is in safe keeping, nevertheless, and I hardly think that Reston Rigg is likely to burn down the vestry of St. Martin’s-in-the-Fields to disprove it, like the harmless necessary baronet of *The Woman in White*.’

I could think of nothing to say, but with some awkward enough idea of having been introduced to a stranger I rose and bowed. The girl motioned me to be seated, but nodded as to accept my salutation as it was meant.

‘I am not explaining the past,’ she said. ‘I am

treating for the future. I wish no harm from without to happen to Reston Rigg. I even hold myself in a way responsible for him. Because I know better than any one else that there are times when he is not at all responsible for himself. There are worse men than the man who is legally my husband; but at times there are few men more foolish or more dangerous.'

'That,' I said, 'I can well believe. There is no need for secrecy. It is on account of Miss January Cassells that you wish to speak with me?'

'You are right,' she said. 'There is not the least need to beat about the bush. I have been a good many years with Reston Rigg, and though there have been difficulties and incidents of the most painful kind in his career, I have never seen him so absorbingly and so passionately interested as on this occasion.'

'Is it because he sees in Miss Cassells an exceptional subject for his experiments?' I asked.

'That, yes,' said the First Soloist, with a lingeringly thoughtful pout of the lips; 'but chiefly because of his unfortunate power of interesting some women in him and, more dangerous still, of becoming interested himself during the process.'

'Then,' said I, stupidly enough, 'I can fully understand your feelings - '

'You can do nothing of the kind!' she exclaimed. 'I have never known jealousy. Every other emotion, perhaps, but not that - not that! I know Reston Rigg too well. At the same time I wish him no harm. Particularly I would ward off any further scandal for the sake of some things which I still respect about him. I do not expect you to believe me, but it is true - he receives many hundreds of letters from people

whom he has permanently assisted to live a better life.'

I suppose that I must have looked incredulous, for the First Soloist added :

'Yes, behind all that flummery' (and she waved her hand backward towards the tent), 'all that

surface stage setting, there is something real - drunkards reclaimed, good lives begun, homes made happy. There is a strange power in the Word, however spoken. There is a power also in the song. There is a power abroad in the great meeting quite apart from the man who speaks or the voice which sings. If you had known it all these years as I have done, you would be the readier to believe it - the readier because I agree that all this good is scarcely paid for by the dangers which accompany such manifestations of magnetic force as those which are Reston Rigg's stock-in-trade.'

I was anxious to get back to the particular question - that of Jan Cassells. I said so.

'Yes,' said Hester Vane, 'that is what we have to consider. Now I have been pretty frank with you. I have, to show my good faith in the matter, trusted you with a secret unknown to any except Reston Rigg and myself. I have a right to prevent this going any further. Now do you be equally frank on your side, and tell me just what you have found out.'

So I told her how January was infatuated by the power which had taken possession of her that Monday evening. I spoke of her attempts to escape from home, of her hallucination that Reston Rigg was calling her and that she must go to him immediately. It was hard to say these things about Jan to a stranger. But then - this was Reston Rigg's wife and my only hope of a helper.

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The First Soloist listened abstractedly, deep in thought. Presently she aroused herself and murmured, half to herself, 'It is possible that Reston Rigg speaks the truth and that, after all, it was the interrupted influence. Perhaps if the Power had been able to work itself out within her heart, the relief would have come to her even as to the others. Perhaps - I do not know.'

Then she meditated again deeply, till after a while she rose suddenly to her feet.

'Listen,' she said; 'it is worth trying. The risk is terrible, I admit, but at least the thing is possible. Bring her to the Saturday-night meeting. She shall sit beside me in the choir. Bring her sister also, the tall one - Miss June I think her name was. You will be hidden from the people. The power that is within her I shall guide, so far as I can. I will be responsible that no evil befalls. I shall also hold Reston Rigg in check. Usually I can direct him, for he is afraid of me. In this case I know he will obey me - at least so far as the meeting is concerned.'

'I cannot promise at once,' I said. 'It is a great responsibility. You must let me think. I must consult her sister.'

'Well,' said the First Soloist, 'do not be too long about it. We cannot afford to think when Reston Rigg is acting, and when he has a girl in his power who will blindly obey him if she knows his will, or thinks she knows it. Meet me here to-morrow - the same time. Good-bye.'

And she turned her face in the direction of the green pine tops of Jimson's Wood, that were just visible above the sand-dunes towards the Isle peninsula.

'Good-bye,' I answered, and I could not help

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adding, 'God help us!'

'Yes, He will - and *I* will; but you must help too, remember that.' She flung the words over her shoulder almost carelessly 'Now I go to take up my burden.'

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

THE FIRST CROSSING OF THE SWORDS

Now a new period opens out. I began to understand Reston Rigg. Hitherto I had only seen the man in his public capacities, powerful, sinister, dangerous.

Dangerous he remained, but I began to see that there was a human side to him also. Let none doubt but that I thought much of what the First Soloist had said, before I ventured to state the case to June Cassells.

After all, might it not be a plot? In spite of what Hester Vane had said, was it not possible that the proposal to take Jan once more to the marquee on the hill might be a concerted arrangement to get Jan more completely into the power of the Mesmerist for the purposes of the mission?

I rejected this. I remembered what I had seen and heard the night when, with Sarah Jimson sobbing behind me, I had spied upon Reston Rigg's strange trance, the trance in which (as it now seemed) he had called Jan to come to him, and she, half a mile off in the old School House, had striven with the strength of steel muscles to obey.

Personally I felt no doubt whatever that Hester Vane was telling the truth. But would I be able to convince June Cassells of that? The question was widely different. Nevertheless I did my best.

At first, as I had expected, she would hardly let me speak, scenting treachery in every word. She preferred, and indeed I could not say that she was

wrong - the risks were certainly terrible - to keep Jan beside her in the School House and look after her there. Reston Rigg could not stay always in Longtown. There were signs that the *furore* of excitement was working itself out. Not that the company of the faithful diminished, but new converts were growing scarce. And also, floating into the town, brought by stray visitors, told by shy fishers who hung dripping mackintoshes in inn lobbies, jested upon by commercial travellers dropping into coffee-rooms after hearing the sound of singing from the great tent, there began to arrive curious rumours and legends as to the Mesmeric Revivalist. In various places throughout the Midlands and Lancashire the name of Reston Rigg was not of sweet odour. It was possible, said June, with some bitterness, that if the man did not quit, he might be compelled to.

This, as I knew already, was also Persilla's opinion, and that young person was willing and anxious on the shortest notice to provide ways and means, ranging from 'riding him on the stang' beyond the burgh boundaries to tarring and feathering.

But I was bound by the confidence of the First Soloist to prevent anything of this kind. At the same time I was compelled to respect the decision of June at all hazards to keep her sister away from Reston Rigg.

I was first at the rendezvous on the sand-hills above Lizbeth Havens's cottage next afternoon. By cautious enquiry of the Forerunner, I found that the First Soloist had lived in that retired place ever since coming to the town. Curiously enough, I had never given the matter of her habitation a thought before.

But now it seemed strange that, with all her interest in her husband's work, Hester Vane should yet be living apart from him. Then I remembered the curl of her lip and the intonation of her voice when she spoke of Reston Rigg. There was a bitter secret there somewhere, I felt sure.

I saw the slight figure in the close-fitting dress of *écru* China silk climbing up out of the hollow in which, like the last of the Longtown smugglers, lurked the little white cottage with the stake-nets wavering across the pearly slime of the wet sand-flats.

'Well?' she demanded as soon as she reached me. I shook my head.

'It is no use,' I said. 'June Cassells will not agree to her sister's being a party to such a doubtful experiment, and, seen from her point of view, I declare I hardly wonder.'

'What is her point of view?' As she spoke she bent her eyes upon me with something so strong and forceful in them, that for a moment I could not answer. I became aware of the same domination in them, though of a gentler sort, which I had seen in those of Reston Rigg.

'Her point of view,' I said, recovering myself, 'is the natural one that her sister's trouble began by submitting to the influence of Reston Rigg at one of his public meetings. She prefers that she should not again run into danger.'

'But did you not explain that *I* would be there - I would be responsible?'

'I did; but then, if you will remember, I was debarred from telling the sole reason which might have enabled her to see the matter as we do - your marriage with Reston Rigg.'

I saw the girl wince - almost like a delicate thing under a brutal blow.

'That is true,' she said, with a sigh, 'that is the difficulty. I had forgotten. But are you sure that you put the matter exactly as I explained it to you? To do him justice, Reston Rigg's "power" is generally a means to an end, and on the whole the end is a good one - else I should not be here. The first attraction, fascination, hypnotism - whatever you may call it - frequently induces a state - I do not wish to use phrases which may seem mere blasphemy to you - which enables souls to pass from remorse or indifference to the clear confidence which is the happiest promise of a good life and - *tut* - here am I - yes, I, who have scorned so long - falling into the set phrases of the Mesmerist. But, indeed, I do believe that the girl might have been telling the sole reason which might have cured in that way.' (Here she sighed.) 'But I suppose that now we must think of something else. Yet I would have been so wise and careful - for my own sake as well as for your friend's.'

'Listen, Miss Vane. I beg your pardon, I mean Mrs -'

'DON'T CALL ME THAT!' she cried, turning suddenly and fiercely upon me, as fiercely almost as Jan when she stabbed me at the name of Reston Rigg upon my lips. I decided that I must be more careful another time.

The name of Reston Rigg certainly produced strange revulsions of feeling among women.

'Miss Vane,' I continued quietly, 'I am bound to say that I think Miss June right in this case, though I neither influenced nor at the moment approved her decision. I have seen Miss January Cassells. Her condition is that of one who has been physically,

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and not merely spiritually, influenced by this man.'

'And how are you sure of that?'

I uncovered my wrist and showed where the stiletto had been run right through it from side to side.

'She did that at a mere angry word of mine - a word against - your husband.'

She took the wrist in her fingers and examined the wound almost professionally.

'That is a strong stroke. Few men could have done as much with so slight a weapon. Yes, I can understand better now. Once I too might have done as much - oh, in the distant ages, when I was a child - a fondly loving and fiercely jealous child! You would not think it of me now?'

She turned eyes of veiled and misty forget-me-not upon me.

I think (but am not sure) that she smiled a little as she held out her hand to bid me good-bye.

'Tell your Miss June that perhaps she is right,' she said. But she sighed as she said it.

* * * * *

The negative results of my interviews with June and Hester Vane, though adding considerably to my knowledge of Reston Rigg and the First Soloist, could not be said in any way to solve the problem of Jan Cassells.

On the fourth day after my second visit to the high bald dune above Lizbeth's hut, I found among my mail what I took first of all for a tailor's bill, so elaborately ornamental was the calligraphy upon the business envelope.

Within, however, the brief letter was written in a

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neat and small characteristic handwriting.

'DEAR Mr. Ross, - He has been in correspondence with your friend. The fault is on your side. Urge stricter supervision and keep me advised of the state of affairs. Three o'clock any day on the dune will bring you within eyeshot of

'Your Friend, H.'

A wildly dashed and blotted letter was enclosed. It was in Jan's handwriting, but had evidently been written under great mental pressure and in the utmost haste.

'MASTER, - Do not try a poor soul beyond its powers. I must see you again - speak to you. I hear your voice calling me to come to you every night. Yet I cannot come. They are for ever watching, spying. I have not the chance to leave the house for a moment. The struggle to obey you and the knowledge that they are keeping me from doing so are driving me mad. You who have put this sacred love into my heart must come to my rescue. If not I am lost. Without you I shall die. Remember I am ready for anything. Remember also that I am not weak, but strong. They only say I am ill (or at most pretend to believe it), that they may have a chance of keeping me shut up here out of your sight. But with you I am ready to fly to the ends of the earth, to serve you, to worship you. I keep the word you sent me in my heart. I can repeat the message word for word, but the writing I destroyed. I can trust no one about me, but shall continue to use the means you suggest for necessary communications. It is safe, and also affords me a sweet revenge upon one to

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whom I owe all my misfortunes - as all my happiness and all my hopes I owe to you, my Teacher and my Master.'

The letter was unsigned, but there was no mistaking the handwriting, and indeed the very turn of the sentences suggested the care of our Ciceronian Erasmus. There was little doubt that by the 'one' to whom poor Jan owed her misfortunes was meant a certain Adrian Ross. I sighed as I thought how she had changed her mind. For at first we had been good friends - perhaps on the borders of something more. Ah well, that was past!

But the means by which they were enabled to communicate remained to me mysterious, and I could not unaided think the secret out. Before opening the whole matter to June, I resolved to consult Persilla, of whose sturdy common sense I had had many proofs.

I could not do this immediately, for it was only in the earlier-falling twilight of August that I could affront the jealous gaze of Eben Watson the carrier, McVeagh the night policeman, and Matt Dalling the journeyman carpenter.

Therefore with the First Soloist's letter and enclosure in my pocket-book I took the main road to the great iron gates of the School House. I asked for the Doctor in a clear, far-carrying voice, but in an undertone informed Persilla that I wanted to be shown upstairs to see the young ladies. I also added (between my shut teeth) that I would be round later to see 'herself' that night. Persilla nodded, well pleased, and flung over her shoulder as she preceded me upstairs the words 'Nine o'clock!' apparently addressed to the stuffed crocodile which

guarded the passage to the Doctor's room. And so in the Flower Parlour I found all three girls. I had, of course, expected tears, flushed faces, angry silences. Instead I dropped into the sunny midst of laughter and happiness.

Jan, on the couch, was entertaining her sisters with a stump speech by a 'Teddy Bear.' Her thumb and middle finger agitated the arms in the most approved oratorical manner, while on the forefinger the head wagged wisely or was thrown back in order to claim for Teddy's fellow-citizens the Teddy Bear Magna Chart - free food, no work, no trusts, nine months' hibernation instead of six, an unlimited supply of meat for all carnivorous Teddies, and of roots and honey for those who loved such things. Everything was to be paid for (the orator declared) by the foreigner.

The Brunonian Teddy would get his living *free gratis*, besides coal, gas, hot bricks for the feet, fur clothing renewed twice a year - and the watchword of the party, the only true and loyal party, the party of full feeding and free rates, was 'Brunonia for the Teddy Bruins!'

And as she threw down the little furry puppet with which her nimble fingers had mimicked the chief orator of the recent general elections, Jan's laughter rang out so clear and hearty that my faith was shaken.

It was quite impossible that this gay and brilliant girl, full of jest and merriment, the idol of her sisters, could have written that desperate and heart-broken letter which I felt like an ache in the pocket-book under my left arm, as I held my right hand out for Jan to take.

For in her old impulsive way she had started up

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at once, and, running to me, had extended both hands. And as she did so the eye was so clear, the smile so frank, that, with a dazed brain but a hopeful heart, I fell back upon the possibility that the First Soloist was either deceiving me - or, quite as likely, herself also.

In Jan's duplicity it was simply impossible to believe.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

PERSILLA'S ARABIAN NIGHTS

And as if to make up, Persilla welcomed me at the kitchen-garden door, and as there were spying 'followers' lurking somewhere in the offing, for an object lesson she held up her face, all one radiance of mischief, for me to salute. I saluted accordingly, and the moment after, to the grind of angry heels trampling the cinder path, we entered the kitchen with smileful self-congratulations.

'There,' said Persilla, wiping her lips with manifest satisfaction, 'I was waiting for that. I told them they would maybe see a good reason for keeping away, if they hung about the Todd's Wynd entries just this one night. I hope they will let me alone now. There's no mistake about Persilla when she kisses. It carries a hundred yards easy.'

'But, Persilla,' I remonstrated, 'there are good and decent men among them -'

'Haud your tongue, teacher,' she cried, slipping her hand over my mouth. 'Do ye think that Persilla Potter has seen the lad that she would leave her good twenty-five pound a year (and everything found) for - and for what? To slave for a man for no siller at all and less thanks! At least, I have not seen that man stand in his own boot-uppers yet. When I do, I'll tell him plainly. And as for yoursel', Maister A-adrian - mind you this, it never hurt a man in this country to be chief wi' a good-lookin', smart lassie yet - no, nor ever will, so lang as Scots folk are kin to Robbie Burns, God bless him!'

I think, however, that something in my bearing

impressed Persilla with a sense that all was not well. Abruptly she checked her careless talk and we went into the kitchen, in silence.

'Is anything the matter?' she demanded, turning upon me as soon as she had closed the door.

'There is trouble, Persilla,' I said, 'and I must see Miss June at once.'

'But you have only just seen her.'

'But not alone - I must see her alone - it is quite necessary that I should speak to her.'

'Oh,' said Persilla, biting the nail of her left forefinger, as she was wont to do in grave, decisive moments, 'well, let me see - I suppose the little waiting-room by the front door would not do? No; not when - when Miss Jan is afoot. For doubtless it is about Miss Jan -?'

'Doubtless!' I answered briefly.

'Nor the vegetable garden - no; there's a view on that from the bedroom windows, on all, that is, except the path out of Todd's Wynd. Perhaps you would not like - no; there *are* too many lads on the wander thereabouts. And the kitchen? That would not be seemly for my mistress.'

She clapped her hands suddenly and made a little lift of her heels which in other less serious circumstances would have been a Persillian skip.

'Donkey! The little boys' playground!' she cried. 'Why did I not think of that?'

This was a walled enclosure, called generally the chicken run, wherein the small boys, during their first terms, were preserved from too continuous a course of the boisterous attentions of their seniors.

It was not overlooked, and was easily accessible both from Persilla's domains and No. 4 classroom - indeed, I had the key of the door in my pocket,

Persilla readily undertook the mission to June, and I passed by Todd's Wynd round to the usual playground entrance. I closed the big iron gates behind me with a feeling of thankfulness, and turning the corner of the big empty buildings, in the most barn-like style of Scottish county academic, I unlocked the French-window entrance to classroom No. 4.

I had a good while to wait, leaning on the green palings of the Rector's garden, and contemplating the newly whitewashed walls and the broad border of lime added during the process to the beaten earth of the playground.

But she came at last. I heard the wide classroom echoing to the purposeful tread of June's footsteps. She did not dash like Jan nor trip like May. Even when in a hurry she came with a swish of skirts, swiftly, indeed, but without haste, or at least without the appearance of it, unbreathed, unruffled, mildly radiant - like an ideal morning in the month to which she owed her name.

Presently she stood beside me. Against the stars and the blue-black vault of heaven, I saw her uncovered head like an aureole of golden mist, then her white face, and a dress of blond tussore silk that glimmered like mellow moonlight.

'I have come,' she began in a low voice, 'because I knew you were too much my friend to ask me unless there were a real cause. You see I trust you.'

'You may,' I answered. 'There is a real and terrible cause.'

We turned and walked slowly towards the shelter sheds, where on rainy days the little boys sat and talked, or, dusty-kneed, played marbles on windy ones. In either case they made shrill noises,

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variously like those produced by poultry or the squeaking of the smaller rodents.

'Jan is in correspondence with Reston Rigg,' I said; 'I have the proof.'

June was silent for a space of perhaps twenty seconds, and we had turned and were walking back towards the schools before she could speak a word.

'It is impossible - oh, quite impossible!' the words came at length. 'I have never seen her brighter and happier than she has been to-day - you thought so yourself.'

'I have the letter in my pocket,' I said sadly.

'You know Jan's handwriting better than I do myself. Come into the sheds. I will strike a match.'

I struck several. The high whitewashed walls gave the blue spurt and yellow flame of many vestas before June had read to the end of that hurried, desperate letter.

She returned it to me without a word, and we paced back to the big window of No. 4. Then quite suddenly June put both her hands on my shoulder, and bowing her head upon them, wept there silently, long and long.

Then, very pale under the stars, she lifted her face to mine. It was glistening wet. Her voice faltered and broke as she strove to speak connectedly.

'Oh, Adrian, we shall lose her after all. He has taught her to deceive us. All her gaiety to-day has been acted to deceive us. Deceit - it has all been deceit, deceit! And to think what she was. I would give my life to have the old Jan back again!'

'And I would give mine, if we two could save her together!'

'Thank you,' she said. 'I must go in now. I dare not leave her longer. But you have put some hope

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into me. We *will* do it together - we will save Jan, you and I. Something tells me we shall.'

I engaged myself solemnly to help her to save her sister at whatever cost to myself. But I did not know how much that promise, given with the door of o. 4 classroom in my hand and my feet on the broad band of be-dropped whitewash, was to cost both of us.

She bade me good night without holding out her hand, but I understood. She had given way once. She did not intend to do it again.

And not till I was almost at Solway House did it strike me as strange that June Cassells had never asked how I came to be in possession of her sister's letter to Reston Rigg. Also that from first to last I had not mentioned the name of the First Soloist.

* * * * *

That night Miss Sheba was waiting for me.

In twenty words she informed me that I was no longer a welcome guest at Solway House. This sudden dismissal and the sternness of my landlady astonished me. For of late she had only manifested a silent but growing disapproval of my doings. I asked what were her reasons for so serious a step.

'It were maybe as well for ye not to ask, sir.' She allowed the words to escape grimly.

'But I do ask,' I answered as firmly.

'Then, Mr. Adrian Ross, ye are in the way of hearing some home truths - truths that if ye had about you aught of the spirit of your sainted mother -'

'Be good enough, Miss Saunders, to let my mother alone,' I said sharply. 'When you have

resolved to chase me out of your house, it is no time to speak of "sacred missions."

I think I have rarely seen so great a change come over any human being as passed over the features of Miss Sheba Saunders at these words from me.

'I - I have no right - I have no mission,' she stammered, divided between dumb rage and latent repentance. (If I had begged for forgiveness at that moment, I should not have asked in vain. But I was proud, and the young are often hard of heart - especially to their elders, who love them far more than they deserve, yet whose affection they take as a matter of course.)

'I would not remain a day longer in your house,' I said proudly, 'not in any possible case - not if you were to pray me on your bended knees.'

'*Me*, Sheba Saunders, on bended knees!' she was recovering herself for the assault which I foresaw, and which I wished to activate as much as possible. I wanted to hear just how much she knew and what her idea was. I might thus learn what to avoid.

Besides, in the difficult days I saw before me, I really wished to have a home where I would be more free in my goings and comings than at Solway House. There were the Editor, and Saul Adam, not to mention the intermittent McRobert, all of whom were more or less on the watch. Most of all I desired to be rid of the constant spying officiousness of Miss Sheba, which I divined night and day all about me.

I had, indeed, in my eye a place of refuge near Red Rob's, which would answer all present requirements. I had been secretly sighing for it, but as may be imagined, I had not dared to broach the subject. So I leaped at the chance offered me by Miss Sheba's unexpected notice to quit Solway

House.

'Bended knees!' repeated Miss Sheba, when she had recovered breath. 'I keep my bended knees for Another than you, I would have you ken, Master Adrian Ross! I will tell ye, though, why and for what cause ye are to leave my house. Yes, you have some right to know that.'

'You will maybe mind of your coming whining here asking me, not many weeks gone by, to help you - you and your Miss Jan. And how I spent a whole day making a fool of myself - me, Sheba Saunders - among my own townfolk for your sake and a lass that was neither kith nor kin to me.'

'I know, Miss Saunders,' I said dryly, for I did not wish to lose what I had gained, 'and that was kind of you. If I remember rightly, I expressed my gratitude at the time.'

'*Your* gratitude!' She stamped her foot as the words came. 'Keep it for your hizzies! Aye, "hizzies." I can say no other. Eight times, to my knowledge, have you been seen visiting the maid-servant of the house where you are received as a guest. Nay, more, kissing and embracing in public. What say you to that, Mr. First Assistant?'

The kissing I owned to, contenting myself with an absolute denial of the embracing, but demurring that in no sense could the School House kitchen-garden gate giving upon Todd's Lane be considered a public place.

But Miss Sheba swept grandly on, besoming mere words before her.

'And that is not all - ye are running hither and thither with others, holding secret confabulations' (Miss Sheba loved long words) 'with the foolish daughters of that foolish man Erasmus Cassells.'

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The Lord forgive him for the way he is bringing them up, and lay not the loss of their immortal souls to his hands!’

‘You think they would be safer in yours, Miss Sheba,’ I interjected, hoping to end the scene.

For a moment I thought that she would have struck me, but she only turned a little more threateningly upon me and delivered her final assault.

‘And there is that Singer of Hymns - hymns that would be fitter for the lowest “theater” in the kingdom than for a religious assembly. You have been here and there with her, by night and day. I have seen you. Young man, you may go down to the pit - but at least it shall not be direct from the dwelling-place of Sheba Saunders. If you must seek your strange women, seek them alone!’

‘Miss Sheba,’ I said, searching for the word that would sting the most - oh, most wicked and ungrateful I - ‘Miss Sheba, you speak as one of the Pernicketties - as the worst and most spiteful of all. The lady you mention is as good and as honourable as you are yourself, and a day will come when you will be glad to ask her to your table.’

And without a word more I left her and went up to my room to pack my boxes.

* * * * *

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PART TWO

THE STORY CONTINUED FROM THE NOTES OF
THE FIRST SOLOIST, CALLED HESTER VANE

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

THE CAGED BIRD

It was during the second week of my stay in Longtown that I recognized my father. Properly my name is Ella Kingsman or Rigg. I had long been known on bills and posters as Hester Vane, but not a soul but myself knew that I had been brought up in a little greystone Congregational Manse at the end of East Street, Rushport; that I had been christened Ella MacMeekin and that from my youth I had been devoted to the service of foreign missions by my father, the Bairnly Minister.

But so it was. I am the girl who had run away with Chief Evangelist Kingsman, of the Perfectionist Mission - that is to say, with Reston Rigg.

I knew my father, David MacMeekin, the moment I set eyes upon him, though I had neither seen nor heard of him since the day, ten years ago, when I left the Manse of Rushport, on Clydeside, like an outcast and one accursed.

How I came to do it I shall tell briefly - not at all

for my own exculpation, to which I am indifferent, but that men and women may understand something of what Reston Rigg really was.

Oh, the woods of Rushport, and the green, westward-slanting braes hemming in the town. It was only there, and only for a very little while, that I ever felt young. Certainly not at home, certainly not in the care of Aunt Rebecca, a tall, gaunt, severe dragon of a woman, with invincible eyes and muscles of steel, whom my father early put in dominion over me and who largely corrected me for my soul's good.

Poor mite! There were so many things forbidden. I must not stand on tiptoe to look out of the window on the Lord's Day. This was a certain sign that my heart was yearning after the vanities - which were the Sunday trippers from the wicked city of Glasgow swarming black off the boat and hieing them to picnic on the Knock Hill above the town. There were many children among them, and oh, how I yearned for a smallest share of their 'goodies' and their 'treacle pieces.' Why, instead of playing on the shady Knock, must I learn pages of texts to me unmeaning and wholly inexplicable, though I tried hard enough to make them out in the dim light that filtered through the down-drawn blind?

I remember the first toy I ever possessed. It was a little wooden doll, hinged roughly at the joints. The round bullet head had once been painted, but when I found it, deserted on the beach, though washed and water-worn, I took it to my heart. But knowing my Aunt Rebecca, I hid it carefully. When taxed with possessing such a thing, I denied in a kind of tearful desperation. Alas, Aunt Rebecca had it at that moment behind her back.

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My father was (and has always remained) a man so unworldly, that he not only gave to the Lord all the pleasant things which might have fallen to his own lot, but the pleasant things of others also who abode in his house. When he quitted business he possessed some money. He had built a church with what remained of it, after fitting himself, in middle life, for the ministry of the Word. Later he had succeeded to a considerable inheritance, and that too he had sacrificed to the cause of foreign missions. My Aunt Rebecca was like-minded with him as to the uselessness of the gauds of life, so far as I was concerned. But, unlike him, she had her little private treats - as I now see, simple and innocent enough. Yet I can hardly experience anything more bitter in my life than the sight of Aunt Rebecca spreading currant jelly on her own bread, while, for some shortcoming, she deprived me even of butter.

The action was certainly ill-timed. For immediately after the discovery of the doll was made, I was in no mood for meek obedience.

'Where did you get this?' demanded my aunt. 'You have kept your Sunday's collection, you wicked child.'

Whereupon the devil entered into full possession of me, and in the shortest form of words possible I informed my aunt that she was not speaking the truth.

Aunt Rebecca took the poor wooden dolly, which I had clad in a Joseph's robe of many-coloured shreds and patches out of the mending-drawer. She took the firewood hatchet in hand and was on the point of dividing it in sunder, after the manner of Solomon, when I seized my treasure and fled to my

father with it.

He was sitting, as usual, poring over the Sunday's morning sermon, which, being wholly for his own people, he wrote and rewrote with immense labour. Big folios surrounded him, and he looked with stern wonder from my flushed face to the disgraceful dolly which I held by one leg.

'Take it, father,' I whispered. 'Keep it - oh, please hide it. Aunt is going to burn my dolly!'

But my father was still sitting in the study gazing at the battered limbs of the dolly I had thrust into his hand, its torn gown falling over his ink-stained cuff, when the avenger appeared in the doorway.

I had called Aunt Rebecca a liar!

'And so she is!' I stuck it out determinedly. 'For she said that I kept my Sunday collection, when she saw me put it in herself. She was pushing me up to the plate. Oh, the wicked woman! She told a lie!'

Of course my father had to support authority. So he whipped me gently and he prayed with me hard. The latter hurt a great deal the worse. But the bitterest thing was that my poor dear dolly was broken up before my eyes, limb by limb, in the strong, bony hands of Aunt Rebecca; while I had to stand and watch it being burned up to black ashes - all but the solid wooden ball of head. This I afterwards rescued, bound tenderly in a napkin, and laid reverently to rest in the duskiest corner of the garden.

Then in my heart I renounced Aunt Rebecca's God, and worshipped at the shrine of the poor blackened knob. I prayed to it; I sang hymns to it with a real feeling of exaltation; and for a month purposely refrained from taking any part in the church services, because I carried about within me

that sense of intolerable wrong.

After that I do not remember much for some time, but as I grew up there was evidently a coolness between Aunt Rebecca and my father as to my education. He was stricter with me in lesson hours, and certainly relaxed no whit in reprimand. But he made me occupy a little desk in the corner of his study during my hours of preparation, and allowed me to play in the garden and orchard only when my lessons were learned and my household tasks done.

I heard a discussion between them one drowsy spring afternoon.

‘David MacMeekin, I will be a party to no such sin and disgrace,’ said my aunt, her voice coming down to me clearly enough from the open window of the study, where I was sitting with *The Vicar of Wakefield* under the white and rose gossamer shade of the orchard trees, cherry and apple and pear each glorious after his kind.

‘Your daughter is your daughter, but she shall and must be subject to my discipline, or I shall leave the house - a house where, after all these years of faithful work, it seems that I am no longer welcome.’

‘Well, Rebecca,’ said my father, ‘if so it is to be, so be it. You came here without asking my permission, and you need no permission of mine to leave it.’

‘Very well,’ said Aunt Rebecca; ‘but hear me, David MacMeekin, the day will come when your system of bringing up this child, vain and self-willed, shall fall on your own head. And in that day perhaps you will wish that you had taken the advice of your elder sister.’

‘Whatever happens,’ said my father, ‘I shall blame only myself.’

And from that day forth my father and I dwelt

alone in the grey manse in East Street, with the front windows looking abroad over the wide firth, where the steamers were for ever passing by between the lighter azure of heaven and darker blue of the sea.

After Aunt Rebecca went, a woman came to help with the housework in the morning - a good, limited, middle-aged woman, with (as I wickedly said to myself, having none else to say it to) 'a game eye and a willing spirit.' But by early afternoon the 'game eye' had done her work and passed away, leaving me quiet with my father, sometimes during long hours of study, alone with the scratch and squeak of his quill pen and the rustle of the leaves of his Cruden's concordance. Or at other times I would sit high in my room, my feet wrapped in a rug and another about my shoulders, deep in some book too old for me by a good thirty years.

There was the dusky orchard too, and the bright garden in which, according to the weather, I worked at the vegetables or flowers, or only sat still and dreamed dreams in the shade. And I think this garden work was what kept my spirit in any wise fresh or young.

But my father, immersed in his books, did not seem to realise in the least how bad this sort of life was for a girl of nearly sixteen - old for her age, isolated from her kind, and hardly permitted even to make calls or waste time in - 'worldly amusements.'

'Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbour's house,' he would say. 'You are learning all that is worth learning, and in six months I will start you in the Hebrew.'

I can see it now - would that I could have seen it then. My father loved me. But his belated religious

experience had stilled all manifestation of affection and, for the moment, hardened him. He had still, so he thought, certain sins of youth and blood that could only be atoned for by austerity, and for this cause he practised an extreme hardness with himself. The same cause made him outwardly hard with me. But seeing him now - the Bairnly Minister, as they call him here - I know that at heart he must have been the same in those days. Only he avoided all expansiveness. He feared every manifestation of feeling, counting it a snare of the devil.

My poor father! Day by day as he fed my mind he starved my heart. He would have made me altogether one as himself - strong in knowledge, strict in self-discipline, yet in no way a busybody about the parish. He did not even visit the members of his congregation often, save, that is, in times of sickness and sorrow. Then, indeed, the heart of David MacMeekin spoke. But mostly he confined himself to preaching the 'strong meat of the Word,' as he called it - the 'eternal decrees' and the 'effectual call.' But certainly his doctrine was no food for babes. My soul hungered, and a certain liberality of nature within me stirred also uneasily and warningly.

Why was I to be for ever apart? The young men looked my way, but something about the minister's daughter, perhaps some awe attaching to my father, kept them at arm's length. When I spoke to them, as I did occasionally, on some matter of prayer-meeting or Sabbath-school, they replied in monosyllables and got away as quickly as possible. For already I led the singing, and with my father's reluctant permission played the little organ. It came about thus, even before my aunt's going away I had begun

displaying such extraordinary aptitude for music that a retired professor of music took notice of me. This was Mr. Kingsman, an old gentleman who had built himself a villa a mile and a half along the bay of Rushport. Finally he amused himself by giving me lessons.

He said that one day I would do him credit, and so I might even then if the sort of music he taught me had not seemed vain to my father. But still, even he was somewhat reconciled when he had once heard me 'raise the tune' at the prayer-meeting when the regular precentor was absent.

Old Mr. Kingsman had in his youth been organist in a great cathedral, but most of his life had been the most famous professor of music in Scotland. After forty years' hard work he had returned to his native place. There he had bought a barren knoll of firs, all bed rock and grey boulder, sparsely covered with whin, heather, and broom. On and about this he had built a wonder-house, unlike any other in that land - all of one storey, but at different elevations, according as he had found his rock foundations. There were broad flights of steps, a gallery with pillars like a cloister, a little interior square with Virgilian pine trees left growing within, and from every window and verandah wonderful glimpses of the Sannox Hills and the mountain flats Argyle's bowling-green.

It was in the music-room, along with a grand piano and a small pipe, organ which he had built himself with some professional assistance, with painted glass and dark-stained furniture all about, that I got my first glimpses of a new life. Mr. Kingsman was delighted with me from the first. He taught me to play, but it was with my voice that he

took the greatest pains. He urged me to go to a wonderful place which he called the 'Conservatoire.' But of that I well knew there was no chance, for if my father called our douce Presbyterian Glasgow 'the Wicked City' - what would he say of Paris?

All the same, there arose a kind of fairy vision before my eyes, no more to be realized than the cisterns of painted fish I had read about in a copy of the little double-columned *Arabian Nights*, with wonderful illustrations, which my father had somehow preserved, possibly unintentionally, because it resembled a *Pilgrim's Progress*, printed and bound in the same manner.

He was a dear old gentleman, my Mr. Harold Kingsman, a Doctor of Music, who yet rarely spoke (save to me) of anything beyond his garden, or the best people from whom to get tomato plants. But to me he would lie back and talk and talk for hours on end - that is, if I had pleased him. For he was a strict master, and only after I had done well would he treat me to a long reminiscence talk of what his life had been and the great folk who had called him friend. So naturally I went away from the Forelands, as he named his house, with a dizziness about the head which hardly had time to get itself settled before I found myself again passing the new red freestone post office of Rushport, and saw before me the grey dyke of the little Congregational Manse, and the window behind which my father would be working, all unconscious (most likely) that I had ever been out of the house.

On such occasions, when I meant to be long absent I would lay his next meal at his elbow. The small kettle I left on the hob, and he would have nothing to do but pour in the water to make the tea

he loved, and indeed took far too much of at all hours of the day and night.

He liked Mr. Harold Kingsman too. He was an adherent of our congregation - because it was the nearest to the Forelands, and also because he could walk all the way along the shore, watching the solan geese from Ailsa diving for herrings in the bay, and the swoop and flash of the swift fork-tailed terns. This reason for his ecclesiastical preference he told to me, but even then I knew somehow that I was not expected to repeat it to my father. Sometimes, too, he would come half-way home with me, telling me all about the flowers and the sea-creatures, his head turning as on a pivot and his mild blue eyes everywhere - a smiling, merry old gentleman, pleased with everything, walking trippingly along the beach, with something of the sea-bird about him still in spite of his five-and-sixty years. He had the same quick movements of the head, the same fixity of the eye - for he had to turn his whole head about in order to focus anything properly.

Wide and wider horizons opened before me. He lent me books to read, and then, after a little, would let me go into his library and choose for myself. But all the same, he carefully surveyed the results of my choice, and on two occasions took a book from me as being 'too advanced' for me at present. I have often wondered, since, if it crossed his mind that all these books, without exception, had to be concealed from my father. I kept them in a little old playbox in my room, dear to me because my mother had papered it with her own hands to keep my baby clothes in before I was born.

So I passed my time, between music, the secret joy of reading, the enforced study of the dead

languages under my father's care, and a few of the more obvious routine duties of a minister's daughter in a small unfashionable congregation - Sunday-school teaching, and a working-girls' evening class, which at once amused and interested me. I could make the girls like me, and all that I taught them was really useful - only mending and knitting and some feebly pretty embroidery - these relics of my Aunt Rebecca - and the little elementary cookery and housewifery that might help girls, kept all day in a mill, when they were promoted to having homes and husbands of their own.

If I had had a proper training I might have taught well, but as it was, this treble training of mine - schoolless, companionless, friendless - with my father, my Aunt Rebecca, and Mr. Harold Kingsman for sole professors, was too scattering to be of any practical use as the art of schoolmistressing goes to-day.

The roads are extraordinarily long that lead thither, and the gates extraordinarily narrow. Besides, I was not fitted for routine. There was a rebel, frondeuse, gipsy drop in my blood, that came I know not whence, but of which, at times, there were traces in my father's abrupt changes of mood and even manner of life. I may instance his wonderful industry at his books, and yet the absolute carelessness he manifested to the simplest and easiest understood methods of rendering himself popular among his people.

Yes; I know - you are thinking of the later 'Little Tommy' and the sermons of the 'Bairnly Minister.' But there was nothing of that about my father in those days. He preached 'the pure doctrine' with stern vigour, resistless logic, and was as dogmatic as

the Confession of Faith itself. Little Tommy came later, when his inventor had come to suffer. It was I that was his Little Tommy - the only child whom he ever lost - ever had, indeed; so with a late-born tenderness, out of the broken shreds of what I might have been, he constructed - patched together rather - 'Little Tommy' and the whole world of motherly sentiment which touches the hearts of the good women to-day.

But at sixteen there came something into my life, something wonderful outside my thought or experience - altogether marvellous.

Twice or thrice Mr. Harold Kingsman had spoken to me of a brother who had gone to India, and though comfortably provided for as an army doctor, had thrown up the service in order to run after mahatmas, astral bodies, and indeed (as Mr. Harold affirmed, with a shrug of disgust) 'the whole hatful of devil-tricks.'

One day Mr. Kingsman told me how this brother was dead, and that his son, instead of having been put to some decent profession, had been practising a species of medicine as irregular and fantastic as the later philosophy of his father.

'And what is the worst,' he concluded, with one of his queer, half-humorous grimaces, 'if I can't stop the fellow, he is as likely as not to turn up here and try to mahatmize me!'

And so it came to pass that one dull afternoon in December, on going into Mr. Harold's music-room, I found myself face to face with - Reston Rigg. Yes; *he* was the son of the younger Kingsman, the resigned Indian army surgeon. But his chief teacher and foster-mother had been Mrs. Denarfon Rigg, a famous high priestess of modern Buddhistic science,

from whom he had received many things besides his name.

This tall young man stood gazing at me with something strange shining in his black eyes, something that checked the current of my life for a moment. I cannot tell whether the sensation was pleasant or not. But at any rate it was an unknown one. He stood so still, I almost thought him a ghost with his dark, thick moustache, his brown skin, and his long, flexible hands. He was wonderfully handsome in those days, and though he had hardly touched the verge of the Power that was within him to move others and bend them to his will, yet he bent me easily enough. I felt myself handcuffed, throttled, fascinated, and all without a word spoken. His uncle was out. We were alone in the room. It had always been my privilege to run everywhere about the house of Forelands alone, and so I had mounted swiftly to the music-room, hoping to have a good practice at the piano before Mr. Harold came in.

Reston Rigg - for I knew in a moment it was he - held out both his hands. You know his gesture, grave and commanding, as though none could resist his will. But then there was something both sweeter and infinitely more simple about it than to-day, when coarsened by years of such practice and even abuse as he has given it.

'You are a Seeker,' he said softly. 'You seek the Light. So do I. We shall find it together.'

At the first movement I had put my hands both of them behind my back and by instinct kept a chair between us. But in a moment, I cannot explain even yet how, I found myself going to him and laying my hands in his,

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And with my hands I laid also my heart.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

THE FIRST SOLOIST CONTINUES

I do not wish to say more than I need about what followed.

Reston Rigg stayed on at Forelands, and I saw him every day. Mr. Harold found little to say to his nephew. They had nothing in common, and, indeed, I do not think they often met except at meals. As it chanced, Mr. Kingsman was specially busy these days with his garden, and set me more pieces to practise than ever before, while Reston Rigg sat and listened. I could feel his eyes upon me like an obsession. They spread a kind of shadow over my soul. Then I sang breathlessly on, till sometimes I had to stop and ask him to look away. When I did so I saw for the first time the look I now know so well, at once avid and triumphant.

Yes, I suppose he fell in love with me - for a little while - yes, perhaps. It is the only excuse and comfort I have for what came about, that it may have been so. There was certainly a feeling on his side - oh, for a little time. I know it so well now. He pursues a passion as a cat a mouse. But when the mouse is caught, hardly does he deign to play with it a little while, and then - he kills his mouse. Yes, he kills it. For there is that about him that cannot help but kill - without his will, perhaps without his intention. But I - you say - I am not dead. No, not so far as pulse-beats, nor the activities of body and brain. But there is something dead within me - my youth, and love, the love that ought to have been the master. Yet I live on, that I may prevent the bad

from becoming the worse, and perhaps in the far-off hope that one day Reston Rigg, who has moved so many souls, thrilled so many bodies, shall yet have his own spirit moved, and arise out of the ashes the man I thought him, the man I sometimes even now dimly see him to be.

But to tell of Reston Rigg during these days at Forelands. He walked with me on the beach. He told me wonderful stories of India - of his strange life there, of how he had worked in a mission hospital in Mysore country, how he had been a 'healer' travelling the country with a backful of native remedies, how in the great hospital at Madras, among the most learned and Christian men in the whole peninsula, he, a mere ward attendant, had forsaken the doctor's instructions in desperate cases and cured the sick by the laying on of hands.

'If I had stayed there,' he said, 'I should soon have had a sect to worship me - like John Nicholson. But my place was not in India. Anybody with a little imagination can work miracles on natives who live or die at pleasure, but with Europeans it is different.'

So Reston Rigg returned home some months after his father's death, with all this strange power and stranger experience. As fate would have it, he arrived in the height of a wonderful revival in the north of Ireland. He saw his chance and threw himself into the work. In a month he was famous. Also he had established a marvellous reputation for himself. Rich ladies interested themselves in him. They had been benefited by his gifts as a healer; they had been "assured of their interest," to use their phrase: and now, a sudden illness taking him, and perhaps also weak from the reckless spending

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of magnetic power, he had bethought himself of his father's brother, and had accordingly come to his house to recruit.

When he found me I was only sixteen. Nothing and no one had ever taken me out of my narrow life before. But now, in the magic of his coloured word, I saw the copper and agate twilights of India. I smelled the wood-smoke and the dead leaves of the hills. I had read of them in certain blue-bound volumes by which Mr. Harold set great store. But this man had seen and known. He came as a hope of a wider world than Rushport, a world I had never thought to see. He made written things real and made dreams possible.

I dare say he fascinated me with intention. Certainly when we went out walking together, I knew nothing from the moment my feet touched the rugged path which led down to the beach till I was at my father's door. Afterwards there would come back, detached and incomplete, but with episodes of clear and almost painful delight, a vision of the arches of rock under which we had sat, the clean, cool firmness of the sand, or dusky cave-mouths with the purple tangle of dulse trailing away in transparent streamers. I remember the salt taste of it yet - for he pulled me little bits which I nibbled as he talked.

There was a place also - our temple, we called it - to which we climbed midway up the cliff, a kind of den hidden behind tufts of gorse and tall sea grass. I can remember the very heads of the rock lavender up there - I think that is the name - a little rosy plant with a round flower all downy scales which I plucked to pieces. But of what Reston Rigg said to me, or how long we stayed, no memory remains.

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When I had entered into the hush of the old manse, I moved about there automatically, my thoughts and my soul far away. Yet my father took no notice. He appeared when I called him to meals. They were of the most summary descriptions in those days. The good and willing woman in the kitchen appeared to doubt of nothing. Then there would be the silence of dinner, after my father had stood five minutes erect asking a blessing on the good gifts of an ever-kind Providence.

For just then he was deep in a new "Harmony of the Gospels" on a plan of his own which would supersede all others, and reveal anew the treasures of the Good Tidings. At table he talked about this, when he spoke at all. But mostly he would leave his dinner scarce touched, and sit, palpably uneasy, till he could find an excuse for getting back to his work in the solemn little folio-lined study.

'And what has Missy been doing to-day?' he would ask sometimes. But he never minded about the answer.

'Yes, yes!' he would mutter, whatever I said, and so relapse into his meditation. Even the Hebrew was in abeyance, and it was as well - or as ill - for, indeed, I had nothing in my head, nor any room for anything, in those days, except this wonderful man who had come to teach me that I had youth and a soul. Sometimes he would listen to my singing, and watch my fingers as they went over the keys. Then he would be very thoughtful, and once he said, looking very steadily at me when I had finished, "I have been dreaming dreams for you. We shall do great things together."

And the plural pronoun touched me with a gladness like the opening of the gates of heaven.

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And then, after many hesitations and much arranging, the first Reston Rigg mission was opened at Rushport. Reston left his uncle's house and took lodgings in the town. He spoke in the market-place. He addressed crowds down on the landing-pier of the Clyde steamers. He was hooted, laughed at, insulted, but he persevered. He made converts. As always, the ministers of Rushport stood in the way. Their congregations were warned, their churches and mission-halls refused. There was no great tent or endowment of money by rich ladies in those days.

The evangelist stood barehead under the pelting rains off the Atlantic, and very noble and brave I thought he looked. Indeed, nothing had ever been heard in that country to match his moving word.

I spoke to my father that he should grant him the use of his little chapel. It was a thing within his power, for the place was his own personal property, and besides he was not like his brethren, a man of sectarian emulations. He had no jealousy, and so after hearing one address from Reston Rigg, in which he told of his missionary work in India, his healer's experience in Madras, and the marvels which had been wrought in so short a time - knowing him also to be the nephew of a man so universally respected in Rushport as Mr. Harold Kingsman, he was not loath to permit him the use of the chapel which he had built.

That was the beginning of the end. Naturally I went every night, and the success was very great. Reston Rigg used at that time none of the adjuncts which have made him famous since. He spoke simply, and though doubtless marvels were done privately, yet he took no personal credit for them. So that not only I, but all our people took him for

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another Paul, speaking the truth without the fear of man.

Of me he made use constantly, but at first delicately. He paid me the compliment of asking my advice, and persuaded me that he was taking it. But as the days crept on when he must seek another field of labour and open his long-planned campaign in the south of England, he broke down suddenly. The faith and confidence he had had appeared to leave him. He declared that not only did he love me after the manner of men, but that he had need of me for his great mission raid. He spoke unceasingly of what we could do together - of how helpless he would be without me. He showed me how I had been specially endowed and miraculously trained for the work. His uncle and my father, said he, had builded better than they knew.

Well, I believed him, and so, indeed, would most girls. They would have asked for nothing better than to believe - nor, indeed, did I. I went with him to London, and we were married by licence.

That night I wrote a letter to my father, and Reston Rigg wrote one to his uncle. Then we went to Bournemouth, and spent the days in organization and the nights in stirring the immense crowds that gathered nightly in the Bright Memorial Hall. Reston Rigg had a considerable sum of money which he had brought with him from India, and from the first there were no appeals for money and no collections. Only it was understood that gifts would be received for the expenses of the mission from those who thought that they were benefited themselves or that others were being helped.

I cannot tell whether I was really happy or not. The world, the new world, swept past me too fast for

that. The wonder of it roared in my ears. Yet there were drawbacks. It was understood from the first that I was not to be known as Reston Rigg's wife. That, he explained, would spoil his influence. I believed him. I did not know what he meant then. I know now.

At first I only believed blindly. I yielded unquestioning, happy to be of any service. At the meetings I proved to be an admirable subject, ductile, docile, giving an impression of innocence. The fascination which had made me leave my father, my home, and all my sheltered life at a word from Reston Rigg remained in force. He could sway me back by a look. So he explained to me that if I were known as his wife we might have been suspected of collusion. Accordingly we went over to Christchurch every night after the meeting. The marriage certificate stitched into my dress never interfered with Reston Rigg's influence over what he called 'the best people,' that is, the rich elderly ladies with nothing to do who frequent such places, or the impressionable young women, past the pale curate stage, but easily moved by handsome evangelists with sad eyes and drooping moustaches and vaguely mystical powers.

But I need not sneer at such – least of all had I the right, for I myself had passed that way.

And, indeed, at that time I had no idea of sneering. The spell was still strong upon me. It was not till later that the scales fell from my eyes, and I saw that I was only one of many, and understood what were the extent and danger of the powers which Reston Rigg could exercise over women.

It seemed, for instance, quite natural to me that a rich lady should give him a large sum per annum,

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and in other ways lavishly provide for his comfort while carrying the Mesmeric Revival throughout England.

I did not even complain when he told me that if it were known that he was married not another penny would be forthcoming. So I must keep my secret for the good of the Cause and the money that made our crusade possible.

I was not unhappy. I think that, taking things all round, I was as happy as I ever expected to be - when something happened. So great a something that it changed my life. I almost died of it. And as a matter of fact it has marked me. Oh, I know well. The agony of that one afternoon has marked me. It was late, just before tea, and Reston Rigg had gone out to arrange something about the evening meeting. I rushed to a hidden basket, and had the needle in the tiny white seam before his back was round the corner. It was a secret I was keeping from him. He would, as I thought, be so glad and so proud. A girl thinks such things just at the first, when she knows nothing, and has all the time there is to think in - to think and smile to herself.

I was happy - so happy - these little dainty paper patterns - all from Putterick's Penny Weekly and Pattern Exchange. No wonder I smiled as I worked.

Then Mary Ellen, the slatternly maid, put her face through the crack of the door with the superciliousness which she deemed due to occupants of the third floor. 'There's a lady below,' she said; 'she was asking for you, ma'am - no, not for your hus - for Mr. Reston. They mostly do.'

And she giggled. I could have beaten her. Slatternly familiarity has always been distasteful to me.

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'Shall I show the lady up?' she went on, still smiling. And I think she hung a moment longer than was necessary upon the 'lady.'

'Certainly,' I answered, 'and at once, please.'

I thought, of course, that it was something to do with the evening meetings, or perhaps an answer to an application for new workers and district visitors to advertise the mission.

Instead it was a young girl who stood before me - that is, not more than three or four years older than myself, floridly dark, with big black eyes, a full figure lightly corseted low on the hips, and - lips that quivered.

She cast one glance at the basket of dainty baby-linen I had not had time to put away. Then she suddenly threw up her hands, laughing horribly.

'*You too!*' she cried.

And so fell in a faint on the little bed-sofa among the Putterick patterns.

* * * * *

Outside the bees went on humming among the flowers and the scant heather. But to my ear their note had dropped an octave, as sounds do after one has come up from a sudden gasping plunge into cold sea-water. The world was not the same as five minutes before. Yet quite mechanically I brought the girl round. Annie Hyde was her name. She was a bold girl, forward and assertive, and at the meetings in Saint Helens, her native town, she had been constantly seeking out Reston Rigg on one pretext or another. She could not let him alone for half an hour. But though I remarked her insistence, I had never dreamed of anything like this.

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#Yes, I forgave him – I forgave him. Certainly, or I should not be here to-day. I did not even bear malice, or cast up the past, like a jealous woman. I am not so sure that I cared. Only - only something died within me. Rather two things died. Thank God, one of them was his baby!

I needed no longer the little nestling white things I had been so happy making. So, with a chilled and stony heart, I gave them all to the other.

LOVE IN PERNICKETTY TOWN
CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

THE BIRD FLOWN

This was the matter of what the First Soloist told me. I have kept her own words as much as possible. It seemed now a marvel to me that I should never have thought of her as the daughter of the Bairnly Minister, whose story I had heard at the Clerical Club. But so it was. Perhaps I was too much taken up with my own sorrows - that is, those of Jan and June Cassells - and all the ties which bound me to the School House, to think of what was lying obvious upon my path under my very feet.

Meanwhile my friendship with the First Soloist grew so quickly that I even trusted her with certain secrets of my heart which I had never put into words before. It is strange how explaining oneself to a sympathetic listener tends to convince and confirm the explainer himself. I had been walking in a mist before, like that which brooded over the Dutchman's Lake. But when I had finished telling my anxieties to the First Soloist, everything was clear as a morning with sun. This is the essence and power of true confession.

Yet afterwards she laughed at me and said, 'Of course, any woman could have told you in a moment.'

I knew that she went to her father's church on Sunday mornings when there was no meeting in the great tent, and I urged her to go to the manse and reveal herself to her father. But she shook her head sadly and said, 'No, not now. I have something else to do. I have Reston Rigg to look after so long as he

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is in Longtown and near your dangerous Miss Jan. My father has waited a long time. He can wait a few weeks more. Besides, I am not so sure it will make him any the happier.'

'You do not mean to go back to him?' I asked rather needlessly.

'Not so long as my husband has the greater need of me.'

'But surely -' I began, but she did not allow me to finish.

'He is still my husband. I am the only person in the world who has the least influence over him. In fact he is afraid of me, and even now I do not despair. There is good in him deep under, where only God's eye can see. Yet I have had some glimpses.'

And indeed I could not help owning that she was right. The Bairnly Minister was certainly quite resigned and content with his lot. I do not say that he was happy, but at present the knowledge that his daughter was in Longtown with the man who had taken her from his house would only have disturbed his calm. And though he could not have opposed her resolution to remain with her husband - to save him, if possible - though he could not choose but count this the duty of a wife to her husband, he would doubtless be happier that the reconciliation should take place when the Market Hill was clear of the great tent, which for so long had been the butt of his pulpit anathemas.

It was not for a fortnight that anything new happened. Such calms are the hoisted cones of imminent storm-warnings.

At the School House I saw June every day and Persilla every night. I heard the latest news. I did not

often go up to the Flower Parlour. Because in these days Jan did not care to talk much. I understood that she suspected I had found her last letter to Reston Rigg, so she seldom spoke much to me. Still, she never failed to come into the dim-lighted hall to bid me good night with the utmost friendliness.

She would stand behind me with the door-knob in her hand, June hovering uneasily about, only to bid me be careful to go straight home, now that I had no Miss Sheba to take charge of me.

Yet my ear noted an obvious strain about this village banter. It seemed somehow unnatural, out of place, un-Jan-like.

All the same, I was glad even of so much. She was sedater, more silent, and, save for the curious interest she took in my comings and goings, content to remain in her own room reading and writing all day long.

'She is beginning to forget - the impression is wearing off,' I said, with some sort of hope. But the First Soloist answered only sadly, 'Do not be so sure. In ten days we shall see.'

And we did see. Not uselessly had Hester Vane made me promise to do exactly as she ordered me. The crisis of all our fates was at hand. Somehow or other, from her knowledge of Reston Rigg, she was sure that all was far from well. The ice was thin under our feet. We must stand by to help one another at any moment, and, above all, she, Hester Vane, wife of Reston Rigg, must have an absolutely free hand.

I promised to obey her, not knowing what it was that I promised. Fate's hour struck one gurly, whirly night in the later heats of summer - the dust lifting itself up in clouds and at street corners and along

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the deserted quays of Longtown, spinning like so many boys' tops. The winds came with a sudden gusty *woof*, and then in a moment all was still again. It was the night of Reston Rigg's farewell meeting in Longtown. There was a great assembly - many of those who had been 'stirred' - that was his favourite word - were to acknowledge their benefits with the living voice. A larger number of well-wishers had come to prevent any counter demonstration which might mar the success of the first Reston Rigg mesmeric mission in Longtown.

For in the burgh there was an opposition - or rather several oppositions. There was the noisy and mirthful opposition of the Three Tumbler Club, headed by the husband of Sarah Jimson. They were in no way dangerous. They would laugh a little, bombard the platform, and perhaps try to push one of their number towards the Mourners' Bench.

But generally they stopped half-way, checked by that sense of public disapproval which breaks uneasily upon such interrupters. They could arrange plans amid laughter and drams at the Crown Inn, but somehow they felt awkward and self-conscious in the hush of the big tent and the multitude of eyes all turned upon one man.

Again, there were the prentice lads - more dangerous because they would do nothing till the meeting was over. But my friendship with Persilla had kept all quiet in that direction. There would be no interference from Persilla's Irregulars. Of that I had assured myself. And Persilla's orders, once given, would be obeyed without cavil or question.

By far the most formidable and real opposition was that of the ministers. But, though speaking freely in private against the methods of the

Mesmeric Evangelist, they were not the men to stir up any riot. They knew well the perfect work of time, and awaited philosophically the certain absorption of the few sincerer converts into their several congregations, as also the vanishing ardour of the others, till the waters of the Longtown pool should again be as still and smooth as those of the Dutchman's Lake.

Even those best acquainted with all the possible discontents of the anti-Restonites could not imagine from what source the trouble was to come. This was not a night on which Reston Rigg exerted much of his special power. He knew that he had made all the converts he could hope for in Longtown. So his concluding 'experience,' though not without gusts of mesmeric power, was directed more to confirming the faith of the wavering and building up that of the chosen, confident vessels.

'I am leaving you,' said Reston Rigg. 'I must continue to fulfil my mission, such as it is, and use my power, such as it is, in other cities also. Remember, you who have received the Spirit - falling like flames of fire, here in this great meeting as in the little chamber of the Pentecost - that on the next few days all your future will depend. I, your leader, your teacher, will be removed from you. And from my experience of other towns - a long experience of the ingratitude of the world toward its teachers - my departure will be the signal for the opening of the floodgates of slander. Evil tongues will speak lies. Believe them not. The innocent has always been crucified, because it is his duty or his fate to interfere with the gains of official Pharisees.'

And then quite suddenly, as if moved by the word, in the centre of the tent arose a slender figure,

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grey-haired, broad-browed, silver-spectacled, known to all - a picture of venerable benevolence - the Bairnly Minister.

It was Reston Rigg who made the sign for silence. He knew the Bairnly Minister by sight. He had crossed him constantly, stealing along in the shadow from sick-room to sick-room. He had somehow gathered the notion that Mr. MacMeekin was less opposed to his mission than the other ministers of Longtown. At least he was well assured of his harmlessness. The name of the Bairnly Minister was the fable of Longtown for supererogatory goodness. He had gone a whole winter, sheltered only by a torn umbrella, his thin 'clericals' flapping in the Cheviot gusts, because he had bestowed his overcoat upon a tramp who immediately sold it for four shillings, and having spent the proceeds at the nearest 'pub,' went to the Longtown lock-up chanting the praises of his benefactor.

Surely there was nothing to fear from such a man. Reston Rigg, who weighed everything, saw at once the advantage of having a God-speed from a 'placed minister' on the last evening of his stay in Longtown. Moreover, he only knew that this was the proverbial 'good man' of the parish. His name had made no impression on his ear, even if he had heard it. They were hundreds of miles from Rushport, and the events which happened there rarely, if ever, crossed his mind. Reston Rigg lived in the present, letting both past and future take care of themselves. Hester Vane had been so short time his wife, so long his First Soloist, and so many things had happened and were happening in between, that he often forgot that there was a time when she had not formed part

of his business outfit. Rushport had long been blotted out, and he only remembered his Uncle Kingsman at times of financial difficulty, with that special bitterness which comes from the knowledge that nothing can possibly be extracted from a wealthy but hard-hearted relative - a relative who could, can, might, should - but will see you hanged first!

Therefore when Mr. MacMeekin rose in the meeting, Reston Rigg smiled upon him, invited him to the platform in a courteous manner, and was the farthest in the world from recognizing in the harmless Congregational Minister of Longtown his own father-in-law.

But the First Soloist knew, and suddenly sat back in her chair, shielding her pale face with a sheet of music.

'Fellow-townsfolk,' said the Bairnly Minister, passing by Reston Rigg's invitation to come up on the platform as if he had not heard it, 'I have ever been among you an apostle of peace, and even now I desire to disturb no man's faith, no woman's hope. But I dare not let this opportunity go without warning you that there are lying spirits abroad!'

At these words there came an instantaneous alteration in the countenance of the Mesmeric Evangelist. The courtesy of the bland smile disappeared, and a much more natural saturnine scowl returned, giving distinction to the stern face and blue-black moustache, beneath which the white teeth now showed in a kind of wolf's snarl. But the First Soloist sank back a little farther behind the sheet of music with which she was shading her eyes.

The Bairnly Minister continued, his gentle voice strengthening as he spoke:

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'You know me, friends. It is not my way to speak evil of any, least of all any who differ from me in creed or method. To be a good Christian, to be a good Congregationalist, one must respect differences. But in this case there is something more. This unknown, uncontrolled, perhaps uncontrollable force, which some call mesmerism and others hypnotism, may be useful medically and in the hands of the wisest and best men. But used recklessly, as we have seen it in this place, it is wholly dangerous, evil, and productive of consequences which no one can foresee, least of all the man who has been spreading the poison abroad.'

The eyes of Reston Rigg settled to their fighting chill.

'I might ask our reverend friend by what right he comes among a company of people quietly gathered for the purposes of the same service in which he engages, or professes to engage - the saving of human souls. But a simple test will clear matters. There are those here who have derived benefit from my humble efforts of the last weeks - let any such stand up.'

In the neighbourhood of the choir and in the front ranks a huge battalion, mostly of young people, rose impressively. The Bairnly Minister even found himself suddenly surrounded by a second bodyguard of Restonites eager to proclaim their obligations. Here and there, scattering back through the tent to the various doors, there were others, all testifying to the efficacy of the new method. Sheba Saunders was on her feet, her features composed, but pale as death. Sarah Jimson broke from her husband's restraining hand and thrust her way

forward to the steadfast regiment about Reston Rigg.

The Mesmerist smiled.

He had called up spirits from the deep and they had obeyed him. His heart went out in triumph; but having more to say, he dismissed them with a wave of his hand.

'And now,' he said, still smoothly but in a slightly higher key, 'I have not been so many weeks in this place as, I understand, our reverend friend has been years. This meeting is, I take it, at once large and fairly representative of Longtown. I will therefore ask any who have benefited by *his* ministrations during these years to stand up. I hold this not unfair, because here in my own tent, at the close of my mission, he has thought fit to challenge me. I have therefore the right to ask of him an account of his own stewardship. Let those who have benefited by my adversary's doctrine and preaching - STAND UP!'

There was something of consternation in the meeting. Many earnest church-going people were there, even some of Mr. MacMeekin's congregation. But among such regulars in Longtown there is a great dislike to any public demonstration of the faith that is in them. Their lives are left to speak. These therefore did not rise, sitting rather with their arms folded, their eyes half shut, every feature and limb impassive. They held, like their kind all over Scotland, that this was a matter which concerned only themselves and their God. A stranger had no right to intermeddle. And so, though Reston Rigg, by the novelty of his mesmeric methods, had influenced a goodly number of the younger and more impressionable - women especially - there was a great majority who willingly heard him, and yet resisted his appeals to 'make a show of themselves

openly.'

So no one moved for a long minute of astonished silence. The Bairnly Minister stood up quietly in his place facing Reston Rigg, on whose sternly domineering features there flashed up a sudden radiance of cruel triumph.

'Not one who has benefited by your efforts after all these years?' he mocked. 'Surely then the birds of the air have carried away much good seed.'

But suddenly, rising from the organ a little to the right side of Reston Rigg, a slender figure detached itself - that of the First Soloist. The music she had been holding fluttered down upon the dusty boards of the temporary flooring.

'I have been benefited,' she said in a clear voice, heard all over that assembly. 'I trust I have done my duty here, but every Sabbath morning I have sat and worshipped in the church of this man of God, and I would sin the sin without pardon if I were to be silent now. God has spoken to me through his voice. For the first time I knew I was forgiven.'

'Thou God in heaven,' cried the Bairnly Minister, lifting up his arms as if to take the girl within them, 'it is as if my Ella had come back.'

What Reston Rigg would have said or done cannot be known, cannot even be guessed, for the Bairnly Minister had fallen back fainting, and the next few moments were sufficiently occupied in forcing back the people and carrying him out.

Few, indeed, knew what was the matter, yet in the sudden revulsion of feeling there were many who would gladly have done Reston Rigg an ill turn. But he had disappeared. In the turning of a switch the light was shut off and the great tent left in darkness and tumult. The First Soloist was swept away in the

rush, and all knew that the great mission of the Mesmeric Evangelist in Longtown had ended in disaster.

More, he would never come back. For, above all else, ridicule kills in Cheviotshire. There was some wild talk of wrecking the tent, but a band of responsible men prevented this till the police came. The bands of Persilla's apprentices were on his track, hot foot with ideas of ducking very clear in their suddenly liberated minds. He had insulted a minister. Now they had a *casus belli* indeed. No man could say them nay.

But they came back disappointed and empty-handed, with the news that Reston Rigg's motor-car had been all ready, waiting with lights burning in the dusk of the poplar avenue behind the School House. Just as they had been closing in, the siren shouted its note of warning. They had seen two people step within, but the next moment the big Mercédès had scattered them like chaff as it droned away along the Great North Road, up which so many runaways had gone Solway-wards in the old days of the Gretna Green welder.

And this was the last that Longtown saw of Reston Rigg, though for years his very name continued to arouse whole companies to fury like the sounding of the trumpets of battle.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

THE NIGHT RIDE

Yes, from the School House gates - from under the very windows of Dr. Erasmus - the big motor carried Reston Rigg and the girl he had bewitched into the night of silence and mystery.

Subtly he had made his plans. Carefully he had carried them out. He knew well that Longtown would be for ever after a shut place to him. He had counted with that. Indeed, for the last few weeks he had been holding on there with the single intent of carrying off Jan Cassells.

He felt, with his strong innate sympathetic sense, sharpened by practice, that he could no longer hold his position in Cheviotshire. Disaster was bound to come - though Reston Rigg quite deceived himself as to the quarter from which it would arrive. But he was a physically a brave man. He never shunned an encounter. He thought that the attack would come from vulgar interrupters, or a sudden inburst of angry and powerful men like Tom Jimson.

But the sudden breakdown of his last meeting - the unexpected attack of the meekest and humblest of all the men in Longtown, and especially the defection of his First Soloist, which had swept the meeting out of his power, hurried him and in a manner tied his hands.

But Reston Rigg was not the man to leave anything to chance. He had seen from the first that Jan would be a wonderful help to him. Never had he been so successful in projecting his will and

imposing it upon any living creature. Never had he found so apt and receptive a medium. It was, of course, in Hester's power to make difficulties with his patroness in Bournemouth and so hamper him in his present mission. But then, was it not open to him to go into the showman business, in which, with a colleague like Jan, he foresaw immense triumphs? On the whole he left things to chance. He had the true conqueror's confidence in his Star. And now, in the moment of apparent defeat, he was already organizing victory.

Besides, he possessed a nature which kindled easily to what he called love. At the first he had been attracted, though in rather an amused way, by Jan's haughty carriage. He had resolved to break that will, and to further that conquest he had used all his means. He had succeeded rapidly and beyond expectation. From the night in the tent, when Jan had been drawn by the power of his eyes to the Penitents' Altar, he knew that he could do with the girl what he would. He could make her cheat. He could make her lie. In comparison with him, all her relatives and friends did not count one farthing's worth of Red Rob's dulse from the rocks by the stake-nets.

She was his instrument, his slave, his toy, his thing. Obedience was her joy - that is, as long as he was near enough to influence her by word or letter. He could draw her by throwing himself into a trance. But while that experiment made her ill with longing to come to him, it also endangered his chances of getting her away in good condition for his purpose. He knew well enough that he was running the risk of sending the girl to a madhouse. It was therefore necessary to discover some less dangerous method

of correspondence. And Reston Rigg devised one - the most ingenious and at the same time the most humiliating for those concerned that can well be imagined.

I am sure he must have laughed each time that his calculations worked out correctly.

He used me as a post office!

Yes, I, Adrian Ross, who had hated him with an intense hatred from the first moment I set eyes on him, served as the method of communication between him and our poor Jan.

And this was what he imagined.

But I must explain a little. A First Assistant in a Secondary County School is by no means allowed to dress as to him may seem good. A Head Master may scorn the conveniences - that is, if he be an Erasmus Cassells and his fame wide abroad in the land. But it is otherwise with a First Assistant. He must not wear a cap nor yet a soft hat. Hardly in summer, and only in times of sporting, is he allowed to drop to a straw hat. During school hours he is condemned to a bowler hat and a cut-away morning coat. If the latter be edged with broad braid at the edges, so much the better. It is more impressive, and the braid can be changed, when the school chalk and blackboard dust begin to indicate too faithfully the topography of its frays and seams.

So accordingly I possessed a 'school coat.' But equally of course, I kept it wholly for state occasions - that is, for school and for going to see the Rector. It was hung up, stretched on two pegs to preserve (a careful youth!) the square of the shoulders, in the lobby of Miss Sheba's.

Now the pockets of any self-respecting tail-coat are atrophied organs, and no young man of

Longtown taste ever thinks of putting anything in them. Their business is to hang straight and close against the thighs. I am sure that I could not even have found the way into mine. My handkerchief in my sleeve and a slim pocket-book in my left breast-pocket were all I allowed myself in the way of 'school-coat' *impedimenta*.

But yet Miss January Cassells knew the way to these pendent pockets. And it was for this reason that she so kindly and regularly conducted me to her father's door. She slipped a letter within every time, or withdrew a reply - one or the other - sometimes both. Then the letter which she confided to me - innocent post-runner - was withdrawn from its hiding-place as soon as I had hung it up. Mr. Saul Adam attended to this, and in due and quick time conveyed the same to his master. I took down the answer with the coat the next time that I set out for the School House.

The plan worked admirably, and I do not know which to applaud the most, the coolness of all the three engaged in the plot or the surprising innocence of the victim, who at that very moment was most probably occupied in congratulating himself on his cleverness in circumventing all the world.

Indeed, I almost deserved it. I was so desperately sure that none could possibly outwit *me* - and I with a message of Reston Rigg's, or a reply thereto, in my pocket at the moment.

The stray letter which had fallen into Hester's hands was through no failure of the plot, but an after-carelessness of Reston Rigg's. When Miss Sheba would have no more of me, the Forerunner came, as usual, to my new rooms above the dunes -

on his way to Red Bob's - and lo! the message was exchanged as readily as before. I suppose that Reston Rigg had simply commanded his follower to do this secretly while in a hypnotic state. And the Forerunner obeyed with the regularity of a machine and the cunning of a pick-pocket. He was my friend - true, but I do not think he had the least remorse or even sense of shame. His master had bidden him. He only obeyed orders. *That* was what he was *for*.

Indeed, the influence of Reston Rigg had never for a moment left the spirit of Jan Cassells. He played upon it as on an instrument of music. But doubtless, as time went on, the interest of the chase gained upon him. The sense of difficulties to be overcome meant much to such a man. Overcome they should be. He would attend to that.

'She shall be mine if I lose all else!' he wagered with himself. And Reston Rigg was a man to make good such promises.

His complexion of clear olive without a touch of red, his dark hair and heavy moustache, his straight eye-brows almost meeting in the 'bar of jealousy,' the lithe slenderness of his figure, told of Oriental, perhaps of gipsy blood. Many dwellers about Kirk Yetholm would have welcomed him as a true Romany Rye. In nature he was a Bohemian. Money to hoard he valued little. Money to spend, money for display, money to burn if there were no other way of getting rid of it - these were pleasures he tasted and valued. But in the intervals of riches he could be content with burnsidies and plain fare, bare boards and straw beds - so that he had the companion of his temporary choice with him to share his changeful fortunes.

Some such feeling doubtless prompted Reston

Rigg to prefer the caravan among Jimson's pines to the fleshpots of the Crown Hotel, and the incidental adventures of a doubtfully gifted mesmerist to settling down at the house of Forelands, overlooking Rushport harbour, to watch the incoming liners and wait for the succession to his uncle's shoes.

All that was vivid and brilliant with young life in Jan Cassells answered to the appeal of Reston Rigg. Something savage and undisciplined in her blood drew her to him. After that first madness, she somehow quieted to his will. She kept step with him, and in a little she obeyed him as punctually and faithfully as the Forerunner himself.

A strange thing this power of his! After the influence of the first meeting and the casting of the spell – the *comether* of the Irish – Jan Cassells did not pretend even to herself that it was desire for her soul's welfare that drew her to the Mesmerist. She only wanted to obey.

More wonderful still, Hester Vane found excuses for him, and thought that, judged by the ancient Gods of the Balance, his scale of Good would weigh down his Evil.

More, though Reston Rigg was now ready to desert wife (not for the first time in similar circumstances), yet Hester Vane, with something of contempt with which mingled no hatred, would have continued to treat her husband with the same easy toleration she might have felt for a naughty child or some one not wholly responsible.

But in the midst of all the excitement of his meetings, and the concoction of his reports to his patroness in Bournemouth, Reston Rigg continued to perfect the preparation for elopement which ended in the dusk of the big Mercédès car in front of

the little avenue of Lombardy poplars, on which the light of Erasmus Cassells' studious lamp flickered green through its dense shade.

In a flash the girl had hidden herself in the corner, her head veiled in white - looking slender and young in spite of her travelling cloak. In a minute more they were outside speeding into the blank darkness. The hedges whirled back in the glare of their head-lights, each gate a startling wonder; but the girl sat wrapped in her blue cloth mackintosh, lined with red, her features misty and vague under the veils and the shadow of the wide hat-brim.

She had neither moved nor spoken since she had been handed in. And Reston Rigg wisely respected her silence. He asked her once if she was sure she was comfortable, and a second time if he should shut the window on his side.

He noticed that she shrank as far away as possible from him, but that was natural. He had noticed the same before, even when girls had taken the first great step. But he was too experienced to dream of interfering. He could wait. He knew that hasty measures could in no way advance him. His cause was safe whatever happened.

He had indeed got his heart's desire. The girl had committed herself. She had eloped with him from her own father's door.

'It will be to their advantage to say nothing about it,' he meditated. 'That old father will rage about a little, and the sisters will take counsel with young Ross. But nothing will come of it. I am sorry to part with Hester, but that can't be avoided. She helped me, but I told her she was trying to draw the rein too close. Besides, she knows me and she will not

interfere. It would have been difficult to keep up appearances longer, at any rate. I had enough of Longtown and that auctioneer woman!

Then he watched the silent figure in the corner as they slid through a sleeping town, the lights of dim rows of street lamps winking momentarily upon her.

'She is asleep - good,' muttered Reston Rigg. And he slipped a pillow skilfully under her head and steadied her in her place with a heavy cushion placed under her arm. He bade the chauffeur slow, so as to steady the motion of the car. He was now, he thought, far beyond reach of pursuit. There was nothing in Longtown to catch him.

He continued his calculations as to the future. He had five hundred pounds in his pocket and another two hundred in Parr's Cheapside Bank, a nest-egg in case of need. A man could afford to run away with seven hundred pounds. Besides, he could sell the car, and there was no limit to the time two people might be happy upon that amount of money. They might even go to America. That would be safe, and no doubt a rich field, easily worked. He had heard of the prevalence of nerve troubles over there. Then there were the 'matinée girls.' They would go wild over him. No - here he looked across at the slumbering figure - this time he must let 'matinée girls' alone. Such things had always brought difficulties. He had had enough. He was now settled for life. He would have no more changes. Hester too would be happier away from him. Hester had never made him happy, except a little while at first. Neither had she been happy herself.

Moreover, she had lately adopted a sneering tone in their private intercourse that could not but displease him. Not that she had ever failed in her

work at the meetings. No one could have had a readier or more suggestive helper. But most likely he would have to change his methods.

And yet, who knew? Perhaps no word of his doings at Longtown would reach Bournemouth, unless these abominable newspaper men poked their noses in. They could spread things with such terrible quickness. Hester, certainly, would give no information. She would not think of writing to his patroness. It was to the interest of the Cassells family to say nothing. Worse for them if they did. But they would not. Hester -

He paused long, knitting his brows in deep thought. No, she would keep silent. He was sure of it. Hester loved him still - that was the fact. Strange, but in spite of all her hard words and scornful looks, she had done her best to keep Jan Cassells and himself apart. That was her way of loving. She was jealous - poor Hester! Yes, he would miss Hester. She understood him, in spite of her bitter tongue - which, indeed, was mostly his own fault.

But - the figure in the corner. That kindled his heart's beating till his ears began to sing. Jan - Jan Cassells, the bright, the vivid, the brilliant, made after his pattern and moulded according to his will - what a perfect tool - what a wonderful instrument! She had yielded at the first glance of his eyes. And now they were alone - alone for always.

There was no one to hinder. They would never imagine that he had crossed half England in the line of the Roman wall, till, a little beyond Hexham, on the Carbridge track, they had turned southward towards Durham and the London road. If there were any pursuit (and there would be none), it would certainly follow the great Caerketton highway, which

skirts the west coast and bowls easily over the fat levels of the Midlands.

Reston Rigg had resolved that he would sleep not at all that night, and in fact it was long before he closed an eyelid. It might be his last ride in the big Mercédès.

His whole life might be changed. He had left the old Negro at Longtown to bring on the caravan by rail to High Barnet, where on the ancient fair-ground was his ordinary starting-place. But he was still uncertain whether or not he would go on with the work of Mesmeric Evangelist or take to the music-hall stage. Or he might do something in the medium and clairvoyant way - but that, he understood, was ill-paid and unsatisfactory unless a new-comer could introduce some startling novelty. And Reston Rigg was by no means so sure that his power, accustomed to the bright lighting and rising barometer of great meetings, would adapt itself to the dim obscurity and hushed voices of the modern séance.

Still, he was without care, for he never a moment doubted of himself. He was of the breed of big, bold, lusty men, coarse of grain and hewn in the rough, who cannot imagine that they can fail in anything, and in consequence generally do succeed. For the best method of succeeding yet discovered is to be quite sure you are going to.

And as Reston Rigg looked out at the whirling country flinging itself back affrighted, the drone of the Mercédès changed to its uphill stress. Hedges, palings, and the steady green-grey stream of trees merged all at once into stone dykes of flat tabloid limestone. They hopped every moment over little bridges switchbacked above the dry beds of winter

torrents, and presently with a profound sough of thankfulness the Mercédès drew level with the great plateau of the Teesdale Pikes, and from thence ran full south among the peewits and the whaups - not a hedge nor a dyke anywhere, but only the heather growing to the edge of the white highway along whose hard and clean surface they were hurtling Londonwards.

Now and then Reston Rigg could see the pale glint of big, well-engineered culverts, empty at present, but built for the quick rush of red earth and melting snow which gushed from the heights at the appointed season.

He risked awaking his companion in order to think at his ease. He lit an Indian cigar, well steeped in opium, and with his head close to the window abandoned himself to the most wonderful of dreams.

His mind wandered from earth to heaven, always returning to the daintily cloaked figure in the corner, which slept so peacefully. She was his. He had brought her out of it all. Not that he pitied her. He also had given up much for her. They loved each other - at least she, dear little thing, loved him; and he - well, it was new, and novelty ever fired the blood of such a man.

So he dropped his cigar outside and drowsed off presently under the influence of the clean kiss of mountain airs. He could hardly even keep awake to hear the chauffeur refilling the petrol tank. And so to sleep again to the soft beat of perfectly acting cylinders and the smooth rush of racing wheels.

When he awoke late (there had been an extra dose of opium in that Trichy!) it was the rosiest time of the morning. The girl's face was still turned from him, but he could see the tip of a shell-like ear

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illuminated by the red of dawn - her cheek also delicate under the triple veil. Then his companion stirred slightly. She turned towards him.

'Darling,' he said, bending to kiss her, 'wake to our first morning!'

The veils dropped, and he looked into the misty blue eyes of the First Soloist, Hester Vane.

Reston Rigg had run away with his own wife!

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

DAWN AFTER DARKNESS

Yes, and I knew all about it. Oh no, not off my own bat. I did not find it out so. But because Reston Rigg, though cleverer than I - let me freely admit it - was not at all cleverer than the girl who had been so long called Hester Vane, but who was, nevertheless, a daughter of the Manse at Rushport above the steamer-furrowed Firth of Clyde.

Ah, it was a good day when I found the way to Red Rob's and from the breezy sand-dunes, starred yellow with stoncrop and blue with sea-thistle, I saw the languidly graceful figure of my tired angel wending her slow way up to meet me.

I never thought that I or mine could possibly find a way to repay her, but still the way was found - though here again I cannot take the main credit or even any great part of it. Hester Vane was playing double, yet without duplicity. She had discovered the manner in which the correspondence between Jan Cassells and Reston Rigg was being carried on - by way of the tail-pocket of my school coat.

To me she said no word, being fearful that, with less self-restraint than herself, I might betray my knowledge. But without a word to any one she robbed Saul Adam as systematically as he pickpocketed me. His mind, enfeebled by a long course of Reston Rigg, could not resist one whom he knew for Reston Rigg's master. He gave up the letters accordingly, *en route*, and redelivered them only after they had been opened, read, and resealed

by the First Soloist.

'It is for his good,' Hester Vane explained to him. 'You do not want that Saint Anne's trouble to come upon him all over again. And it will, unless you and I take counsel together.'

So they took counsel accordingly, and between them the harmless elopement which I have described (from the notes of the First Soloist) was made a possible thing.

My share was the management of the School House party, and especially of Jan herself.

It was long before June could be brought to see the kind of interest which the First Soloist took in me. She imagined that I was making love to Hester. Indeed, I do not deny that was the version which was current in Longtown, and to which a certain colour was given by my frequent visits to Red Rob's. Mrs. Havens alone could have testified to the reality. Unfortunately, no one thought of asking the fisherman's wife.

But it became necessary, owing to June's aversion to Hester (and also with the faint hope that the revelation might have an effect upon Jan), to tell them that the First Soloist was the daughter of the Bairnly Minister, also that she had so great and long-standing an affection for Reston Rigg that she desired to protect him from the consequences of any hasty folly.

'I knew it,' cried Jan, cutting short my story; 'she has always looked as if she hated me. She wants him for herself. I am certain of it. I always thought so. But she shall not have him He loves me and I love him!'

And she darted furious looks of scorn upon me as a tale-bearer and upon her sister June as an

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encourager of young singers with designs upon Reston Rigg. She went out of the room in a passion, and we were left helplessly looking at one another.

I shall never forget the night of the elopement. In fact nobody will who had anything to do with it. Jan Cassells had been all day in a state bordering on frenzy. I was in classroom No. 4, and thither came both the other girls (for May was now of necessity in the secret), and especially Persilla, to report progress one after the other.

For once I had to be commander-in-chief, for Hester Vane had enough to do at her end of the tangled skein.

'She has got a bag hidden away, and she is putting her bits o' things intil't,' was Persilla's first bulletin. 'Oh, the poor thing! Aye, and to think that not one of them will ever be wanted!'

'They had better not be wanted just now,' I said. 'Remember, Persilla, a great deal depends upon you.'

And indeed a great deal did so depend. For the original missive received by Jan Cassells had made the rendezvous under the trees of Jimson's pines. The car was to start from there immediately after the meeting. But by the advice and assistance of the First Soloist, a message had been sent to Reston Rigg, telling him that Jan could not possibly go so far with her bag, but that if the car waited for her at the end of the poplar avenue, she could slip out and no one would pay the least attention.

Which, indeed, was entirely true.

And so it was carried through. But poor Jan's excitement and her eagerness to get to the pines on any excuse soon became pitiful to see. For of course she was left with the first rendezvous in her mind. We had simply arranged that Reston Rigg was to

elope from the poplar avenue after the close of the meeting. We had received his acquiescence by the hand of the Forerunner. He had (said the note) given the necessary orders, and the Mercédès would be at the end of the avenue, as requested. But (he added) Jan must be most circumspect, so near her own house

This we were resolved that Jan should be.

And for this very purpose we called in the aid of Persilla and her irregulars - or at least of the more trusty and noteworthy of these. From Persilla's point of view it was a good chance to explain away any ill feeling which might have arisen out of my frequent visits to the back door, via the Wynd and the vegetable garden.

So at 8 p.m. this was the position of affairs. Jan was eager for the opening of the meeting in the tent, which, by taking us off, would clear the way for her dash in the direction of the pines, whither Reston Rigg's letter had called her. Reston Rigg, with the First Soloist, was busily arranging the details of the final demonstration of Mesmeric Evangelism in Longtown. The chauffeur was getting the Mercédès ready for her long run, but he saved time enough to come over to the corner of the poplar avenue, where he found a nook in which he could keep station without attracting too much attention. It was one of these oblong indentations which had been used by former stonebreakers, but was now given up to silence, the growth of weeds, and the quiet plays of little girls glad to escape from the turmoil of the neighbouring great playgrounds.

We did not, of course, say anything to the Doctor. He would only have wandered helplessly about, getting in everybody's way, or have become so

aggressively bellicose that not one of our plans could have been properly carried out.

So he remained in his study as usual, his blinds drawn up, his fine student's head bowed over his books - an admirable object-lesson to the inquisitive chauffeur, and to Reston Rigg himself when he came, of the peace and regularity which dwelt within and around the School House.

But by far the most difficult part of our task was the management of Jan. It was here that we had to call upon our reserves in the shape of Persilla's levies. And indeed Persilla helped us nobly.

Butchers' boys and prentices generally were excluded as being too untrustworthy and light-minded for the serious work on hand, and Persilla's choice, after long consideration, fell upon Eben Watson, the Caerketton carrier, a certain 'wiselike' and powerfully built carpenter, and Police Constable McVeagh, who had just got his 'stripe.'

'Handle him?' said Persilla contemptuously, in answer to one of my queries. 'Aye, and three like him. I'm no sayin' that they would handle him what ye might call *gently*. Oh no! The reverse, if onything! But they could heave the 'shuver' and him, aye, and the black man too, in to the tide-water, if ye gied them the word. And then McVeagh wad get a medal and a rise of a shilling a week for saving life. He would haul them out by the hair o' the head, first making them promise not to tell wha it was threw them in. What think ye of that for a plan?'

I represented to Persilla that on the whole she had better not make any plans, but give the word to her forces to obey me. And for the twentieth time I patiently explained to her all that had been arranged between Hester Vane and myself.

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'Oh, I understand,' said Persilla, with an obstinate toss of her head; 'but I'm loath to let him go like that, the scoundrel! A bit pitch into the water would have done him no harm - no, nor that 'shuver' neither. He has not an idea how to speak to a decent lass.'

I replied severely that this certainly was no night for private revenges.

And Persilla, though far from happy that Reston Rigg was getting off so easily, finished by acquiescing.

'Besides,' I added to comfort her, 'are you so very sure that he will get easy off? What would *you* say, if you caught your man running off with another woman, and you had him in that car by himself?'

This was a new light to Persilla.

'Say?' she cried. 'Say? Is it ye'll be asking what I would say? Man, his brother might sup porridge with him out of the same bowl and never ken him, when I had done with him!'

'Well, then,' I retorted, 'you should be satisfied. That is what he will get to-morrow morning if all goes as we expect.'

'I wish I could be sure. Faith, I would be half inclined to run away with him mysel', just to see him properly attended to in the morning. But I'll do as you say and warn the lads.'

So Persilla warned the lads, and indeed they proved most careful and serviceable.

It was about nine when McVeagh, in his official capacity, appeared at the gate of the playground, where Jan had deposited her bag to wait till it was dark enough to be carried to Jimson's pines. He had brought a very frightened old Negro with him.

'Now, Uncle Jim,' he said, 'you see that bag? and

there's a young lady somewhere about, watching it, most likely. Well, understand - you are to carry that bag for the young lady, and she will follow you to the caravan. No harm is intended to your master or to you, if you do just as you are bidden. If not, if you try to cheat by so much as a hair's breadth (McVeagh was proud of this expression), both of you shall have cheap lodgings this night in my lock-up.'

Uncle Jim recognized the voice of authority and promised to do as he was bidden.

'And, mind you,' whispered McVeagh, 'not a word, whoever you may meet. I shall be within a step or two, ready to nab you, if you utter a word, or so muckle as open your lips.'

The threat was a wholly vain one, but to Uncle Jim the silver buttons on Constable McVeagh's coat were arguments more convincing than the wisest words. Though a favourite subject of Reston Rigg's (when not otherwise occupied in the cook-house), Uncle Jim bowed down to the fetish of visible authority, and he would have knelt before Constable McVeagh with pleasure. Besides, his master needed no supper that night. He knew that the Mercédès was ordered, and in his dim, disordered mind he connected the two things together, and took it for granted that the bag contained the provisions for the excursion, since he, the proper cook, had not been ordered to prepare anything. He thought of suggesting that his master liked cold chicken and could not endure hard-boiled eggs. But the hard aligned glitter of silver buttons on McVeagh's coat shut all speech tightly within him.

He picked up the bag and shouldered it. He found it unexpectedly light, and fell a-pondering on what possible provend could weigh so little. He dared not

look behind. There was an ominous silence over the by-street, and the vast playground was a vague, fawn-coloured, empty space behind him. He was a little scared, for McVeagh had suddenly ceased from his side. And at such a moment even a policeman with buttons would have been a comfort. But he tramped forward, his eyes upon the ground, in obedience to orders.

The gate of the playground creaked, and as he glanced half round he saw a shadow which was clearly other than the policeman. It was moving stealthily along in the dusk of the garden wall. He turned automatically into the secluded path which led round the outskirts of the Market Hill. He could see the big tent in full light, and hear the ring of Hester Vane's voice soaring high and triumphant. His companion and he were in deeper shadow now, and as they moved farther away from the neighbourhood of sounds, the tread of police boots grew clear and distinct, and to the simple mind of Uncle Jim made a necessity of virtue. He could not choose but obey.

He found the door at the back of Jimson's auction marts unfastened. He knew he had shut it and that the key was in his pocket. But that night Black Jim walked in the midst of marvels, and one more made little difference.

Jimson's pines sighed forlornly, and above them stood out the chill familiar stars. He placed the bag carefully in the caravan, as he had often done his master's, and as he stood uncertain at the top of the steps a dark shape flitted past him. If he had not heard her voice a few minutes before sounding from the tent, he would have sworn it was the First Soloist.

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But the moment the figure had entered, a strong arm, clad in official blue, shut the door and turned the key in the lock with one movement. A chevroned sleeve appeared alongside his arm and conducted him to his cook-house, where he was put in charge of an unknown man in private clothes, whose orders were to 'knock the nigger down and sit on him if he tries to get away.'

Thus Jan waited alone in the splendid caravan, lost in a happy reverie, for the lover who never came. She could see faintly through the deep shade of the pines the lighted roof of the great tent. It was to her the golden dome of her hopes. It had glowed so always in her dreams, and now - it was to be her life. He had said so - he had promised that she should be his helper - his only helper, companion, friend, wedded wife. There would be no First Soloist ever any more to come between them - a forward, designing, insolent -

But just then the sound of music floated over the wall of the auction marts, parted the green pine-needles, and arrived at Jan's ear, as she sat in the brooding silence of the caravan.

Jan opened a window, for she felt suddenly stifled. Even now that woman was with him. But it would not be for long. He had promised it. She had been useful to him, he explained. It had been a burden laid upon him by his patroness in Bournemouth, that he should use the one talent of Hester Vane's voice in opening his work.

As Jan pushed the window-sill, it struck her that some one moved hastily back into the darkness.

'Jim! Uncle Jim!' she called out, with a quick touch of anxiety in her voice. 'Was that you, Jim?'

In the rear of the cook-house I hastily instructed

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a scared Jim what to say, while Constable McVeagh whispered in his ear a grim 'You had better.'

So at the window from which Jan looked out Uncle Jim appeared, a stewpan in his hand.

'Dearie, it was on'y me, honey - ole Jim, ready to take care of you till Massa comes.'

'Thank you, Jim,' said Jan. 'You are certain that you did not hear anything else?'

'No, honey,' the Negro asserted lugubriously. 'Why, dat's all right, honey.'

And he backed into the darkness, conscious of McVeagh's imminent clutch on his collar. He hated to betray his master, but the Law's majesty, in the person of her officer, was too strong an influence for one who had been born a slave.

So Jan sat waiting within and we watched without. Close beside me was June. I could hear her soft breathing at my elbow. Once or twice when she bent nearer to look in at the window I felt against my shoulder the rise and fall of her bosom. Sort of sacred it was. I think it was fear that made her nestle a little closer to me than she had ever done before. Once she clutched my arm, for Jan had risen and was gazing eagerly over the tree-tops into the dim shadows above the wall, and this was the reason.

The lights of the golden dome on the hill had suddenly begun to go out. Doubtless he would come soon. She could not have much longer to wait. She peered out every way for the lamps of the motor. But naturally she saw only the deep shade of pines, the black needle-sown ground seamed with sandy paths on which the caravan rested, and above the crest of tall trees cutting with their black coronets into the immensity of stars.

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The door of the wood opening from the auction marts was strongly guarded. The carpenter and the carrier, two men of their parts, stood one on either side. They waited tensely silent, while the great meeting ebbed tumultuously away. At that moment all our thoughts were anxious ones. Suppose Reston Rigg were to miss something and return to seek it. All our work would then go for nothing. But no one came near. The First Soloist had broken up the meeting early on purpose. Also she had made things so unpleasant for Reston Rigg that the Mesmerist knew the sooner he could get out of the town the better it would be for him. The angry crowd might well have sacked his camp; indeed, but for the opportune appearance of McVeagh at the gate, some of the rougher lads might have wrought a great deal of mischief.

But we were all waiting one thing definite - the appearance of Persilla.

At last she came flying over the hill - never had she run so quickly.

'They are off!' she panted. 'He handed her in. I saw him. He gave the order to the shuver to go Hexham way. I heard him. And they went off on the wings of the wind. I watched them. Good riddance. Now let's get Miss Jan home before any one knows.'

Ah, there it was at last - the true difficulty, that which none of us had thought of in our eagerness to get Reston Rigg out of the way. *Who should break the news to Jan?*

CHAPTER THIRTY

THE LITTLE MORE AND HOW MUCH IT IS

Yet done it. must be, and the sooner the better.

'Come,' said I to June, who held me tightly by the arm.

'Oh, I dare not. It will kill her,' she murmured.

'Come,' I repeated. 'It is far more cruel to leave her a moment longer like this.' Then suddenly, I shall never quite know why, her arms were about my neck, her lips very near my ear.

'You are braver than I,' she whispered, and I think (but am not sure) that she kissed me. If not, it was I who kissed her, perhaps by way of imparting a little of the courage of which she had spoken. Honestly, I do not know which. At any rate, the thing happened, and in a moment and for ever all was different between us.

There was not much time to appreciate the wonder of the little more which was so much - which was all. For with one hand on June Cassells' shoulder I had already the other on the key in the caravan door. Before me I saw the florid blue and gold of the ornamentation glimmer faintly. One big gilt scroll, with a text upon it, I made out dimly, and for a moment I shuddered.

But I think that text, vaguely seen, somehow strengthened me. To save Jan from such a man - that was worth any possible poignancy of anguish. And indeed, now that the thing had come to this point, the sharper, the more cruel the pang, the better would it be for her. The knife of the surgeon cannot be too well cutlered.

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We went in - I first, June following.

Jan stood up white and indignant. She made that gesture of lifting her hand to her throat which I had learned to know so well. But she did not speak. It fell to me to break the silence, after I had carefully shut the door. I knew that Persilla and her watchers were outside, but far enough away (Persilla would see to that) not to hear anything.

‘Jan,’ I said, ‘you must come home at once. We have come to fetch you -’

‘You - you - you - !’ she panted, all of hatred in her expression that a woman’s eyes can carry. ‘You will not succeed in tearing me away from him now. In a moment he will be here, and then you will see if I am any longer a weak, helpless wretch, such as you and my sisters have made of me these last weeks, spied on, suspected, and imprisoned. He will come and take me away from all of you. He has promised. I have his promise here.’

‘No,’ I answered, judging it best to cut quick and clean; ‘he will not come back - you will never see him again - he has gone -’

‘You lie - you lie!’ she cried fiercely, advancing as if to throw herself upon me. ‘You have done nothing but sit in that classroom and hatch lies. I know you. I know you, Adrian Ross, and I hate you!’

‘No, Jan, I speak the truth. By this time Reston Rigg is twenty miles on his way to Hexham. Persilla saw the motor go off. There was a lady with him - !’

‘Oh,’ she cried, flourishing a letter before our eyes, ‘now I *know* that you lie. I have his word - he promised to meet me here. He called me here. I have come here to meet him - to go away with him for ever - because I love him - because I love to obey him. I have deceived you all, but we love one

another. We are to be married in London.'

'That is impossible,' I said very softly and quietly. 'Reston Rigg has gone away with Hester Vane, and Hester Vane is his wife.'

'Oh, the black lie! I could kill you! Liar! Liar!'

Her teeth snapped and she looked so threatening and dangerous that June stepped in front of me.

'Jan,' she said, 'Adrian does not lie. It is true. The man has been playing with you. Happily we have prevented this thing in time. He is gone away with his wife, and you will never see him again. Come home, and we shall be so happy - happy as in the old days.'

'Oh, lies, - lies - lies! How am I to know what is true? Certainly I cannot believe you. I will not!'

'Perhaps,' said I, taking Hester Vane's marriage certificate out of my pocket-book; 'but this may serve to convince you that we speak the truth.'

I saw Jan grasp it, read it in the glinting of an eye, the sense, as it were, springing to her brain. Then with a quick twitch of nervous fingers she would have torn it in pieces if I had not laid my hand on hers.

'That is useless,' I said. 'Copies can always be had for a shilling or two. They have been married for many years, and now you know what you have escaped.'

Jan stood with the long cheque-like paper in her fingers, as white as any winding-sheet, and then she let it flutter down on the fine Persian rug which covered the floor of the caravan. June and I hastened to support her.

'His wife - his wife - all the time - for years!' she moaned. 'Oh, take me back - quick. He may come at any moment and find me here. Yet I would obey him

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still. But take me home; and oh, take good care of me. Do not let me go till I die - till I die!

And then she added in a hoarse whisper, 'If there be a God, pray to Him to let me die soon. For me, I shall never pray again!'

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

THE SHADOWED VALLEY - AND THE WAY OUT

There was wealth of moments hard and bitter in the days to come. We got Jan safely and secretly home to the old School House, but for long she was a stricken thing. She would sit with her hands limp and frail spread before her on her lap, gazing into the green and russet of the autumn garden. The Virginia creeper made a more and more glorious frame all about her. She sat still - desolate, forlorn, but uncomplaining - at the window of the Flower Parlour.

'I brought it upon myself,' she would say. 'I deserve my curse. I am the shame of my family!'

She had a notion, which no one could eradicate, that the whole of Longtown knew the secret and was mocking her. There was one consolation only. She had lost her old antipathy to me. Why I do not know. It seemed that as soon as the evil influence of Reston Rigg was removed, the feeling that I was her best friend came back to her. She called me 'Adrian' again, as if nothing had happened between us.

After a week of blackest misery she began to come into No. 4 classroom - at first to ask for advice as to books, and then without any excuse at all. Her sisters marvelled at the change. For with them she remained distant and constrained, treating both like strangers, or keeping them at a distance - now with haughty civilities, more often with farouche silences which lasted for days.

But with me it was quite different. I could hardly get time for my studies, and if I had not taken up

the rooms at Red Rob's, vacated by the First Soloist, and arranged with Rob to wake me in the morning when he went to his nets, I should never have got my work done at all. As it was it was ill enough done, and I must have been greatly favoured by fate and examiners to have got through at all.

But I was troubled by the difficulty I had in seeing June alone. She seemed to withdraw herself from me in proportion as the convalescence of Jan affirmed itself.

After a while, as the end of the long vacation came in view, Jan spent nearly the whole of the day under the rolled maps of No. 4. She watched for my comings and, as much as she could, retarded my goings. Yet, so far as I knew, she showed no real affection, nor indeed anything but a constant desire to be with me and an increasing unrest when I happened to be absent or late.

Finally, I entrapped June in the garden, where she had gone to water her plants. For June was by taste and habit the gardener of the family. It was the calm purple close of a day of serene September heat. I found her clad in a short garden dress, her tussore blouse open at the throat, and a white silk handkerchief knotted loosely about her bare neck. Perhaps it was the twilight and the rich sky, perhaps a glamour in my eyes, but certain it is that I saw a kind of golden halo all about her - emanating from her skin, her hair, and the curves of her lithe young body.

I told her of it. Because an observation like this should never be kept to oneself. But June did not even smile. Nor did she glance upward, as she would have done even in the worst days of the trouble.

I could not understand it. Surely June could not

be angry with me. Accordingly I asked what was the matter, and why she was so markedly avoiding me. Had I done anything? Surely there must be a misunderstanding somewhere.

‘Come with me to the field and help to gather potatoes,’ she said unexpectedly. But she did not answer my question. Only after a while she relented, and as I bent gathering the egg-shaped tubers (richly golden they also), shaking them from the fibrous roots, she leaned upon her fork (*grape* is the word) and laid her hand sadly and gently upon my head.

I was on my feet in a moment, my eyes tingling with the smart of tears, and I held out my arms to take her within them, thinking all was well. But she kept the tall handle of the grape between us and smiled upon me pensively.

‘No,’ she murmured, eluding me. ‘Do you not see that there are higher things - than - to do what one wishes?’

‘But,’ I said, ‘surely you have not forgotten the night we stood outside the caravan under the pines - before we two went in to - speak to Jan?’

‘I have not forgotten,’ she answered, her voice suddenly unsteady, but clasping her fingers the more nervously about the handle of her grape.

‘All the more reason,’ she repeated, ‘if we were foolish once, that we should not be foolish again - foolish, yes, and selfish.’

Now I knew very well that a girl the day after - sometimes the hour after - she has betrayed her feelings attempts to retake the citadel of her pride or of her self-respect, by denying her deed and especially the permissions recently accorded by her heart. But I felt that this was something more than

the usual recoil-crisis, the necessary vengeance which the miserly head takes upon the lavish heart.

With such a girl as June Cassells, I could not count on any gradual and normal return to the state of feeling which had drawn her to lay her lips on mine, or in the other case to permit mine to find hers. Not that she denied or tried to attenuate - which is generally a woman's way. She did not even *ignore*, which is more femininely universal still.

Such things had been, but - they must not be again. That was her position. 'We were surprised,' she said; 'our own emotions mastered us. But now we know better -'

'I do *not* know better,' I asserted. 'I do not want to know better. I shall never know better.'

She gazed at me with a grave fixity which somehow made me feel surprisingly young and immature.

'Then I shall teach you,' she said firmly.

We went silently out of the tall green-grown skirts of the potato field, where the stalks of the later varieties were still white and purple with blossom - fading a little truly, but now freshened by the dew and rich lake hues of evening.

'You have nothing else to say to me?' I asked her. 'Remember, we have been good friends, June, you and I; and because we have succeeded beyond hope, that is no reason for giving up your friend.'

Some emotion caught her suddenly, and even in the twilight I could see her full lips quiver. She was carrying one of the light baskets heaped high with the beautiful straw-coloured roots. She rested it on the top of the gate-post, automatically dusted her shoulder, and leaned her elbow upon it, the attitude bringing out all her young vigour, as well as those

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gracious curves and contours by which womanhood signalizes its coming victory over girlhood.

June Cassells was younger than I, but I saw with a pang of jealousy that she was ripening infinitely faster into a full and fragrant maturity.

It was inquieting to stand near her, such a fragrance of sweet graciousness disengaged itself from her. Indeed, all her person was still glowing and radiating with the easy joy of the field-work in which she delighted I watched, with a certain faintness about the heart, the quick rise and fall of her throat, and as I looked a sudden strong thrill of longing came upon me.

I could not resist saying a trifle hoarsely, 'Oh, June, I love you. Remember that. I may be foolish, but I cannot forget. You would not wish me to forget.'

She looked at me calmly, straight in the eyes, and bent her pure graceful head a little towards me reassuringly.

'I do not ask you to forget - though that were better,' she said calmly; 'nor do I say that I myself forget. But it were better for both of us if we did.'

'And will you tell me why, June?'

'*For Jan's sake!*' she said, very low.

I started. I seemed to touch another and deeper abyss of tenderness and desirableness in the heart of June Cassells. But fear took hold of me also.

She was not looking at me now, but at the stars which were beginning to look down upon the high school gables and the brick walls of the playing-grounds. I will not deny that as she stood thus thoughts of embracing were in my mind - as indeed they ought to have been in the mind of every clean, healthy young man standing thus alone before his

peeress. My right arm stole out towards her. In another moment I would have committed the capital sin in the eyes of June Cassells - that of not understanding her. (I know not why girls should so determinedly demand of men that they should understand them. They so seldom understand themselves.)

However, this time I escaped the danger, though, as it were, by a hairbreath. To evade temptation I stood a little farther off, in the cool dewy silence, and I admired merely - a poor and paltry substitute.

'It is because of Jan,' she forced herself to say.

'Why because of Jan?'

She regarded me with pity and the contempt which the wisest of men sometimes surprises in the eyes of his women folks.

'Do you not see,' she went on, 'that it is only with you that Jan is happy - only with you that she is herself? She treats all the rest of us as in the days which we thought past. Well, Adrian, you remember what we promised, you and I?'

'No, I don't,' I denied sullenly. For I saw suddenly whither she was taking me, and I did not want to be so driven.

'We promised to do anything - to suffer anything - to give up everything for Jan. At least' (she added) 'that is how I understood it.'

'Not so!' I broke in furiously. 'Since then you have taught me to love you. You have made yourself all to me, June Cassells. You have given me a right upon you that no other man can ever take away -'

'There is no other man,' she said. 'There will be no other man.'

'That is small comfort, if I am not to have you!' I spurted the words fiercely. 'Besides, how am I to be

sure of that?’

She moved uneasily, and I think she was mastering herself.

‘It was Jan you first loved,’ she said persuasively. ‘It will not be hard *for a man* to - to go back - even though he may fancy - fancy - ’

‘Fancy!’ I burst out. ‘I do not “fancy.” I know. You have taken all my heart against my will - against my thought - against - ’

‘But it was Jan’s. You admit it.’

‘It was not Jan’s!’ I cried. ‘I admired her, it is true. I was charmed by her brightness. She was dark and I fair, and what more natural -!’

‘There you are,’ she cried, with a light laugh that sounded false. ‘You will not find it very hard to go back a little and take the other path - the one you trod before. Besides, you *must*, if you are to remain my friend. Look here, I have to be the head of this house for reasons which I do not need to expose to you. Well, I went to our old doctor friend, Sir Waldemar Russell, of Edinburgh. He has spent all his life reading the minds and hearts of women, and he knows better than any how closely body and soul are connected with us. Men are built, he says, in watertight compartments. Brain and sense, body and soul are shut off the one from the other - that is, they can be. But it is otherwise with us. I told him all about Jan. That was where I went on Sunday. He is staying at the Lochaffleck Hotel for the fishing.

‘I will tell you all,’ she continued. There was a pause. ‘This is what he said. Listen, Adrian. If *you* will not help us, she will die, and I - well, I do not know that I shall die, but I shall surely never be friends with the man who in the hour of need

refused his help. Yes, I know it is a great deal to ask. But the thing cannot be disagreeable to you after what I have seen. After all, I was only your second thought - she was your first; and at any rate hear what Sir Waldemar said after he had lunched with us on Monday and talked long with her.

“Your sister” (he said) “is probably on the way to be cured; but she is not yet out of the wood. Her resentment against her family, covert as it is, shows this. But the young man - your friend - of whom you tell me such excellent things, he can probably save her. She appears to have transferred to him, probably unconsciously, something of her clinging affection for the other. No, hypnotism has nothing to do with it now. But her mind is greatly weakened, and as a climbing plant from which a support has been rudely snatched away stretches out for the nearest stay, she has taken this young man for hers. Most likely she confounds them already. And it would be highly dangerous to undeceive her. Let the process go on till transference is complete.”

Then he asked me many questions about you and about her - if you would be willing to - to marry? If you would be able? And when I told him that Jan had a little money of her own, and so that you could afford to - please yourselves, he clapped his hands and stood up to say good-bye.

“Then let them be married as soon as possible,” he said. “Encourage them - give them chances to make their arrangements. Marriage is the great cure-all for such as your sister. And the sooner the better. That alone will clean the slate.”

‘And as he was going away he took me aside, and said very earnestly, “Above all, give them plenty of opportunities to fall as deeply in love with each other

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as possible.”

‘And that,’ said June, shouldering her burden with one strong, easy gesture, ‘is what I have done.’

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

I CONSULT THE ORACLE

I went up to Lochaffleck Hotel myself on Saturday. It was a mere 'cast,' as they say in Cheviotshire, on my cycle, though the last part of the road curves and climbs so steeply as to be almost impossible to ride.

I was determined to find out from the lips of Sir Waldemar himself what I ought to do. The great man proved unexpectedly shy. No one about the hotel, neither the busy landlady, nor the indolent waiter, nor the half-dozen miscellaneous children, could give me any clue to the whereabouts of the specialist. As usual, he 'just went off, saying nothing to nobody' - except, I presume, to enjoin all and sundry to hold their tongues.

So, having said everything I could think of to everybody who would listen (Lochaffleck is a place which encourages little speech), I had to adventure myself into the unknown in search of the great man.

The sole item of interest, gleaned from the smallest of the small boys (in return for a penny), was that 'he couldna be a very braw fisher, for he aye brought hame his basket as he took it away!'

'Ye are a liar, Rudie,' contradicted a slightly elder brother fraternally. 'He tak's it away half full of sangwitchers and stuff to drink, and he brings it back with not a think intil't but crumbs! More than that, ye mind what mother said! Ye'll catch it, my lad!

From this I had a fancy that the erring Rudie

would not long be left in undisturbed possession of his penny. Discipline and 'what mither said' would despoil him.

For he had evidently been cautioned to know nothing about the movements of this pillar of the hotel, who (sole and only) had a private parlour and 'took his meals apart.'

I judged, however, that Sir Waldemar used his fishing as a shield for a well-earned and unlimited idleness. He would and did avoid the loch, which lay before me peaty yellow in the shallows and deep black in the depths. Boats were being rowed there with rods projecting over their sterns. Heavy barges of local make moved slowly up and down, trawling for the spiky perch, the shy bandit jack, and certain all-but-extinct loch-trout. Surely no more peaceful method of sport could have been devised, but Sir Waldemar was not on the loch. He never went that way - Rudie had remarked as much at first sight of the penny which was to bring trouble upon him.

Which way, then? Rudie's mouth was closed. I had only myself to depend upon.

I tried to think. Supposing I had been a great surgeon of souls, fatigued with the unceasing burden of a thousand cases, what should I have done at Lochaffleck? Naturally I should have sought the most sheltered, the woodiest, the shadiest spot within miles. And thither I should have hied me. Arrived, I should have cast aside my rod and basket, and stretched me on a suitable sod, put my hands beneath my head, and looked up through the leaves at the blue sky. What if, after all, Sir Waldemar were moved by the instincts of a tired First Assistant!

Accordingly I climbed a little heathery mound, hardly a hill, close to the hotel, and thence I marked

down one by one all the likely spots where shade would tempt the intentionally and, as one might say, scientifically idle.

One in especial, a little rivulet of feathery birches that serpented up the bed of a hill-side burn, attracted me. So cool it looked, green and delicate on the face of brown, purple, and black expanse. But I caught sight of the burn which ought to have run through them - the water-course dried to an empty track of grey stones, the very pool's with scarce a gleam of water in them, and everywhere, even under the sparse foliage, the heat quaking and quivering up from the bare Silurian rocks, tinged only with arid yellow 'corklit,' the sole lichen that will condescend to clothe those barren clints.

No, it could not be there. I looked across the loch, where was a great moss, with plenty of moisture glimmering steamily in the sun. But there were unhealthy, arsenical green patches everywhere. Bluish scum covered the glairy stretches. Not here would one seek for Sir Waldemar. There were mineral springs there, bursting bubbles out of the peat that sent up unholy smells; and yet farther afield 'quakkin-quaas,' over which danced nightly the will-o'-the-wisp - enough and to spare of folklore and of scientific interest, but a place to be avoided by one who came to Lochaffleck for rest of mind and health of body.

I spied farther, and lo! on the utmost verge of the horizon, where the Affleck Water comes leaping down through the Nick of Benerick, I became aware of a cluster of tall Scotch firs. Of course, I could only see the tips dark green against the sky. Then others appeared to come stalking over in companies and sections, till a certain bend or loop in the water

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gathered them close about it like people standing on tiptoe to look at a street accident. There, for a wager, was my man.

I set out across the moor. About the hotel there was a little breeze of life. On the loch I could hear people talking, as if in their sleep. But once out of sight of these, all was still, with the stillness of a Scottish manse on Sabbath morning in summer-time, when even the poultry lay eggs without superfluous and un-Mosaic cackling.

The sun was shining as if for the first time, but without oppressive heat - a temperate, respectful sun, withdrawn (it too) into a kind of September meditation.

Now there is religion in the very air of Scotland - that is, in all its lonesome places. It breathes in the wind that passes over the graves of the martyrs. Sanctuaries and kirkyards and the pale lavender heather of the shaggy hills are surcharged with it. The wind brings it right to the High Streets of towns, and (except where many motors pass) the streets of villages breathe of it. It is a religion of no particular creed. Confessions have nothing to do with it. I have even scented something Pictish and aboriginal in it, which I have afterwards traced to the good smell of wet bog-myrtle. Specially towards the evening of a stormy day have I been conscious of this. Then the night winds brought me news that I too was kin to the little people who of old lurked unseen in the heather or 'gall bushes' by day, and only in the night season, when the sentries were drowsiest, herded swiftly together, and (just for one time more) drove like a torrent at the Roman Wall.

As I expected, I found him in a little ferny cleuch, which I reached after toiling long through the waist-

deep heather of the Loch Affleck moors. All that high world was a lucent purple-grey, but very clear, as if the dew of evening were already abroad. Only in the extreme distance could I see any signs of life. The hotel was sunk deep in its hollow. The loch had retired behind its willows, and only on the verge of things a little herd's cottage presented a reeking 'lum,' where some decent man's dinner was cooking, the fire of dry bog-oak licking blithely up the wide chimney, and the pale blue smoke, fine as gossamer, rising straight up into a yet bluer heaven.

Sir Waldemar was lying face-down on the heaped pine-needles. He had stretched out a 'Just-What's-Wanted' patent foldable mackintosh rug under him, and with his feet waving in the air like those of a studious schoolboy, his clean-shaven, youthful face set comfortably in his palms, and only the silver-grey of his head to tell his age, he was deep in a novel and chuckling to himself as he read.

At a slight crackling of the underbrush he sat up and regarded me with no very friendly eye. However, he nodded and went on with his book in a slightly more restrained position. I think he took me for a moorland stroller (a rare bird at that time and in that place), and hoped that I would continue my wanderings and leave him in peace.

But when I had stood before him, hat in hand, declaring my mission, I could see the annoyance pass from his face. Sitting up, he drew on his boots with the greatest calmness and attention to detail, but I could see the boyish aspect pass from his features as he took in my purpose.

'Yes,' he said at last, 'I have heard of you, young man. So you are interested in the daughters of my old friend and college tutor, Erasmus Cassells. Well,

I don't wonder, after what I have seen. I am the last to blame you, though I have seen so many such troubles that I have stayed a bachelor all my life.'

Then after another pause he suddenly shot a question at me: 'In which of them are you most interested?'

I could feel his keen cross-examining eyes upon me, not sternly, but, as it were, irresistibly drawing the truth from me.

'In Miss June,' I admitted shamefacedly. For though a Senior Assistant, I felt like a schoolboy at his first Oral before this man.

'Ah, he said like one checking a mental note. 'Yes, exactly.'

And I wondered how he had thought so before and what had led him so to think. Nothing that I had said, I was sure of that.

Presently Sir Waldemar stood up and leaned against a tree.

'Tell it all over again to me from your point of view,' he said - or rather he commanded.

So obediently I told him of our happy walks before our old world went to pieces with the advent of the mesmeric mischief-maker.

Once only he looked as if he were going to put a question. That was when I told him of Jan's running on ahead every night when we got to the first view of the Dutchman's Lake down in the woods of the Isle. But his firm, immutable lips lay only the closer one upon the other. He nodded to bid me go on. I told him of Reston Rigg's influence, and in a moment I saw that he understood. Who, indeed, should understand if not he?

'Such men are unconscious criminals with a base of lunacy,' defined Sir Waldemar. 'I am not sure

whether your particular specimen ought to be in prison or in an asylum under my care.'

'I should prefer the former, sir,' I said

'Of that I make no doubt; but go on - you interest me.'

After I had finished he put to me some of the most strange and unexpected questions. Among other, I remember that he asked me if Jan had ever called me by any other name than my own. I answered that since she resumed her friendship with me she did not call me anything except 'Adrian,' but that one day -

'She called you "Reston" by mistake,' he interrupted.

'Yes,' I cried, in utmost astonishment; 'but how did you know that? I never told any one - not even June.'

Sir Waldemar smiled.

'Each man to his own trade,' he said. And then he went and strolled among the pines a good hundred yards away.

I was left alone with the deep hush of the afternoon.

Beneath my eyes, as I looked through the trees, spread out the purple magnificence of half a dozen leagues of heather lands. The moor-birds were silent after their burst of nesting gladness. Only the sheep called to each other very far away, a wistful, almost intelligent sound, as though one were dreaming half awake, lingering on some delicious confine of sleep. Nearer there was only the cool gush of the waterfall in the Nick of Benerick, where the Affleck Water flings itself southward in a spout of chocolate foam.

But chiefly I followed the footsteps of the great doctor, as he made up his mind concerning our

three lives. And I sat there and watched him, not with any great fear - I will not pretend that - but with the confidence that he would see to the bottom of the difficulties which so puzzled me.

At last he appeared to have taken a decision. He came quickly back and installed himself on the grass beside me, leaning forward with the palm of one hand laid fraternally on my knee. The mere touch somehow gave confidence, and for one instant I felt sweep over me a wild and foolish desire to break out into childish protestations of gratitude that he should be so kind to me. This was quite another sort of mesmerism - that of kindly forethought and the bearing of one another's burdens.

'So Far as I can see,' began the calm, wise, friendly voice, speaking as if close to my ear, 'the situation is this. You began by feeling a preference for January Cassells. You may or you may not have allowed that preference to be visible. Not consciously, you say. Very well, I am sure you speak the truth. But then, girls are so quick at perceiving such preferences. Yes, sometimes they do imagine them. But that, I fear, makes no difference.

'Next, during the constant assistance which you were called upon to render the Cassells family, in order to rid January of this nightmare, you were naturally thrown a great deal with Miss June. An approachment of your spirits followed. Your hearts became engaged. All at once you became conscious that you were in love with her, and if I mistake not, she with you.'

I fear that at this moment I showed an unbecoming and unworthy exaltation, but Sir Waldemar quenched my triumph in a moment,

'No,' he said, 'you mistake. I guess your thought. But it was nothing that the young lady said which led me to form this conclusion - indeed, rather the reverse. She did not seem to consider you at all in the matter. On the surface of things, she appeared to have a grudge against you. But I do not habitually regard the surface of things, and I judge the matter to be as I have said. Briefly you two were, or fancied you were in love with each other. You had better tell me how far you have gone with her.'

It was hard, but I told him faithfully - for doctors are the real modern confessors - what had happened the night under Jimson's pines before we two went in to break to Jan the news of Reston Rigg's flight with his own wife.

'And that is all?' he asked pointedly.

'That is all,' I affirmed with quite as much definiteness.

'Very well,' he said, after the slightest pause, during which he looked me squarely in the eyes; 'the matter seems clear - save, that is, for the complication of your former advances to January -'

I muttered something vague in protest.

Sir Waldemar held up his hand, gently commanding silence, but commanding all the same.

'Oh, I do not say that there was anything definite - anything that you have not confided to me. But, at any rate, you let something appear to January. Her special dislike to you during the Reston Rigg madness proves it. There is also, first, her brusque revulsion of feeling in admitting you, and you alone of all her family, to your ancient intimacy. More than that, she has evidently transferred to you a great part (if not all that was personal) of the affection she

had for that scoundrel - I mean the part that did not come from the exercise of his hypnotic gift.

'Now, sir, you want my opinion. You can follow it if you think fit. If not you must take the responsibility of rejecting my advice. But now and here, as man to man, I will, if you so decide, speak my mind and deliver my own responsibility. Possibly I shall give you pain. Certainly what I have to say will lay a good deal of responsibility upon you. Now, if you do not wish to pledge yourself one way or the other - if you want to be free to follow the dictates of your own desires - well, yonder lies the road over the heather. Leave me with my book and my pipe. Now you are free to go - free to do as you like in the matter. But after I have spoken, I shall hold you not free, but morally responsible. For then you shall know as much as I know myself.'

'Speak, Sir Waldemar,' I said. 'I accept everything beforehand. I will loyally obey you. It was for that I came so far to see you.'

'Obedience? No; acquiescence is all I have a right to expect. That, and the subordination of the lower to the higher need. Mr. Ross, you are young; you are (it is no fault!) somewhat impetuous. Think again before I speak. Do not let me surprise you into a promise you may desire to be quit of.'

I stayed still and awaited with some fear, I do allow, his next words. And they were these, spoken gently

'Then, sir,' he said, 'I count it your duty to accept and follow up such opportunities as January Cassells may give you. I do not say "make love to the young lady." That would be cruel - and probably unnecessary. But accept all that she expects from you as your duty. Respond to her advances. Let her

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never feel herself rebuffed. If not your own fault - I do not say that there is any fault - it is at least the natural consequence of your previous attitude. Thus only will the Reston Rigg episode be wiped out. Unconsciously the old will be grafted on the new. The young blooms will be all the better, I promise you. And thus in doing your duty you will find one part of your reward. The other part you will receive in the certainty that you are saving an innocent girl, perhaps from suicide, and certainly from complete mental derangement.'

He bade me good-bye, without more words. My heart was too full to speak. To thank him was impossible, but I fully recognized the clearness of his reasoning. He was right, so right that he did not seem to expect any answer.

But while Sir Waldemar accompanied me to the edge of the wood, like a man doing the honours of his private dwelling, my heart was crying out in mad protest, 'But what of June - what of June - my June - my very own June?'

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CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

ONE NIGHT - BUT ONE

June was waiting for me when I got back. I felt certain that she would be. She had drawn her own conclusions from my absence out of No. 4 classroom, and in addition had delegated Persilla to make enquiry from Mrs. Havens. I had gone early, Red Rob's wife could not tell where; but I had taken my cycle with me.

As June had told me of her interview with Sir Waldemar, she was quickly convinced that I had gone off to have a second on my own account.

We met in our usual trysting-place, the sheltered, hard-beaten, high-walled bounds of the little boys' playground. I entered, as always, by the big iron gates, of which I carried the key, she through the high French window of No. 4 classroom. She came straight forward, with that air of prompt decision which set on her so well, towards the playing-sheds where I sat waiting. I met her under the pent and took both her hands in mine.

There was enough of agony, perhaps something too of renunciation, in the action, for June to permit it without a word.

'He has told you,' she divined.

I kept silence, but the pressure of my hands assured her. She knew my heart's bitterness now. It was the equal of her own. She knew too that I was determined to make the sacrifice, and that after rebellions, protests, sullens, fierce battlings against fate, I would yet give up everything to save Jan.

Her own woman's heart was already dressed for

the torture. She could not, it was true, withdraw a jot of her love from me. Of that I felt assured. She would not marry another. But that I should wed Jan, and so save her from all the horrors that Sir Waldemar foretold, appeared to her a necessity.

She was the elder and it was her right to give up.

But this night, before I had spoken to Jan or plighted my troth, June Cassells considered as her own. She had even made a little addition of pale blue neck-ribbons to her usually simple tussore blouse and skirt. She had taken pains also with her hair. Altogether I never saw her look more lovely. Her eyes were deep, dewy, tender, with a little spark of light in them, as if they reflected Jupiter - now in September sagging slowly southward and waning as he fell.

She drew me down beside her on the seat. The high black-windowed walls of the school rose staidly all about us, shutting us off from the world. She took my head between her soft arms, and whispered between her kisses, 'Thank you, dear - thank you! I knew! Thank you for Jan' And I was less surprised than one might think. It seemed somehow natural.

After that we were very quiet a space, so that we could hear the beating of our hearts, smothered and dull, in the warm dusk of the falling dew.

'This is our one night,' she whispered; 'our little solitary one night before we have to give each other up. Oh, I will not pretend it does not hurt, Adrian. It hurts more than death to give you up - though it is for Jan's sake. But I am glad you loved me - glad to let you see and know I love you, so that you will not forget - not afterwards or ever.'

She tightened her arms about my shoulders and laid her soft cheek against mine, confidently,

unreservedly. And all along my side I felt the wondrous pliant warmth of her body - mine just for this one night.

'We are not doing Jan any wrong by loving one another,' she said presently, as if arguing the case with herself. 'You are not hers yet - no, not yet. There will be the days and the nights and the weeks and the years, always till the end, when you will be a good and true man to her, and I will be a true sister, and nothing more - as a sister ought to be - to you both. But just for to-night you are not hers. You are mine. You never were hers, were you, Adrian? Sir Waldemar was wrong there - tell me that he was. He was right in all the rest. But wrong - oh, so wrong in that. You never loved any but me, and you did not even tell me of it till I made you. Yes, I ought to be ashamed - only I have not time to be ashamed - the hours will pass so rapidly, and the day will wake that is to separate us. But I am glad I kissed you first that night - '

'No, June; no,' I answered. 'It was I, dearest, who kissed you.' (I said it, I asserted it, though even yet I am far from sure.)

Then June Cassells startled me by one of her strange questions.

Did he bid you make love to Jan?'

I told her 'No' - that he thought it would not be necessary. I was only to accept the consequences of the situation and "do my best - "

'Do your best? What best?'

My best to keep Jan out of the madhouse.' I thought it well to put what Sir Waldemar had said strongly.

June shivered in my arms, and then clung to me convulsively.

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'Oh, no - no! Not that!' she moaned, thrusting hard against me as one half asleep may try to push away a nightmare.

'Yes, June,' I said gently, drawing her closer to me till her arms and wrists grew limp again. 'He demanded this sacrifice to preserve Jan from that.'

'Because she had loved you first?'

'Not at all - because she had passed on to me the feeling she had in her soul for Reston Rigg. Sometimes she thinks even yet that I am that man.'

'And you let her? Oh, shame!'

'Sir Waldemar bade me. Otherwise, he said that if suddenly awakened to the reality, he would call me responsible for her reason or even her life.'

'Her life. Did he mean that she *might* - '

'Yes, he meant that.'

'Oh - God - God, help me!' 'She moaned the words. 'Then you must be married soon - soon,' she repeated, with more firmness. 'Yes, it must be at once. I had thought that - that there was no need for haste; that things might just linger on the same way; and that perhaps - perhaps - Jan might be cured without that - without your marrying.'

With the curiously clairvoyant stupidity of a man, I could only think of holding June closer to me in the dusk of the playing-shelter, till she sobbed more quietly and presently ceased altogether. As she gave way and laid her face down, my lips tasted her tears. Then all suddenly it seemed if I did not do something the cord would break, and we might shut ourselves off from the power of helping Jan for ever.

If we loved each other, and told one another how much, the tide might rise so high as to sweep us away from Jan, her needs and her misfortunes. In my heart I knew that these hours in the bare

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majestic dusk of the old School House, safe-walled and silent, only the stars and the bats intruding upon us, were not wise. But then, both of us needed something to give us strength to do our duty. It would not be long, and I, no more than June, could forgo the one night that was ours.

June sat down, lover-fashion, her face close to mine. She dried her tears on my handkerchief, which she sought for herself in my breast-pocket with a dear familiarity that went to my heart, because it showed me how much I was giving up. I had the instinct, too, that after all we deserved some compensation for our unselfishness; also that if we did not take our reward now, we might never have the right again.

June had somewhat the same feeling, for she smiled up at me mistily, the pale flame of Jupiter still in her wet eyes, and, cradled in my arms, she whispered, 'I will not be your sister till to-morrow. To-night I will be your love.'

So all that glorious night, till the pale citron began to come up out of the east, we two clung together and whispered - century-old whisperings, which doubtless Adam and Eve said low to each other, the night before the Eden expulsion and that forbidden gate for ever guarded by the flaming sword.

What we said - and how, and why, and when - shall not be written here. There are few who, looking back, do not know.

And if any such there be, then God pity them.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

THE BITTER MORROW

The opium was still rancid in Reston Rigg's mouth, his eyes bloodshot, and his face moist with perspiration and bleached with the suddenness with which he was called upon to meet the most unexpected crisis of his life.

The Mercédès was now turned away from the sunrise. The chauffeur had received his orders, and the car was running smoothly northward and westward through the high green central valleys, making a clean furrow towards Rushport and the green circle of hills that looks toward the Atlantic.

'Hester - *you!*' was all that Reston Rigg could say. The First Soloist nodded in the most matter-of-fact way. She had much to say, and knew better than to storm at him.

'We are going to visit your Uncle Harold,' she said. 'I thought of it last night. It is long since we have seen him, and - I like him.'

Reston Rigg remained obstinately silent. His grim face, carved in granite for all the world, had now taken on the expression of a naughty boy caught in the apple orchard by a severe mother.

'Yes,' he spoke at last, after a long pause, 'I suppose we should go and see Uncle Harold -'

And he was silent, wondering whether the matter was to blow over like this, yet instinctively guarding himself from saying the word which might bring on his head the torrent of reproach which he knew to be his due. He had not in the least forgotten Jan

Cassells, but in the first moment of surprise, he had the power, which only comes to habitually dishonest men, to guard himself from confession.

'*N'avouez jamais!*' the famous scaffold saying of the terrible French butcher Avenain, was an excellent motto. So Reston Rigg was silent and waited the mood of his wife. In his heart he was frightened, but he kept, in spite of the papery pallor of his cheeks, a front of brass and the levelled eyes of firm determination.

Though Hester had no idea of sparing Reston Rigg, she was quieter than he, of quite another nature, and her faintest whisper had more of will-power in it - so far, at least, as *he* was concerned - than that strong, far-echoing voice of his, no matter how masterfully it fell upon her ear.

Hester had long ago fought her battle. Reston, when brought face to face with her, capitulated at once - without the honours of war. In any serious conflict he knew himself beaten in advance.

'Reston,' she said very quietly, her clear tones level and a little expressionless - speaking in what the French call a "white voice" - 'there had to be an end to all this, and the end has come *now!* You have played a game and you have lost - as you ought to have known that you would lose - because you played against me. I have forgiven you before - to the verges of life and death - to the breaking of the springs of life within me, *but* - I forgave you. I forgave, to that final limit which hardly any woman can reach - I also *forgot*. Nothing since has been as bad. I have been numbed as to my own soul, my heart was seared, but when you were in danger I have always been able to intervene. This time it was the merest chance that I have been able to save you.

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'But, as I say, it is the last - your last ride in this car. Richards will take it back to Bournemouth, where it and he belong. The last of the great tent, and the last of the caravan! I have left word that they shall be sold. The last meeting - Reston Rigg's last Mesmeric Mission. Finished - ended! Full stop and colophon! No more of this for ever and ever.

When the devil struggles within you, I shall be there to fight him. For the second and the harder time I have left my father to follow you. Because this time *I know you, Reston!* And I know what you meant to do. You meant to desert me - with a little reluctance, perhaps - with a little sorrow, possibly, because I have been useful to you, and in a way necessary.

'But the girl whom you thought to have carried off - did you think of her at all? Did you dare to say to yourself that you loved her? Do you venture in some cobwebby corner of your heart to think so still?

'If you do, undeceive yourself. My dear husband, never all your life have you loved anybody but yourself - never thought or cared for anything but your own great, strenuous, selfish, exacting body. But that too is finished. I shall see to it that poor Jan Cassells is not left in ignorance - '

'Oh no,' cried Reston Rigg, suddenly stung to speech; 'not that. Anything for myself, but as to that I know better than you. If she guards the memory and can think of me kindly, she will live, and another love, worthier than mine, may in time take the place of - '

'I dare you to say it, Reston Rigg,' said Hester sharply. 'Of what I would have given her! Say it! Say it!'

His eyes sank before hers as she bent forward,

dominating him. He only completed his sentence lamely with, 'the happiness of which she had dreamed.'

'Ah,' said Hester Vane, sinking back with her usual air of contemptuous languor. 'That is well! And as for January Cassells, I have in my heart a far greater pity for her than ever you could have. You knew well to what you were taking her - to give her three weeks of the same false paradise which long ago a foolish minister's daughter tasted. But then - what would have come after? I can tell you, Reston Rigg, if you dare not answer.

'You would have deserted her, even as, both now and before, you would have deserted me - if I had not been of those who set their talons in deep. I will not let you go, Reston Rigg. I will keep you in spite of yourself. There is something in you that is not evil, and that I mean to bring out. I know not how, but with the help of that God whose name and power you have taken in vain so long, I, your wife, mean to bring out that latent good.'

* * * * *

It was afternoon when, across the green heights of Carrick, they saw the blue splintered sierras of Arran, the strange cone of Ailsa, and the shining levels of the great firth, calm in spite of the hither-and-thither of its thousand vessels.

And yonder to the left was the little green hollow into which the Rushport road dived, and presently, the Mercédès sticking her nose over, they saw the new road, still red and freshly steam-rolled, which Mr. Harold Kingsman had made to his house of Forelands.

Hester took her husband's money, paid the

chauffeur, swiftly calculating journey expenses and the stages necessary to go to the south of England, settled for these, and to the amazement of the man, bade him return himself forthwith to Bournemouth and report the car and himself to Reston Rigg's lady patroness. A letter would follow - that was all the message, all except that Mr. Rigg was too ill to continue his mission, and - that his wife was taking care of him in his uncle's house.

The chauffeur took one look at this beautiful but eccentric house, built without the least regard to modern needs, such as garages and car-tanks. Then he shook his head, and betook himself philosophically down to the little town lying along the sea-edge. And at Rushport he learned a great deal about Mr. Harold Kingsman, but nobody in the Rushport motor world even knew that he had a nephew, much less a niece. Moreover, nobody cared. They were willing to sell him petrol, however, and as he turned his back on the steely firth furrowed with keels and ring-streaked with flaws and wind-flurries, he muttered to himself:

'After all, I shall be better in Bournemouth. People know what a chauffeur is there, and treat him according. I've had enough of meetings and experiences for one while. And oh, but the Poole ale will taste good, after all the rubbish I've had to listen to!'

And so as the chauffeur laid out the road smoothly behind him, feeling a joy in uncontrolledly breaking all burghal and county regulations as to speed limits, Mrs. Reston Rigg was introducing her husband to his uncle.

'You were once good to me for my own sake,' she said; 'perhaps I used you ill. But he needed me more

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than you. Help me now to take care of him. He needs it more than ever.'

And, indeed, Reston Rigg did need care, quiet, and nursing more than ever his wife had any conception of.

* * * * *

For on the following morning Reston Rigg was raving in grips with a violent attack of brain fever.

To the eye he had been a thousand miles from suggesting such a thing. Strong, healthy, and to the outward appearance as fit a man as walked the macadam of seven counties, Reston Rigg had drawn largely upon his supply of nerve force. In the course of the Longtown meetings, the most continuous and trying series he had ever given in one place, he had been lavish with himself. He had never spared any effort in order to make an impression. He had poured forth his magnetic power as though it were inexhaustible, while all the time he had been carrying on the absorbing sub-interest of his intrigue with Jan Cassells, in addition to whatever might come his way in the matter of Sarah Jimson and others.

Perhaps, also, the hollow beneath the pines was too near the Isle marshes to be a good open-air encampment. Reston Rigg, with his East Indian experience, knew this well enough. But the necessity of being at once perfectly free in his movements and near his mission tent had caused him to continue in that unwholesome glade above the fever flats of the Isle. It was different on the other side of the dunes, away from the green scum of the pools and the nightly will-o'-the-wisps - near Red Rob's, for

instance, where the winds blew clean and brisk from the firth and the clouds scudded in like galleons homing from the Atlantic.

At any rate, by the morrow the fever had taken full possession, and Reston Rigg was tossing and raving unconscious in the very chamber which had been his own in the early days when he first came home from India. His wife watched over him, and his uncle, with a troubled face, consulted the Rushport doctor and wired distractedly for night nurses from Glasgow. But it was the niece, not the nephew, he was thinking of.

Hester went about with a pale, set face, for she alone had the clue to the tangled skein of his wild meanderings. He spoke constantly of Jan Cassells. He jumbled many other things, but remained always perfectly clear about that. He laughed aloud at the tricks they had played upon 'that teacher-fellow from the Academy.' Sometimes Hester paled and compressed her lips, especially if the doctor or his uncle happened to be present. Sarah Jimson's name also occurred, though less frequently, cropping up unexpectedly, sometimes as a woman to be soothed, more often as an unspeakable nuisance.

'When will I learn sense?' cried Reston Rigg, throwing himself athwart the pillow, and rocking his head to and fro in that wearisome bear-in-a-cage movement which accompanies the worst stages of the disease - 'a woman half a dozen years older than I, and - with Jan there! She might have been told at any moment - she would have thought them lies, of course. But still, I could not have borne to lose Jan!'

Then he would add, looking tenderly over at Hester, 'You forgive me, Jan, because you love me, and I love you. I - I mean to devote all my life to

proving it - see if I don't. You do forgive me, Jan? Yes, I can see that you do.'

And the Jan to whom he was speaking murmured the gentlest forgiveness.

These were the daily agonies of Hester Rigg, who had been so long Hester Vane. But still more bitter was the necessary explanation with Mr. Harold after the second or third time that he had heard his nephew raving of Jan Cassells.

Mr. Harold Kingsman's face grew more set and fixed as he listened. 'My dear,' he said gently, 'if I had been younger, perhaps if you had let me, I could have made your happiness. For I am a Kingsman of my mother's quiet sort. But youth will to youth. And it is natural. My nephew I do not know, but I knew his father. Never could *he* rest faithful to any woman. And from what I see and hear, his son is like to him. But with you to help - and me - and perhaps also a certain Mercy that is infinite, we may yet bring him through. He obeys your voice, I see. That is one great gain.'

'Yes,' said the First Soloist, with her grave, habitual quiet; 'when I watch - when I have him to myself, I can control him. But he is strong, determined, cunning, and wonderfully resourceful.'

'What was it that your father used to call his favourite text? Do you remember?'

The old music-master looked at Hester very fixedly. He wanted her to recall the words of herself.

'Yes,' she answered; 'it was, "If God be for us, who can be against us?"'

'Ah, who *can*?' he repeated, gently touching her on the shoulder, as her own father had never done - which, if he had thought of doing in time, might have altered many things

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

THE BOW IN THE CLOUDS

Reston Rigg woke from a great terror - a white terror, waves and boundless waves of it, defying the immensities of space. But he had no memory save that he had struggled with the powers of darkness and had not been overcome. He found his wife by his bedside, and he held out to her a hand so wasted and unlike his own, that he stared at it and turned it over to be sure.

Many days Hester had been kneeling by his pillow, many nights by her own, and the influence of her prayers had certainly calmed his spirit - that spirit so susceptible to outer influences, so ready to take in and to give out. He had abused for years the great words salvation, conversion, forgiveness of sins, till they had grown vague and meaningless to himself, though he used them in his work effectively enough. But it is to be feared that the mere power which a man knows himself to possess to move others has a hardening influence upon his own soul.

All the greater wonder, then, that Reston Rigg rose from his bed with a spirit as humble and obedient as that of a child. He was perfectly conscious of how low his own natural man had brought him. He knew also that his wife - perhaps, rather, his wife's prayers - had saved him. And he burned to do something to prove that he was no more the man he had been.

Perhaps if he had regained at once his former strength, recovered his confidence and the power of

influencing great audiences, if he could have swayed admiring crowds as in the heyday of health, he might have backslidden. But for the moment he was like wax in Hester's hands - gentle, obedient, wistful, full of resolves to make atonement wherever he might.

Daily they walked the shore, Reston Rigg with his hand on his wife's arm, talking eagerly to her, abounding in projects, full of ways and means of spreading the new knowledge that had come to him so strangely.

'I have deformed the simple Gospel,' he would say over and over. 'I have not preached Jesus Christ, but Reston Rigg. Now that the old man is dead, perhaps God will let me work as a simple labourer in some corner of His vineyard.'

And it was from this that his intention came into being, of visiting all the places in which he had formerly exercised his mesmeric gift, and by the humble and earnest message of the Carpenter of Nazareth effacing in some degree the former things which were now to him mere sin and vainglory.

And in this Hester encouraged him, glad that his thoughts dwelt no more upon any woman but herself, nor yet very much even upon her, but rather upon the wrongs he had done, wittingly and unwittingly, and upon the eager desire he had to efface all - as he said, 'to clean the slate of Reston Rigg, and write there the name of his Master.'

At first Hester was ashamed of her latent unbelief, but daily she lost more and more of her suspicion. Yes, for the first time in his life, Reston Rigg was sincere. He meant to do as he said, and to do it for the sake of the truth. No, it was not a pose. She was an excellent judge of Reston Rigg's poses.

She had seen so many of them, and at first she had been taken in like the others - indeed, rather more than any others.

So these walks of theirs along the beach were precious to Hester. Her husband had come back to her, and for the first time was wholly her own.

She carried, however, deep within her, a consciousness that it could not last. It is not possible, save in an unheard-of miracle of grace, that a man like Reston should be changed through and through once and for ever, never to alter or backslide any more.

Here again came the doubt. She had seen so many. She was one of the augurs who, when they met, winked the eye. Oh, the flocks and droves at all the great Mesmerist's meetings! And only three months after, where were they? Here and there a few more church-members, that was all - excellent, so far as it went; but what of the rest - just as deep down, just as fallen, just as helpless, and just as much in need of the power as before.

et Reston Rigg was in earnest. The tongues of Pentecostal fire he had so often invoked had somehow fallen upon him. He was cleansed, at least for the moment, from his own grosser elements. So there was room and place for the new man, and Hester began to understand that what she had so long hoped for without hope, and prayed for without faith, had been given her. Whether she was entirely satisfied is another matter.

Still, for a little while she was privileged to see the Reston Rigg of her early dreams, weak with sickness, pale and tottering, but full of the high spirit of a wholly unselfish enterprise, a true missionary of Another's message - almost, as he had

so vainly boasted, 'an apostle, born out of due time.'

Perhaps in this too there was something of his Indian training. He had washed in Mother Gunga, which, like Lethe, is the River of Forgetfulness, and his past had been carried away from him like the dust and ashes of a Benares faquir.

And from this emerged clear and definite the resolve that he must go to Longtown first to make reparation. Wife and husband had long arguments about it as they passed down the avenues of fuscia trees which grew there (as opposite in Arran about High Corrie). Also down on the shore among the little scuttling crabs they discussed it.

Hester pointed out the dangers - his weak state, the doubtful feeling of the people, disturbances to be feared - but one by one he brushed them all aside. He would accept all gladly. He rejoiced that he should suffer, so being that he was permitted to make plain his repentance. He would go wholly without apparatus - no tent, no caravan, if necessary a srip on his back, and the sending of God wherewith to pay his humble lodging.

'Ours,' said Hester, with a sudden firmness. He looked at her in quick deprecation.

'No,' he said; 'yours was not the sin, you have no part in the expiation.'

'You mistake,' she answered him. 'I knew all the time we were wrong, but I believed in you - I have never ceased to believe in you. And now (with a fond look that paid for much) I have my reward. It is the bow in the clouds.'

'The promise of our perfect day,' he answered solemnly.

'Rather, as the Belfast Almanac says,' Hester interposed hurriedly, to keep the talk from becoming

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too serious in tone, and reciting like a schoolboy, ‘A - rainbow - in - the - evening - is - the - shepherd’s - delight - because - it - shows - that - the - storm - clouds - are - passing - away - from - the - eye - of - the - spectator!’

‘God grant!’ said Reston Rigg fervently, and taking no notice of her mimicry.

* * * * *

But Hester’s real objection to bringing her husband to Longtown was not the fear of his not being understood, nor yet of any serious persecution. She had passed through both before by his side and had no fear. But it was the thought of what effect his presence might have on Jan Cassells.

However, seeing Reston Rigg determined to go to Longtown whatever happened, Hester took it upon herself to write a couple of letters. One of them was addressed to me at the house of Mrs. Havens, The Nets, near Longtown.

‘Dear Adrian’ (she wrote), ‘There is news. It is perhaps too good news for you to believe. I also am “as those that dream.” Reston is now the clear-seeing man, the unselfish, the earnest, the true in heart and word - all that my heart hoped for him. I am the uncertain, querulous, the doubting Thomasina, yapping and carping at his heels like an ill-mannered cur.

‘Briefly, he has, after a long illness, “experienced a change” - you know his old phrase, which this time is more than a phrase. He has discarded all his impedimenta of follies, and wants to undo as much as possible of the ill he has done. He is still very weak, but I do not know how long I can keep him

out of Longtown. Prepare the way for us, and let your old friend know anything which you judge would be good for her to know. And remember her husband's welfare is hers, as indeed it has never ceased to be.

If you will tell me what was said after our departure - whether the angry feeling of opposition has at all died down, and what are the chances for a simple, brief visit (as much to ease my husband's mind as anything), you will be doing her who was Hester Vane a good turn. She will always be Hester Vane to you.

Lastly, the fact of our marriage need no longer be hidden, nor that we went away together: and the only other secret, that I am the daughter of our dear Bairnly Minister - the original and only "Little Tommy," will, I hope, be a secret but little longer.

Your friend and ally,
'HESTER.'

At the same time she wrote a letter to her father, the text of which I cannot give, as it has not been confided to me, but the purport of which can easily be made out from what happened at the Clerical Club on the very day that Mr. MacMeekin received it among his ministerial schedules and ordinary begging letters.

I took care to be present, for I too had got the First Soloist's letter in the morning, and was distraught in my mind as to the answer I should return. I had determined that I would consult one or two of my best friends among the ministers, men who knew Longtown far better than any layman, with a clearness of vision and an exactness of detail such as only ministers of long local standing can

attain to.

The Barnacle was in the chair, hotly benevolent and kind-heartedly contradictory as ever. His dear enemy and most intimate friend, Thomas Conley, of the First Union Kirk, was there to argue the opposite of his every proposition with a wealth of cold and deliberate logic, which, added to the evenness of his temper, gave him the advantage.

The Birdy Minister, young, handsome, and intelligently silent, sat well back, thinking probably of his next paper on the breeding habits of the common buzzard, to be read before the British Ornithologists' Union - the B.O.U. and its doings being more to his mind than the high problems of abstract theology and church government, in which the two champions of the Clerical Club delighted.

The Fiddling Minister, Mr. Rex Gay, was also there, jovial, ready with witticism and light raillery to sweeten the discussion when the clash of opinions left a taint of Marah bitterness in the cup. By vote he supported his ecclesiastical superior Dr. McGirvie, but in debate he was wont to say brilliant things on both sides, and in general he helped to calm the troubled waters, whosoever happened to have troubled them.

He was, in fact, a rubicund, glossy, good-humoured cleric, without any very fervent convictions, who yet somehow brought men into good humour with, themselves - which, in Longtown at least, meant generally in good humour with one another. His sermons were beneath contempt, but his very appearance at the far end of the main street settled quarrels from one end of it to the other.

'Well, no matter, maybe I'm wrong, after all,' a belligerent would say. 'At ony rate, yonder's the

Fiddling Minister. It will never do to let him hear us miscalling each other like a couple of fish-cadgers. He would keep up the joke on us for a twelvemonth!’

Thus the rubicund, short-legged, bull-necked, smiling minister of the chapel of ease of Longtown managed to ‘keep down din,’ laughing at and imitating the mischievous and quarrelsome, and by the single radiance of his humour upheld the King’s peace within the burgh bounds as no other man did or could do.

Only the Bairnly Minister was absent, and the Barnacle, who missed him as his best and silentest listener, cast about for an explanation.

‘I’ll warrant he will be off seeing some old wife, that will wheedle a shilling out of him before he gets back across her doorstep.’

‘Mr. MacMeekin!’ said another flippantly. ‘Oh, he will be playing marbles with a new Little Tommy!’

‘Whatever he is doing,’ put in the Fiddling Minister, in his quick, twinkling way, ‘he is sure to be better occupied than any of us, wrangling here about our labels on our shop-drawers, and thinking shame to let people know that Sod. Bi-Carb. is just plain baking-soda, and will raise scones just as well under one name as the other.’

I am not sure that the Barnacle always understood his subordinate, but to me what Mr. Gay said seemed always to be worth the pains of a little unravelling.

Then, in the midst of a furious argument between the Barnacle and Mr. Conley as to the conflicting solid benefits of state connection and the splendid freedom of spiritual independence, the Bairnly Minister came in.

He did not interrupt, only nodding to those who

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happened not to be on their feet or shaking their fists at each other. The Fiddling Minister indicated the combatants with a twist of his thumb and, stopwatch in hand, prepared to call time round by round.

When the hubbub had quieted a little, the Barnacle lay back contentedly in his chair, wiping his face breathlessly, and exclaiming at intervals, 'Oh, Conley, ye did well! Man, I havena had such a turn up for years. If it hadna been for the table, I declare I would have given ye What-for-Davie!'

And Mr. Conley, who had not turned a hair, smiled calmly and acknowledged his opponent's compliment with a nod. Then suddenly struck with some subtle difference in the Bairnly Minister, they all turned with one accord towards him.

'What is it, Mr. MacMeekin?' said the Doctor. 'Shall I give you a little Something out of the press? I ken ye are a teetotaler, but - as medicine now, it might do ye all the more good that ye are not so well used to it.'

But the Bairnly Minister rose quietly to his feet and stood silent and shaken among his brethren. I could see that their hearts were touched at his evident distress, and with the unity which (save for the Reverend Cyrillus Brodérick) pervaded the manses of Longtown, they were eager to help if it were in their power. As ministers, they were all except Mr. Gallio May, (called the Fiddling Minister), tough controversialists, but as men and brethren of one cloth, they stuck at nothing to help a friend in trouble.

'Gentlemen,' the Bairnly Minister began, with his usual gesture of taking off his silver spectacles, wiping them, and putting them on again, 'you are

right. I have something to say - something to add, rather, to what I have already said. In dependence upon the sense of honour and friendship common to us all, I told you of my daughter, my only daughter. Well, most unexpectedly and providentially, I have had a letter from her. She was married on the day she left my house, and has, as I gather, been kindly treated by the man I maligned, who is no other than Reston Rigg, the Mesmeric Evangelist, against whose methods I thought it my duty to preach so often and so vehemently. My daughter writes to me from the house of the young man's uncle, a man well known to me, who holds himself guarantee for the excellent sentiments and true desire for good now manifested by his nephew. Reston Rigg has given up his advertising methods. He will use no such strange arts as those which incurred our unanimous disapprobation, and he is anxious to come hither again to state in public the reasons for his change.'

'Humph!' said the Barnacle. But he shut within him the remainder of his speech, because of the happiness which shone on the face of the Bairnly Minister through the mild glow of his silver-rimmed spectacles.

'I wronged him - yes, gentlemen, put the blame on me - I wronged him, and I wish to ask if I am allowing my feelings as a parent to overcome my judgment as a minister, in offering him my church for his meeting, and to my daughter and her husband the shelter of my roof.'

'Very proper - very proper indeed!' cried the good-natured Barnacle, ashamed of what, in his haste, he had been on the point of saying. 'And I should like to see the man who would venture - I mean' (he continued, changing his tone a second time, for

immediately before him he saw very clearly the man who would dare anything) - 'I mean that it is a most becoming and parental thing to do. And, by Jove, MacMeekin, we will all come in a body and sit on the platform! I presume you know that he means what he says?'

'My daughter knows,' said the Bairnly Minister gently. 'He has been quite at the point of death, and you must expect to find him greatly changed.'

There was a sentiment in the Club, unexpressed but quite manifest to me, that such a change would require more than the word of Reston Rigg's wife. Yet no man dared or cared to run counter to the spontaneous generosity of the Barnacle, backed by the more formidable though silent acquiescence of the Reverend Thomas Conley, the fighter of the brotherhood.

Still, it certainly was a good deal to take for granted, and I do not wonder that the Longtown ministers were a little dubious of the genuineness of the change. I therefore asked that I might be allowed to add a word, and with the First Soloist's letter in my hand, I put before them the reasons I had for believing in the sincerity of the change which had come over the Mesmeric Evangelist. I read the letter which I had received, or at least such portions as seemed necessary or useful - and I was glad to notice that, as I proceeded, there was a great clearing of the countenances of the brethren. The Barnacle came and shook me warmly by the hand.

'I am glad to find that in your opinion my impulse was justified. We shall all go together.'

And even the Reverend Thomas Conley nodded a grim approval.

'You must sit next me and save me from going to

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sleep,' said the Fiddling Minister in a low tone. But his remark did not escape the quick ear of the Barnacle.

'For shame, Mr. Gay!' he said. 'As President of the Longtown Clerical Club, I inflict a censure upon you for untimely and, I must add, foolish speech.'

'But, sir, for such a censure, you need to consult the meeting.'

'Upheld! Upheld! Support the chair! Censure! Censure!' cried everybody with the instantaneous animation of schoolboys.

'And I move,' added the Reverend Thomas Conley, 'that our friend Mr. Gay, in addition to the censure, be required and appointed to propose a vote of thanks to the speaker at Mr. Reston Rigg's meeting.'

Thus I could truly write to Hester that so far as in me lay, the way at Longtown was prepared for the second advent of Reston Rigg.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

THE THUNDERBOLT

There was no mistake about it. Reston Rigg was coming to Longtown. But all did not think alike as to the proposed visit. Perfect agreement is an impossibility to expect of any Scottish town, and indeed the mere fact that the ministers were this time in favour of the evangelist stirred up quite other elements of discord.

Tom Jimson was naturally enough at the head of this opposing band. His position as Perpetual President of the Three Tumbler Club required so much of him. Also his domestic sorrows had, if not exactly embittered his jovial nature, at least made him wilder and less careful of the opinion of the public. His very profession also helped. For in Cheviotshire a certain amount of wildness is as necessary to an auctioneer as an outwardly blameless life is to a minister of religion.

Also he must swear more than a little, whether he likes it or not. It is in the mart, at least, "an offset to conversation." He must say and do out-of-the-way things to bring the laugh; he must clown it in the ring; and the ready practice of fisticuffs is a valuable asset.

All these qualifications Tom Jimson possessed. In addition he had almost been compelled to abandon his home. The pretty villa, with the garden in front and the sand-dunes behind, had become a kind of pandemonium since the advent, and still more the departure, of Reston Rigg.

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Partly, no doubt, it was Tom's fault. I fear he was not very long-suffering with his wife. He did not understand that in her divagations she was more to be pitied than blamed. But when he never entered the door without affronting an inexplicable anger, and never ate a meal that was not poisoned with black looks and sullen silences, the busy, lively auctioneer soon had enough of it.

Of course the bow-window of the Three Tumbler Club was open to him, but Tom had desires for something more retired and in a way domestic than the noisy club-room; and at times, with a chosen three friends, he would withdraw himself to a little country cottage, "Good Luck," he called it, which he had taken down the water-side. It was isolated on a knoll and shaded by a dense growth of trees. The popular report was that those who passed that way at night might sometimes see strange things through the sparr'd lattices of the palings, for the open windows shone with light and the whole "Luck" was riotous with Tom Jimson's special brand of mirth.

A big, thick-set, full-lipped, full-blooded, ruddy man, with beard of Assyrian trim, still glossy with health, though his age was full fifty years; his hair lightly and becomingly touched with grey at the temples and in the strands of his short curls - that was auctioneer Tom, the lord of Jimson's "Luck."

And "Good Luck" itself. The drivers of the Gatehouse and Auchencairn omnibuses smiled at their clients as they passed it. The hired coachmen from the "Crown" and "King's Arms" confided spicy details behind their hands to the local bucks who shared the box-seat. Tom Jimson's "Luck" was a standing joke. He went there, it appeared, to

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entertain a trio of intimates - his general staff, as one might say.

There were gay doings abroad in the enclosure, and even outside the sense of the humours within permeated the air. People laughed as they passed, and hardly knew why.

'They do say,' Eben Watson confided to a big Caerketton drover, 'that Tom Jimson is the deevil-an'-a!' This from Eben, who, because of his daily wanderings, was in the front rank of all gossip, had the virtue of a certificate.

'Once,' he continued, 'I was taken over the "Luck" by Jim Carter, the painter lad from McWilliam's, on the High Street. He was lettering up the names of the rooms - aye, a name by itself for every door.

There was "The Armoury" - that was the lobby, where they left their coats and hats; and a door off it that was named "The Throne Room" - I never could get to know just the reason of that. Then there was "The Flies' Rendezvous," a long, sunny passage; and at the end behind a cane screen was "Cat's Corner," with a stool for pussy to lie in the sun, and above a notice hanging on the wall, "No Dogs Admitted. Mice warmly welcomed."

The dining-room was named "Swallow Gate." (It was a professor of the name of Menzies who invented that - aye, and he was a fine theologian too.) Over the door of the kitchen was printed "Good Victuals Spoiled Here." Then each room had its name through all the house. One that I mind was called "The Black Hole," because it lacked light and air. Another "Windy-Gowl," because it possessed too many draughts. "Balaam's Friend's Manger" was devoted to the occasional use of Mr. Peter Thomson,

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minister of Rascarrel, the most talkative of Tom Jimson's friends.

In the outer garden the public was warned in large letters that there were "Traps Set Here." But when the policeman came to investigate the illegality of this threat, he found that the "traps" were the work of spiders in waiting for flies, and of Tom Jimson, who could not abide moles in his garden.

It was in Tom Jimson's "Luck," then, that a plan for the breaking up of Reston Rigg's return meeting was hatched. There were four conspirators - Tom himself, elated to escape from the everlasting evil tempers of his spouse, whose humour had of late changed to a kind of black hate, from which the jovial Tom fled as from a pestilence.

There was Kyle, the Caerketton writer and journalist, who liked to come down to Good Luck because he could talk as he liked without anybody paying the least attention.

Next was Hexham, the great English cattle "buyer" for the southern markets, and Tom's partner in many a lucrative "arrangement." There was "Spun" Sowerby, son of the wealthy Longtown builder, so called because (when he had had tumblers enough) he was in the habit of saying, 'Gentlemen, I'm spun!'

These four mostly all talked at a time. No one thought of answering anything that another advanced. To question statements was extremely dangerous.

'Lambs will be deuced scarce this year - hear ye that, Hexham? But we will have a new agreement, you and me, and you can charge double to the English butchers. That will be sixpence a pound out of the pockets of the pock-puddings.'

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This, of course, was Tom Jimson's contribution. But Hexham was far away.

'As fine a lass to look at as ever I saw, and her old father with as good a farm - well, I might do worse, if I could bring myself to settle down. Lads, what think ye? This is what she said to me only Saturday week, when I was over there buying some pigs -'

Meanwhile the journalist discoursed of his craft in its higher developments :

'There's no literature now,' he said, wagging his head at his lifted glass; 'nor anybody to read it if there was. The Board Schools have spoiled all that. The Man-on-the-Street wants romance, hot and strong, but especially cheap. The middle classes like to be "moved," so they still read for the sentiment. While the artists and writers read books that only they can understand - and that mostly by accident. Poetry - come, I ask you, gentlemen -'

But he asked in vain. For some minutes the "Luck" was a mere babel of tongues. Out of this chaos emerged an appearance of solidarity with regard to the approaching visit of Reston Rigg. As to that, all were agreed, save the journalist, who smoked peacefully and pulled the Tubal Cain's tail, like a city Gallio who took small care of matters merely local; except such as he could make a humorous paragraph out of.

'See here,' said Tom, 'last time the ministers were against the spiritual electrician. This time, it seems, he has forsworn his old games, and is going to play at theirs. But for all that, or because of that, he does not deserve to get off. We of the club must teach him consistency. And we are going to do it.'

'How will you manage, Tom?' Sowerby demanded. 'You are fast-handed with Mr. Gay, of the chapel of

ease, and he is to be on the platform - to propose the vote of thanks, they say. I should like to hear that myself.'

'Well, you won't. There will be no vote of thanks,' Tom asserted thunderously. 'Not, that is, if you fellows back me up.'

The fellows would - all except the visiting journalist, who remarked scornfully, 'That he thought he saw himself.'

'Besides,' he added, shooting out his phrases, punctuated with puffs of smoke, 'you cannot break up a meeting in a church - not even an auctioneer, and the President of the Three Tumbler Club, can do that.'

The three looked at each other. They had not thought of this before. Disrespect in Cheviotshire may possibly reach ministers, but it must of necessity stop short at the door of the house of God.

'I hae it,' said Tom Jimson. 'He's a great hand at kidnapping, by all tales of it. Well, we will kidnap him at the outcoming of the meeting in the Bairnly Minister's kirk, and we will bring him over the hill and tie him for a short six hours' tide to one of the near stakes of Red Rob's nets. Then he can preach to the fishes while we drink a drappie and sing hymns on the shore.'

No objection being offered, this was taken as the sense of the meeting and ordered to be transmitted to the Three Tumbler Club by Tom Jimson, President.

For of this bin is the rude humour of that rowdy minority which in Cheviotshire, as in all other parts of the Lowlands of Scotland, has ever made war against the kirks, their ministers, their doings, ordinances, and conventions ever since the days of

Knox.

But the great meeting in the Congregational Church proved to be very different from all suppositions. With a last remnant of charlatanism Reston desired that he should be allowed to pass through the ranks of the people to an improvised Penitents' Bench, and there, kneeling, do public penance. But from this his wife dissuaded him. The more simply, the more orderly, the more dignified his renunciation of the past, the greater would be the effect.

The Congregational Kirk in Bank Street stood, like most of the churches of Longtown, a little back from the road. There were trees about it. Ivy grew abundantly on its walls, clambering even on the steeple, and hiding the inscription over the lintel of the door:

*'Go up to the House of God,
Go up to the Solemn Assembly.'*

The Bairnly Minister took a strange pride in these words. They were of his own choosing, and several times a year he would borrow a ladder and climb up in order to disengage them with his pocket-knife.

* * * * *

We had thought of taking Jan quietly away till all was over, but the season and the difficult state of her health rendered this impossible. She had not been satisfactory of late in any way.

She seemed to be hiding something. Yet so far as I was concerned, she showed more affection than ever, and certainly I did my best to make up to her for all that she had suffered. When strong enough she flitted between the Flower Parlour - flowery no

longer except for the careful pots within - and her bedroom.

We had an unexpected visit from Sir Waldemar at the School House. I was one of the household now, though I kept my room always ready at Red Rob's. I think we were all thankful to see the great physician. Jan received him graciously, and when presently he offered to examine her - making it a sort of play, in order, he said, to discover why she was so lazy - she smiled knowingly, and said, 'I know there is some one who is wearying for me to get well.'

And she pointed me out, saying simply, 'He wants to marry me - see how like the wan lover he looks - much worse than I. I tell him I can wait, but he and June are determined that it shall be as soon as possible. My father is going to resign, and Adrian is to have the appointment. But we shall all live together just the same. The old School House is big enough, goodness knows, as you would know if you were here at spring-cleaning time.'

I caught the doctor's eyes. He was smiling at Jan, but there was something which said, as clearly as eye can speak, 'Poor thing, she will never see the spring nor lift a finger at a spring-cleaning any more.' And I judge that I paled under his glance. I cannot - I dare not say what I felt. For it came like a thunderbolt upon me that Jan Cassells could not live.

No, Sir Waldemar had not much to say, mostly; but he talked apart with Robson, the local doctor, who had been attending Jan. I could see the face of the kind little 'Doctor-Whom-Nobody-Paid' alter as the low-spoken words reached his ear.

When Sir Waldemar came back, after seeing Dr.

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Robson to the gate, he had thrown off his gloom, and as he sat down by the side of Jan's couch, he lifted her hand and cried gaily, 'Now what is the meaning of this? They tell me that you are putting off making this excellent young man happy. Think better of it. You are altogether too pretty to be cruel to those who love you. And your sister June too - she wants the marriage - a new bridesmaid's dress, I suppose. You can make every one happy. And after, there will be no more of this foolishness, lying on sofas, and an illustrious and titled doctor from Edinburgh not able to find anything wrong with you! Do you know what we call that in good plain English? Laziness, madam; plain laziness! But a married woman cannot afford to be lazy. So brisk up and invite me to the wedding. I don't say that I can come - my time up there is not my own - but it will always be an excuse for sending you a present. Now what would you like best?'

And motioning us all out of the room, he sat and chatted long with Jan.

To me he talked also, as I went to the station with him. We paced the platform together, waiting for the train, and his face was of the gravest.

'I can find nothing,' he said; 'nothing to justify her condition. But that is not to say that there is nothing. There must be something - something of the gravest. But I tell you frankly, sir, that you must and ought to marry as quickly as maybe - else - else - well, you understand me.'

I put a question here.

'Yes, Mr. Ross, I think there is a chance - the only chance for life and happiness. If I did not think so I would not be advising you as I am doing. Let it be soon - soon. You hear me? - soon.'

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And so saying, he climbed into his first-class carriage, drew his rug about his knees, donned a cap with ear-flaps, and nodded to me without another word. I lifted my hat and went slowly back. I knew that he did not want to be thanked. But there was no need for more. As I approached I saw the roofs of the School House clear against the stars, and yet all seemed to be different within. Jan was dying - surely, if I did not marry her - perhaps in any case. But in me, and the love and happiness I had to give her, lay her sole chance of life.

But what had I to give her? My love and affection? They were June's. My heart? It was also June's. But there remained duty, quickened by the doctor's warning. I must walk along the road to the end. But all the same - I could not help it - my heart was breaking with yearning for June. Because in her face too I could read the suffering.

Tenderness - faith? Yes, I would give Jan both of these; but there was infinitely more that I could never give - that I had not to give. I walked on and on, till I found myself at the old pines, and saw the familiar auction-mart gate, open now and trodden by many feet. Then I turned about and very slowly made my way back to the School House.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

THE MYSTIC SUMMONS

Our marriage-day had been fixed for the Friday following that on which the classes at the Academy were closed for the Christmas holidays. It was most convenient for me. I had long been Rector in all but name. Even the morning prayers were now my part, also the reports and the examination papers. A week before I had received my official appointment from the County Committee, but I had begged them to delay making the matter public for the present. The narrow means of the Cassells family had benefited by an unexpected legacy, and really Dr. Erasmus would be far happier in his study alone with his great work on post-Augustine prose literature. For his duty in connection with the Academy always worried him - not indeed to the extent of doing any of it, but still it annoyed him, and prevented his mind from settling as it ought.

During these days June did not speak much to me. I think we kept away from each other by a kind of unspoken convention. But she was unspeakably gentle with Jan, so much so that Jan would sometimes rebuke her for this silence, and, taking June's hand, would place it in mine.

'You two are "outs" with each other - oh, don't deny!' she would say. 'I lie here and have nothing to do but notice things. You are both so good to me - why are you cold one with the other? There - you take away your hand just after I had put it nicely in his. It is not kind of you, June. He is so loving to me

- without him I should die.'

It was the night of Reston Rigg's meeting in the Congregational Church, and the eve of my marriage-day. A keen wind whipped the thin snow off the round cobbles that still formed the main part of the paving area of Longtown.

All day Jan had been brighter. She declared often that she was better, and indeed there were moments when I almost believed it.

She had been sitting up on the sofa in the Flower Parlour, in the prettiest of wrappers, pale blue with dainty lace. Her eyes were very shiny. They glittered like frosty stars, I told her, and she was pleased. But yet she seemed to look a great deal at me with a wondering gaze, as if she were not quite sure whether I was really myself or another. She spoke of our marriage, stroking and patting my hand, and cooing over it. Once she held it up and looked long at it.

'What have you been doing with yourself?' she said. 'The back of your hand has not nearly so many hairs as it used to have. You have been shaving, I declare!' (She laughed aloud.) 'Shaving your hands! I like a man's hands as they are - a strong man's hands. You will have to stop that when I have got you all to myself.'

And of course I promised, but at the moment when she was kissing my fingers to "make up," as she said, June came in and as quickly went out again.

Ah! it was a weary day, and I was glad when the lamps were lit and the blinds drawn. For all the time while it was light I was afraid that some one might pass with a notice of Reston Rigg's meeting on a sandwich-board, and Jan (as I knew) had sharp eyes

for that name.

* * * * *

It is with something of pain that I begin to tell, as briefly as may be, what took place at the last meeting Reston Rigg ever held in Longtown. All Pernicketty Town was there, good, bad, indifferent - and the Pernicketties.

The members of the Three Tumbler Club occupied a commanding position near the door, and all the old Restonites were close in, their ardour somewhat cooled, but ready to be rekindled by the message of their first leader. Most were a little vague as to what was to happen, but the presence of the ministers of the town in a body convinced everybody that there must have been a great change somewhere.

Something remarkable had transpired. The thousand rumours which had run through the town, filtered through the hamlets and upland farms, gathered force and substance under the able culture of Eben Watson and his comrades - all would now be cleared up.

What wonder, therefore, that an hour before the time there was not even standing-room in the Congregational Church in Bank Street?

The platform alone was still unfilled, save for a generous allotment of chairs in semicircles, but there were many who looked forward to scaling even to that eminence so soon as the ministers should have taken their seats.

They entered with dignity. First came the chairman, the Bairnly Minister, who brought with him his daughter on his arm.

And at sight of the First Soloist, all the people

whispered and rustled in their seats with a souging sound like the wind among Jimson's pines.

Then came Reston Rigg alone, his height as imposing as ever, but now his head was bent. He no longer challenged his audience with his old haughty regard. After him followed the ministers of the town, with some of the more prominent elders and laymen. Both of the partners of the great ironworks were there. Indeed, as one might say, all Longtown, eager, critical, cynical, indifferent, believing, or anxious to believe.

The Bairnly Minister, as was his duty, opened the proceedings. After prayer he said: 'My son-in-law, Mr. Reston Rigg, already known to many of you, has thought it his duty to inform you now how mistaken he was in some things he said and did on the occasion of his former series of meetings here. This is his part of the public apology which he counts due to this meeting of my fellow-citizens. But there is another, and that of a character more personal to myself.

I also laboured under a terrible delusion, based upon a supposed fact - an apparent disaster which had a great effect upon my own life, for which I held all men of Mr. Rigg's evangelistic calling responsible. The old leaven of uncharitableness working in me, I spoke much in public, and more particularly in private, against many whom I now know to be as honourable and perhaps more honourable men than I. For this I crave the pardon, first of Mr. Reston Rigg, and secondly, of those members and adherents of my congregation now present whom I made silent partners in my hasty speech.

'Not that I have changed in any way my opinion of Mr. Rigg's former methods. He himself will tell you

in what he has been led to alter them. Still less do I stand here because his coming has enabled me to recover a long-lost daughter - a daughter who is his wife. I trust that, in a matter of such high importance, the ties of mere earthly kinship would not blind me. Also I desire, in conclusion, to inform this meeting that for years I have been using the early history of my daughter as a quarry for affecting stories and incidents concerning children. I am aware that these incidents in the life of a fictitious "Little Tommy" and my too prolix moralizings upon them have been a matter of jest to some. Well, let them jest. They are perhaps right.

'But there are others, widows and mothers in Israel chiefly, whom I bless, who have esteemed themselves benefited and consoled thereby. This heartens me to confess that, though there never was a little Tommy, there was always another little one in my heart. And' (here he put his hand upon the shoulder of the First Soloist) 'this is my only Little Tommy, and all that I have said of her is true.'

He sat down, and the meeting waited with a great hush of expectancy for what was to come next.

When Reston Rigg rose, his face pale, his profile hewn finer by recent illness, struck every one with a fresh surprise. Under the sensitive nostrils the bar of the blue-black moustache seemed denser and blacker. But it was not belligerently flamboyant any more, but fell naturally towards the angles of a resolute chin.

I shall not extend the few remaining pages of my tale with any complete account of Reston Rigg's great Message of Renunciation, though a *verbatim* report lies before me, and may be procured at a

nominal charge at the office of the *Cheviotshire Advertiser*. It was printed for distribution among "Friends of the Truth." It contains Reston Rigg's unvarnished account of how, little by little, he had been led into the practice of dangerous mesmeric gifts, partly in the hope that the influence he thus gained might compel or enable his patients to submit themselves to his will and so break more surely the power of evil habits, but chiefly 'after my return from India' (and here Reston Rigg accused himself directly), 'because of natural vain-glory and the sense of power which had been given me!'

Then in a sort of palpitating silence the people followed the pleading of the man who had at last cast loose from the carnal and discovered the reality of the spiritual within himself. Speaking as one who had passed that way, he reproved those of haughty minds and hard hearts.

'So thought I - Pharaoh and I. We hardened our hearts, but I sinned against the greater light. I have spoken the word without believing it myself. Yet - oh, strange mystery which God only can explain! - there are those who here *were* led to think aright, even to change their lives, while the physician himself had not been healed.

'It needed a great stroke. God brought me to the brink of the other world. I looked over the wall of eternity, and, looking, I trembled, and am now come back to tell you so.'

It was all marvellously simple. Not a burst of the former eloquence that had made the great tent ring with his voice. A simple narrative rather which the youngest and the most unlearned could follow. Yet never in the days of the crowded penitents' bench and the "laying on of hands" had the people been so

universally impressed.

Scotland likes a show - for a while, but no land is more quick to recognize the accents of a simple sincerity.

I arose from a long discourse with death. I came hither, moved by Him who has the power of death, to declare before you all my errors and sins. I go hence, perhaps to new fields and a worthier work - perhaps to yet closer acquaintanceship with death, but sure am I that whatever comes or goes, however narrow the pathway, or however short the way, I cannot be led outside the love and care of Him who has put these things in my heart which, as one from the dead, I have risen to speak to you to-night.'

In the solemn silence which followed the ministers of the town, led by Dr. McGirvie, filed past and each in turn gave to Reston Rigg the right hand of fellowship. Thereafter the Fiddling Minister abruptly left the hall without sitting down, so that he should not have to say anything.

I tell you, if I had opened my mouth, I should have made a con - I mean, a consummate fool of myself!

And indeed the good Barnacle saved the situation and expressed the feelings of the people by giving out in his most commanding pulpit voice the order, '*Sing Praise God, from whom all blessings flow!*'

And they sang as one man, though there were tears in many eyes, while Reston Rigg, a little aloof from all the others, listened with bowed head and his hands netted nervously in front of him.

The Bairnly Minister pronounced the benediction, and the great gathering, the most moving and powerful that had ever been held in Longtown, melted away.

As soon as it was over the ministers shook hands once more with Reston Rigg, Hester his wife, and that one of their brethren who was his father-in-law. It was the general impression that it would be well to leave that little family alone. The Clerical Club was a good judge of such things. They had the daily practice of souls, and in this matter judged rightly. For already Hester had taken her husband's arm.

'I am proud of you,' she was saying. 'You have made me proud and thankful.'

'Happy too, I hope?' said Reston Rigg, smiling sadly. 'If only I had made you say that ten years ago.'

The Barnacle, who had had forty years of a fortunate marriage, recalled some things which must be attended to, and hurried off the other members of the Clerical Club.

'We are not wanted here,' he said. 'Better leave them alone.'

And Thomas Conley, that austere logician, nodded assent. There was nothing to do but to follow the people down the aisle to the main entrance, while the three, father, daughter, and true son, withdrew into the vestry together.

And even in that place there was little said. Hearts were too full. Reston, indeed, was still radiant with the glow which comes only on the face of a man after the heart has taken fire and the tongue has spoken its innermost message.

'It has been a precious season,' said the Bairnly Minister, falling back upon his professional glossary to hide his real diffidence. 'Truly the Word of the Lord hath been spoken among us this night.'

But Hester said nothing, for her eyes were for her husband. He was as she had almost despaired of

seeing him - almost, but never quite.

Slowly the minister put on his overcoat, but Reston, in his haste and preoccupation, had forgotten his. Hester would run home for it. He had been speaking - must consider his throat. The night air would be dangerous.

The vestry door opened on a little by-lane with walls on either side; but even here was a sprinkling of the curious or grateful waiting to see Reston Rigg pass out. There were some who, if they had dared, would have asked his blessing. Among them was Sheba Saunders.

To test the weather Hester put out her head. Then, still uncertain, she stretched forth her hand.

'Why, it is beginning to snow!' she exclaimed. 'Stop a minute, Reston, till I fetch your Inverness cloak. I am all bewrapped, while you have not even a scarf. What was I thinking about?'

Reston came to the door and laid his hand on her shoulder to restrain her. Thus husband and wife stood for a moment clearly thrown up against the lighted vestry behind them.

A slight attempt at a cheer went up from the young people waiting, when out of the doorway opposite, parting the groups of curious folk, came into view the dark figure of a woman. She was haggard of face, and her hair tangled and untidy. But her eyes flashed in the gaslight, wide and fixed. She had a pistol in her hand, the muzzle pointing to the ground.

'At last I have found you, woman' she cried. 'To-night you have lied, Hester Vane. He is not your husband! He is mine! Mine! Mine! He promised me, and he is a true man. You are a thief, a supplanter.'

Her speech failed her. She seemed ready to fall,

stumbling this way and that like one in liquor. But the sight of Reston Rigg, with his hand on Hester's shoulder, changed this. She squared herself and took a step forward towards the lighted oblong of the vestry door.

'There he is!' she cried. 'He will not deny. He cannot deny. For him I left the happiest home and the kindest husband to become - what I am to-day! Without a thought or a regret I did it - to show him how I loved him! And he knows - he knows. Now I will finish with this woman, and then he will return to me again. Out of the way there. Let me kill the singing woman. If she is his wife, as she says, I have something here that will divorce them, quicker than a score of lawyers!'

She stopped within a couple of yards of Hester, who, descending from the cheerful, lighted vestry, and hearing indistinctly, did not take in the meaning of the words, nor in the least understand that these menaces were being uttered against herself.

But Reston Rigg was not deceived. He knew the voice. With his usual swift precision he thrust Hester behind him, and as the pistol rose to the level of his wife's heart he stepped quickly in front.

'And now,' he said quite calmly, 'what have you to say to me?'

The report of the pistol answered him, but it is doubtful if he even heard it. Instead there was in his ears the sound of many waters. He stood a moment solid and massive, then slowly his legs gave way under him. He crumbled rather than fell to the ground. His wife bent swiftly over him and received him in her arms. Save for murmuring a name, Reston Rigg spoke no more. Hester Vane heard, yet though the name that came from his lips was not

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her own but another's, her pale face gave no sign. That also she could keep for herself.

It was her supreme penance.

The Silent Foot had overtaken the Mesmeric Evangelist in the hour of his public sorrow. For even the sincerest remorse for sin does not stay consequence.

And as for Sarah Jimson, she stood and watched calmly, the pistol still smoking in her hand, till they came and led her unresistingly away to the asylum from which she was never more to come out.

* * * * *

All this happened on the eve of my marriage - the marriage which was to save the life of Jan Cassells. All day long we had been busily keeping her up, amusing her as close to the fireside as possible. No papers, local or others, were brought into her room. But with heavy hearts June and I chattered indefatigably, and in the evening her father came in. He told us, with befitting Erasmian sobriety of language, of all the happiness he looked for from our union. It had been the dream of his later life to remain where he was. The house, and especially the study, suited him so well. Indeed, the situation would in every way have been ideal, but for the irksome duties in connection with the School - so fatiguing and so liable to turn aside a man's best ideas; perhaps even lose them irrecoverably. But with Mr. Ross in his place, and he enabled to contribute, owing to the recent heritage (for which he took not the slightest credit) to the necessary expenses and supererogatory comforts of the domestic establishment, all things might go on

unchanged. It was a consoling thought to the good Rector, and he felt that the least he could do was to acknowledge his blessings.

I thanked him, and so, in his haste, did the Birdy Minister, who was to marry us on the morrow. I saw him look questioningly at May as he did so; but she shook her head, as if the present were not a good time for him to open his mind upon some subject at present a secret between them.

Jan was strangely excited that night, and several times June and I (making hasty rendezvous without upon the stair-landings) whispered the anxious question, 'Is it possible that she knows? If so, who could have told her?'

May - no; she was to the full as careful as ourselves. Could it be Francis Elder, the Birdy Minister? He would certainly do what May told him! Dr. Robson? He knew his business too well. Her father? He did not know himself, and without his glasses could not have read a placard a yard away, even if one had been carried past him on the street.

But though it was impossible that Jan could know of the presence of Reston Rigg in Longtown, it is certain that she was nervous to excess quite different from what we had ever known her, since the old days when we had to be a bodyguard about her to keep her from escaping.

Even Persilla Potter, the ever confident, shook her head. She was not taken in by the brilliant eyes and quick, witty speeches of her young mistress. The Celtic mysticism of her Highland mother, the instinct of prophecy, took possession of Persilla.

'There's something behint her e'en, Mr. Adrian, that I dinna like,' she said. 'I have seen her like that when YON was takin' her. I'm dootsome - aye, I'm

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sair dootsome that ye will wear the black and she will wear the white! But no for a wedding, poor thing. Oh no - it will not be for a wedding she will be needing the white.'

She settled somewhat a little after the hour of the meeting was past, and there fell a hush upon us all as the hour-hand crept from eight to nine on the dial of the little chimney clock. At half-past nine Jan said that she wished to sit up. She wanted breath.

'No, not you; let June come and hold me - nobody but June - dear June. I have been so cross and horrid with you, June. But now you will be happier. Yes, happy, really happy - I mean, as in the old days in No. 4.'

At a glance from June I slipped out, and by the favour of the postmaster got a telegram through that night to Sir Waldemar. I besought him, if it were at all possible, to come in the morning, as Jan seemed to be very much worse.

When I turned homeward again it was later than I thought. I had been delayed a little by the flood of people slowly moving down Bank Street, away from the Congregational Church. To look at they were a solid mass a couple of rods away. But when once I got into the stream I found that each half-dozen or so constituted a serried group, with heads all bent inward, discussing the events of the meeting just over.

I had to thread my way painfully amongst these, for no one paid the slightest attention to me.

But at last I got to the little souging avenue of poplars. I opened the door of the parlour gently. Jan was on her feet pale as death, June clinging to her arm and helplessly weeping. I could not make out why. I went up to Jan hastily, saying, 'What is it,

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Jan? Let me help you back to the sofa. You know you ought not - '

But she cut me short with a stony stare and with a haughty gesture of her hand pushed aside my arm, thrust forward to hold her up.

'How dare you?' she cried. 'Who are you, sir?'

And she looked at me as at an intrusive stranger. The seizure had come upon her stronger than ever, and it was for this reason that June was weeping.

But after a few minutes something rigid about Jan seemed to lose its hardness. Her strength failed her. She sank bank into the arms of her sisters June and May. We called her father, and as he came in, his face suddenly whitened, but he found not a word to say. This was somewhat beyond Erasmian eloquence. The lips of Francis Elder moved - perhaps in prayer. I do not know - I was too astounded at Jan's reception of myself.

Jan lay on the sofa very still - her dark hair all loose and scattered about her shoulders. One arm was limp beneath her head, the other lay extended by her side.

Her eyes were open and fixed - as it seemed, on something very far away. She saw nothing in the Flower Parlour, of that I am sure.

I think it must have been about ten o'clock, or perhaps a few minutes before, that we heard the first words from her lips. During these minutes she had grown strangely beautiful. Instead of being deathly white, as of late, she had again the full rosy flush of youth and love.

She turned her head like one who listens. Then, like one satisfied, she nodded slightly.

'Yes, I am coming,' she murmured, with the sweetest smile I had ever seen on her lips. Then in a

louder tone, 'I hear you calling me. *I am coming to you, Reston!*'

And she went.

* * * * *

RESCRIPT

Little remains to be added, and that of the slightest but most needful sort. Reston Rigg and Jan Cassells lie apart, but not too far apart. The turf of the same green knoll covers them, and at least their spirits went together into the presence of the Lord of the Balances.

Rest their souls, say June and I, and all folk who do not make of themselves judges and dividers of the lives of others.

June and I are none the less happy - but the more - that we have been proven by the Trial by Sacrifice. For if it was not our lot that the sacrifice should be made, at least we were willing to make it. May has long ago left us for a home of her own, but I am still Head of the High School of Longtown and Cheviotshire. The 'Rector' (for so we call him still) has his precious books, his undisturbed days, his untouched study. Only Persilla dares confront him there. But thrice a day he comes out of his own accord, hunger perhaps tempting him, and lays before us the treasures of his learning. His head is white now - the winter after Jan died changed the colour of his hair. But he looks nobler, wiser, and more unselfish than ever - so we love him all the better that he leaves us so largely to ourselves.

I do not think that we speak much of Jan. We

agreed that we would not. The Bairnly Minister is no longer to be met on the streets of Longtown. And many are the sick folk who miss him. He resigned immediately, and went back with his daughter to the house of Forelands on the heughs above Rushport.

There my Tired Angel has taken the headship of everything. For though Mr. Harold Kingsman loved not his nephew, his eyes brighten as they rest on the comfort of his old age, once Hester Vane, but now referred to by the staff and all the neighbourhood as 'the young Mrs. Kingsman.' But to me and June, she will be for ever 'The First Soloist.'

And Persilla! Of a surety she needs a paragraph and more. Persilla it was who on the day before our marriage (June's and mine) took on her own account, and without previous consultation, an invitation to Miss Sheba Saunders at Solway House.

She was not received with contumely. Miss Sheba did not even get time to ask her to carry the piece of pasteboard to Elizabeth Havens, the wife of Red Rob and my latest landlady. Persilla was before her. She said, 'Miss Sheba, you are of a better family than I can lay claim to (though mine is good enough for a working lass). And so you should be the more ashamed of yourself - you being well brought up! Now you are to come to Miss June's and Maister Adrian's wedding the morn, and ye are to put on your black paduasoy that Mr. Adrian likes. And for a wedding present ye are to send them the auld chairs Chippy-somethings, that are no good to ye at all, but are just rotting up yonder in your garret. Fair firewood, I call them, but Miss June would value them. I have heard her carrying on about them. And your father and grandfather, sensible men both, have sat in them. *They* would have come to the

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wedding and never need to be speered twice. And mind the black paduasoy, with lilac ribbons and some o' your mother's auldest lace! There's for ye, Miss Sheba Saunders! Tak' your tikkut!

And on this invitation Miss Sheba Saunders actually assisted at the wedding, and now she comes across to take a bite of supper with us when her engagements allow, and perhaps she plays a game of backgammon afterwards with her old friend Dr. Erasmus. Whereupon they quarrel about points, and accuse each other of cheating, as if they were still children at the village school.

We would certainly be the better of another servant. It would be more becoming, and besides we could afford it. But Persilla stands in the way. Indeed she blocks it. She has not yet made her matrimonial choice, and besides Eben Watson, McVeagh the policeman (now a full sergeant), and the silent carpenter, there are others of a younger standing.

I am not expected any more to frequent the shades of Todd's Wynd on any pretext. That day has passed. Even June is not possessed of the lordship of the kitchen after eight o'clock, but Persilla, a stickler for etiquette, sees that it is always clear by half-past nine, a late hour in Longtown.

The Clerical Club meets regularly now in our house, and I think the old walls inspire them, for the discussions are more acrimonious than ever. But the fiercest battles are apt to be calmed into shamed silence - not at the entrance of June - they do not care a button for her, that is, in the way of restraint - but when Persilla states that 'Tea is on the table,' then there falls the most sudden of reconciliations. For they all know June's teas and appreciate them -

clerically.

Persilla asked the Fiddling Minister a question the other day which shook him up.

'What does a decent, jolly-looking man like you do without a wife?'

Which is just what the club has been wondering for many years, and it is possible that the Fiddling Minister may 'tak' a thoct and mend.' Besides, he is, like the rest of us, a trifle afraid of Persilla.

But it will not be Persilla who will help him into double harness. For, to prevent mistakes, she added in the presence of all, 'It's not me that would marry either a dominie or a minister. No, Persilla Potter has seen ower mony of thae breeds.'

Accordingly Persilla reigns in the School House and rules alone. June has to consult her as to my allowance of shirts per week, and if the time has come when she can buy herself a new summer hat. True, my wife has some few remnants of independence left. She is not strictly tied down to Persilla's taste in the trimming of head-gear, otherwise she would go to church in a huge white feather, with something 'lightsome' in the way of huge bows of scarlet and green, flaring all along the front of the gallery. For such is Persilla's taste.

No, we may be happy, but we do not forget, June and I. There is a great breadth of fertile gratitude in our twin hearts. Jan was our tender spring morn, our summer thundershower, when first we nestled together because we needed to. We did the best we could. We were willing to do all, and now I do not think we can be blamed if we accept our happiness with quiet hearts.

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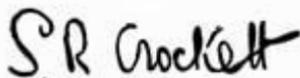
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'Mayhap that is the best fortune of all – to be loved by a few greatly and constantly, rather than to be loudly applauded and immediately forgotten by the many.'

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S. R. Crockett". The letters are cursive and somewhat stylized, with a prominent "S" and "R".

