

ROSE OF THE WILDERNESS

The Complete Crockett

*The Galloway Raiders*

*digital edition*

Scottish works



ROSE OF THE  
WILDERNESS

S.R.CROCKETT

# Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

First Published by Hodder & Stoughton, 1909.

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

*As a description of life in a wild moorland region of Galloway this book will serve very well.*

*Rose of the Wilderness* appears on the surface to be an out and out rural romance. The central character Rose Gordon is the orphaned daughter of Henry Gordon of the Dungeon of Buchan which is some eighteen miles up the hill from the village of Minnigaff. The actual setting is around the 'Backhill o' the Bush' area, still not very accessible (except by forestry roads).

The journey to Cairn Edward (Crockett's fictionalised Castle Douglas) is something of a trek and the possibility of a trip to Jenners in Edinburgh is almost fantastical. Aged seventeen, Rose Gordon has never seen a row of lighted shop windows. No wonder then that when she visits the capital she is overwhelmed. However, this novel is about journeying and in the course of it Rose seriously broadens her horizons. She learns of life from Austen, Dickens and Tennyson – and from her own experiences.

Published by Hodder & Stoughton in 1909, this is about as far from *The Loves of Miss Anne* in style as it would be possible to get and yet remain a romance, and is perhaps more akin to *Strong Mac*. If nothing else, this fact shows Crockett's versatility in writing to order for his publishers (and readers). Yet behind any obviously quaintness in *Rose of the Wilderness* there is a rural reality which is quite compelling. As with many Crockett novels, scratch

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beneath the surface and a treasure store emerges.

Travel is a large part of the novel. Like several of his other novels, railways play a part in this one. Glasserton Station gets a mention, as does the New Galloway to Portpatrick Line which Crockett knew well. For a substantial part of the novel Rose travels from Galloway. Her marriage opens up a whole new world. She and her husband travel on honeymoon to Paris, spending three months in Europe before settling in the South of England. They return to Galloway with a baby – and servants!

Back on the familiar territory of Galloway we are once again treated to Crockett's descriptive powers and powerful ironic humour in his best known and best loved scenery.

The Galloway sections of the novel are set around Cairn Edward, Nether Dullarg, Loch Dee and Clatteringshaws – covering a vast area of central Galloway. One would not be advised to use this as a strict map of the actual places because Crockett used his imagination and re-sited places to suit his immediate aims. The Galloway we visit in *Rose of the Wilderness* is real but also very much a construct of Crockett's imagination. That said, we revisit a lot of the familiar Gallovidian haunts and habits in this novel. Quoits is played – and the narrator points out that this is generally accompanied by strong drink in Central Galloway. There is partying and drunkenness. There are people letting their hair down and people being reprimanded by ministers. There is also a humorous description of a camping trip and more comedy in the description of an attempt to give up smoking. And of course there is romance.

With his description of the great November storm,

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Crockett renders a vivid and moving picture of the harshness of stock rearing. As the men struggle to bring the sheep back to the house, we feel for them, not just emotionally but also viscerally. Crockett's descriptions of extreme weather, especially storms, are every bit as strong and evocative as a Turner painting. Nor does he shy away from reminding the reader of the impact of nature on the rural dweller. The loss of sheep causes rent arrears and evictions and the harshness of life is caused by the power of nature and of man. But Crockett manages to inject humour in the midst of it. The ubiquitous collie dogs, Tweed and Tusker, play their own role in maintaining order and are as lively and well drawn as the human characters. Rural and small town domestic life is put under scrutiny throughout and to my mind is actually of considerably more interest than the love story itself.

Rose may be inexperienced and to many eyes a 'hick' but she is as feisty as any of Crockett's heroines. When the family tenancy is put under threat she stands up to Andro Freelan. He is a dislikeable and ruthless man. He owes the Gordons money which could square them with the landowner, but he refuses to pay his debt. The Minister tries to remonstrate with him, but it takes the wiles of Muckle Tamson, stealing his horses and hiding them, to put Andro back in his place.

But money is not the answer. Even when Rose's father can pay the rent, he falls ill and trouble is not at an end. Crockett illustrates the iniquities of the system, showing us that tenancies could be bought and sold by landowners with little concern for the people whose lives were tied up with the land. This gives us another good insight into the reality of the

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lives of ordinary rural folk a century ago. Never one to shy away from describing rural poverty, its consequences are also highlighted as Crockett draws a picture of 'Spring Heeled Jacks' and the fear they engender amongst the ordinary rural folk. He also suggests the distinction between 'gaun bodies' and tramps, reminding us that there is more beneath the surface.

Typically, harshness is always underpinned with humour. There is a wonderful scene where the ever resourceful Muckle Tamson intercepts the Sheriff's Officer at Clatteringshaws and takes him across the bogs, via the 'gauger's pool'.

The boys Stoor and Tommy entertain with their antics. Yet there is always darkness underlying the humour. In an attempt to frighten a deranged Selina into her senses, the boys attempt to dig up the body of her former husband, Chug. When this fails they make a scarecrow of his old clothes. Their comic antics are thrown into sharp relief with the pathos of Stoor's desire for a 'name.' He wants nothing more than a family to call his own. As so many times throughout the novel, it is Muckle Tamson who steps in to provide a practical answer to the problem.

Madness is often dealt with by Crockett in his novels and *Rose of the Wilderness* is no exception. A form of madness is revealed in the actions of Selina who refuses to give up Rose's baby. More significantly, there is the madness of the spurned Willie Gillespie who is placed in the Crichton mental asylum. This whole section is both moving and somewhat unsettling. Whereas earlier in his career Crockett wrote madness in a primarily gothic style, he now shows a far more real picture of

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psychological breakdown – just as extreme and just as disturbing – but somehow more rooted in reality both in the impact for the sufferer and those around him or her.

In *Rose of the Wilderness* Crockett also plays with the narrative style, at times giving Rose a chance to speak for herself through first person narration. Understanding that he was working within the episodic tradition, which allows for such shifts of narrative voice, can help the modern reader, perhaps more used to linear fiction, to enjoy his work. Crockett's canvas is more three dimensional than linear. He looks at issues from a range of perspectives and in doing so, shifting narrative stances is a bonus rather than a failing.

Throughout, there are a range of observational details which stay with the reader. From the declaration that affection is rarely displayed in Scotland and the assertion that Scottish folk do not kiss one another, to the 'domestic' descriptive detail of coffee pots and linens, Crockett manages to convey a picture of a world that while now long gone, was once very real. All in all, there is plenty in *Rose of the Wilderness* to keep the reader interested – way beyond the interests of a light romance novel.

*Callie Phillips*

March 2022

## CHAPTER ONE

### A HEATHERY WORLD

Four times I had been at Newton Stewart, twice at Dalry, and once at Dumfries, which has thousands of people and pavements that go right across the street. My name is Rose Gordon, and silly folk call me 'The Rose of the Wilderness'—though not in the hearing of my father.

He is Henry Gordon of the Dungeon. The Dungeon is a farm—a little sheep farm with heathery hills thronging about it as far as the eye can see. Many gleaming little lochans separate these, and in the flat places between there are slow blackish 'lanes' of water turning and twisting among the black peat hags.

The nearest school is at the Rowan Tree, but it is a long, rough road, so my father mostly taught me himself. He is a well-learned man, my father, even for a Galloway herd, and in his younger days, before he wedded my mother for good and all, he had many strange and terrible adventures.

But he settled down well enough, only for the sake of peace very far from his fellow men. He had plenty of books—more than could be brought to the Dungeon on the backs of four strong horses. For when he came here there was not even a cart-track over the moss-hags and the heather grew to one's armpits.

Of course, also, up in that solitude there was great dearth of nutriment for everything—that is, except black-faced sheep, whaups, and all the wild

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things of the moorland. My poor mother died when I was three days old, and my father brought me up.

Think of it, at the cost of what sacrifices I breathed the breath of life! I had the milk of a foster-mother ass for three weeks, till Biddy fell into a moss-hag and was brought out, the first dead donkey ever seen in the neighbourhood, and still remembered in local song. My father comforted himself and me by reading a passage out of a book by a man named Sterne—which I did not get the chance to do for a long time myself, and then did not understand it. I was, therefore, only three weeks and three days old (and an orphan on my mother's side) when he thus began my literary education. But father meant well.

Then I had cow's milk fetched from the Macmillans' house at Bongill—good ten miles. But father fell lame, and could not do the daily double journey, though he held out a long while. After that he milked the ewes for me till there were no more ewes to milk on all the hillsides of Dungeon or the Buss. Even Tweed and Tusker, his rough-haired collies, could not induce them to be trapped. They haunted coves under rocks, called 'bunkers,' and the inaccessible fastnesses of the heather which had neither been cut nor burned.

But in spite of all father brought me up, and I thrive. He carried tins of preserved milk on his back, a dozen at a time, all the way from Dalry, coming over the smooth green mountain called Corscrine in order to do it, his lame leg trailing wearily behind him. After mixing it with water he heated it. He ground oatmeal fine as flour in a disused quern, for which he had often been offered large sums by antiquaries because it had curious

whorls and marks upon it.

What else he did for me in that lonely place I never found out till it was my lot to be a mother myself. Then I began to understand my father better. He was not a man to boast about himself, this tall, close-mouthed Henry Gordon.

In his moments of greatest expansion he only said, 'There she is, my daughter, Rose— I brought her up!'

And when they asked about my mother, as sheephefters and dealers sometimes did laughingly, he would draw his brows a little together, and say, 'I, poor Henry Gordon, am the only mother Rose has ever known!'

He was as clever with his needle as with the housewife's porridge spurtle. The house was always like a new pin—swept, garnished, but by no means empty. I remember to this day after I was put to bed, the silence broken only by the sound of distant falling waters and the rustle of leaves as my father sat reading to himself through the night watches. Among his other papers he got women's fashion magazines— there were sometimes things for babies and children in the back pages. He corresponded with distant firms. He received and unfolded mysterious paper patterns; he even learned to make his own shirts, which he did from an exaggerated pattern of a feminine chemise, and so presented an extraordinary appearance when, next year, he went over into Kells parish to the harvesting.

Some laughed, but Henry Gordon, calling upon the name of the Lord, stretched them one after the other as scoffers and men of mean understanding. He found that an armless chemise is one of the best and readiest of fighting trims—no rolling up of

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sleeves, nothing to restrain the muscle play at wrist, elbow, or shoulder-blade. Charlie Hogg, Eben Williamson, and Muckle Tamson of Ironmacanny found out this also.

More than that, they would have lost some days of good harvest pay and better feeding if their late antagonist, at whose armless shirts they had laughed, had not stayed them with consoling draughts (dictated by experience), and comforted them with plasters originally designed for me when I had fallen over the Glints of the Buss. Besides, he took them all three under his wing, and explained to them the visions of Daniel, the true character of Queen Elizabeth, and—the way to bring up motherless female children eighteen miles from anywhere, if ever they should find themselves so situated. Besides, he did a good half of their work. His arms waved bare to the 'oxters,' and there was not a smile on all the harvest-field.

Eben Williamson fell away the first time he passed a public-house—that is, he did not pass it. But both Charlie Hogg and Muckle Tamson of Ironmacanny remained permanently attached, which says the more for Charlie Hogg, who was a great quoter and tournament player. This profession, in central Galloway at least, does not generally accompany sobriety. His former nickname of 'Drouthy Charlie' showed that he was no exception. His eye was never in till after the first tumbler. He reached the 'pin' with the second, and stayed there with the third, clinking it thereafter as automatically as a good hammerman does the cutting chisel at the anvil. His backers, therefore, saw to it that he was supplied.

But Muckle Tamson, a sort of huge brute in

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whom my father had awaked a rudimentary soul—first by thrashing him as he had never been thrashed before, and then by talking to him about the stars, stayed entirely faithful. Willy-nilly, he returned to the Dungeon with my father, and for no wage at all, or only what little my father could afford, he would sit in the kitchen, taking his bowl of porridge with ewes' milk or treacle, and listening to the lessons my father was giving me, quite uncomprehending but wholly revering.

Can you fancy the strange appearance the world presented to me at this time? I was seventeen, and I had never seen a row of lighted shop windows. I had never seen street lamps. In my world people began to be crowded if they lived within two miles of each other. I had read about love-making and courtship and all that in books. But my first experience of the ways of men was when a wandering tourist asked for a glass of water at the door, and offered to kiss me. I thought at first that the man was mad, and called the dogs. But when I knew what he was after I cleaned the place (it was the side of my nose) with grass, and then washed it with black soap. My father chased the tourist for three miles with a shotgun kept for scaring crows, and just failed to wing him. We did not tell Muckle Tamson or there would have been murder done to a certainty. No more was heard of the tourist, except that when a man was taking a ticket for St. Pancras at New Galloway Station, he told the stationmaster (considerately named after the place, and a good fellow) that there were 'few'ful savages up in those hills' —to which he pointed with his hand. 'One of them,' he said, 'had shot at him three times!'

'What mischief were ye up to?' said the station-

master.

'Ah—hum—nothing!' said the man with the through ticket to London.

'Ah—hum—something!' retorted the station master, nodding his head and passing to his duty. He knew his own people, and had a poor opinion, generally speaking, of people who went to London except by Caledonian and London and North Western. He saw guilt on the man's face as soon as he booked for St. Pancras.

But for all that, the tourist Cockney made me think. Accordingly I looked in the glass at different angles, and announced that it was time for me to go to a proper dressmaker and get 'properly dressed.'

My father bowed his head with an involuntary sigh. Something had gone out of his life.

'Yes, yes,' he said. 'I have been expecting it this while. Maybe it would have been better to have just shotten him, and ta'en the chance of burying him quiet-like in a moss-hag!'

He was thinking of the tourist fellow.

But father made no difficulties, and he went to Dumfries with me. It was to be properly done if done at all. In due time—or, rather, what seemed to me an exceedingly undue time, I was fitted out with two dresses, one dark blue, for Sundays, and the other a 'serviceable grey,' for weekdays. Really, there was no need for the second, because on weekdays I, dwelling still in the moorland, stuck to the homespun skirt and lilac-flowered bodice which my father and I had made. For by this time I was his qualified assistant.

But I think father was never really quite happy after the advent of the two town-made dresses. I would steal in and catch him comparing them with

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his own handiwork, shaking his head all the while, and communing with himself.

'There's a something—aye, there's a something! I canna just hit it. But it's there! I can sew as well; and the Dumfries woman's lining is shamefully scamped. But there's a fit and a swing and a 'hing'—I own that it's ayont me! Yet have I striven for seventeen years to be thus beaten at last?'

Then, secretly and with immense precaution, he got the stuffs, the linings, the buttons, the skirt braid, the belting. For trimming he had heavy black braid, all ready made up into loops and patterns. He was on the hills all morning, but almost every afternoon he would go across to the Clatteringshaws to fetch his parcels. Then, locking his door, he would work far into the night, determined that the manly experience of seventeen years should not be put to shame by mere 'town lasses that were in their cradles when he was already making petticoaties for his bairn.'

I think—indeed, I am sure—that during this period Muckle Tamson, once of Ironmacanny, did most of the Back Hill work. The dogs had taken to him immensely, and were wont to follow him now almost in preference to my father, knowing by instinct where the work lay.

Of course, I was not allowed to follow the progress of the masterpiece. The whole was to be sprung upon me as a vast surprise on the morning of the summer sacrament. We had about eighteen miles to go to the kirk of Minnigaff, striking the Hollow of the Waterfalls a little to the left of the lion-shaped mountain called Curleywee, then crossing Bennanbrack by the famous wire paling, along which the birds lay by scores on its first erection,

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before they learned the trick of vaulting it in their flight, as a boy does the playground fence. Then away we went down the long Palnure Valley, green and kindly with bracken, the verges by the waterside grassy and restful to the eyes. High above all were heathery knowes and hopes looking down so as to keep a hill girl from feeling lonesome. Just at the last there was a mile or two of the road to which the feet took ill after the velvet caress of the verdure on one's bare feet. For, in those days, I went barefoot whenever I could. My father had made a pair of sandals for me with leathern soles, but I rebelled against these, using them only in case of crossing burnt heather or where the yellow flowers of the gorse warned of the green prickles all about.

I shall never forget that Sunday of high summer-tide, the Minnigaff sacrament. There had been a proud look on my father's face the night before. I could see all the time, after our frugal bowl of porridge with sugar sprinkled on the top for me, and treacle and ale for Muckle Tamson, that he was watching me—measuring me with his eyes, as it were, wondering about this and that.

Doubtless he was saying to himself that at last—at last, he would beat those town dressmakers with their own weapons. Such was his desire for secrecy and to take me by surprise that he did not dare to try anything on, or even to suggest such a thing. But he measured the 'town-made' dresses jealously, comparing them with his handiwork, using a ship's carpenter's foot-rule, and marking tenths of an inch.

Since I came to the age of doing such things for myself I have found out that this is one of the most difficult tasks in all dressmaking, at least for an amateur.

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Well, it was Sunday morning. At the farm of the Dungeon, about the steading, the silence could be felt. It could be heard, smelt, tasted. It was ambient, like the high, rare stillness of the mountain air, which, though seldom still, is yet, when quiet, the true image of the peace of heaven.

I found the new dress, brave and simple in its adornment as my father's faith in it, on the chair by my bedside. During the night he had stolen in and placed it so that my waking eyes might strike upon it.

I have not the least doubt that at that moment even he was listening, and I am glad now to think that I cried out with joy at the unexpected sight. But, alas, for the putting on! It clasped me at wrist and neck. It caught me like iron bands across the shoulders. I could scarce breathe in it. Poor father—I was so sorry for him and his disappointment, which was (or would be, rather) far greater than my own.

He had measured from the completed Dumfries dresses accurately, but he had forgotten to allow for the seams. It was specially revolutionary at the armpits, where the taking in had been greatest owing to the tight shape of the sleeves then in fashion.

Nevertheless I managed to array myself in it, my seldom-girt, free-limbed hill body straining at the whalebones of the bodice as in a strait jacket. The tears were standing in my eyes. Nevertheless I made me ready for the sacrament. My father had done this for my sake. I would go there, all the way to Minnigaff, for his sake. Cost what it might I should go.

At first I was rewarded. Luckily the skirt hung

clear of the ground. For that also had been liberally taken in, so that when I came out, and clasped my father about the neck, he pushed me off, and walked round me nodding his head, and smiling with the satisfaction of the artist content with his work.

'Are ye no pinched a wee?' he asked. 'No at the neck? I never saw ye look so smally? But it's genteel—aye, aye, unco' genteel! And the black braid pattern looks far afore thae Dumfries folks' garnishings! It cam' a' the way frae Pairis—they say so in the catalogue!'

I managed down the stair, and found Muckle Tamson in a sort of lusty frenzy of admiration, first as to my appearance, but secondly and chiefly of his master's cleverness, incomprehensible to a man who could not put a stitch of a darning needle into his socks without sending the steel from side to side of his finger. So, as my duty was, I suffered and said nothing.

Downstairs I found everything done—all the indoors work completed—the table laid, the sweeping and dusting all perfection, as in the old days before I was able to take my part. No farm-town like ours in all the wilds, and the curious thing was that I got the credit of it!

But to eat off that spread table was beyond my ability. I 'mumbled and crumbled,' as my father said, and I should certainly have heard more about it if it had not been for the looks of four eyes concentrated on the unaccustomed wasp-like neatness of my figure, as outlined by my father's masterpiece. Still, Henry Gordon had a feeling that something was wrong. For he asked me over and over again 'if I liked it?' 'As well as the Dumfries ones?' he added.

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'It's nocht gaudy,' he said, 'but juist brave and plain, suitable for a Sacrament Sabbath day, and for the daughter of Henry Gordon of the Dungeon!'

Furthermore he would guarantee that in all the parish there was not one damsel arrayed like me that day. I also could have prophesied as much, but for the life of me I was not going to say so to my father.

The day was clear and calm, the sky pale blue at the horizon, running into sapphire at the zenith overhead, little ripply white cloudlets banding it here and there—the perfect promise, perfectly fulfilled, of a day of great heat.

People who have never been up there—lived up there, I mean—think that it is always cool on the hills. They do not know that there come days far more glistening than any of the low countries, when the south-looking rocks are not to be touched with impunity, when the stones in the beds of dried-up burns glow with fervent heat, and when the sun, apparently only a few rods away, strikes down as if to turn men's brains into water.

It was such a day that I stepped out, father's masterpiece like a suit of plate-mail about me, bible in my hand, to walk the eighteen miles to the Kirk of Minnigaff. Muckle Tamson stood at the door and watched us go, a collie on either side of him, and Henry Gordon moving along by my side in all the dignity of his black suit, the wrinkles not yet out of his trousers and waistcoat, his dress-coat over his white-shirted arm, and a staff in his hand.

Oh, the agony I suffered during that first mile of rough walking shall never be known. Women may imagine it. Men cannot.

I think that ere I went half a mile I grew a little

lightheaded. I knew I should never reach Minnigaff Kirk. But, after all, that seemed so far away, so infinitely small, that it had not the least importance. Just to go on and on was the thing. Everything lost proportion. My father, striding before me, alternately rose so high that he overtopped the hills and anon shrank to the size of the little black things which began to shoot and scuffle among the heather at my feet as I drove through it, walking as on wool in an unreal world.

We came to the rocky bed of the Bonegill water. I saw beneath my feet the dry slabs broad and easy to be crossed as the pavement of a street. They seemed white hot. I could feel the heat gusting upwards in my face. Beneath, and a little to the side, was a black pool, overhung by the very last and slightest fringing birches of the moorland. How cool it would be—how pleasant!

To this day I do not know whether I fell on the heat-slippery slabs, or whether I threw myself into the Witches' Pool. At any rate, it was from its depths that my father saved me.

And when I came to myself, it was in my own little white room. The windows were open, the bees booming away down the valley, laden with heather honey, and my father sitting beside me keeping my head cool with fresh cloths of wet dipped linen. Outside I could hear the clink and jangle of the blue-painted cans as Muckle Tamson brought fresh supplies, and his abrupt command as he ordered the collies 'out of his road.' The sheep on all the hills might look to themselves that day. The Dungeon was their own.

As I came back to myself—when I regained consciousness, as the books say—I saw a strange

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sight. The new dress on which my father had expanded such treasures of labour, and love, and devotion, lay in ribbons, slashed and maltreated, as if with a kind of joy. The weapon gleamed among the debris.

Refusing help, he had carried me home. On the way he had doubtless divined the cause. And while I was lying fainting on my bed he had slit and slashed with his great pair of tailors' scissors, taking vengeance upon his own folly, chastening his pride, wreaking upon the masterpiece a sad wrath in which there was no anger.

But he was holding my hand when I awoke, and his grave, tender eyes, the eyes of a hill shepherd, vague and grey as a day of mist up there, dwelt upon mine.

'Rose,' he said, 'my Rose of the Wilderness' (it was the first time he had called me so), 'ye maunna be vexed with your faither for his fault. He is sair, sair humbled. Thae besoms o' Dumfries dressmakers hae beaten him. And it serves him richt! For the pride o' the flesh and the lust o' the eye that were in his heart on a Sacrament Sabbath morn! The Lord—yes, the Lord Himself—hath spoken with me this day!'

I put the strong old hand to my lips, and smiled at my father with the water standing in my eyes.

Many daughters have done virtuously, but it is not given to them to be loved as Henry Gordon loved me.

CHAPTER TWO

LILY AND ROSE

They tell you that nobody is really alive to the beauty of their birthplace. Well, perhaps not for some time after. But in the long run it depends on the person. For me, Rose Gordon of the Dungeon in the uplands of Galloway, from my earliest years I was glad of the large freshness of every breath I drew.

Solitary? Why should I be? I had my father. I had books. Men did not often come there, it is true, save our great Lob-Lie-by-the-Fire, Muckle Tamson, but on winter evenings a stray shepherd or two would look in, each with five or six miles of trackless moorland to cover when he left our warm ingle-nook. But men I did not want—at least, not yet.

I have told you how unhappy my father was after the failure of his great plan of making my dresses by rule and line—how he slashed the good cloth in order to give me relief when I lay fainting, so that it was no longer any good except to make floorcloths of.

But he was a determined man, my father, Henry Gordon, as you shall hear. He had a cousin, or niece, rather, who had married a great banker in Edinburgh. Her name was Nan Gilfillan. She was said to 'lead her husband a life,' but my father said that that was 'no more than was good for Watty Gilfillan in thae big towns.' You see my father had known him as a laddie-boy about Clachanpluck. In fact, Henry Gordon had been a strong, big boy when

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Walter Gilfillan was a timid, little one. Well, it chanced that one August day my father had been down at Cairn Edward with some lambs—the first thinning-crop of the year—and there, who should he meet but the banker's wife, a determined lady, bold and bright, if ever there was one—a true kinswoman of his own.

And to her he opened his mind, concerning the dresses and also about me. In one way he could not have done worse—in another he could not have done better. For you see, as I found out later, it was Mrs. Nan Gilfillan's joy to take hold of things, to bend them according to her will, to invent plans for other people, and to make them carry them out, on pain of her severest displeasure.

Still, I was fairly safe. It was a far, far cry to the Dungeon, bosomed in tall heather and deep morasses, sphered by roadless, trackless wildernesses, and wide slow 'lanes' to be crossed only by the leaping-pole.

Like the Montenegrins, our Black Mountain, that is to say the Dungeon, saved us for long from the invasion of the Turks. Not that Mrs. Nan was a Turk—or if she were, it was only in the intimacy of her family, and a very pretty and lovable one always.

At any rate, now she could only advise. She knew a family of poor girls—relatives of her own in some remote degree, traceable only by Mrs. Walter Gilfillan herself. For Nan the whole world was divided into two very unequal portions—'my people' and others. So far as in her lay, she was kind to outsiders, and helped them in a sort of organised charitable way that discouraged too frequent demands. But 'her folk'—she would run on all fours, climb a lamp-post, or camp out for their sakes!

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The Kemp family had once been—no, not exactly rich, but well off. The loss of Father Kemp had changed everything. A careful, clever, managing mother had done her best for the five or six daughters. They had gone into a small house. The elder had taken to school-teaching, governessing, and the usual sad makeshifts of women left to their own resources.

The youngest, Lila—which is to say Lily—had neither the head nor the stamina for such pursuits. She possessed, however, a turn for dressmaking. Once she had been sent for to stop with some rich relatives of her mother's—not the Gilfillan's; bank managers are not, as one might think, hideously wealthy. The clinking dross, the dirty rustling oblongs which represent money, do not stick to their fingers. But in no profession is there perhaps a higher percentage of good men—no, I will not say that, lest I should be misunderstood—perhaps rather 'of fine fellows' than in any other.

At any rate, Lila Kemp went to the Langleys. Mrs. Langley was a capricious woman. At first she thought of adopting little mouse-like Lila, whose fair hair and blue eyes attracted her. If she had kept this to herself, no great harm might have been done. But being of that type of woman who can keep nothing to herself which redounds to her credit, she told the girl of it. She even made her sign 'Lila Kemp-Langley' in her letters to her own proper mother!

'Mamie always was a fool of a woman!' said Nan Gilfillan, in her breezy rapid way; 'that poor man she married is only fit to be a stock-broker! All the same, she has no business to put foolish notions into that girl's head.'

And it was not at all little Lila's fault. She could

not help having an artistic nature. Mrs. Langley spent her days in taking her to the most expensive and exclusive dressmakers, but there was something in that little head of Lila's which guided and overruled the fancies of her foster-mother, her aunt, and the preconceptions of the millinery women. Instinctively Lila knew what was right. And the result was astonishing. Lila floated into great drawing-rooms like a windborne fay. She swung in the dance as the half-open petal of a flower sways in the breeze.

Gone were the short-skirted little home-made frocks, the neat white blouses, the straw canoeing hat with the white feather picked up in the poultry yard. She breathed a very incense of adulation. Men noble and distinguished bowed before her. What wonder if her head was turned a little. But her heart was the heart of Lila. And as to her beauty, that seemed to grow rarer, daintier every day. 'Pale as a lily,' so far as she was concerned, was no mere play of words. She possessed, however, to hide her paleness, a creamy bloom on her cheeks like that which the bees gather for their cells of wax.

It lasted one winter—the beat of light feet on waxed floors, the quicker, lighter beat of Lila's heart above, the thrill and tremble of some great opera—hundreds and hundreds of fair women, darkly backed by the silhouettes of men, all with their eyes on one stage—perhaps watching one woman, Lucy of Lammermoor, pouring forth her desperate sorrows, or listening to the Huguenots singing their midnight hymns to the praise of their God. Fervently Lila believed in them all. They were all true to her. As true and real, that is, as any other part of her life.

## ROSE OF THE WILDERNESS

How could it be otherwise? She looked at her wrists, and under the mist of diaphanous laces she could see the blue and gold bangles glittering snake-headed, brought at great price from the Orient. She wore her new mother's rings on her fingers. When the artist-coiffeur spent a couple of hours on her long, rippling hair—pale Australian gold—she looked sometimes in the glass at the girl whom it shined, at the flowing lines of the kimono—willow-pattern with hanging sleeves—and wondered if this were indeed little Lila Kemp. Her 'mother'—not that first one with the hands hardened with household duties, but the woman of carriages and 'male domestics'—appeared never to tire of her company. Her husband was all day away at his business of money-spinning, and Lila was there to delight Mrs. Langley's eyes with a frail daintiness like that of some rare ornament which the connoisseur unwraps from its silver-paper with the utmost care, so fragile and precious it is.

There was one man who seemed to be that connoisseur. He was Mr. Assheton Baddow, a man of means and family, who frequented the Langley's, delighting to hand about tea-cups and bend over little Lila at garden parties.

Did little Lila's heart beat the quicker at his approach? I do not know. Certainly mine would not, out here on the moorlands. As Henry Gordon says, the air of the Dungeon is a wonderful solvent for conventions. But still, I have never been tried so high, and what emotions ran or hopes crystallised in little Lila's breast, I know not, and you will soon see why I never asked her to tell me.

The very month when Lila was beginning her second season, with a skin cleared to the rare

paleness of alabaster, and a carnation mouth too red and full and gracious, from which all the sharp lines of poverty and hard condition had been ruled away, Mr. Langley died.

Lila was promptly sent home. The hireling 'mother,' the woman of the rings and the 'male domestics,' had other plans. Lila stepped back into a world as unreal as the one she had left. She put on again the alpaca and the linsey-woolsey, and resolutely, like a brave girl, shut all her brave doings and the witchery of Langleydom into the chest with her city dresses.

It was as well. In a year to a day Mrs. Langley was Mrs. Assheton Baddow, and using her money to further her husband's candidature for a seat in Parliament.

But all was not over. From those months of heated rooms and late hours little Lila had brought back something—a seed of disease. Gloriously happy and carefully nurtured she might have escaped, though a look at the spots of rose that hovered at times without apparent cause in the midst of the alabaster of her cheeks, told that the ill was by no means of yesterday.

But the worm of disappointment and rejection was burrowing deep, though Lila said nothing. Nan Gilfillan, one day when she came, charged as usual with good words and fruitful deeds to her kinswoman's home, stood aghast at Lila's appearance. She swept her off to the city—another city which is set on many hills, and is called Edinburgh, through which the winds blow almost too purely from the East and whirl across the Firth when the hills of Fife are blue and hard as Penrhyn slate.

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No, decidedly, Edinburgh, after a month's trial, was not the place for little Lila. A masterful, encompassing, motherly love she had, that of Nan Gilfillan—as well as good thoughts and attentions from her husband Watty, the Clachanpluck boy, in his short intervals of business. But the light burnt too low in its delicate lamp of gold for that rude Northern place, in which (as the natives say) even summer 'sets in with more than its wonted severity.'

But Galloway is sweeter, warmer, better. The very winds and rains there lack the Baltic edge, the tang of Russian steppes, and are soft and kindly and flowing like the speech of its natives.

So as soon as my father had the words out of his mouth, Mrs. Nan Gilfillan knew what to do. Her plans sprang like Minerva, wasn't it? (wait till I look out Lempriere!), full-armed for battle from the head of Jupiter.

'Lila Kemp!' she cried, and clapped her hands.

Then she explained. Lila was no invalid. She knew all about dressmaking. She was eager for work, but to send her into an ordinary establishment would be to send her to her grave. The moorlands was the place. And she told the girl's story.

My father objected. How could a girl, daintily nurtured and accustomed for so long to such luxuries, put up with the roughness of a Galloway farm? And so on, and so forth. But Mrs. Nan Gilfillan cut him short. She had two words for each that he could utter, in his softly resonant speech—not dialect, for, like most of his class, whenever moved, Henry Gordon used the best of English, only he wore his rue with a difference. Something more eminently gentle—like a child speaking a foreign

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tongue, perfectly yet somehow ashamed, I used to hear something almost sacred, too, in his finest moments, when my father took to his English—like the benediction after sacrament; I speak advisedly and with reverence.

Well, as you may think, Mrs. Gilfillan arranged it all, and in due time my father, with Charlie Hogg, Muckle Tamson, and a friendly neighbour herd, went to the Clattering Shaws to bring little Lila to us. She was the first girl companion I had ever known, and my heart went pit-a-pat as never for a lover's coming.

I can see them yet. Let those who have ever dwelt in a world bounded by the rocky 'taps' of the hills, with green peeps of grass where the sheep fed, with the brown and purple heather, the grey of granite, say what this first invasion of my solitude was to me.

There were things I could not tell my father—hidden yearnings such as girls whisper to each other in the night when the house is still and the candle out, or when they stroll -arm-linked, looking round every once in a while lest they should find themselves overheard.

Could I tell Lila all or any of these things? She had been in the great city. She knew 'the world!' Would she look down on us—on me? Oh, was I glad or was I sorry? As they came nearer, I became more excited. I could see them from far with my young sheep-searching eyes—one, two, three, four —yes, four men, and between them, led by the giant Muckle Tamson, a moor-pony. Something slight and small was set upon it, and a man, doubtless Henry Gordon of the Dungeon, supported the figure on one side.

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I could see them winding slow among the moss-hags, then getting into the midst of the tracked links of the Cooran. Presently the four men drew together. It was a place impassable for any one on horseback. I knew what was happening. My father and Muckle Tamson would be making a chair of their hands, clasped hand upon wrist. Charlie Hogg and the herd, Will Gillespie, would have the luggage. The moor-pony, eased of responsibility and load, found a way for himself, grazing as he went.

So they came to the garden-yett, through the high heather and yellowing tangle of bent.

And how shall I tell what it was that they set down there at my feet? I cannot really. But in a moment my whole heart went out to little Lila—Lila Kemp, who had once been Miss Kemp-Langley and ridden in a carriage with two horses. Now she had four men.

But, you see, Lila smiled up at me, and the lift of her eyes, at once pitiful and patient, gentle and loving, did away with every fear. I loved Lila. I love her still. She turned and thanked the men, so gently, and shook hands with them each. They were not awkward, because the right hill-folk have the original Celtic good manners which come to them perhaps with their race, at least with the names of their hills and habitations.

And Lila stood smiling at us all, though in her cheeks (as sayeth the preacher) the almond tree flourished and already the grasshopper was a burden. Yes, she smiled at us all. And thanked us with a voice which showed that at least the daughters of music had not yet been brought low.

And Muckle Tamson stood looking at the hand she had taken in hers—a part of it, that is. He held

it up to see if it were not different from the rest. Then he turned to his comrade, and uttered as his highest token of surprise and admiration the single word 'Glory!'

This in Muckle Tamson's vocabulary had no direct religious intention. It only expressed the utmost limits of happy astonishment.

'Noo for the sheep!' he said. And whistling on his dogs he padded away up the front of the fell with his long, slow, steady hillman's stride.

'Lila,' I said when I had her up in my room, 'am I to call you Lila?'

'What else?' she smiled, 'and may I call you Rose?—Have you any other name?'

I shook my head.

'Sometimes,' I said, 'they call me The Rose of the Wilderness.' She clapped her hands happily and simply as a child.

'Then I shall be the Lily!' she cried— 'yes, yes, the Lily and the Rose!'

It was a happy time—happy, that is, but for something that tugged at my heartstrings, or whatever is the thing that feels achey and will not let you alone inside.

Ah, well—no one suspected it, except myself alone. The breezes of the warmest summer and the longest autumn on record, the hills all one spread garnishing of rose and purple, league after sunny league of heath bells and heather, the hum of bees, the distant bleating of the many sheep, worked like magic on her spirits and on her body.

Lila was no longer the same Lila as when she came. She had forgotten London and Langleydom. She had forgotten the narrow things of a narrow home. Here there was plenty—such as it was— milk

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from the ewes, all the men in the neighbourhood ready to tramp the heather for her slightest wish to bring home anything that would make the colour come back to the cheek of our Lily of the Wilderness—or, more materially, tempt her appetite.

And she was happy. She laughed while she and I were dressing together in the mornings. She taught me to sing, for she had brought her banjo. And she knew old dreamy negro melodies so gladsome that they made you weep, and others so sad that they had perforce to finish with a laugh.

She taught my father also to dress-make. She taught him more than that too. The reader can guess what. I for one soon saw it. But I was not jealous—only there came into my heart a pain so exquisitely sad and sacred and—yes—sweet, that there is no name for it in any tongue or in any land, till we shall reach that one where God shall wipe away the tears from every eye.

But these our lessons, with Lila for a teacher, were not long. One autumn held them all. July was already bright and hot upon the purple mountains when she came to us. The very granite slabs of the precipices reflected the heather bells as if it had been sunset all day long. Yet it was only the first bitter day of November when a procession went across the moorland, and so down the long glen.

Our Lily of the Wilderness was in the midst. Four men bore her body. It was not heavy, but the black of the coffin made a sombre dash on the first snow of the winter.

I stood in the doorway and watched them go. For that in Scotland is an affair for men only. Only the colliers Tweed and Tusker abode with me, obedient and whining, because of the sense of calamity in the

air.

Four men bore her, and four relieved. My father, Henry Gordon, walked bareheaded behind. The goodwife of Bonegill and she of Craigencailzie had done what was necessary for Lila. But it was Henry Gordon himself who, with his new learning, had made the shroud as never shroud was made before. They were taking her to her own, and at the little railway station of New Galloway, the banker, Walter Gilfillan, was in waiting to convey Lila Kemp to her mother.

But I shall ever feel that her real funeral, from amidst those who loved her, was when I saw that little dark burden dwindle and vanish into the swirls of bleak November snow, upheld by the shoulders of four strong men, my father, tall and a little stooping, in front, and Muckle Tamson tramping steadily alongside waiting his turn, his eyes far away and the snow in his beard.

Then darkness came. The storm swept up the glen. In all the Wilderness of the Dungeon there was no longer any Lily.

And she whom they called its Rose was lonely indeed.

CHAPTER THREE

STORM ON THE WILDERNESS

The night of Lila's going away, my father came to kiss me. Usually he said, speaking his English gently, like one who has learned it by reading the Bible to himself, 'Good night, little daughter!' But instead this night he said, 'Good night, my only little daughter.' And he kissed me. Now in Scotland nobody (except certain foolish young people), kiss one another. And even they not much after they get married. So, as you may suppose, I was surprised, though Henry Gordon of the Dungeon had gentle ways with him too, quite different from other people. In Galloway the rule is the copybook one—'A Kiss for a Blow!' But the real interpretation is, that if you try to kiss anybody, she gives you a blow, and as hard a one, too, as possible.

It was a memorable winter that followed the summer of which I have written, the like of which for the beauty of its nights and days had never been seen in the uplands. But such a contrast is, however, no uncommon thing. Hill folk do not like their summers too good. They know that, as for all good things in this world, you have got to pay for them later.

After Lila's death my father was clearly discouraged, abode much in the house, reading books or appearing to read them. But he could not be persuaded to put his skill in dressmaking again to the proof.

'No,' he said, 'never—never again!'

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And there was the far-away look in his eyes which told me of what he was thinking. He had exhausted himself on the last dress that the little Lily of our Wilderness was to wear—the one she was wearing even now.

He took noticeably less interest in the farm. Muckle Tamson, our big, rough, silent giant, was on the hills all day. Then every evening he made his report, to which my father listened without great interest—how the ewes on such a hill were becoming 'packed' and ought to be 'driven out a bit' so as to find better provender—how those of another glen were working too low down and encroaching on the 'home sections.'

To all this Henry Gordon nodded assent, but said little in reply. Nor did Muckle Tamson expect it of him. They were accustomed to work into each other's hands, like two dogs bringing home a flock, one acting fore- and the other rear-guard.

On a certain afternoon there came to the house of the Dungeon the queerest, the quaintest little midget ever seen—a boy, small in stature and tanned of skin, but when one looked at him closely, evidently older than his looks. He said that his name was just 'Stoor'—which being interpreted means, 'Windblown Dust.'

He had no other name that he knew of—so, at least, he affirmed. He had been with the gipsies. He had tramped it—'hoofed it' was his expression, all over the three kingdoms. But still there was something of bright vivacity and clever directness about his small sloe-black twinkling eyes that was irresistibly mirthful and free from care.

Of course, 'Stoor' was received at the Dungeon. So much was compulsory. It is the fashion of the hills.

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You cannot turn a fellow-creature out upon the heather, and risk having their stiff, frozen corpses to stumble over when you go to the well to draw the morning's water. This is the lowest point of view. Flinty-hearted men argued so. The worst of them admitted the wanderer. They fed and sheltered him, but not so sumptuously as to provoke a return.

Not of such was Henry Gordon. He did not, of course, admit 'unkenned wastrels' into his house, but next to the barn he had a vacant chamber floored comfortably. And upon it good oat straw and plenty of corn sacks made none so ill a bed. The vagrant might share the family meals for four-and-twenty-hours, even for longer in case of need. Provisions were carried out to them, sometimes by me, but oftener by Muckle Tamson, whose slaves in a manner they were. The tray was passed over the 'half-door' of the old disused threshing-floor, which had become the 'wanderers' chammer,' and they were left to it, with the information that they could draw their own provision of water from the well. Sometimes they even washed up the dishes. But neither my father nor Muckle Tamson much approved of this. In fact, they counted it worse than nothing, and you should have seen both of them in the back-kitchen, almost scrubbing the enamel off the plates and dishes which had been so cleansed.

I recommended, as a solution of this difficulty, a set of crockery to be kept specially for tramps, which seemed to me sensible. But my father looked through me with his mild misty eyes, and said, 'Rose, they are human creatures just as we ourselves. And they shall be treated the same—as it was in my father's time, and his father's here on the Fell o' the Dungeon!'

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'Then,' said I, a little pertly, I own, 'there is the best spare bed vacant for the next comer, and you can let him wash all our dishes!'

But he did not take up the provocation. He only answered very gently, 'Rose, you are young, but the day may come when it will be well for you that Henry Gordon so kindly entreated the poor ones of this earth.'

Whereat I was abashed, and only said, 'Father dear, whatever you do is right!'

But at this he threw out his hands with a sharp cry of denial.

'Oh no, Rose—not that—far from that!'

I am, however, forgetting 'Stoor.' The boy had a strange way of insinuating himself, which to people more sophisticated or richer than ourselves might have seemed suspicious. He actually took his first meal in the kitchen—eating on a plate by himself in the window-seat, for such was his pleasure. Then he fetched a 'double-rake' of water from the well, and covered it up carefully so that it would not freeze in its place behind the door.

The dogs, jealous as only the dogs of a 'farm-town' in the wilds can be, never once barked at him, even at his first outgoing. 'Stoor,' though by birth a town laddie, had scoured the country so long that Tweed and Tusker knew him for one of themselves. He brought in sacks from the barn and slept cheek by jowl with Tusker and Tweed on the warm hearthstone.

He was out early in the morning with Muckle Tamson, away to the Back Hill o' the Buss, a place where all the ceiling of heaven seems to have fallen in, scattering far and wide the debris of other worlds.

## ROSE OF THE WILDERNESS

I said this once to my father, and he nodded his head approving the invention. Yet he had his expert's opinion to oppose to my ill-regulated imaginings.

'But yet it's none such an ill place for sheep as ye might think,' he said. 'I have bidden Tamson gather as mony o' the West Side sheep there as he can. Ye see the rocks are lying ower and ower yin anither, this way and that, as in the game ye fetched frae Dumfries—aye, spellikins, that is the silly name o't! And when the snaw comes, and the wind on the muirs is like a besom, it soops and soops and brushes and blaws till the maist pairt o' the snaw is soopit into the bunkers, as into sae mony scaffenger carts! But for the maist pairt the grund is bare. There is good feedin'—moreover, the sheep are not smooed under the snaw. It's on the bare hills like Corscrine, green and bonny to the e'e, that in the storm the yowes die by the score!'

And this I found afterwards to be a true word.

This winter we had need of all our Back Hills, of all our 'bunkers,' of all the ways of saving the sheep that were my father's only means of livelihood.

For on the 30th of November, a date long to be remembered through all the 'black-faced' country, the great snow-storm broke that wrecked the fortunes of many, and shook those of all who counted their poor wealth, not by the quotations of stocks and shares, but by the price of mutton.

On the afternoon of the storm my father stood at the window, the little window in the gable of the kitchen, close by the great ingle with its swinging pot, and watched, carelessly enough, the first flecks begin to fall out of the slate-blue sky. They, too, seemed to drift along listlessly, small and fine at

first, then gradually they increased in size till they seemed large as the palm of our little Lila's hand—and something of the same shape, too.

'Stoor' played with the collies, all three carefully keeping in the background and not permitting themselves any noise, lest they should find themselves kicked impromptu out of the comfortable kitchen to take refuge in barn or stable.

Only the giant Tamson, once of Ironmacanny, was visibly uneasy.

At last he spoke to my father, moving up till he stood shoulder to shoulder with him. For though my father was over six feet, he stooped, and Muckle Tamson overtopped him by good half-a-head.

'It's a baad nicht!' he said in Henry Gordon's ear.

My father assented with a sound that was almost a moan. I knew what he was thinking of—a little narrow grave, which had hardly yet had time to grow green. The snow would be falling thick on it, away there to the north.

Muckle Tamson tried again, leaning down and moistening his lips apologetically.

'The yowes!' he said, 'they should be lookit to! The Back Hill is fairly safe—me and That Craitur,' he pointed to 'Stoor,' now playing with the collies and pretending to let them eat his head in turns, 'we drave them ahint the 'bunkers.' But on the Dungeon itsel' and up by the Glints, likewise by the Head o' Dee, there's nae sayin' what may not happen by the mornin' licht!'

My father, angry with the falling snow, and thinking of the Lily of the Wilderness that had bidden with us so short a time, answered testily that he supposed after all that the sheep were his own, and that if it pleased him, they could e'en take their

chance.

'Na!' The monosyllable burst from Muckle Tamson as a river bursts a dam, 'Na!'

'NA!' he repeated the third time in yet louder tones.

Henry Gordon turned from the window and looked at the man. I think his idea was that Muckle Tamson had suddenly gone crazy. Never had he been contradicted by any man in his own house before. I saw the warning pinch of his underlip, the drawing down of the upper, which I knew so well.

'What do you mean, Tamson?' he said, and through the liquid softness of his Galloway speech there struck, sudden and strident as the cry of the sea-mew, the accent of anger, 'what do you mean, sirrah? Are the sheep not mine?'

Still the giant towered mildly above him. His body quailed before Henry Gordon, his master. The instinct of obedience was strong within him. But the spirit that Henry Gordon himself had awakened, the heart of a man, spake.

'Hers!' he said, hoarsely, indicating me with a huge thumb, as I sat on the other side of the fireplace busy with my book and knitting, 'hers — no yours!'

And with a twitch like the first shock of an electric battery, the muscles of my father's face jerked.

The giant stood before him, afraid now of his own temerity. He was not a noble figure. Rather it seemed to me he grinned a little with a weak sort of apology.

'Ye ken yoursel,' he added, wringing his hands, because his master did not reply, 'if anything was to happen to you, maister, yon yokes wad be a' her

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possession. And mine wad be the care o' them for your sake—and hers!

The words of the Innocent had gone home. My father's face lit up. He held out his hand.

'Tamson,' he said, 'I shall not forget this—be sure of that!'

With an assured countenance he took down his plaid, belted it rapidly about him, the ends over his shoulders and the fringes caught in at the waist. Then he took his longest 'clickie,' the hooked crozier of the first bishop in the world, the shepherd of sheep. The giant was also ready, and as for the dogs they needed no preparations, unless cocked ears, eager eyes, and frantically wagging tails might be so called. Ready they were, night or day, storm or shine. As an artist loves the skill of his art, the play of brush on canvas, so Tweed and Tusker loved the hillside and the sheep, the far-heard summons, the perilous leap arrested in mid-air, the ewe dragged back into safety, all the play and skill and genius which in dogs they call instinct. The care of sheep on wild hills was to them the finest game in the world—better than love, better than war, better than all!

Then my father's glance fell upon 'Stoor.'

'Let me come too,' cried the boy.

'Tut,' cried my father, 'a town's lad would only be in the road!'

'Wad he?' shouted Stoor, suddenly springing up and pointing his finger at Muckle Tamson, 'speak you!'

'The bairn's worth his salt,' said Tamson, 'he has a nose like a collie!'

And they went out into the raging storm, with only a nod to me, such being the custom of herdmen

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among the hills. Sheep work in these parts is wild work, and women have no part therein. Only when the mothers drop in a sickly spring, and there are too many lambs to 'graft' on deceived foster-mothers—then the woman of the sheep farm becomes a foster-mother in her turn. With an old coffee-pot hooded with soft linen well soaked in milk, she administers warm milk to twenty or thirty orphans, whose fathers deserted them at an early age, and whose mothers either died of a broken-heart—or in a more practical way, of water in the head, 'turning aval,' or one of those internal maladies that ewe-mothers are particularly heir to.

The evening grew to night. I kept a good hearth-fire, warm meats and drinks rested all night by the hob. But they came not. Sleep I could not, though perhaps I dozed, awaking with a start and the always deceived belief that I heard them knocking off the clods of snow from their boots on the doorstep.

But I was alone, and the storm swept in great gusts over the wilderness, each one like a huge dog hunting its predecessor, howling as it went.

I was at the door often, but could see nothing. The storm was close set, hugging the hills, driving like a white darkness before my eyes.

Then I fell on my knees and prayed. At times it is all that women are good for. Perhaps also there is nothing better to be good for. At any rate, that is what I did.

It was almost morning before any news came from the wild hills behind which two men and a boy wandered, storm-battered. And then through the deepening drifts of snow I ploughed my way to the outer 'yett' of the farm-stead and set it open. I do

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not know to this day why I did this, save that our house of the Dungeon stood with its back to the hill, and I could see a great drift gathering behind, which my father and the rest would need to turn before they could reach the courtyard and the open door.

Luckily also I bethought me of setting a light in the window of my room, the little gable chamber that had been mine and Lila's. Hardly had I done so when there came a gentle tapping at the window. I had been thinking of our Lily, lying far off under her first coverlet of winter white.

Could it be? No, impossible! I was not a girl to be subject to such fancies. And if she did come back, Lila would do me, who had loved her, no harm. But, of course, it was only a storm-forewandered bird attracted by the light, as I have read of them doing in lighthouses.

The tapping came again. Mastering my nerves I went and threw the wicket window open.

I saw a queer little face, the snow frozen and clinging about the shaggy tags of hair, wild eyes dark as sloes, and a mouth that cried words that were instantly swept away by the tempest without.

It was 'Stoor.'

I helped him in—indeed, I may say I dragged him in. He had seen the light and had come straight for it, climbing the snow-wreaths on his way. Standing on tiptoe his head just reached the window where the lamp had been placed.

'Your father and Muckle Tamson are 'back there,' he said. 'They are 'nearly dune!'

And the dogs? They were with the sheep. Could I give him something to take to them?

'Laddie,' I said, 'you will never find the way!'

Stoor threw up his head with the action which

dogs have of levelling the nose. 'Find them,' he said scornfully, 'what's half a mile at the maist. Lassie, I could find the dogs!'

Then he cast a curious look at me. 'It's no the like o' me that gets lost!'

He gathered a back-load hastily. I insisted upon coming, though 'Stoor' discouraged me by asserting that 'there wad juist be anither to bring hame.'

But being, after all, twice his age, and mistress of the house, I bore my point.

'Tak a guid grip of my coat, then,' he said, 'or ye will get blawn awa!' And indeed, once out of the shelter of the square of farm buildings, the breath was blown right out of me. I was dashed this way and that, but as I had been told—so I did. I clung to 'Stoor's' coat-tail, which luckily had first been made for a much bigger boy. I could not hear my own voice when I shouted. On the mountains the snow raged onward like sea-billows, and I thought we never would reach the two men.

But though the light was tardy, nevertheless a sort of greyness crept through the blackness of night. The tempest scudding over the fells became darker than the ground, instead of lighter, and after an abrupt turn and a plunge through a low archway, the entrance to a sheep-ree, we found my father.

He lay back and seemed very still. I had seen death once, and a great fear came into my heart. Muckle Tamson was stretched beside him, his coat off, and rubbing my father's hands. His coat of rugged frieze was wrapped about my father's feet.

We had a glass of fairly hot spirits first to give them both, then out of a tin pannikin some Scots broth. My father found himself the first.

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'Tak him hamel!' said Muckle Tamson, 'I'm gaun back to find the dowgs! They will be expectin' me!'

This 'Stoor' approved, and guided us back, helping my father like one long accustomed to the hills. The lights were still burning, and the house bien and warm. But my father seemed like a man beaten down and oppressed.

'We are ruined, Rose,' he said, mournfully, when I had got him to bed, 'and to think that I, who have been a herd all my life and my father one before me, should not see what that lowland ploughman and that changeling laddie saw!'

But the 'changeling laddie' was gone. He, too, was off into the bitterness of the second day of the storm to find Muckle Tamson, and to retrieve the dogs.

There was a long period of waiting. My father was half unconscious, at times raving of Lila, or calling on her to get into some 'rock bunker out of the snow.' Then, 'Aye, that's the place!' he would say, gleefully, 'the Lily will be safe there!'

The other two came back about mid-day, when the fury of the storm had moderated a little—a 'canny blink,' was what Muckle Tamson called it. But he did not hide from me that the disaster, which was likely to strike all the hill farmers, would certainly be also our portion.

'The Glints are safe,' he would say, 'and 'Stoor' here an' me hae driven the bulk o' the lave behind the Jinglin' Stanes, where at least they hae a chance. But it's a big storm—aye, a great storm, and a sair!' As for Stoor, he said nothing, he was already asleep on the hearthstone between the dogs, his quaint little wizened apple face laid across Tusker's shaggy back. And that, too, was a marvel, for Tusker took no liberties from any stranger.

## ROSE OF THE WILDERNESS

Up in his room my father kept murmuring his questions. 'Are ye sure her grave is bonny and green, Rose?' Or, maybe, 'Wasna she a bonny lass—I think I hear her singin' the nool!'

While down below Muckle Tamson made short excursions to estimate the extent of our disaster.

'If it freezes on the back o' this,' he would say, 'It will be by a mercy o' Providence if we save twenty score!'

And it was thus that ruin looked in upon the house of the Dungeon. Thus also that my father and I were in a manner saved by two waifs and strays blown in upon us by the winds of destiny—that is, by Muckle Tamson, once of Ironmacanny, and the wandering gipsy lad who had no other name than the 'Stoor' that the wind swirls along the road on a dusty day.

They saved us while my father lay raving, and I had to attend him—for he would scarce let me out of his sight for a minute.

But how, it will need another sheet to tell.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ANDRO OF THE RED HAVEN

On the hills the sheep had to take their chance, and a poor one it was. From Lammermuir (where the sheep is a sacred animal) to the Back Shore of Leswalt (where a score or so may tumble into the Irish Channel and never be missed) there went up one wail of moorland distress. A hundred miles by fifty was something like the surface dimensions of that wailing, but of its depth no man can plumb.

The smooth Moorfoots cried to Hundleshope, and Hundleshope passed the word to Minchmoor. Cheviot and Carter Fell on the south cried to Broad Law and Hart Fell on the north. But of all Galloway was the worst smitten. The storm had spent its fury there. The others, bad as was their case, had got off with only the tailings.

And of all in the Wilderness of the Free Province the Dungeon topped the list of 'casualties,' as these were duly reported in the published accounts of the storm.

However, by a special mercy, my father did not know the extent of his losses. He lay, weak and wandering on his bed, talking of this and that with the most sane voice and manner; only the matter was mere scraps of foolishness.

Moreover, spring rent day was coming on, and what should have gone to Wallet's or Lichtbody's mart lay rotting under the still frozen snow. The giant Muckle Tamson and his aid 'Stoor,' with the dogs, had indeed rescued many. Tusker proved

himself a dog of parts at these proceedings. The least tiny funnel, warmed and then melted by the breath of an imprisoned ewe, guided him. He would patter to and fro with waving tail, and then suddenly begin to dig with, as it seemed, all his four paws at once. The snow fled every way at once. Yet the matted spectres of animals that appeared, when found, were sometimes little the worse, and would begin to graze immediately. Often, however, so wide was the Wilderness, and so curious the ways of sheep, that a flock of them would collect in the only place where they must assuredly find Death—perhaps in a hollow shaped like the palm of one's hand, where they were immediately snowed over to the depth of thirty or forty feet, not to be found till the spring winds and rains had cleared the land, sometime in the early days of May.

It was a crowning disaster. Every night I could feel that Muckle Tamson and Stoor brought home no good news. They were keeping something from me — something which, as they thought, it would do me no good to know.

Yet I could see that Muckle Tamson was aching to speak with me. I gave him the chance. For three times running he did not take it. A certain dour awkwardness within him triumphed, and he could not even take the openings I made for him.

At last I had to ask him plump and plain, 'What is it that you want to say to me?'

'Oh, mistress!' was all he could get out.

But I encouraged him.

'Yes,' I said, 'there is something—out with it, Tamson. There is nothing I will not hear from you, and with gratitude!'

'The rent,' he said gruffly, to hide his emotion, 'it's

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about the rent! Henry Gordon hasna gotten it! He telled me!

'But the landlord?' I said; 'surely with Gordons for three hundred years in the Dungeon.'

Muckle Tamson interrupted me sharply.

'This year o' a' years, the laird will be at his wits' end for siller!' he said; 'the storm will hit him like the lave. There will be farms by the score left on his hands. And the new factor is no like the auld yin. Maister Caylie was a guid sheep-farmer himsel', and kenned what was what!'

This was unexpected, and unpleasant as unexpected. I went to my father's drawers, and found the private cash-box where he had always kept his money and bank-book. A balance, small, but to my eyes enormous, stood against the name of Henry Gordon. I knew nothing of banks and banking, and I thought they might be even as the new factor on the Wilderness estates—Pharaohs that knew not Joseph.

Of course I see now what I should have done. It is cheap and easy to be wise after the event. I ought to have written to Mrs. Walter Gilfillan or to her husband. But at that time, I hardly know why, I did not think too well of Mrs. Nan. I called her 'interfering.' Yet in my case kindly, well-judged interference was just what was wanted.

Eleven pounds in cash and the bank deficit was all that I could find wherewith to pay our rent of £95.

I could only look helplessly at Muckle Tamson. During my search he stood clutching at his big reddish-grey beard, and shoving it, almost by handfuls, into his mouth.

'There's a man,' he began, and so stuck fast, the

magnitude of the speech he had before him choking him.

'Yes?' I answered, encouragingly, 'there is a man—what man?'

'A man down in Riddlings Pairish. He owes your faither siller. He cam' yae nicht frae the Shore side to Ironmacanny, and telled in the kitchen what was his errand up to the Dungeon. Forbye, I saw the siller after he cam' back.'

'And his name?' I cried, greatly interested.

'Freely,' said Muckle Tamson, out of the midst of a handful of beard, 'or, maybe, Freelan—a Belfast Scotsman, whatever—an' nane the better o' that! He's a hard man—terrible rich, they say, and a pillar o' the Establishment!'

'With my father's money!' I cried indignantly. 'How dare he?'

'Oh, he's a great man for horses,' said Muckle Tamson, 'he breeds them, and ye will see about the 'Pride o' Solway,' his graund prize stallion, every week in the Cairn Edward paper! Oh, a great man is the Belfast man. He has a big farm, too, a' laid out in grass parks and wi' fine-to-superfine breeds o' cattle—no for decent eatin' but to send to shows!'

Here Muckle Tamson nearly swallowed his entire beard in his endeavour at once to make his idea clear to me, and to conceal from me certain points of it which, later, might come into contact with the laws of the land.

However, the thing came out bit by bit. Freely or Freelan had borrowed a large sum of money from my father 'in the midmost o' the Guid Years,' as Muckle Tamson reported. He had never repaid that loan. Meanwhile he had become a great horse-rearer and dealer. But concerning this there was no use asking

my father for details. He was far beyond any thought of debtor and creditor. Most likely, even if he had not, he would only have said, 'Leave the man to his conscience!'

But I had some of Nan Gilfillan's blood in me, and my way of seeing was by no means so unworldly. I borrowed my father's keys again. Muckle Tamson said I had the right, and my conscience affirmed the same. I found the receipt for the loan without the least trouble, also copies of certain unanswered letters which Henry Gordon had sent yearly to his debtor—more perhaps as a New Year's card than with any real hope of getting his money back.

'I'll hae to come wi' ye,' said Muckle Tamson, doggedly, like one who knows that he has strong opposition to face, yet feels himself 'able for it.'

'And the sheep?' said I, feeling that I had him there.

'I think that craitur—what wi' the dowgs and what he has learned here, will make a shape at it,' he answered. 'The 'girss' is comin' awa' fine, an' he's nane sic an ill callant, yon. Willie Gillespie will gie him a hand wi' your faither, and be proud to do the like!'

The sum was eight hundred pounds, and that, though no great matter to very rich folk, made all the difference to us.

A blustering wind was blowing out of the high nor'-west, and one of our three cows, an investment of my father's made in the days of Little Lila, looked piteously over the dyke. I could see the fell on their necks and flanks twist like blown grass as the blast struck them. And I minded the old Scots poet, of whom my father was so fond:

The wind made wave the reid weed on the dyke,

And gurl weather gruit beastie's hair!'

I felt there was some fitness in this way-going. The Dungeon had been a kind place to me for many a long year. But now I had begun to perceive the terrible strokes of Destiny which might befall us even there—the storm, the sheep, Lila's death, perhaps my father's. And the eight hundred pounds would be a very bulwark against the future.

But would I get the money? I feared much that it was a very forlorn hope, when my father had so often failed.

But still Muckle Tamson bade me carry on, and shook his head at the very suggestion of a lawyer. If, according to him, a lawyer took the matter in hand, I would never see more of the sum in question than the two nothings at the end.

It was people like Andro Freeland who went to 'lawyers.' As likely as not he would buy up ours. Muckle Tamson had all the prejudice of the hill man, with the blood of dead generations of Raiders in his veins, against the law and its councillors and myrmidons. 'Him' he was accustomed to say of some objectionable person, 'I could as soon clout him as a sheriff's offisher!'

Muckle Tamson preferred to be his own justicer, and in his wild days, before my father 'reasoned with him according to the flesh,' he had several times been sent to languish 'without the option' in Kirkcudbright jail, while the other man went about in bandages and plasters, spreading the name and fame of Muckle Tamson, even when (in accents of feigned sympathy), his neighbours inquired tenderly concerning his Injuries. For in Galloway, at least as between the male sex, sympathy is with the strong man who leaves his mark. And the fame of Pin

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McMyn, who dabbled his wooden leg into the soil at the butt end of Cairn Edward Railway Station and fought six Irish drovers, hath not yet passed away. He was an Orangeman, and his slogan-cry, uttered between every blow, had to do with the ultimate salvation of the Pope.

When I set out from the Dungeon, I did not realise with whom I was going forth to battle. But as I progressed southward I heard more and more of the name and fame of Andro Freelan, mighty in person, mighty in horses, a great, coarse, loose-living man, much like those who had persecuted the Martyrs, excepting, that is, John Graham—such a man, in fact, as has always led ‘the Opposition’ in Scotland, and rejoiced to defy ‘God, man, and the decent discipline of the kirk.’

I heard of the ‘Pride of Solway,’ and also of another prize horse, named ‘The Red Macgregor.’ Both were supposed to be worth hundreds a year to their fortunate owner. Both were represented indifferently by the same rude woodcuts in the local paper, while the medals, cups, and prizes they had won were popularly supposed to occupy one entire room of the house of the Red Haven.

I stayed a night at Cairn Edward with some relatives of my mother's, Patersons by name. They lived in a little white house with a garden that stretched up to the Cockhill, where in old days the boys of the town school had fought their game-cocks on ‘Master's Day’ to the profit of that same teacher, who garnered corpses and entrance fees and lived on cold fowl for a month.

At first the Patersons, these ‘far-oot-friends’ of mine, would not hear of my doing such a rash thing as to venture within the guarded confines of the Red

Haven, or the power of its redoubtable master. But when they had caught sight of the huge, rather slouching figure of Muckle Tamson, looking as if he were ready to run on all fours like a big St. Bernard with a shaggy head—after they had observed with interest that when he squared his shoulders he just filled up their outer doorway neatly, they became less afraid of what man could do unto me—that is to say, Andro Freelan, of the Red Haven.

Nevertheless, the Patersons, one of them the town postman (with five gold stripes on his arm, marked the way wild geese fly), bade me go and see the minister of Riddlings Parish, the Reverend Absalom Kenmore.

It was the first time I had heard the name at full length. I had seen 'A. Kenmore, Clerk,' printed at the end of the reports of Presbyterial meetings. But I now first learned that the minister of Riddlings was sensitive on the score of his name. When he remembered (which was not often) he kept his hair cropped as close as sheep-shears would cut it, and the easiest method of offending him was to refer to him in public as the Reverend Absalom Kenmore, B.A.

Sometimes he would murmur that the follies of the fathers (in which he included his mother, who had a tenderness for the Biblical Absalom inexplicable in a godly woman) even more than their sins, made the children suffer.

For the rest, I knew him to be a man strong in action, beloved in his parish, and a little feared, the very sight of his striding legs and wind-tossed apparel being a terror to evil-doers and a praise to them that do well.

Fortunate, indeed, it was for me that I went to the

manse of the minister of Riddlings. At first, indeed, it did not seem like it. Mr. Kenmore lived alone with a severe-eyed woman who was supposed to have the entire presbytery under her thumb. When any domestic affliction struck one of them, they bowed to the will of God—and called upon Mrs. Parkend. The order of events was this; the illness, the decease, the funeral—and Mrs. Parkend. She had a pinched nose, turned up a little and frostily ruddy, a widish mouth, lips thin, as if slit with a knife, and her eye was upon the shortcomings of every young woman in the parish.

Mrs. Parkend was not an amiable woman, and at first sight she took a dislike to me.

‘No one is allowed to see the minister at this hour,’ she said, severely, as if I ought to have known better, ‘he is at his sermon.’

But there was the blood of Nan Gilfillan in me; and, besides, the patience of having tended seven generations of motherless lambs on a hill farm.

‘Very well, then,’ said I, ‘I can wait! There is no hurry.’

And I sat down calmly in the shady corner of the porch, took a volume of Emerson from my pocket, and began to read.

‘Get aff my doorstep!’ screamed Mrs. Parkend, stamping furiously. I read on. She was a small, wizened snippet of a thing, bitter as gall, but of her I had no fear. I could have thrown her bodily over the hedge, on the other side of which stood listening Muckle Tamson, late of Ironmacanny.

‘What's this—what's this, Mrs. Parkend?’ said a voice a little stern, not musical like my father's but somehow strong, helpful, and cheerful withal. The words seemed to descend upon my ear from a great

height.

I rose to my feet, and there before me, his fair hair for once long and blown about like a field of corn, stood Absalom Kenmore, the minister of the parish of Riddlings.

He motioned me into his study with no more than a courteous wave of the hand. And he sent Mrs. Parkend to her own place—that is, to the kitchen, with a motion of the head, almost imperceptible. The well-worn clerical housekeeper evidently had no terrors for the Clerk of the Presbytery of Cairn Edward.

He offered me a chair in his library, but he himself refrained from sitting down.

‘You think I can help you in some way?’ he said, very quietly. ‘Tell me what it is—and if I can I will!’

‘I am the daughter of Henry Gordon of the Dungeon!’ I said, without thinking that he might never have heard of my father; for these low-country folk know little of the rearers of sheep unless they have turnips to sell for winter feeding.

However, he merely bowed, and as he did so I could see a white hair or two lying among the corn-colour. Absalom Kenmore was not exactly a young man—not as I was young, that is.

And of this I was glad. You understand I was not yet old enough to like young ministers. I had the weakness to prefer them a little ripened by experience, a little wearied, even, with the strife that had brought them so little of worldly gain. Perhaps I was wrong, but at any rate that is the way I felt about the matter.

I told the minister all about the debt. I expected him to cry out with astonishment, knowing that Freelan had long been one of his elders. It may seem

strange, but sometimes elders are elected for other reasons than godliness, especially in country parishes, where the session adds to its own numbers without much congregational interference, and, generally, is a law unto itself.

But the minister did not cry out. He only gravely shook his head, while an expression at once sad and grim grew on his face.

‘For long I have held no communication with the person you name,’ said Absalom Kenmore. ‘In that way I fear I cannot help you. I have, in fact, suspended him from Church privileges on account of contumacy and evil example.’

Then he asked to see the papers.

‘The debt is unquestionable,’ he said, ‘but whether or not you will be able to get the money is another matter. I fear not!’

I asked him why.

‘Because,’ he said, ‘in my youth I knew some law, and on the original receipt there are evidences of the loan having formed part of a regular account. Your father supplied sheep to Andro Freelan in the ordinary way of business. He may claim the three years’ prescription.’

‘But my father’s letters?’ I said, feeling the ground slipping from beneath my feet.

‘Ah!’ said the minister, ‘but these are only drafts; they ought to have been regularly kept in a letter-book, or else certified before a justice of the peace!’

‘Then you think there is no hope?’ I said. And the water was standing in my eyes.

He smiled at me.

‘No, I do not quite say that,’ he answered, smiling, ‘you are a woman—if I mistake not a wise one. Did not Abigail, the wife of Nabal, win the lives of all her

folk from an angry David?’

But he added in a little lower tone— ‘True, the cases are far from being identical.’

‘If you have any trouble with the man,’ he continued, after a long pause; ‘that is, not connected with your father's debt, say that I, Absalom Kenmore, sent you, that you have come straight from the Manse.’

At the gate of the little avenue, Muckle Tamson was in waiting.

‘Weel?’ he queried, as soon as I came out.

‘Little hope!’ said I; ‘but he is a good man, this minister, though he has none to say of Andro Freelan!’

To my utter astonishment Muckle Tamson's face lighted up with a kind of joy.

‘Aye, I was thinkin' that!’ he said. ‘Come awa', lassie—the sooner the better! Ye hae your faither's watch. Bide nae langer wi' the man than ten minutes. If ye pass the mark (here he lugged out of a very light pocket an ancient egg-shaped verge timepiece), Muckle Tamson will come ben askin' for ye. And maybe there will be things broken!’

Then he put one hand on my shoulder, which he had never done before.

‘Be not cast doon, bairn,’ he said, chuckling a little low to himself, ‘if the man willna pay his debts honestly, aiblins Muckle Tamson will try the ‘Law o' the Marshes’ on him! It's a heap less troublesome than thae lawyvers!’

## CHAPTER FIVE

### BEAUTY IS VANITY

The Red Haven was a curious place—half old-fashioned low-country Galloway farm-house—half mansion of rampant bad taste. The dwelling house of the old steading, with its windows looking on the open square, had been given up to the ‘grieve,’ or foreman. A ten-foot-high ‘midden’ could do him no harm. But Andro Freelan, his master, though by all accounts reared but-and-ben with the pig, had built him a brave mansion of red freestone some distance away, a thing as ugly as even the heart of such a man could conceive.

I went first to the ‘steading,’ where I was informed by a lank, hopeless-looking man that ‘the maister wasna at hame,’ but that ‘if onywhere’ I should find him either at the new stables or in the billiard room.

Longshanks was obliging enough to walk to the big archway, and from thence to point out these objects—to wit, the stables—long, brick buildings lying across a field which he called the ‘paddock,’ though I saw none of these about. Also, equally in brick, but attached to the house, he indicated the ugliest building I had ever set eyes upon. It was squat and featureless, but spacious, and would have made a rare place for rearing motherless lambs in. It was ‘the billiard-room,’ but as for what billiards were, I neither knew nor cared. Some sort of fancy poultry, most likely, I thought.

Well, Henry Gordon's daughter was not going to go and look in at the window on the chance of seeing

her father's debtor. I went to the front door of the Red Haven, and rang the bell.

A smartly dressed, but what we would call among the hills rather a tawert-looking serving-maid opened the door, and regarded me with much displeasure.

No, the master was not at home!

Then when would he be? I had come a long way to see him.

'Doubtless!' said she, tossing her head and trying to smirk. I think she feared competition, and dimly felt that her bed and board were in danger. However, I used the same trick which had served me so well at the manse of Riddlings. I arranged my skirts, got out my Emerson, and sat down to read.

If ever murder looked out of woman's eye, it glinted naked and unashamed in that of Andro Freelan's house-lass.

'Get away,' she cried, 'or I will call the dogs!'

'Happy to see them!' said I. For having been born and brought up among 'tykes,' naturally I had no fear of them. She whistled, putting her fingers awkwardly to her mouth. I gave her a lesson as to the correct manner, which was very badly taken.

'See!' I said, making the brick walls of the billiard-room resound, and fetching an echo even from the distant stables, 'that is the right way to whistle up dogs!'

Half a dozen came bounding. But seeing me seated there so much at my ease, and whistling in the key they knew so well, they leaped joyously about me, instead of devouring me as the powdery-faced young person evidently desired.

Immediately I rendered them sedate, by a motion as if reaching for an imaginary switch. They

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cowered, and there I sat ready to receive the master of the house.

I had not long to wait. He had been somewhere about the stables, had heard the professional whistling, and seen the outrush of the dogs. Now in his turn he came forth to inquire.

'Who are you?' he said. And as I stood on my feet, I saw what I had never before seen on any man's face, admiration without respect—a very hateful thing to see. From that moment I was as set against him as the floury-faced lady was against me. I think I could have slain him if he had lifted hand upon me.

But he did not. He only repeated his question in a somewhat different key, rather fawning and false. A great, ruddy clatch of a man with a black beard, hair growing as thin on his head as it was curly and thick on his chin, and very red lips—that was Andro Freelan, late pig-dealer from Belfast. The very sight of him gave me the 'grews.'

'May I ask,' he said, 'to what I owe this honour?'

I think I surprised him. At least so I flatter myself.

'To the fact that you owe my father eight hundred pounds!' I said. 'I am here to receive payment.'

He stopped, all a-quiver with excitement of the wickedest sort. His eyes grew little and currant-like in his suddenly pallid face. His red lips paled and shivered like cold shape.

'This is no talk for the front-door of a gentleman's house,' he said at last with an effort. 'Come inside, if you have anything to say to me!'

I went. Everything was wax-cloth—on the walls, on the floor, and, for aught I know, on the ceiling. Afterwards I heard he was local agent for a linoleum firm in the Lang Toun, and so had got his house

tapestried for nothing.

Such a house—so chill, and cold, and comfortless! Corridor after corridor, room after room all glancing frigid with sheeted oil-cloth, with little ugly chairs set exactly in corners and yet smaller ones at intervals about the tables. And then his study! There were bigger chairs there and a smell of tobacco smoke. That was all the difference.

‘Will you sit down,’ said he, civilly enough, ‘and have the goodness to tell me who you are?’

‘I am the daughter of Henry Gordon of the Dungeon,’ I said. ‘You owe my father £800. We are in sore need of the money. The storm has harmed us greatly. We have not enough to pay our rent.’

He kept his eyes fixed upon me, moving a little nearer as if he thought that he had me fascinated. I could have laughed in his face. No, that is not what I would have done in his face.

But he kept advancing.

‘Let me see your proof,’ he said. ‘I suppose you have some sort of receipt, forged or genuine?’

‘I have your writing, properly stamped and witnessed,’ I answered. ‘I have copies of my father's letters.’

He made two strides, and caught me by the wrist, drawing me close up to him with a strength which I had not expected in such a softish, pig-faced man. But he had been accustomed to the training of horses and knew the tricks. Now I was naturally a strong girl, but I felt at that moment that I was in the claws of a brute. However, I did not lose my presence of mind as I might have done. I used my only weapon.

‘If you think I would come here with such documents upon me, you take me for a fool,’ I said,

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‘and Henry Gordon's daughter is not a fool!’

‘Then she does not take after her father,’ he sneered brutally, ‘neither in brains nor in looks!’

Here he made me a kind of mocking bow. The words and action gave me an opportunity to wrench myself free. I fell back upon the rack of guns. Andro Freelan evidently considered himself a sportsman—that is, so far as shooting rabbits was concerned. I saw a double-barrelled shot-gun at half-cock, with a box of caps on the ledge handy. In an instant, as if it had been my father's old ‘Slay-all,’ I snatched the gun, full-cocked both barrels, and slipped on a couple of caps. Cartridges were still strange to the Dungeon, save for a few days when the gentry came up to shoot the grouse in August, but I understood all about this.

I suppose also that Andro Freelan understood his own rabbiting guns. At least, he attempted no further advance, and for the rest of my visit I held him in respect. Mark, I did not point the gun at him. That would have been wrong—but at the ceiling. And that, -in a one-storied house, can hurt nobody except the spiders.

‘Now,’ said I, ‘you have chosen to deny your debt—you have tried to get the receipt from me by violence.’

‘Nothing was farther from my thought!’ he exclaimed. And now I am rather of the opinion that for once he spoke the truth.

‘At any rate, the papers, receipt, copies of letters and all are in the hands of Mr. Kenmore at the Manse!’

‘Absalom!’ sneered the master of the Red Haven. And then, adopting a preaching tone, he cried, ‘Absalom—what have I to do with thee, Absalom,

who didst steal the hearts of Israel?’

And from that I knew that the man, though evil in his heart's core, had been, decently brought up and with some knowledge of his Bible.

‘Will you pay the debt?’ I said.

‘Bonnie lassie,’ he said mockingly, ‘thy servant is but a Philistine and an Edomite in comparison with Absalom of the golden-locks—go to him and he will pay thee!’

Then giving another turn to the mockery he had adopted, he bade me sternly, ‘Be off with you. Lucky is it for you that you are only a girl. I owe your father nothing! And many is the gallon of good stuff he has had from me without the payment of a penny!’

This also I knew to be false, my father being ever a man most temperate. But I saw it was useless to remain. So I shouldered the gun and made for the door.

‘What would you do with that?’ he cried in astonishment.

‘Maybe,’ said I, ‘it will serve me for a shot at a rabbit—maybe at a rat! But I will restore it at your outer gate—not before!’

He followed me, since from fear he declined to go before. But I walked sideways as one does on a hill-slope, following a little-used sheeptrack—so that I could keep my eyes both on Andro and on the tawert personage in the white apron with pink bows.

Neither, however, really attempted to molest me, which in the circumstances was perhaps as well.

In this order we arrived at the gate, over which Andro had his arms engraved. These had recently been found for him by the Ulster Herald—a pig rampant, above the five strawberry leaves of the

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O'Freelans, and the motto 'Ich bin,' which in the German tongue signifies 'I am!'

I took the caps off the nipples, put them in my pocket, let down the hammers to half-cock, and leaned the weapon against the armorialed gateway of the representative of the ancient kings of Ballyfreelin.

Then, at once triumphant and discouraged, I took my way to the Manse.

The minister heard what I had to say with a sympathetic expression enough. But at the corners of his mouth I could at times divine the saving twitch of humour.

'Miss Rose,' he said, gently, when I had finished, 'there is no use in your staying longer here. In fact, I should advise the contrary. If you can trust the papers with me, I will warrant that they shall be kept in safety. I have a good stieve beast in my stable, and it will be a pleasure to me to drive you to your friends in Cairn Edward. Being a bachelor and a minister, I am precluded from offering you hospitality!'

'But Muckle Tamson?' I cried.

I thought that a shade came across the minister's face, but he answered readily enough.

'I know nothing of any person of that name—of his whereabouts, I mean,' said Mr. Kenmore. 'Tamson is a common surname in these parts—none commoner—and the most part might appropriately be styled 'Muckle.' Is your friend a man or a woman?'

I had told him before, but he must have forgotten, which struck me as strange. However, he went out, murmuring that if he saw the aforesaid Muckle Tamson, he would get him to help with the 'yoking of

his pony'—a job at which ministers, as a rule, are not so clever as at reading their sermons.

But I said that I would come and help him. Which thing I accordingly did. Indeed, I practically completed it by myself. For on his side the Reverend Absalom tangled and twisted the breeching and other things in such a marvellous manner that it was easy to see that he was thinking of something else.

'I have often thought,' he said, 'that the harnessment of horses could be much simplified. The load ought to be pulled from the centre of animal gravity, which is in the chest, and not, as is the custom, by a collar from the neck!'

My centre of gravity was also in my chest or thereabouts, and in spite of my griefs of the day I could hardly help laughing. He gazed at me, astonished. He had apparently never met anyone able to do that. That anyone should laugh while he decanted his wisdom, drop by drop, like some rare liqueur, struck him as something new. However, I do not think he disliked me for it.

I told him how that I had read that in America they had introduced the Russian fashion of harnessing, just as he described.

'Ah,' he sighed, 'I had thought the idea original. It is always so. I have an idea that seems to have risen from the blue depths of my soul—and lo! it is as the scum which floats on the surface of the truck-and-barter of nations. I was born to search for hidden wisdom and to discover commonplaces.'

'Such as that you have forgotten your whip?' said I, pertly.

'Whip?' cried he, startled, 'why, what need is there of a whip?'

'The usual one,' said I. 'Your brown mare has been walking at a snail's pace for the last half-hour, and if we want to be in Cairn Edward tonight, we must make haste. Shall I jump off and cut a switch from the hedge?'

'These things are barbarous inventions,' he said. 'They deepen the gulf betwixt man and his fellow-creatures—falsely called the brutes. All that is needed is to appeal to that higher intelligence which is latent in every living thing! But, it is true, the feminine four-legged thing lags!'

Then all at once he cried out to his mare with an astonishing power of voice—not loud, but with a certain thrill of command in it, quite new to me: 'MARTHA!'

I had never heard that name applied to a horse before, and I asked him why his beast was so called.

He seemed unwilling to tell me, but at last he said, 'It may seem that I am giving you right in the matter of your suggestion of the whip or scourge. Nevertheless I will tell you that Martha of old—by the makers of the Genevan Bible, at least, the greatest men the world ever saw—was taken to mean 'bitter' or 'provoking.' Such, however, is not my own opinion, and you will observe how the poor thing has quickened her pace at the very sound of my voice!'

I had, as a matter of fact, observed it. I had watched the flexible ears of the pony, cocked alternately fore and aft, as if to find out how soon it would be safe to relapse into a walk. This happened in about five minutes.

But after the third calling upon 'Martha' and a third relapse, I took the reins out of the hands of the minister of Riddlings without his appearing to be

aware of it. Shortening my grip on them I leaned forward and brought the edges of solid leather smartly down on Martha's rump, to that lady's vast astonishment. She had not been accustomed to moorland customs with ponies. But she recognised at once a new hand on the tiller and trotted on, without, for the rest of the way, deserving her curious name. Mr. Kenmore paused for a moment to look down from the heights of his great argument and speculate upon my actions.

But, perhaps feeling obscurely that after all reins were not whips or scourges, but something natural to the equine race, and having scriptural authority, he only quoted the quaint old verse of Francis Roos in the Scots psalmody:

*'Then be not like the horse or mule, Which do not understand, Whose mouth, lest they come near to thee, A bridle must command.'*

Martha, after a further application or two, which her master did not deign to notice, got up quite a decent pace, and (what is more) kept it all the way till the long High Street of Cairn Edward took us in, and the low gables of whitewashed houses began to bound the horizon.

Then, and not till then, Mr. Kenmore suddenly stopped his 'wrapt oration flowing free.' He remarked that he had never known so rapid a transit between his Manse of Riddlings and Cairn Edward, adding that I was a most intelligent young lady, and that my father must be a singularly well-instructed man to have brought me up so well! He would be proud to make his acquaintance

He was, of course, quite right. And I told him so. Though (I suggested in addition) how he could possibly know was a marvel, seeing that I had

hardly spoken three words the whole way!

At this he looked staggered for a minute, and then remarked that I must surely be mistaken. He himself was a man of few words, and certainly my argument with regard to the necessity of a whip had much matter in it. He would think over the desirability of procuring one. In the meantime he would take my affairs to his friend Mr. Clelland, the lawyer, and see what there was to be done. Later in the evening he would call at Mrs. Paterson's, or, perhaps—for Mr. Clelland was a man full of hospitality—in the morning, if I could content myself so long!

I answered that, having no hopes of the money, I must e'en think of something else to help my father.

Then he let me out of the gig at the Paterson's door. As I did so I caught the murmur of Absalom Kenmore, minister of Riddlings, while he was reluctantly taking the reins, and I springing lightly to the ground as one who in our country would jump a dyke with lifted kirtle.

I did not understand his words at the time. They were evidently not meant for me. It was an act of self-communion, and in reality Absalom was warning himself against himself. Perhaps against me at the same time—who knows? It was a verse out of the Proverbs that he quoted. I looked it out after, as soon as I got a minute to myself at our old Genevan version, which is still so common in the wilds of Galloway, thanks to Andro Hart's versions. In this form it read:

*Favour is deceitful and beautie is vanitie,  
But the woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be  
praised.*

I stood and thought. What right had this man

## ROSE OF THE WILDERNESS

thus to judge and assign? What did he mean? Was I the 'beautie that is vanitie,' or 'the woman to be praised'? There was no reason (that I could see) why I should not be both. But if I had to choose —well, being only twenty-one and a girl, I voted strongly and unanimously for 'the beautie that is vanitie!'

And I fear I went to sleep that night in Isa Paterson's bed thinking more of what Absalom Kenmore, Clerk of Presbytery, meant by his text, than of all my father's loss and the dread rent-day looming in the near future like a hill-spectra seen against the mist.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE ARM OF FLESH

The next morning, while still asleep in Isa Paterson's bed, I was awakened by a loud knocking at the outer door. It could not be her brother, Postman Jamie, for I heard her mother go to the door, and in the discussion that followed I thought that I distinguished my own name.

I dressed hastily and went down.

There, on the doorstep, was the Cairn Edward inspector of police, very calm and very polite, and with him Andro Freelan—very much the reverse.

'There she is, the besom—take her—get the handcuffs out! What are you thinking of?' cried Andro, quite beside himself with fury.

'My business!' said the inspector, without even deigning a glance at the furious master of Red Haven.'

'But I tell you for the twentieth time that lass came to me yesterday asking for money, and this morning my two pedigreed horses are gone from my stables— 'The Pride o' Solway' that I have refused a good thousand pounds for, and 'The Red MacGregor,' that has ta'en mair prizes than he could carry on his back!'

'Well,' said the inspector, yet more calmly, glancing at the little white cottage inhabited by the Patersons, I suppose, Mr. Freely,'

'My name is Freelan, I tell you!' cried the now exasperated ex-pig-dealer.

'Freely, I think I am correct,' said the inspector.

'You see, I spent some time in Belfast and Lisburn in the winter of '77-'78. Yes, I think we will say Freely!'

The great horse proprietor blanched under the lilac-veined mottling produced by his open-air life and national beverage.

'Freelan is my name in this country!' he said, with notable softening of his mood.

'So?' said the inspector; 'well, after all, it is only previous condemnations that count, Mr. Freely—tickets-of-leave and that kind of thing. Outside of a police office a man may call himself pretty much what he pleases. But an ill-founded accusation is a serious thing, and I am not sure but that already this young lady has good cause for an action against you!'

Andro stood righting for words, his eyes injected, the veins on his forehead full to bursting. I should not have been surprised had he fallen down on the spot in an apoplectic shock.

'My horses! My prize stallions! Worth thousands of pounds—if a shilling!' Such were the fragments of sentences that came from his lips, all hashed up with a gibberish of oaths and denunciations.

'It is true that I did visit this man yesterday,' I said, 'but it was for the purpose of obtaining payment of eight hundred pounds that he owes my father.'

'A falsehood—a lie!' cried Andro Freelan. 'I do not owe her father a penny. We were in trade together, Henry Gordon and I, and he received value for every pound I ever had from him! I can prove it. Besides the debt is twenty years old!'

'I was with the minister of the parish of Riddlings all day yesterday,' I explained, 'excepting the time necessary to go to this man's house and demand my

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legal dues. Mr. Kenmore drove me back here to the home of his friends and my relatives. Thereafter he took my papers to his friend, Mr. Clelland, where he has been stopping the night.'

'Ah, Mr. Clelland,' said the policeman with obvious respect, 'a justice of the peace and a sound man!'

'My horses—I want my horses, I tell you!' gasped the master of Red Haven. He was almost out of himself with fear, anger, and consternation. Even the inspector had pity on him—of an official sort, that is.

'Come away,' he said, 'come away, Mr. Andro' (he let the surname slip, as it were, in the meantime), 'you are doing no good here. The young lady hasna your 'Pride o' Solway' at her watch-chain, nor yet 'The Red MacGregor ' threaded away amang her neck-corals.'

'But there is Mr. Clelland and the minister of Riddlings—they will doubtless be found in the office of the former—yes, doubtless, by this hour. And we are causing an assemblment of the peaceable burgesses of Cairn Edward—so let us be going, and perhaps Miss Rose Gordon (with one or other of her relatives as witnesses) will have the goodness to meet us there in half an hour!'

The official 'assemblment' complained of consisted of my cousins Isa and Margaret, with their mother close behind me. A grocer's boy or two outside made up the crowd. But the inspector was acutely conscious that behind every lace window curtain all down the long Cock Hill Port there were watching eyes. And as for Mrs. Paterson, my good aunt, she clasped her hands, and groaned aloud: 'Oh, that it should come to this—thirty year come

Martinmas in this hoose, and to think that noo a policeman should come to oor door wi' roarin' Andro o' the Reid Ha'en ! Oh, the disgrace! The disgrace! That I should live to see the day!

The disgrace, however, being a family one, was in her opinion as much hers as mine. Yet the mere presence of the polite policeman on the Paterson kerbstone was a stain that hardly blood and years could wash away.

Notwithstanding, because, after all, the affair was a family quarrel, and it would be a thousandfold disgrace to allow me to go 'by my lone,' my good aunt did put on her best crape bonnet that had never before smelt weekday air. Her Paisley shawl she folded about her yet comely shoulders. She adjusted a steel buckle as large as a breastplate at her waist to keep all taut. Then she drew on her lisle-thread 'half-mitts,' felt the lack of something, and looked about for her bible, which she always carried away with her from church, 'because o' thae deils o' Sabbath-school bairns.'

Thus arrayed, she stood ready to sally forth. And never did any of her ancestors sacrifice more for the family honour than my Auntie Bessie, as she nerved herself to enter a lawyer's office—a place of which she had a deadly fear, feeling that the odds were strongly against her ever again leaving it alive.

But blood will tell! Family ties before all! She lifted her head and, with the courage of despair, withstood the gaze of the clerks in the office, whom she called 'snifflin' seefers' on the street. She penetrated into Mr. Clelland's sanctum, where a long, narrow table pleasantly concealed its purpose of separating rival litigants by offering here and there, at regular intervals, ink-pots, apparently of silver, and various

writing materials. For Mr. Clelland was famous as a referee in quarrels, especially of the bitter family sort, where it is to the advantage of all parties that the linen should be washed very much in private.

Well, we got there, my aunt and I. We sat us down at one side of the table. Mr. Inspector Black and the master of Red Haven were on the other, while at the top sat Mr. Clelland. At the table-foot a confidential clerk unostentatiously took shorthand notes. Beside Mr. Clelland—a grave, clean-shaven man, with the Raeburn mouth of the old-fashioned Scots country lawyer, was a little bell. On this he ‘pinged’ sharply at intervals; whereupon another clerk appeared, took his orders, brought or put away documents, moving about and disappearing silent as a spectre seen at dusk far down a corridor.

I need not describe the ‘sederunt’ at length. I will only put down what appeared certain:—

First, that Mr. Andro Freelan or Freely, of Red Haven, had lost two valuable stock horses, and with them the prospect of a large income during the next travelling season.

Secondly, by the testimony of the Reverend A. Kenmore, minister of Riddlings Parish, and Pres. Clerk, it was clear that I, Rose Gordon, of the Dungeon, could have had nothing to do with the affair, which must accordingly be set down to the malice of some person or persons unknown.

Thirdly, it was, alas, too clear that I might indeed sue in name of my father for the money due, but without much chance of ever seeing a farthing of it!

At this opinion of Mr. Clelland, Andro Freelan could not keep from grinning, and the minister, standing up, affirmed that this was no doubt law. Had he not threshed it out, as well as he could, the

night before with his kind friend? Mr. Clelland was doubtless correct in his reading of the law and the character of the debtor— but —(the 'but' was launched like the Greater Excommunication) 'never would the miserable creature prosper—not on earth, and even in the great hereafter. The consequences of his villainy would track him!'

Here Mr. Clelland signed to his confidential clerk to stop taking notes, and to the inspector that the interview might as well be suspended.

'Come,' said Inspector Black, to the ex-pig-dealer, 'we must do our best to find the horses for you. But it is a poor look-out. Tomorrow is the Dumfries Tryst, and every road in Galloway will be hoof-marked by scores of beasts making for the Sands of Dumfries. But we will do our best—even for you—because such is our duty!'

The policeman and the robbed man went out together. Mr. Clelland motioned to the confidential clerk to go off and transcribe his notes.

We were left alone—that is to say, Mr. Clelland, my good aunt, Absalom Kenmore, and myself. Mr. Clelland waited till the door was shut behind the clerk, glided to the window to assure himself that the policeman and Andro Freelan were a good way down the other side of the street, and then burst into a roar of laughter.

'How on earth did you manage it?' he cried, looking at me, admiringly.

'I did not manage it!' I answered, a little severely.

'Now, my dear young lady, better let me have it all!' he said. 'It is a serious matter. Of course you do not mean to steal the man's horses, but just to hold them long enough to put the fear of breaking his contracts upon him. It is very well imagined. I do not

blame you a bit. In your place I should have tried for the same means of temporary sequestration — though not having moorland experience, I doubt if I should have succeeded so well!

I repeated that I knew nothing about it all.

‘Do not be afraid, my child,’ he said, ‘tell me everything. There is such a thing in law as the professional secret. And I think we can work it together without putting a respectable man and a magistrate in danger of condoning a felony!’

Seeing that he was resolved not to believe me, I called in the Reverend Absalom, who shook his oaten locks and said, ‘Sir, whatever that young lady says is true!’

This, though evidence of the highest as to character, did not in the opinion of the sceptical lawyer, altogether meet the facts of the case.

‘Doubtless—doubtless,’ he replied, smiling with that air of superior wisdom and detachment that annoyed me so much. ‘I do not doubt it for a moment. If only we could induce the young lady to speak. Up to the present she has concealed all—even from her legal adviser—that is, if I may arrogate to myself the title.’

Then I rose and went to Mr. Clelland, where he had again seated himself at the table-head.

I put a hand on one of his shoulders.

‘Sir,’ I said, ‘you have daughters of your own.’

‘Yes,’ he said, smiling, ‘and sometimes I require an affidavit with some of their statements—such, for instance, as concern the dresses and new hats that they need!’

‘But,’ I said, looking at him fixedly, ‘this is earnest. This is no play. I know nothing about this man's horses. I only know he owes my father money

that he will not pay—money we sorely need!’

‘Ah!’ he said, his countenance changing to the proper professional gravity of one who is asked a favour.

‘Yes,’ I continued, ‘the storm has tried us hard — as it has all the hill farmers. I do not know what we shall do if I cannot get a portion of that money for my father.’

‘We shall see—we shall see,’ he said, soothingly. ‘I wish it had been in Mr. Caylie's time—he was a friend of mine. I do not know this new man. He may be the same breed or he may not. At any rate, he has lifted the estate account from my bank!’

But I was anxious that he should believe me.

‘Mr. Clelland,’ I said, ‘I know no more about these lost horses than does your friend the minister, there!’

‘That,’ he smiled, ‘is certainly final! He knows nothing about a horse more recent than the description in the 'Song of Solomon,' or in the Book of Job—which is it, Abe? I forget, somehow-’

It was the first time I had heard that contraction for the name of the tall Riddlings minister. But he seemed to find it perfectly natural in the mouth of his grave lawyer friend.

‘True,’ he said, ‘I have forgotten most of the little law you and I read up together. And so, Paul, you have forgotten your bible, which is more to your discredit, seeing that you go to church most Sundays —or ought to!’

All this time my aunt had been sitting rigid, her eyes travelling from one to the other, but ever returning to the handsome, pleasant face of the minister, an ancient favourite and acquaintance of hers.

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She now rose and shook his hand.

'Thanks be to you, sir!' she said, fervidly, 'aye, aye—the heartfelt thanks o' a' the family, kith and kind—Gordons, McGillvrays, Patersons, and McGhies —no to mention the Purvises, McNaughts, Ither-wards, and MacNoahs. Also the mair far-oot friends that will be glad to ken o' what ye hae dune to keep Henry Gordon's daughter oot o' the gled's claws— nae offence to you, sir. But I wasna' reared to hae ony dealings, mair nor I could help, wi' lawvyiers, police, Eerishmen, or siclike! Guid day to ye, sir,' she added, curtseying deeply to Mr. Clelland, 'and Guid kens we shouldna judge yin anither. Our ain bairns are no aff the face o' the earth yet. Nane ever kens what they may hae to turn their hand to. And, maybe, when a' is said and dune, it's no a'thegither your faut that ye are a lawwyer! And I will aye gie ye the name o' a decent man— for a lawwyer!'

Mr. Clelland gravely thanked her for her good opinion, and said that he would endeavour to deserve it, especially qualified as it had been.

'Weel,' said my aunt, 'maybes I expressed mysel' a trifle ower strongly. But I hae read somewhere in the Guid Book that a lawwyer cam' gye near bein' a guid man—but I never read that he a'thegither managed it!'

We had not been long in the Patersons' house when a tall black shadow passed the window.

'Lock the door!' cried my aunt, 'I canna bear ony mair lawwyer bodies—no this day. Na, I hae had my fill o' them!'

But instead it was the minister of Riddlings, and Isa, my cousin, opened the door for him. He entered—his face cut like a statue, grave and thoughtful. Only the eyes were strong and the voice certain of

itself—as soon, that is, as it was directed to matters within the understanding of such weaklings as I.

Everyone at the Patersons liked him; my aunt, shamelessly, on account of his good looks, and the others because of more spiritual graces.

I also—I never cared about boys. I suppose having been my father's companion for so long, gave me a taste for something more solid than the nonsense which lads of my own age think it their duty to talk to a girl.

But I did wish I could have told him how to dress himself better, or at least to brush his black clothes once in a while. Also, he ought to have been told that a man who habitually reads at breakfast is certain to drop his egg about.

But for all these instructions I had, of course, to wait.

Mr. Kenmore came to suggest that while things were thus in abeyance, it might be as well for me to write a line to my father, by way of the Clatteringshaws, to tell him not to expect me for a day or two.

'For me, I will get a preacher to take the pulpit on Sunday,' he said, 'and that will give me a clear week without any parish duties.'

I thanked him, fearing that I was giving much trouble, but he said that he had been thinking for some time that he would be the better for a short holiday.

The next news we had of the progress of the plot (behind which I began dimly to discern mysterious forces moving) was brought by Jim the postman. He was jubilant.

'To think,' he said, 'that I should have leaved to see a minister cast his coat and lay about him wi'

his fists—Lord, it was great!’

Somehow at these words there came a fear upon me, which to this day I cannot explain.

‘Is he hurt?’ I cried with a sort of lightning-flash of second sight, or ‘intuition,’ as the minister himself would have said.

‘Who?’ said James Paterson, the five-striped postman.

‘Muckle Tamson!’ said I, instantly recovering myself. ‘He was in a wonderful taking about the payment of the siller!’

‘It was a minister, I am tellin’ ye,’ said the postman with the stripes on his arm, ‘an ordained minister o’ a pairish—aye, and nae ither than Maister Kenmore himself!’

‘Never!’ cried all the family at once, though all knew that James was incapable of invention on this scale. Somehow, I felt kind of proud. It was, I know, a wicked thought. But it leaped up in my heart before I was ready for it. Most things that really matter happen that way. At least so I have found.

‘Aye,’ said James the Post, enjoying his triumph, ‘it was at the Market Hill. The minister was leanin’ on a dyke reading his buik, and meditatin’ on the vanity o’ things, as ministers does, when oot there cam’ the muckle horse-dealer frae Riddlings pairish—him that I hae seen here wi’ his stallions—Freelan, the name o’ him, a rank Patlander—a man that Davie Glass says never gies a farthin’ to the post even at Christmas! And the Irishman had a paper in his hand.

‘D’ye see that?’ he cries, ‘it’s a threat—it’s blackmail—that’s what it is, and you are at the bottom of losin’ me my twa fine horses!’

‘And he struck at the minister wi’ the butt-end of

his whip.

'But the minister peels his coat, and, says he, 'The arm of flesh is but weak, yet sometimes the Lord hath need of a rod for the fool's back. I will e'en do my best!'

'And with that he stretched him once—and twice. Then he kneeled beside him and said something in the Patlander's ear, whisperin' like.

'He is a good Presbyterian,' said the minister of Riddlings, 'and a member of my own congregation, though presently debarred from ordinances! I will commune with him!'

'So he communed a good while with him, and stopped the cut on his brow with sticking-plaster as he was doing it.

'I do not know,' concluded James the postman, 'what the minister said, nor yet what the horse-dealer thought of it. He looked pretty dazed—too dazed to swear, whatever. But,' (here he flashed out his conclusion triumphantly, as if he had been a minister himself) 'here is the paper that the Irishman came up and flourished before the minister's eyes.'

The five-stripe postman regarded the slim slip, torn from the edge of a newspaper, with great self-complacency.

'No muckle that,' he said, 'to raise siccan a dust, and only me to be a witness thereof. Thirty year hae I carried her Majesty's mails, and never did I see the like—a placed minister in his shirt sleeves— wan, twa, three! Lord, it's a fine thing to hae been an honest, God-fearin' man, and nae doot the reward is sure! But as fac' as death, I wad gie thae five stripes on my airm (barrin' the pension) to see the like again! Aye, that I wad.'

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‘Read the line,’ I cried, out of all patience. ‘Oh, man, read the line!’

He handed the strip to me. It was written in capital letters—print capitals like what a child might use. And it said what follows: —

*‘Mister Freely, deer sir, The two annimals that ye ken of are wel and weel ta’en car o’. but if the lass is no payed her eight hundred pounds afore Friday next, the puir brutes are liable to die of hunger, owing to me hevvin the feeding o’ them!*

*(Signed) an auld frien’ o’ yours, Masiter Freely, wi’ respects.*

*P.S. The siller is to be payed to Masiter Clelland, withooten fail, and the annimilies will be in the stable the day after, if no formerly.*

And as I read I began to understand that the mysterious force which moved behind these things, like a kind of junior Providence, had once dwelled at Ironmacanny, and bore the name of Muckle Tamson.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SPRING-HEELED JACK

I was soon set at rest as to the part of 'god-from-the-machine,' played by Muckle Tamson. It was the twilight of the next day, the hour of lovers' meetings—in books. Really these occur 'when I can manage to get away'—on the lady's part. Nor war nor business stands against the masculine will in these first stages. If he wants to be there, he will be there. At any rate, it was twilight—pretty deep twilight too, and Isa Paterson and I were standing under the white rose-bush overlooking the whole white-and-blue town of Cairn Edward, with the loch lying like a dusky mirror beyond, and the islands like little bits of a green Eden scattered from a pepper-pot—absolutely as in a story-book just when the hero arrives on the scene.

Well, the hero did arrive—and considerably more of one than is usually the case—who at best just manages to climb a wall in order to steal what does not belong to him—the affections of an honest man's daughter.

Our hero we saw first as a kind of sideways-flying black mass high above the hedge. He alighted without the least sound, and his name was Muckle Tamson (Christian name worn away by the attrition of years). Softly as a bat settles among your hair, he came down almost between us. Isa screamed like the girl when the bat takes hold. I put my hand over her mouth to stop her. She might easily have brought someone on the scene—girls are so

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thoughtless—town girls, I mean. Moorland ones, who have to struggle with the forces of nature each time they go to the well for water, are not so easily frightened. They are the ones to marry. But, unfortunately, the supply is limited and the demand great. If anyone is an old maid on the hills it is her own fault—or her temper's.

Yes, it was Muckle Tamson, and when I had quieted and half choked Isa, we asked him when he had learned to fly, and if he were really the awful Spring-heeled Jack, a mysterious character just then beginning to be a delicious dread to our countryside. I mean, that is, among the lowland villages and town's folk. Spring-heeled Jacks keep away from farms, and especially from hill-farms, where the master is rather too handy with a shot gun and does not wait for explanations.

So far as we could see Muckle Tamson smiled, as from the hedge he produced an extra long leaping pole, such as is used all over the Cooran and Dungeon country for crossing the dull black stagnant 'lanes' of water which lie summer and winter upon the face of the moorland, criss-crossing each other like fortune-telling lines on the palm of the hand.

'Juist this,' he said, caressing the smooth shaft, 'my service to ye, mem—wad ye like to handle it?'

Isa shrank away till I reassured her that there was no man so good, or so worthy of confidence, that this was my father's helper and our earthly saviour. You had to put things that way to the Patersons before they understood.

Muckle Tamson said 'Humph!' at this description of himself, and I got Isa out of the way as soon as possible, telling her that Muckle Tamson and I had

private matters to talk over together.

'But I shall wait for you at the door! It will be open!' said Isa, still unsatisfied.

'Wait up the chimbley, gin ye like!' growled Muckle Tamson, who felt his consideration and politeness ill-rewarded. Then, after she was gone, 'Oh, thae town's lassies,' he said sarcastically, looking after her, 'I declare a man wad need to send them word three weeks afore that he was proposin' to coort them, so as no to be a shock to their bits o' systems!'

I said in defence that my cousin was a good and brave girl, but that people in Cairn Edward did not usually fly over house-tops, and drop into gardens at eight o'clock in an autumnal gloaming, between two lassies busy swopping conscious misstatements as to their several futures. I had learned to talk that way out of father's books. It always boggled Muckle Tamson.

'Och, aye,' he remarked, carelessly enough on this occasion, 'a wee bit shock to her nerves is guid for a lassie whiles—I hae heard Dr. Laidlaw say as muckle.'

Then he looked after the now vanishing figure of my cousin. She had entered the house at the foot of the garden, leaving, as a port of safety, the back door open for me. The fire in the kitchen was breathing out a kind of warm red light, kindly and soft, the last of the two loads of peats my father had cast for them the year before.

This year Muckle Tamson had done as much, but the chance of sending them to Cairn Edward had not yet arrived.

'Ye'll be wantin' to ken about the 'hoggets,' he said in a low voice, and very suggestively.

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'What 'hoggets?'' I said, much surprised. I thought for a moment he had had further bad news from the Dungeon. But he lowered his voice still more and bent to my ear to reassure me.

'Some folk that ken nae better might caa them 'blood horses,' or 'pedigree Clydesdales' or some fule name like that. But for the sake o' peace, and being mair hamely-like, we will, an' it please ye, just caa them . . . twa bits o' 'hoggets!'

'You have never made away with?' I began, surprised out of my Scottish caution.

'Aye—aye,' he broke in hastily, 'the 'hoggets'—your faither's ain 'hoggets! What hairm in that? What mair naiteral? A man's ain is aye his ain. And if no—Muckle Tamson will try and make it sae!'

'And where have you hidden the—'hoggets?'' I whispered, awed by the very thought.

He wagged his head sagely.

'Na, na,' he said, 'it will be as weel for you no to ken. So that ye may be able to deny a knowledge void of offence. Nae blushin' nor lookin' conscous. But if ye will think o' 'hoggets'—speak o' 'hoggets,' dream o' 'hoggets'—if ye will never let your mind rest on onything that wears a bridle or a saddle, or has a rosette or a ribbon knotted on its mane—if ye will never speak o' the 'Pride o' Onything'—but just wee bits o' sheep that ye send the dogs after, crying, 'Coom oot o' that, ye wee black-faced curses!' Then—and no till then, will I tell ye my tale!'

All this I promised to do, and to leave undone, according to Muckle Tamson's wish.

I will not try to follow his broad and comfortable Doric, though I should dearly love so to do. In the interests of the lay reader of these histories I shall endeavour to give merely the flavour of the recital.

'Ye see, the way o't was this,' he began, with some faint and far-away flavour of the style of my father reading from the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel, 'there was a man named Henry Gordon, that dwelled among the hills. And your mither—that had the best richt to ken—declairit him your faither. I never heard onyway that he denied it. Aweel' (here a long sigh as if the ice had at last been broken), 'there was anither man that owed your faither money. His name was Andro. He denied that he had siller, but Muckle Tamson, that was a faithfu' servant to Henry Gordon and your mither's daughter, kenned that he had 'hoggets.'

'They were braw 'hoggets'—very rams o' Nebaioth—as the minister of Kells says, worth maybes a thousand pund apiece—maybes less!

'This Andro,' continued Muckle Tamson, 'made a heap o' siller by takkin' the 'hoggets' frae farm-toon to farm-toon to show them aff—or something! He had a' his dates arranged like a circus company, and he was whiles in an awesome tirrorivee lest some o' thae folk should bring him up from breach o' contract, or something. It's a weary thing to hae to make a show o' 'hoggets' when ye hae nae 'hoggets' to show.'

'That was Andro's case. It is his case noo!

'What is it that your faither says? Aye, aye—'ground between the upper and the nether millstone!' That's where I hae Andro. 'The upper millstone is the folk that will sue him for the breach o' contrack—the nether is the wee bit scrawl I wrote him yesterday to tell him that he had better pay the eight hunder pound into Mr. Clelland's hands by Friday or the 'hoggets' wad maist likely be no weel and maybe dee—for ye see it's me (says I to Andro)

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that has the feedin' o' them!

'Oh, aye—he's seekin'—he's seekin'! But let him seek. The 'hoggets' are safe. There are nae tracks. Muckle Tamson pat bonny 'hoshens' on them. And brawly he kens the hidie-holes. His grandfather and his great-grandfather in their generations werena smugglers for naething. They kenned the hale land frae Prussia Cove (that's in Cornwall) to the Corse o' Slakes, and there's nae safer keeping for a couple o' 'hoggets' than an auld smuggler's cove!

'On Friday we'll see! Guidnicht to ye, Rose o' the Wilderness. I trow ye are like me, wearying for a sicht o' the Nick o' the Dungeon and the Spear o' the Merrick! But duty first—especial when it means siller! Guidnicht to ye, bonny lass!'

And with a sweep like a rising bird, silent and easy, Muckle Tamson had lifted himself over the tall garden hedge and the night swallowed him up, as a bird is gone in the darkness.

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After he had taken himself off and I was in my room, or rather Isa's, I cast my mind over Muckle Tamson's riddle. He had spoken in parables—true—but the interpretation was clear enough.

Somehow for his purposes he had subtilised the two grand prize horses in which, more than in any God or devil, Andro Freelan put his trust. Somewhere he had them hidden. And now, with the resourcefulness of an old poacher and the descendant of a family of famous smugglers (who had never known any repentance), behold him putting a double turn of the screw upon their owner!

Steal them?—no, of course not! No one can steal a pedigreed stud horse with his name, his forbears

(and fore-mares) all marked and printed in a book as carefully as if he had been a duke—and with much more presumption of accuracy.

But Tamson would use them for our needs, and perhaps—perhaps—all might turn out right. At any rate, the money was ours if we could get it—the means to that end were wholly Muckle Tamson's, and he had no idea of bringing anybody else into the responsibility. If Andro paid the money, a possible sojourn in the county jail was of no account to him, save in so far that when he, Muckle Tamson, got back, that daft loon Stoor would be 'neither to haud nor to bind.' The thought of Stoor ruling over the Dungeon, and also over Tweed and Tusker, at his sole pleasure, was the only bitter drop in Tamson's cup.

Friday approached, and as it came nearer the excitement began to mount. Even Mr. Clelland was touched by it, placid, unsentimental, square-mouthed old sage that he was. As for the minister, he simply could not keep away from our doorstep. I wondered that the Patersons did not tire of him. He took most of his meals with us. Not that he ate much—a man of singularly abstemious habits was Mr. Absalom Kenmore during these days.

After this pretence of eating he always wished to discuss the situation with me. From some innate delicacy of feeling, Isa and her sister left us alone—though often and often I told them there was no need. For, after all, there was nothing new to say. I had warned Isa to say nothing about the visit of Muckle Tamson in the twilight, and she, pleased to have a secret, guarded it so well that she went about all day with as guilty a look as if she herself had stolen the 'Pride of Solway,' and carried off the 'Red

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Mac-Gregor' in her green baize schoolbag!

I don't quite know what the minister did, except to look as uncomfortable as he looked handsome. A man never is really fine-looking till he begins to have his hair sprinkled a bit and his face fined out like those old fellows in the family portraits they painted so many of last century, all frilled shirts, smooth faces and powdered hair.

At least, that is what I think.

I was not particularly 'good,' you see—I mean religious. How could I be, brought up so far from a kirk and the means of grace. I liked better to be out with the whaups and the wheeling plovers, and the moorland scents. My father had talked to me, of course, but—but as I sat by the minister of Riddlings and saw that high, far-away look on his face, I knew that in the long run (if I let him) he would end by making me like him.

Yet somehow I felt it was not fair. In ordinary things I could twist him round my finger. I had far more will power than he—wagon-loads more. Yet somehow that glow of the inner goodness won on me. I wanted to get away from him, especially when he took me for better than I was, and called me, patting my cheek, 'One of the Lord's own!'

I should have liked it better if he had patted my cheek without saying anything like that. Yes, I would. No use bringing that sort of thing into the affair! And he was quite wrong—I wasn't, anyway — just an ordinary girl, but with a temper that could scatter men folk before me like chaff, or like Nan Gilfillan, of whose blood I was.

Well, the Friday came, a still day of heat, that was hotter even between the low white houses of Cairn Edward. Mr. Kenmore must have been a nuisance to

## ROSE OF THE WILDERNESS

Mr. Clelland that forenoon. He was in and out of the bank every half-hour like a dog at a fair. You know, the bankers in Scotland generally have two businesses, lawyer and banker, and, as the saying is, one hand helps to wash the other. Likewise there are two doors.

At last, about eleven o'clock, Mr. Kenmore made a dash across to tell us that Andro Freelan was in the town. He had driven up in the early morning, and looked very savage when he got down from his gig. Now he was hanging about the post-office, doubtless on the watch for a telegram. Mr. Kenmore wanted me to put on my hat and go over to the office of the lawyer to see that the money was rightly paid.

But I considered it best to leave well alone, and keep out of things altogether. However, at the entreaty of my aunt (who lamented my losing my right to my Christian name by staying so much in the house), I consented to take a turn up the Drap Road with the minister. There were no houses there then; past Mrs. Green's, where was the post-office, after which, barring a railway bridge, the road was quite a rural one.

I went upstairs to get ready, with my aunt at the bottom, all the time telling me that the minister was waiting—which is good for ministers, and specially at this time for Mr. Kenmore, who, dreamy and forgetful by nature, took to action restively and restlessly.

Besides, did you ever notice, though nobody can put on a man's hat but himself, he himself puts it on with a single motion of his arm, without the least adjustment, while on the contrary it takes a woman ever so long before a glass, stabbing and twitching and wagging her head. Also, the lady in the hat-shop

can do it for her still better. Did you ever hear of a man's hatter putting on his hat? From what I know of men, the proffer of his offices would not be well received.

This little bit of natural history by the way!

At last I was ready, and we went out. In spite of my heather step, the minister took two strides to my three, and I felt like a little breathless thing trotting beside him. This somehow made me angry—why, I do not know, except that I knew my aunt and cousins were watching us from behind the window-blind.

Near the telegraph office I got one of the greatest shocks of my life.

I saw Stoor—yes, the very Stoor who ought to have been up at the Dungeon looking after my father and the black-faced sheep, under the remoter guidance of Willie Gillespie. I turned to tell the minister. I merely lifted my eyes to his face, and when I looked again Stoor was not there. I peered over into the gardens which here fringe the road. I sent the minister of Riddlings to search for a gipsy-like boy in the post-office. I examined all their nearer and possible entries, also their exits. Stoor was not to be found. In the heavens high or on the earth beneath, so far as I could see, no Stoor! No, the minister had not seen him. He had, in fact, been speculating upon the amazing fact that the hair at the back of my head—but, there, what he said was quite unworthy of the meditation of a placid minister. Not that it matters, after all—he only said (what was true) that it was curly, and must be a fearful nuisance to brush out. He expressed this differently, it is true. He said something about 'clinging like young ivy tendrils, wind-blown about

my neck!

Well, would you ever imagine things like that would come into ministers' heads? I think I shall go oftener to church after this.

We walked a good long way into the country, and Mr. Kenmore noticed more and more things he had no business to, till I thought it was quite time to turn back. I told him so, and also that, with the affair so uncertain, and his Sunday sermon to write, he ought to be thinking of other things than how girls looked and what they had on.

But he answered, shamelessly, 'No, no—her price is far above rubies!' Which, to my thinking, showed how a noble mind may be 'here o'erthrown!'

However, just as we came on to the main street the sole and veritable Stoor passed us running like the wind. He bolted round a corner and into the post-office.

I have no doubt that he sent a telegram, which had been all ready prepared, but when he came out he would tell me nothing about it. He even denied the facts with a face like the great mural precipice of the Dungeon on a sunless day. But he said my father was better—much better.

'And he will be a heap better the morn!' he added with much emphasis. 'If I were you, Miss Rose, I wadna bide ony langer wi' thae Paitersons. We are sore in need o' ye up at the Dungeon!'

These words were hardly out of his mouth when a tall, good-looking clerk, with an immense stand-up collar and generally smart appearance, stood before the minister and me.

'Miss Rose Gordon, I think?' he said with an inquiring tone. 'I believe I saw you in our office the other day?'

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'This is indeed Miss Rose Gordon, of the Dungeon,' said the minister of Riddlings.

'I am Henry Gordon's daughter,' said I. For neither then nor since did I desire any higher title.

'Then,' said the youth, 'I have a letter for you from Mr. Clelland.'

His back was hardly turned when I tore it open and read aloud.

*'Dear Miss Rose, Andro Freelan or Freely paid the eight hundred pounds (£800) this morning into my hands, and it will be a clever man who will get them out, except upon your father's order or your own!'*

*Yours faithfully,*

*'W. CLELLAND.'*

I burst out crying there on the street. The minister stood with lifted hands, as if in benediction. But my aunt, who had been on the watch, came rushing out, crying, 'Oh, the disgrace—the disgrace to a' the Gordons and the Paitersons, and the McGillvrays, no to mention the McNoahs—forbye the ither branches o' the family—to gang and greet on the public street, and a' the neighbours looking through their window-blinds. Come ben wi' me, ye disgracefu' lassie, and greet doucely and cannily where naebody will see ye!'

I went with my aunt, clutching the precious paper, which meant our salvation, in my wet hand. And the minister followed, muttering to himself, 'Ech aye, she's ane o' the Lord's bairns—'far above rubies'—'she layeth hand to the spindle and her hands to the distaff.' 'Her children shall rise up and call her blessed!'

All of which, in the circumstances, I could not help feeling were, to say the least of it, extremely premature and out-of-place observations.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE HOMECOMING OF THE ROSE

'Deed, and it's brave and kind o' ye, Maister Kenmore, to come a' the road across the street to do us honour at this time i' the mornin'!

It was, of course, my aunt who spoke, and I was bidding farewell to Cairn Edward with a cheque-book and the assurance that Mr. Clelland would be pleased to honour my father's draft to the extent of £800 sterling coin of the realm.

The minister had not much to say. Perhaps he was thinking of his sermon still to be written, perhaps of the grey skies, perhaps of the reception that was waiting for him down in the parish of Riddlings. For there, as elsewhere, Andro Freelan had his backers and dish-lickers.

But the Reverend Absalom Kenmore had no fear of man or devil. On the other hand, God and woman struck him with an almost equal awe. Probably, because of this fact, he presented the best type of a good man. Strength, reverence, self-control (and the amiable weakness of liking me) made him a man I was not likely soon to see the like of again.

But still, when I said 'Good-bye,' thanking him with tears (restrained only by my aunt's sense of the family honour) in my eyes, I hardly expected ever to see Absalom Kenmore again. There were several things I should have liked to discuss with him—things, I mean, of real interest, that had nothing to do with the shape of my head or the way my hair curled in the nape of my neck, which formerly had

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seemed to interest him most! And, considering his profession, 'the more shame to him,' as my aunt would have said.

Well, it had to be done. And done it was. I set out for New Galloway Station, on the Portpatrick line, from which a neighbour's gig would take me to Craigencaillie, a lonely little farm (but one highly to be desired) set gallantly, like a forepost of civilisation, in a wilderness of heather. From thence I must push my way alone to the Dungeon.

There was no time to send messages. If there had been, who was there to carry them? The penny post had not yet reached the Dungeon, or, save at intervals the herd's house—our nearest neighbour—on the Back Hill of the Buss. My mission was accomplished. My father was delivered, yet in a way I was wae, and the tears were ready to flow, save only out of respect for the jet beads on my aunt's bonnet. These kept all taut.

I had met a good man who had done much for me. Never should I forget him; and now he was going back to meet, perhaps bodily harm, certainly ill-will, for our sakes. It was on my tongue-tip to ask him to be sure and come up to see us at the Dungeon. But this I did not do, for no very well-defined reason, save perhaps a feeling that if Absalom Kenmore were very anxious, Absalom Kenmore could find out the way thither for himself.

It is no good policy to make any man's way too easy, and in matters of love and liking it is absolutely fatal. This I did not know at the time; I only learned it later, as the knife of experience opened up the world's oyster. Even then, however, I possessed the instinct.

My aunt furnished me with a little basket for my

journeyings. This contained, besides the ordinary provender, medicines and bandages, lest I should be injured in a railway accident, about which she read every day in the papers. Marshmallow salve was a good thing for bruises. Also, if not needed for disasters, it made an excellent tea for certain weaknesses of the stomach, which she described in detail.

All the time Mr. Kenmore stood rigid and stern by the carriage door, while Aunt Paterson fussed and buzzed to and fro like a motherly bumble unable to find the mouth of her nest. Isa and Mary stood back and conferred in whispers with their favourite porter as to how many stations it would be before I got out. Then they informed me, each contradicting the other, and proceeding to the very verge of a quarrel.

The guard had whistled. The stationmaster had held up his hand. My aunt had shouted her last parting counsel as to the dangers of wet feet, when the minister's hand shot out as if seeking something. I felt the tug of the moving train at the same time as his fingers closed on mine. He said nothing, not even 'Good-bye.'

He only took off his hat hastily to my aunt and cousins, and stalked out of the station like a man who has suddenly remembered another and more important engagement.

But in my heart of hearts I knew it was not that. It could not be that. He was going back to Riddlings parish to face no pleasant task.

As for me, I sat staring at the landscape running back on both sides of the train like two green streams. I saw the well-kenned places—a flash of broadly mirrored sky with the white splash of flat-boat upon it, which was the Boat o' Rhone. Then

came the windings of the Black Water through the Hensol woods, the rocky fords I knew so well, the broad brown face of the moorlands—farther beyond the opening of the deep Stroan cutting, lochans and lochs scattered everywhere, the change from blue slate to grey granite, from comfortable Cheviot ewes on lowland pastures to my own brave, far-climbing black-faces, knee-deep among the heather. Then, at the station, and in the ‘machine,’ sitting greatly at his ease—who but Muckle Tamson, serene and content with himself, while at the horse's head, looking as if he had never done anything else all his life, I saw Stoor.

And all our long way by Clattering shaws to the house of Craigencaillzie Muckle Tamson told me in short, crisp sentences—the words of a man of action—the marvellous tale of the lost horses.

‘Stoor it was,’ he said, ‘I gie the wee gypsy wastrel that credit. It couldna hae been dune but for him. He had the gypsy word. He kenned auld Wull Bachellor's whisper. For me, I jüst sent a case o' 'improved' speerits addressed to Andre Freelan at the Red Ha'en. It was sent up frae the station. Every bottle was warranted to send a man to sleep for a week. It was Jock Malcolm, the groom, that fetched it frae the goods shed at Cairn Edward, and it was Gib Doan, the 'Pride o' Solway's' caretaker, that handed it doon, sniffin' at the case, for I had been carefu' to spill some.

‘Stoor saw them. He was hidden in a haystack—so he heard them, too. Says Gib to Jock, 'What's this, think ye?’

‘Guid ‘Dew o' Ben Nevis’ by the smell o't!’ says Jock. ‘It has been makkin' my mouth water a' the road frae Cairn Edward. Read what's written on it!’

## ROSE OF THE WILDERNESS

'For, ye see, owin' to his mither rinnin' awa' wi' a sodjer, his education had been arrested at an early age. A present to the Red Haven from a friend just sailing for Australia.'

'That's what it says,' remarked Gib Doan, the horse-guard, rubbin' his hands hopefully, 'it doesna say for Andro Freelan—but for the Red Ha'en! Man, it's for us!'

'Man, Gib,' groaned Jock, 'that wad be fine—oh, miraculous! But when Andro cam' back, he wad be askin', and the baith o' us wad get the grand heave oot o' this; forbye oor banes mishandled maist shameful!'

'Na na, dinna be feared,' says Gib, 'we can tell him that there has been a mistak'. It was addressed to the Red Haven, and we thocht (seein' that he wasna at hame) that it micht be frae some o' oor auld comrades. But maist likely he will ken nocht about it. For, ye see, the man that sent it will be on his way to Australly, and it's an unco' lang road to send back word. Even if the man that sent the case wrote to say sae, Andro wad only think he was leeift!'

'So Jock allowed himself to be persuaded. It was none too difficult. His throat was wide and deep and desperate dry, like that man's the minister is sae fond o' tellin' aboot in the kirk—him that was sae keen to get into Abraham's bosom aside the beggar man.

'Weel,' Muckle Tamson gave his characteristic short chuckle, 'they were really ower saft game—thae twa. Folk that ken aboot horses are clever wi' horses. Trickery is nae name for the devilment they are up to. But for everything else they are saft—new-mixed putty is fair flint to them.'

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'Weel, Miss Rose, to cut the story short, by nine that nicht Gib and Jock Malcolm were weel into their fourth bottle. Oh, they had guid heids to hae gotten sae far, after the wee bit o' chemist-an'-druggistry that me and Stoor had done. And barrin' us twa, there wasna a man about the stables—only Gib and Jock Malcolm and the empty bottles!

'As ye may think, it wasn't lang afore Gib and Jock were snorin' on the strae. Stoor and me put the 'hoshens' on the great beasts—waterproof railway sheetin' stuffed wi' felt—never a sound, never a mark. And the twa—the 'Pride' and the 'Reid MacGregor '—followed like lambs, because Wee Stoor had said the gipsy word in their lugs!

'Ye hae heard o' the Reid Ha'en Port? If ye haena, Miss Rose, being heather-bred, my grandad kenned it weel—nane better. For he was a noted smuggler, as bauld, though no sae muckle spoken about as Captain Yawkins—him leevin' in the country, as it were, and it no bein' healthy to misname auld Muckle Tamson o' Ironmacanny, my forbear.

'Mony is the cargo he has hidden awa' in the auld 'vaut' o' Blue Hills, a wee bit farm-toon no half a mile frae Andro Freelan's stables. Brawly I minded him tellin' me that, though the farm was only a pickle ruins, the 'vaut' underneath, being built o' grand auld masonry an' solid shell-lime, wad stand till the day o' judgment. The door was a kind o' arch that had the look o' being roughly rilled up wi' grey dyke-stanes. There was a mark where there had been a peat-stack set against the gable. Noo it was a' grass-grown, wi' the bonny wee ferns haudin' on like grim death amang the nooks and crannies.

'Aweel, Stoor an' me, we made the horses comfortable in the auld 'vaut' o' Blue Hills that my

grand-faither had ridden his smuggling cattle in a hunder year syne! We set up the wall again, and daubit it a' wi' glaur and stuck in the wee sprouts o' fern and brecken. Ye see, that by liftin' the auld hearthstane in the kitchen, there was an easy road with hewn steps doon into the hidie-hole.

'But, of coorse, it was neither the 'Pride o' Solway' nor yet the hardy smugglin' rouncies o' my grandfaither that could gang doon through a lifted hearthstane.

'But for feedin' and seein' that Andro's graund stud-stock was brave and comfortable, naething could hae been mair convenient.

'Stoor was at the awakening o' Jock and Gib. Andro Freelan did it himsel', wi' the toe o' his boot. Indeed, they say that he trampled them baith underfoot, swearing that he wad stamp the verra life oot o' them. Oh, a man's no canny when he is roused is your Belfast Irishman—especially a pig-dealer!

'And the noise there was, and the running, and the police wi' their noses to the roads whaur neither 'The Pride' nor the 'Red Macgregor' had ever set a foot! Och, it was bonny to see. But nane cam' near the ruins o' Blue Hills, nor fashed us in the least. And Stoor himsel' delivered the letter to the pig-dealer, did ye no, Stoor?

'And after that I sent a bit line to Maister Clelland for him no to chase awa' Stoor, if he saw him aboot the bank, only just to come to the window on Friday and rub the side o' his nose if Andro had payed the siller. Then I was to tak' back the horses at the double. But if he rubbed his chin, the siller wasna payed. And, dod, I'm feared that, if the decent man had scarted his chin by mistak' the 'Pride' and the

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'Macgregor' micht hae dee-ed an unnatural death!

'Oh, Tamson!' I cried, 'but at least the poor beasts had done no wrong.'

'Maybes no,' said Tamson, calmly, 'but their maister had—heaps! And if it is just an' richt that bairns should suffer for their faithers' and mithers' ill-doings unto the third and fourth generations, what wad hae been the maitter wi' twa dumb brutes lyin' doon never to rise mair, and neither o' them kennin' what had struck them? At ony rate, that is what wad hae happened, had I no gotten the telegraph frae that wee de'il there!

'Sae as soon as I had it, I took oot the horses and let them into the 'paddock,' as they caa it. They made straight for the stables. The doors were open. I saw them gang in, looking for their corn, and waited for nae mair. For weel kenned I that the place wad be watched. Muckle Tamson took the heather, and wee Stoor the train for it! And so, here we are, baith the twa, and the decent man in the bank at Cairn Edward has the siller.

'Owe, aye, I'm no say in' but I wad hae likit fine to hae brocht the hale mysel' to put into your faither's hands. But he's an awesome man, that Andro Freelan. He sticks at naething!'

I laughed at Muckle Tamson's sudden conclusion, so lame after what had gone before.

'Tamson,' I said, 'that's surely the pot calling the kettle. It seems to me that you don't stick at much yourself!'

'Oh, that,' he said, 'that's different. I was only renderin' unto Caesar—that's your faither—what was Caesar's. But Andro Freelan was keepin' what wasna his. Besides, the man was a rank Eerishman, that says 'pates' when he means 'peats'! Wha wad

keep the moral law wi' a craitur like that—no even your wonderful minister!

He said this with a quaint sidelong look at me.

'What do you mean?' I demanded indignantly. He laughed with that curious chuckling laugh which, so far as my experience goes, only Muckle Tamson and the common green talking parrot possess of all animated nature.

'Oh,' said he, 'maybe Maister Kenmore kenned more than ye think!'

And with this oracular utterance I had perforce to be content. For not another word would Muckle Tamson speak. At Craigencaillie the horse and gig were left behind to be taken down to the Bennan next day by the herd who was going that way to Dumfries Tryst, and would be glad of a lift as far as the station.

Then the three of us struck right across the hills. When I got fairly away from the little steading of Craigencaillie, and saw the true lilac bloom on the real hill heather, I declare I dropped down and hugged a bush of it. Muckle Tamson took Stoor by the collar of his coat—the only one he possessed—and led him to a distance, where the two of them viewed the scenery all round, except in my direction.

There was a knoll a little way off from which I could see the reeking chimney of the Dungeon, the whole house still a mere speck on the face of the Wilderness. My heart—ah, my heart bounded within me. But I had other thoughts, too. I saw the minister of Riddlings in his lonesome manse with the severe-faced woman lording it over him—that is, so far as he was a man to be lorded over at all. Yet I could not give up the heritage of the heather. But I own I did wish that he had been there to share it with me—

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I do not mean with any thought of foolishness. But just to walk out together, so that he could tell me about the customs of swallows and the stars in their courses, and me to find him plovers' eggs and fruits in their seasons, blaeberry, and cranberry, and the rare little strawberries at the copsewood edges.

But, still, for the present this mere thought was enough for me—that yonder was the house of the Dungeon, with my father better in mind and body, and here were the three of us, each of whom had done something. And—oh, the news that would bring the joy to his heart, even more than his daughter's return —of the eight hundred pounds safe in the bank, and the certainty that we would not now have to quit the Dungeon either for landlord or factor.

Yes, yonder was my father at the door! How white and frail he appeared! He and the sun had not looked each other in the face for long. And there, too, was Will Gillespie, who, when a little herd-boy, had always declared that he would marry me. I was grateful to him, I remember, at the time. For he told me that all girls had to be married, or else be forever disgraced. Indeed, if I remember rightly, so far had matters gone that at the age of five I was already wedded to Will with a curtain-pole ring and a crown of green rushes.

Somehow this did not hold afterwards. My father taught me too much and too well. I read too many books, and women were too scarce a commodity in the Wilderness.

But Will held to his side of the bargain, and with commendable regularity asked me to marry him about once a week, never disappointed or

## ROSE OF THE WILDERNESS

discouraged at any refusal, but saying only, 'Maybe the next time ye will have changed your mind!'

In vain I told him no—that I should never change. Because, of course, I knew how foolish it is to suppose that girls ever do. Only men are fickle. A girl does just as she likes, so long as she is true to herself. That is the new way of it, or, at least, so I read in the books that father got for me from the Cairn Edward circulating library.

Now, of course, you think that I threw myself into my father's arms weeping passionate tears, that Muckle Tamson waved the letter from the banker about his head, and that we all hugged Stoor and promised to send him to college.

As a matter of fact I said to my father, 'Come indoors—you know very well you should not be standing out in that sun without your hat!'

My father said nothing at all. Muckle Tamson was ascertaining (roughly) the probable profit and loss account of the 'yowes' since he left, from Will Gillespie. I shook hands with Will, and said that, thanks to him, my father was doing wonderfully, and that apparently they could get on better without me at the Dungeon.

'Oh, Rose!' was all that poor Will could say, and, blushing deeply, he turned from me ostentatiously, and plunged into the discussion of the best date for dipping the lambs on the Clints of the Dass.

As for Stoor, he was already deep in a game in a corner of the farmyard with Tweed and Tusker. The fight was a free one, and which was boy and which dog it would have been hard to distinguish.

Such was our homecoming. But when I got my father indoors the first words I said to him were these, 'Andro Freelan has paid his debt!'

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I saw him pale and stumble. I caught his arm and set him down gently on the sofa.

'It was all Muckle Tamson!' said I, 'you must thank him!'

Henry Gordon got up, and with one hand on my shoulder he went painfully to the window.

'Tamson,' he cried, 'Tamson!'

'I ken what ye want—I'm no coming a fut!' rejoined Tamson from across the yard. 'I did naething but what was a pleasure. It was Miss Rose that fettled the job!'

'Come here, you and Stoor!' commanded my father in a firmer tone.

'Weel, then, I juist winna,' cried Tamson, 'an' if that young loon dares to set his nose within the house—I'll break his back!'

But Stoor had no such intention. He disappeared round the corner of the barn in a fresh tumble of fighting dogs, waving brushes, and joyous barkings.

Only Will Gillespie leaned on his elbow on the gate-post and looked across the brown Wilderness of the Dungeon, about whose peak the mists hung grey and sad. Then, suddenly lifting himself up, he squared his shoulders, and strode away down the glen to his solitary house of the Dullarg, like one who has done his day's work and of whom no more can be expected. The Rose had come back to the Wilderness, but perhaps she had shed a petal or two by the way.

CHAPTER NINE

THE SHADOW CAST BEFORE

The next morning dawned with a great peace, a peace so great that it positively awoke me. I thought I was in heaven, and that it was the eternal Sabbath there, so clean and high and gay was the air, and in all that world no sound. Even at the Dungeon we were too far away to hear our neighbour's dog bark or his cock crow.

The peace was like the peace of God (as Absalom Kenmore often said afterwards). It passed understanding. Yet it was gladsome, too, and at the first call of dawn upon the mountains I ran to my father's room, so glad that I think I should have awaked him, if he had not already been lying watching the peaks of the Star and the Dungeon grow rosy, while between them and him a buzzard wheeled in widening circles in the kindling blue.

'Rose!' said my father, 'Rose! What has fetched you from your bed so early?'

'Gladness, father!' said I, 'the gladness to be home—to you!'

'To me, Rose,' said he, holding me at arm's length, 'ah, but there is a difference! I fear now that you have mixed with men and things, I shall not keep you long. The Wilderness may bloom, but it shall be without its Rose!'

Being a man without much joviality, my father was often what people who knew no better might call prophetically sentimental, chiefly in the morning.

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'There is a difference,' he said, his mild grey eyes misty with a kind of second sight. 'Who is it?'

'It is no one—I shall never leave you, father!' I affirmed, with the certainty of any young girl to whom such a question is put.

'Ah, puir Willie Gillespie!' was what he said in reply.

I own that I started, because, with the curious blindness young folk have in the matter of their love affairs, I had never imagined that Henry Gordon had interested himself in the comings and goings of Will or the other farmer lads of the countryside.

But, seeing me threatening to turn out what they called up there 'a fine bit lass,' my father had always cherished a little spark of jealousy. Not, perhaps, of any particular person, but rather against the fates that caused maids to leave their homes and their fathers in order to follow strange men athwart the world.

Of course, nothing is easier than to turn the flank of a jealous parent with the obvious tu quoque. 'And how about yourself, please?'

But I knew too little about my mother for this; besides, I had no cause—nothing to tell. A name is not written more impermanently within the seaweed and tangle of the tide mark than was the name of Absalom Kenmore on my heart. So I thought then. Still, on the whole, I judged it were better to say nothing about the matter. For you see, Henry Gordon, being only a tenant, though one of almost immemorial standing, he and his forbears had always looked with a kind of liking and hope upon my youthful comradeship, and also because (who shall blame him?) Will Gillespie was an only son, and his father's muirland acres would one day

become his own.

So he lay back, holding my hand a while, while I inquired as to his health, his outgoings and incomings. Oh, yes, he was better! He was almost the man he had once been. He could now mow a rig or herd a hill with any man.

But all the time I saw differently. Henry Gordon was better—yes! The same man, or anything like it, he would never be! Some permanent ill had hold of him—not perhaps the lack of desire to live, but at least something like it.

He did not speak of Lila, the little frail love-blossom of his later years—who never could have been his, save (as he had once said) in that place where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage. He did not speak any more of Lila. And, with the quick leap of a woman's instinct, I knew that this abstinence from what had been his hourly cry was the worst sign of all.

I tried him with the subject once. I had had a letter from Nan Gilfillan in Edinburgh. She had sent a photograph of little Lila's grave—a simple cross above it, and upon it the shape of a mower's scythe placed amid tall flowers in a raised pattern, with the sad and bitter motto cut deep into the marble:

'Consider the Lilies how they grow!'

My father merely nodded his head, and his face became like the flinty rock.

'Aye,' he said, 'it was I, Henry Gordon, who chose that inscription!'

And he swept his hands abroad with the mower's action.

'All flesh is grass,' he went back to the old parrot cry; 'today it is, and tomorrow it shall be cast into the oven. But wherefore not take puir weary Henry

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Gordon, and leave the young and the innocent, their hearts pulsing with the red bluid o' happiness, and all life fair as a meadow o' flowers afore them, to gather at their pleasure?'

'Hush, father,' said I. 'I cannot answer you. But I know a man that could!'

At this I could see his eye glisten for an instant, keen as a knife-point.

'And who may that be?' said he.

'Mr. Kenmore, the minister of Riddlings,' said I. 'I told you yestreen that he had helped me in everything, from the beginning.'

'Aye—aye,' he said drily, 'he helped you, did he? And I'll wager he will be comin' up here to be thankit. And he winna be so backward at hearin' the sound o' his praises as were Muckle Tamson and that laddie Stoor!'

I said to my father that I knew nothing about that. I had not asked the minister to come. I did not, however, tell him how close to my lips the invitation had been.

'Oh, he will come,' he said, pointing a lean finger at the Nick of Loch Dee, through which visitors arrived, 'all too quickly he will come. I would sooner have dune without the eight hunder pounds! It will be my death-warrant if ye leave me, Rose!'

Now, I will own that my feelings and my heart strove together like wind and tide when I heard this prophecy. I was glad to hear that surely (in Henry Gordon's opinion) the minister of Riddlings might come 'chappin' at our door.' But it was a little unfair of father (as I thought, at least) thus to take it for granted that I could possibly leave him alone.

'Hearken, father,' I said, 'I will never leave you nor the Dungeon so long as you bide in it. I will be your

daughter always—always! You understand—always!’

He nodded his head in sign that he understood—his eyes grew mistier. Then, seeing him visibly fatigued, I stole quietly out, with the feeling that now, by the words of my mouth, I had raised up a barrier that could not be broken down between me and the tall Absalom of the beard like ripe oat-straw.

I need not have troubled. It was many and many a day before the minister of Riddlings would appear through the Nick of Loch Dee and breast the fell of the Dungeon, with our little house framed in heather straight before him.

For that very day there came to Muckle Tamson the word, carried, as usual, through his own mysterious channels, that the minister of the parish of Riddlings, our friend and councillor, had been assaulted most grievously, and lay at his own manse in danger of his life. Furthermore, it appeared from the story, as reported later in the Weekly Intelligencer, how Mr. Kenmore had been taking means to stop the inpour of tramps into his parish, and that he had advised several farmers to give no shelter to those who would not work. It was suggested as the most probable cause of the outrage that it had been the vengeance of some of these aforesaid ‘tramps’—the word was just beginning to oust the old and kindlier Galloway ‘gaun bodies’—and, indeed, with some reason. For these ‘tramps’ were of quite a different class. ‘Gaun Bodies’ were wanderers with a pledged and prescriptive, if not a legal, right to bed and board. ‘Tramps,’ on the other hand, paraded the roads as if they belonged to them, terrifying homeward-bound school-bairns with satchels of smelly leather over their shoulders, and,

worst of all, setting fire to barns and stack-yards in revenge for a rough word or a barking dog.

But when Muckle Tamson asked my father for 'a few days off,' I felt certain that he was going down to regulate matters in the parish of Riddlings. The paragraph headed 'DASTARDLY OUTRAGE BY TRAMPS,' in the *Intelligencer*, had ended with the words: 'The unfortunate gentleman was found by Mr. Gilbert Doan and Mr. John Malcolm, assistants upon the horse-breeding establishment of Mr. A. Freelan, the well-known expert in agriculture and hippology. The reverend gentleman was conveyed first of all to the beautiful new mansion of the latter, situated at the Red Haven. But afterwards, at his own request, upon regaining consciousness, he was again removed as carefully as possible to the manse of Riddlings, where three doctors have since been called in to attend him. Hopes of ultimate recovery are entertained.'

Muckle Tamson read this to Stoor, who contented himself with wrinkling his nose.

'Ye are sure it wasna you, Stoor?' he demanded.

'Na, nor ony o' my folk—they that I used to 'tan' wi'! This is nae gypsies' job. But I ken.'

'Wheesht, Stoor,' said Muckle Tamson, 'maybe I hae a fair guid guess mysel'! But juist you bide here, and let Tamson work this oot by his ain hand!'

'Humph,' said Stoor, 'ye warnae the waur o' me last time, that ever I heard tell o'!'

'Maybes no,' said Muckle Tamson, 'but there's better wark for ye here. Ye hae to look after Miss Rose, there. An' the sheep, and the auld man—na, na, Stoor, nae telegraph offices for ye this time, ma man!'

And so, with these words, Muckle Tamson betook

himself over the hill, till his huge figure dwindled and became a mere dot on the surface of the big brown Wilderness of the Dungeon, long before he had reached the Nick of Dee.

Tamson the Regulator (as Alexander Cruden, in his last sad harebrained days, called himself) was gone, but there were those in the parish of Riddlings who had not heard the last of him.

We got our own next news when the following number of the Weekly Intelligencer reached us, only three days late—it usually took four to get to the Dungeon—and had served half-a-dozen paperless families by the way !

But the paragraph of last week had now reached the dimensions of half a column of spaced ‘burjo,’ as my father (who had had a brother who drank himself to death as a printer) pronounced it technically. At any rate, it read as follows:—

#### CARNIVAL OF CRIME IN RIDDLINGS PARISH.

Following close on the dastardly assault so recently made by presumed tramps on the minister of the parish of Riddlings, we have to signalise an offence against reason and humanity yet more extraordinary.

It will be remembered that the reverend and unfortunate gentleman was rescued almost from the clutches of the ruffians by his friend and neighbour, Mr. A. Freelan, of Red Haven, the eminent, &c., &c. . . . Now the ruffians, excited doubtless by this rescue, have had the actual audacity to attack Mr. Freelan himself, together with his two foremen, Messrs. Malcolm and Doan. The assault took place in the twilight near the deserted farm-steading of Blue Hills, and the gentleman and his servants were on their way home from the Auchencross Arms Inn,

where they had been partaking of some refreshment with the genial landlord, Mr. T. McFuddle.

The character of the assault was peculiar. All the three injured persons agree in saying that they witnessed a mysterious shape rise suddenly from behind a hedge, hover an instant over their heads, and then with one blow strike them to the ground. A panic prevails in the district. The assault appears to have been of the most serious and determined character. All three were left insensible, and our able local practitioner, Dr. Corkscrew, who happened to be at the Auchencross Arms while his horse was being baited, gave it as his opinion that they must have been beaten with some instrument of quite superhuman force— ‘as if they had passed through a threshing mill’ is the surgeon's graphic description of the condition of the unfortunate men. The police have already several clues, and will follow them to the bitter end. The gang of tramps and bold burglars to whom popular report has given the name of ‘Spring-Heeled Jacks,’ appears to be at the bottom of these occurrences. We recommend the lieges not to go out at night except when well armed or accompanied by dogs of known ferocity. The injured gentlemen are all doing as well as can be expected— that is, considering the circumstances and the unwearied attentions of Dr. Corkscrew.

‘Hooray for Tamson!’ shouted Stoor, and instantly commenced to turn a series of handsprings and somersaults so rapid and complicated that to the naked eye he appeared the very first wheeled vehicle ever seen upon the Dungeon.

‘What's that you say?’ cried my father, ‘let me not hear another word of that! Muckle Tamson is a douce, weel-doing man, if not very clever, and would

never fyle his hands with any such job!’

‘It wasn’t his hands, it was his loupin’ stick—ten feet o’ solid oak and as thick as my wrist! Oh, glory! Lamb’s fry an’ trotters! Tamson’s the lad! Oh, if only I could hae been wi’ him! He danced on them! He batted them! He ‘melled’ them! He learned them to let the minister alane! I’ll warrant him that! Tamson—Tamson for ever!’

For in his ignorance Stoor held by the ancient law of talion—an eye for an eye (or even two), and for a tooth, the need of a complete new set at the nearest dentist’s!

My father hounded him out of the house, but I could hear him going hurraing up the hill, with the dogs leaping and ‘youching’ about him, as hearty a young pagan as ever warmed his toes at a tribal camp-fire or chattered with his mates among the tree-tops.

My father looked at me when he was gone, long and hard.

‘You are of Stoor’s opinion?’ he asked, much more soberly, ‘that it was Muckle Tamson who did this?’

But I guarded myself and also Tamson carefully. For one never knew in these days how my father would take a thing, and I did not want to be left at the Dungeon with only Stoor, and every evening Will Gillespie wandering about in the gloaming like an uneasy ghost in watch for a chance of asking me to marry him.

On the third day, however, Tamson turned up smiling. He said that his second cousin at Ironmacanny was a little better, and that with care she might pull through yet.

‘I suppose,’ said I, flourishing the last Weekly Intelligencer before his eyes, ‘that she is being

attended by Dr. Corkscrew?’

‘The same,’ said he, shamelessly, looking me in the face. Even to my father he would be no more explicit. He had done his errand. His sick relative was ‘past the worst!’ She was ‘likely to come roond,’ ‘She wadna steer the mools (mould) just yet,’ and so on. But of the ‘Fearful Outrages in Riddlings Parish,’ not a word from Muckle Tamson.

But it was evident that he had been much more explicit with Stoor. For that youth would burst out laughing in the most solemn moments, as when his mouth was full of hot kail broth, a recurrence of which made my father send him to eat in the window corner, saying that if he chose to behave like the brutes he could also eat with them!

Once even, Stoor, struck by some unholy reminiscence, had to rise and flee in the middle of the evening prayer, to the interruption of that wholesome exercise, taking the dogs with him. And, afraid to venture back, he ended by staying in the barn with them, Hidden among the straw, till the displacement of the lights showed that my father had gone ‘ben’ to his chamber. Whereupon Muckle Tamson opened the door and let Stoor and the collies slip in noiselessly as so many Jacks-each-with-four-spring-heels! Then they curled themselves up on the hearthstone, the boy's towsy head resting on Tusker's flank, and Tweed's shaggy muzzle nosing up cold under his chin.

Some days after this my father received a letter which put us all in great disarray, and in Henry Gordon's mind well-nigh upset the reason that was already tottering on her frail throne.

(I know that sometimes I write like the books I have read, but as I am only a moorland lass it

## ROSE OF THE WILDERNESS

cannot be expected that I have had many chances of talking the English; I must e'en therefore sow as I have garnered.)

The letter was from Riddlings Manse, and was written in a very shaky hand. It ran as follows:—

To MR. HENRY GORDON,

In House of the Dungeon, Parish of Minnigaff.  
DEAR SIR,

Your daughter may have mentioned my name to you— though perhaps not. At least I am some far-away relative of yours, through the Patersons, dwelling in Cork Hill Port at Cairn Edward. I have suffered from a severe accident, and my medical adviser, seeing more clearly with his spirit, perhaps, than with all the skill of the physician, has ordered me high mountain air. It matters not if the time be already autumn, I must get away from the sea if I am to live.

Accordingly I have bethought me of you, sir, as a kinsman, hoping that perhaps, for the time of my vacation (which I have already obtained by grace of the Presbytery, of which I was Clerk), you might be able and willing to receive me as a guest into your household. I have been sorely shaken by my accident, but, having been brought up among the hills, I trust that in a little I may prove worthy of my salt.

If there be in your house any prophet's chamber, however small, I shall account it a service done to my Master, and one not to be forgotten between kinsfolk, that I be permitted to occupy it.

Present my homage most respectfully to your daughter, Miss Rose, and in the hope of hearing from you,

I beg to remain, Dear Sir,

Your friend and faithful kinsman,  
A. KENMORE (late Pres. Clk.).

The word 'late' electrified me. Mr. Kenmore had given up one of his appointments, that one which held him the closest. Had he by any chance divined that I was anchored to the Dungeon and that whoever wished for me must come there and seek me—must come there and abide by my side—a hard thing for a placed minister.

But no, surely not. I but deceived myself. After I was gone Mr. Kenmore would never give a thought to a foolish girl such as I—ignorant, or at best book-learned only in patches—not college bred like him, and wholly without his air of walking in a higher and sweeter world.

But my father took the matter hardly. He lay looking at the paper a long while without-speaking. Then, as if murmuring to himself, he said, 'Aye, aye, the strong man is come that will spoil my goods! Give me pen and ink, child!'

And as I went I bethought me how curious it would be to have two men in the house both of whom talked to themselves. Perhaps they would hurl texts at each other as the Titans cast stones from mountain-top to mountain-top.

But this only shows how light, frivolous, and unworthy a thing I was—thus to judge by the tape-line of my own folly two men, great and grave, like my father and Mr. Kenmore.

The letter that my father sent back was thus conceived: —

'Kinsman,—Come quickly. I may not have long on the footstool, and great need that I should see you face to face. Do your diligence to come before winter. Come and abide. The lodging is ready. My daughter

salutes you.

And lastly, kinsman and brother, pray for this poor earthen vessel, nigh to the shard-heap, who once held his head high and was worthy to sign himself

HENRY GORDON of the Dungeon.'

Before, however, he shut the envelope I got a chance to scribble in pencil, without signature, the single word 'Come!'

And this I gave to Will Gillespie to carry to the Clatteringshaws, from whence they have postal communication nearly every three days if the roads are good.

You see Will Gillespie would do anything for me, being made like that. But from the very moment that the letter was gone I began to watch the gap in the hills through which he must come.

I do not mean Will Gillespie. I heard him that same night about seven o'clock talking with Muckle Tamson in the yard, and leaning from the window asked if he had left the letter. No, it was of a tall form that I thought, oaten-bearded, leaning on a staff, perhaps limping from his mishandling.

As I stood thus watching the distant Nick of Loch Dee and the dying sunlight, my father came behind me, and with altogether unwonted tenderness he said,

'My little Rose—afterwards— afterwards —do not forget that I have done this for you!'

## CHAPTER TEN

### GUIDSAKE GILL'S CROWNING MERCY

We had thought that all would now go well. But we had counted without Andro Freelan. In spite of the payment of the rent, there came a man with a paper for my father to warn him that he must quit his tenancy of the Dungeon at the end of the year. It seemed that the new factor for the Earl of Glasserton had had a better offer from an unknown 'sporting tenant.' Deer were to take the place of the black-faced sheep on the hills of heather, gamekeepers to supplant the herds, and the occupation of all of us would be gone—all, that is, except Willie Gillespie, who, farming his own land, was beyond the reach of earl or factor.

Even in Galloway things change. The old was passing away and we were in the new and less kindly time.

This Pharaoh not only knew not Joseph, but after three hundred years of Josephs, his underling showed him the door like a monthly tenant in arrears with his rent.

Not that Henry Gordon knew anything of this. Oh, no, I watched the posts, and sunk every legal letter in the deeps of the Dhu Loch with a stone of seven pounds tied about its middle. They were in every sense weighty communications.

Well did I know the figuration of them—Snell, Sharp, and Smart, Writers to the Signet in St. Andrew's Square, Edinburgh, being the subscribers thereof. Neither did the Earl of Glasserton know. The

fault, save in carelessness, was not his. He was a young man recently come into his estate, and now dispersing the savings of his minority in a yacht voyage round the world in joyous company.

Then, while we were still waiting for the minister to arrive, the man with the warning—a writ to serve, I think they call it, came to the moorlands seeking Henry Gordon and the Dungeon. It chanced that Muckle Tamson was down at the Clatteringshaws that day, for we were in instant expectation of the minister of Riddlings.

The sheriff's officer was a little man, who wore a rusty black suit as if he had bought it off a kirk beadle after it had grown too shabby for weekly pulpit use. His arms swung low by his sides, and he looked anxiously at the threatening array of peaks which barred the road to the Dungeon.

'Henry Gordon?' said Muckle Tamson, scratching his head as if in great bewilderment, 'I believe I hae heard tell o' sic a man! And the Dungeon? That's a prison, is it no? That will be mair in your way I'm guessin' by the look of ye!'

'But I am advised that this is the most direct road to the House of the Dungeon,' said Guidsakes Gill. He was called 'Guidsakes' because of his favourite exclamation of surprise.

'Guidsakes! What a place—I never thocht to see the like in the Queen's dominions!'

'This is no the Queen's dominions, my lad, as ye will soon ken,' said Muckle Tamson, darkly. 'Nae writ rins ayont the Water o' Dee—not till ye hae passed the Moss o' Cree. And the sooner ye do the like, the better it will be for your health. There are some desperate characters up this way!'

'Guidsakes me!' cried Sheriff Officer Gill, who had

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read some recent fiction of the local sort— ‘not smugglers, not cattle-lifters, not raiders?’

‘Waur nor that!’ said Muckle Tamson sombrely, ‘there’s some wad that think nae mair o’ trepannin’ ye than o’ slittin’ a sheep’s wizzand!’

‘Guidlife!’ cried the officer, again swinging his arms, ‘I had no idea. This is very serious. I have never been interfered with before in the discharge of my duty to her Majesty and the Sheriff’s Court of Kirkcudbright. I will declare myself deforced!’

‘But they are cunning deevils, too,’ said the wily Tamson, ‘ye will hae to find them first, and then declare yoursel’ ‘deforced!’

Muckle Tamson continued to explain.

‘Ye canna declare yoursel’ ‘deforced’ by a when black-faced yowes,’ he declared, ‘and that is a’ ye can see frae here! And as for me, Muckle Tamson will be glad and prood to render ye ony assistance in his power, as a faithfu’ subject o’ the Queen and an auld customer o’ the Sheriff Coort o’ Kirkcudbright!’

‘Guidsake!’ cried Officer Gill, swinging his arms with a curious jerk that made his fingers crack, ‘ye are yin o’ the gang!’

‘Wha? Mel!’ cried Muckle Tamson, towering over the little man like the Merrick above the Palgowan knowes; ‘tak’ back thae words! D’ye hear? There may be a minister or twa in the country that’s mair sedate than me, but no mony. Speer at the guidwife there. But mind, ye hae asked for the help o’ Muckle Tamson to convoy you into the Wilderness, and into the Wilderness ye shall gang.’

‘I saw a boy with you when I came along in the Lochinvar gig?’ said Guidsake Gill, suspiciously; ‘where can he be now?’

‘Boy!’ cried Tamson, in great apparent

astonishment, 'a collie dowg, gin ye like—but feint a boy is there to be seen!'

Which was entirely true, the fact being that Stoor had got his instructions, and had disappeared. Tamson dived into the house of Clatteringshaws, demanding, of all things in the wide world, a little soft soap 'for the love of heaven.' He got it on condition that he should tell the giver all about what he wanted it for.

'Maybe he'll tell ye himsel' when he gets back—if ever!' said Tamson, with one huge finger pointed at the trembling minion of the law.

Growing more confidential, the sheriff's officer confided to his companion that he had never done such an errand with more pleasure. Firstly, because he was a friend of the new tenant's, Mr. Andro Freelan, of the Red Haven, and secondly, because once in his warlike youth Henry Gordon of the Dungeon had thrashed him till every bone in his body ached worse than every other. This had happened at Lockerby Tryst.

'Faith,' cried Muckle Tamson, 'so did he lick me, this same Henry Gordon, at the harvesting in Kells parish it was, and, truth to tell, Maister Guidsakes, I have never been the same man since!'

The eyes of the vindictive legal messenger flashed with excitement.

'Then you also have something for which to pay him back!' he cried, and laid a lean finger on the huge arm of his companion. Such an ally was worth having when one entered the port of these wild hills on such an errand.

But Muckle Tamson shook him off. He explained to the offended Guidsakes that 'wee beasties crawling about him made him nervous.'

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'But,' he added, to restore the peace, 'I owe that to Henry Gordon that I shall never be able to repay till I see him in his grave—so drive on, my man. Muckle Tamson is wi' ye, frae first to last.'

It seemed to Guidsakes Gill that he had sown good seed on fertile soil, and that whatever were the perils of the Dungeon and the yet greater unknown dangers of the House of the Dungeon, where he was to serve his writ of ejection, the burly figure of Muckle Tamson would stand between him and harm.

Yet a surprising number of things happened on the long way across the face of the Wilderness. In the first place they were not really going in the direction of the Dungeon at all, Muckle Tamson having apparently forgotten the road he had trodden so often, by the Nick of Loch Dee and over the Glints o' the Buss.

It was indeed singular that so ancient a navigator of the untracked Wilderness should have been so deceived in broad daylight as to mistake east for north. Perhaps, however, this was owing to the contents of a little flask which Guidsakes Gill, 'sherra's offisher,' produced from his pocket at almost equal intervals. Thereafter Muckle Tamson sat down to think upon the road. It was hard to come at, that road. Still, he was a faithful man, Tamson, and only ceased from his labours when he had his prey finally and hopelessly bogged between two links of the Black Water of Dee.

They were now in the wild country between the Kells Range and the Cooran Lane. Black, sluggish waters loomed up in front of them with an oily glimmer, and carrying on its surface a 'blae' scum, 'exceedingly unwholesome,' said Guidsakes Gill.

## ROSE OF THE WILDERNESS

'Aye,' moaned Muckle Tamson, 'if ye kened as muckle as I do about the terrible characters that frequent this Wilderness, ye wad say that the water was indeed far frae wholesome!'

'Oh, wae's me,' cried Guidsakes, for once varying his expletive, 'what will come o' me, and what will her Majesty the Queen say?'

'Dinna bother your heid about that, honest man,' said Muckle Tamson, pointing to the ink-black and stagnant pool in front, 'she will never ken, honest wumman! There's mair men been drooned in that pool and naething said about it, than wad cover the sands o' Dumfries on a Wednesday!'

'Oh, kind Maister Muckle Tamson,' cried the unfortunate bearer of the 'warning' to Henry Gordon, 'ye will no forsake me, wull ye?'

'Forsake ye, na—I hae no the least thocht o't!' said Tamson truly. 'But if it be our fate to lie in the black and slimy pool, let us comfort oursels by the thocht that it's the only decent feedin' the puir eels get! For even the sheep kens better than to come here. There was a gauger frae Newton Stewart cam' this road—aye, aye, it was this verra pool. He was a muckle fat man, but it's a guid six months syne, and I daresay the puir bits o' eels hae finished wi' him by this time! They will be gye and hungry, puir things! They say that since that, they hae been seen nine feet lang and as thick as my airm!'

He seized his companion hastily by the wrist, as if in great alarm, and drew him away from the margin of that dangerous oily water. Who more willing to let himself be persuaded than Guidsakes Gill!

'Aye,' continued Muckle Tamson, 'and there was the ploughman frae Glenhowl. Ye hae heard o' him? He was crossing the Black Water, wi' the intention in

his black heart to wrang a puir bit lassie doon at the foot o' Trool. For, ye see, it is the intention to do wrang to anither that does it. He slippit, did the plooman—and— slump —the geds and the eels got him! But he was nane sae guid eatin' as the gauger man. He had gotten a fine malty flavour wi' tastin' the beer, and spending his time doon about the Blednoch! John MacMillan o' the Bongill, that is a judge, said to me that he could taste it even when the wife made eel-pie. Aye, aye, the taste o' Blednoch whuskey carries far, and the eels heeraboot were fell fond o' the gauger man!'

Muckle Tamson said all this with a perfectly immovable countenance, and with frequent uneasy glimpses at the Gauger's Pool, in which some oily swirl sometimes brought to the surface the blackened branch of a tree. Whereupon Tamson instantly snatched away his companion, that his eyes might not see the horrid sight of the man-eating eels and murderous 'geds' that lay in wait under the canal of ink.

Then Tamson would be taken with a solemn fit, and, starting from his reverie, he would seize his leaping-pole, and poke about among the black slime at the bottom of the pool and skirmish along the edges. Of course he found bones. For sheep would sometimes find their way thither, and be unable to get out again. Also, the neighbouring shepherds occasionally cleared their borders (after removing the fleeces off dead sheep) by casting the carcass of some unfortunate 'aval' ewe into the water.

In any case, Muckle Tamson recovered enough bones to make three excisemen, together with a dozen herds. And at each discovery he had some new legend of terror for Guidsakes Gill, till that hero

had almost worn away his vocabulary of exclamatory wonder.

But after each thrilling adventure and tale of sudden death, there was always the conclusion—

'But be never feared. Trust yoursel' to Muckle Tamson. He is the best louter wi' the pole in a' the hill country, and together we will manage it bravely!'

'But what does that advantage me?' cried the sheriff's officer, almost in tears, 'that you should be a jumper with the pole?'

'Oh,' said Tamson, soothingly, 'it's juist a trick and easy learned!'

Whereupon he proceeded to give simple illustrations on the comparatively dry land that surrounded them.

'Ye had better learn quick,' said he to Guidsakes Gill, 'for the nicht will be comin' on. And thae eels — what wi' them being; ae hungry, and the excitement o' the smell o' a weel-fed town man—they will be seeking the hale place for us wi' their mouths that wide open, they could swallow your leg and you never ken!'

Guidsakes Gill instantly withdrew that member from the neighbourhood of the Gauger's Pool and its hungry inmates.

Nevertheless a slight doubt had passed across his mind.

'What's that ye say about thae eels preferrin' toon-bred men?' said he, cocking his head to the side.

'I did not say toon-bred, but toon-fed,' said Tamson, solemn as a professor; 'there is a great difference! Ye see, there's me. Now look at me. I'm a bigger man than you, Guidsakes! Fatter, and better eatin' on me. That's what ye wad say, no havin' studied, as it were, the natural history and habits o'

thae deil's beasties. But ye wad be wrang. It doesna gang by looks, but by toon-feedin'. Did ye ever taste 'braxy'?'

He asked the question with surprising suddenness.

'Yes,' said the sheriff's officer, making a wry face, as if he had carried away from the encounter no very keen desire to taste it again.

'Well, then,' said Muckle Tamson, sawing the air impressively with his hand, 'ye ken 'braxy' is a trifle high—sort o' gamesome whiles wi' the wee white 'mauks' turnin' and twirlin' on it when ye put it in the pan. But a' that juist adds to the flavour.'

'Ugh!' said Guidsakes, too deeply moved even to call upon his favourite gods.

'Aye,' continued Muckle Tamson, tranquilly, 'but us on the muirlands gets to prefer weel-maukit braxy, juist as thae Duch folk like their cheeses buried for twa or three months in the sappy heap outside a guid weel-filled byre! And that gies us lads o' the hills a flavour that gars the eels let us alane! No, they winna touch us. It's marvellous, the workings o' Providence, that there are juist enough o' thae toon-folk fed up wi' a' mainer o' baked meats and rich gravies to keep the eels and wild beasts frae carin' the dottle o' a pipe aboot us!'

After he had finished this little lecture on local natural history, Muckle Tamson remarked quite casually that it was time for them to jump the Black Water. They must, it appeared, be at a certain green hill faint on the horizon, so as to be wholly in safety, before the night fell.

'Will I show ye the way, or will ye jump first?' he demanded of his companion.

Then the long-armed sheriff's officer was taken

between two fears. It was certainly terrible to run the risk of being abandoned in that wild place by Muckle Tamson. But to make the attempt first—that would be still worse. Because if, by any failure of nerve, he were to fall short, there would be nobody on the farther side to drag him out.

On the whole he chose the lesser danger. Muckle Tamson was a well-kenned man, and so far had dealt very fairly with him. Tamson would show him how the terrific leap was taken over the Black Water o' Dee. Then he could throw the pole across, and if anything happened—well, there was Tamson ready on the brink to help him ashore.

'Yes,' he concluded, 'that was certainly the proper procedure and order of events.'

And Tamson, gripping the pole and taking a run, launched himself boldly across.

'Nothing more easy!' he cried, as he slipped his hand into his pocket, and, turning the soft-soap of the good wife of Clatteringshaws well between his fingers, he greased with it both ends of the pole. Then he threw it across to Guidsakes Gill, that ill-fated sheriff's officer.

No matter, then, which end he took hold of, the poor man would be sure to come to grief—in medias res, as the minister of Riddlings would have said.

And to grief he came, surely enough. Before starting he remarked on the slipperiness of the pole, and proposed to wipe it off on a piece of bent grass.

But Muckle Tamson warned him against this with more earnestness than he had yet shown.

'Did ye no see wi' what elasticity I flew ower—a muckle man like me,' he said; 'there maun be a kind o' pliancy, ye see, aboot the pole—as in your trade, an auld quill pen writes better nor a new-cut ane!'

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Guidsakes Gill saw the force of this. The illustration went home.

And so, commending his soul to the providence of sheriff's officers (I will not soil my pages by writing the shorter word Muckle Tamson used in telling me of it), he grasped the pole and leaped.

But, alas, he knew not the proper art! He had not observed how Tamson avoided the deep black mud of the middle way. In this he planted his pole deeply— too deeply. It stood upright with a quiver, and the scatterer of warrants and writs of ejectment found himself in the position of a salt herring dangling on a pole.

His hand slipped from the top. He slid downwards, the warning shouts of Muckle Tamson mingling with his own imprecations.

'Haud on, man—oh, haud on! There's a big ane just underneath, the size o' your leg, wi' a mouth and teeth like a carding machine! Oh, haud on—haud on! As ye value your precious life—as ye love your Tamson—haud on, haud on!'

Though the last reason moved him not at all, the former was exceedingly powerful. He valued his life, though few other people did as much.

He could only cry out, 'Guidsake! Guidsake! GUIDSAKE!' in ascending tones, which quickly reached a scream.

Tamson kept warning his victim of the perils waiting for him in the deeps of the Gauger's Pool. But in spite of everything he slipped lower, all the time lifting his feet high and crooking his legs like a boy shinning up a lamp-post.

Tamson kicked a peat or 'truff' into the water behind him and crying, 'Save us! It's a' by wi' noo! Here comes the big yin that ate the Gauger!' The

pole swayed. Guidsakes Gill dropped with a scream of fear, plop, into the oily water.

Without a single smile traversing his face (well can I imagine him), Muckle Tamson fished the officer out, half choked and wholly blinded by the muddy water, but equally untouched by the tooth of sinuous eel or greedy 'ged'!

While pretending to clean down the unfortunate, and afford him what succour was in his power, Muckle Tamson took also the opportunity of drawing out from an inner pocket the writ which would have obliged Henry Gordon to leave the Dungeon on the following term-day.

With his pole he poked it deep under the overhanging margin of the pool, rolling great turfs upon it. And there, for aught I know, it abides unto this day to witness if Muckle Tamson lied. As for me, I have given the tale as he told it to me. He may have touched it up in places, but the main facts in their order are true enough.

Tamson saw Mr. Gill safe to New Galloway, to the accompaniment of innumerable 'Guidsakes!' also 'Save-us-a's!' But after they had established themselves at the 'Cross Keys,' and the night had begun to get a little more canty, Guidsakes Gill, who was a steady supporter of the 'Poet's Corner' in the local paper, was induced to sing a song, partly by Burns, partly of his own composition, only one verse of which now remains upon record :—

*I'll gang nae mair to yon toon, Oh, never in my life  
again! Whaur fearsome eels they wallop roond—  
Guidsake! They'd pyke ye to the bane. I'll gang nae  
mair to yon toon, Guidsake, what troubles me befell!  
Wi' deep moss holes and slippery poles— The Sherra  
e'en can gang himsel'!*

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### THE ANCIENT WAY

Tamson had so many friends to visit, as he said, 'ower on Ironmacanny side,' that it was a day or two before he returned. He brought with him, however, the new visitor's slender provision of clothing and two valises full of books, swagging on the backs of moor ponies. These impedimenta had been left at the Clatteringshaws, because Muckle Tamson was off on his own affairs at the time and there was no means of bringing them on. Still, when Tamson did appear, he was held by all in the secret to have deserved well of his country.

Only Henry Gordon reproved him, and threatened him with his displeasure if he should hear of him drinking about Dalry or the 'borough toon.' This was not all that had kept Muckle Tamson away, though no doubt something like it had been included in the bill of fare.

So it befel on a fine autumnal eventide, so fine that, but for the shortness of the light, one may well say that of all the moorland months October is ordinarily the finest. Not a leaf had dropped from the birches, but all were turned to crimson and golden red when I went out to stroll over the heather.

Of course, I kept my eyes pretty often southward, towards the Nick of Loch Dee. The heather lingered longest there. The browning purple bloom ran along the hill-tops most lovingly in that direction. In the west, of course, there was the usual riot of colour as the sun went down. But in the south under the hill

scarps all was solemnly sweet—yes, I know that I have used the words before, yet I can think of none better. The loch was, I suppose, like that wonderful colour which (they say) is beneath the last visible purple of the spectrum, invisible to mortal eyes, or perhaps too fine for them.

I looked for him there, and saw him not, only Will Gillespie herding a noisy flock in the direction of his shieling of the Nether Dullarg.

Then lo! I lifted my eyes, and there he was beside me, his hat in his hand, and the very depth of the sleeping waters of Loch Dee in his eyes. His voice, too, was wonderful when he spoke.

‘Rose!’ he said. And then, as if repenting that he had been too familiar, he added, ‘Kinswoman!’

I did not quite like being called ‘woman,’ which in Galloway is a word of uncertain sound. But when you come to think of it this was silly, for you can't say ‘kins girl,’ though I am sure I don't know why.

I suppose I took his hand or he mine. I believe, but am not sure, that he held it longer than there was any need for. However, there were no witnesses but the sheep, Tusker, the bigger of our two collies, and a newly-arrived woodcock—who knew that I, of a certainty, would not do him any harm.

As soon as Absalom Kenmore came and we sat down together on the little ‘biggin’ of turfs on the moor-face, I knew that now all would somehow go right. Muckle Tamson could fight off the underlings, but there was a faith in me which said that he alone could help us with the great ones of the land, speaking to them as man to man

We began to talk. But for a long time little was said of any moment.

It had taken him most of the day to make his way

so far, being still feeble and having to rest often. I looked at him. He was certainly very pale, and his face had lined down to the fineness of the single statue I had ever seen in my life—that of Mercury over the Cairn Edward Post Office. He looked more like a man of fifty than the forty which was his actual age. There were also a few crisp grey hairs along by his temples, and others scattered through his thick Absalomite locks in which he allowed the winds to blow freely, sitting with his face towards the sunset and breathing in the hill air with long, glad liftings of the lungs.

I shall always think of Absalom Kenmore thus. He had doffed his clerical black, and was now attired in a suit of sober grey, very well fitting—indeed, almost anything became him—though marked with the creases of the man's clothing who sits much at his desk. He wore a black tie, small and neat, and his whole person breathed the gentleman—born, bred, and living all on a higher plain than the ordinary of mankind.

'I have come, Rose, as I promised,' he said, without, however, taking his eyes from, the sunset clouds.

'And who more welcome?' I answered. 'You will find my father in a low state. But he will be glad to see you!'

'And not my cousin, Rose?'

'Oh, as for me, I do not matter,' I laughed. 'I see so few people that I am glad to come out here with the dogs to—to—look for—Muckle Tamson!'

'Ah!' he answered gravely, 'if thy servant be a dog, Cousin Rose, I trust you will find him at least a faithful one!'

This was decidedly better, but still I felt that we

must not, at least so early, get to the colour of my eyes and the little wind-blown ringlets in the nape of my neck. Everything in love (so I am told by Nan Gilfillan) ought to be done by stages, though sometimes in practice these click past like wayside stations when you are on the express train—a white flash, a swirl of dust, and then the fast-flowing twin river of the green fields again, fished over by telegraph posts, each throwing a good-length salmon line.

But to the story. Absalom Kenmore had come, and there was a great difference about the Dungeon, a difference notable to all the world. My father felt it directly. After one attempt at treating Mr. Kenmore as the minister of Riddlings Parish, he yielded to the gentle firmness of the man gone early grey. He began even to forget his jealousy a little and to treat him as a younger brother, if not quite as a son.

Hitherto Henry Gordon had never had anyone near him who could speak with the authority of his beloved books. He had therefore become (and who would not among people who knew so little?) somewhat doctrinaire and even autocratic. But he found Absalom Kenmore 'a high-learned man,' 'a colleged man,' and (crowning concession) for one so young, 'a scholar of remarkable judgment.'

All these things were true. Mr. Kenmore had had a long experience as Clerk of Presbytery, an experience which means familiarity with affairs of a singularly complicated kind, a firmness in debate, and especially a finished aptitude in the composing of quarrels. It was almost too much for me, this sudden fondness of my father's. He could not have enough of Absalom Kenmore, and consequently, save as a listener to the high things they discussed

concerning the soul and the mind, I got little chance of speech with our visitor.

Perhaps, too, there was something in all this that savoured of jealousy. If Henry Gordon could not look after me, dominate me, be certain of me, he could at least keep Absalom Kenmore out of my way.

Notwithstanding, I found out that it is wonderful what a look can convey, the pressure of a hand in passing, or a little lingering (the very slightest) in the saying of good night.

No, I was not unhappy. How could I be? In the little peat-warmed parlour on stormy evenings or long chillish days, or from the top of a heathery boulder-strewn knoll when the sun shone, came the echoes of such high debate as one seldom hears nowadays, save in the nooks and corners of Scotland. I heard them speak at length of the Trinity, and understood no more than I did of the moorland wind that blew in my face, till Absalom had showed my father the Tri-unity in man—the reasoning brain, the willing heart, and the acting body. No, of course, I did not understand even then. Does anyone, when it comes to that?

Still somehow or other the dry bones began to live. I read with a new light upon the page. I was quite content (because I loved them) to sit for hours and listen to these men scattering great words—Trinitarian, Unitarian, Neologian, all in high-sounding Calvinian sentences. What the Nazarene said. What Paul had made of it—what Augustine—that which Calvin had carved, hard and granitic—but perhaps eternal—line upon rugged line, precept upon imperious precept. Ah, well, it is a good thing for a woman to know the limits of her intelligence. I sat and knitted my sock, quite content that Absalom

should sometimes, in the heat of his argument, turn half-unconsciously to me, demanding why Turretin should be a greater authority than a man's own heart.

I only wished that his own would hurry up !

Not that I loved him—no, of course not. I am not of the girls who love first or cast themselves at men's feet unasked. But, also, of course, if my father imagined he could stay the forces of the gravitation of soul to soul (Absalom's words) he imagined a vain thing. For this is surer than Newton's apple, higher than the stars in their courses. I who tell you, know.

Will Gillespie came just one night. The tall, grave man smiled, sat down beside him, and searched the lad's heart and mind in one half hour, speaking gently and quietly all the while upon such moorland topics as Will was master of.

I heard the end of their conversation.

'Yes, sir, I will bid the lads to come,' said Will. 'They will be here on Sabbath afternoon, and Muckle Tamson and me will clear oot the barn!'

I understood that it concerned a Sabbath service to be conducted by the minister of Riddlings. It had indeed been my father's custom to read a sermon to the herds who dropped in on that day, and maybe offer up a prayer, so that, as he said, 'they might think upon the holy day and not be as the beasts that perish.'

It was an afternoon in late October, the wind still kindly and heather-breathing, that I had my first long talk with Absalom Ken more. My father had dropped asleep in his chair. That sort of sleep came easily to him now. So lightly did he breathe that sometimes one had to listen well to know whether or no he breathed at all.

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And yet so ready was he to awake that (as the minister said) 'he would rise up at the voice of the bird!'

At which I do not wonder, seeing that the bird that chiefly frequented us in these potato-raising days, was the rook. We said crow, of course, but made a distinction between the kindly thievish omnivorous rook and the 'corbie' that pecked the eyes out of our sick lambs and weakly ewes.

The two of us went away across the moor, not mounting higher, but following unconsciously the easiest of the many sheep-tracks, the line of least resistance, where there was nothing but the wide, empty air and the tangle of heather-paths before us for miles and miles.

'There is a shadow upon you, little Rose of the Wilderness,' said the minister, as easily as if he were bidding me 'Good-morning.' He never said or did anything like other men. Why should he go courting like them? Oh, yes, of course, I should not have thought about that, or counted on it. No more I did, but trust a girl to know!

Then I told him of the shadow, not on me but on our house, of the project of the new factor Fitzgerald to turn the Dungeon into a sporting forest.

'It will be a deathblow to my father—that of a surety!' I said. Absalom raised his hand with the gentle gesture which he used to signify that Life and Death were not in our power. He could express most things by the least motions of his hands.

Great, lovable, kindly as he was, at first I could not quite get near him—in the spirit that is. It was like having Isaiah or one of the major prophets whisper sweet nothings in your ear—I mean, if the supposition be not irreverent. Only Absalom did not

so far forget himself.

He set at once about the business of blocking the proposals of Andro Freelan, and with this in view he wrote two letters—one to 'Inspector James Black,' of the Cairn Edward Police Force, and the other to 'The Right Hon. Edward Fitzgerald, Greenore, Co. Dublin, Ireland.'

What he put in these he did not tell me at the time, but he sent off Muckle Tamson on the instant with them to the Clatteringshaws, and bade the house and farm carry on with a steadfast heart. Of course, my father dwelled apart from all these things. If the place had been his own there could not have been more absolute peace in his soul—save on the one subject of fear lest someone (probably in grey tweed) should come and carry me off.

One fact only did Mr. Kenmore tell me, which was, that as a young man he had been tutor in the family of the Right Honourable Edward Fitzgerald, then a Minister of State, and now one of the last surviving Irish Liberals. The factor on the Glasserton estates had been a lad preparing for college at the time, reckoned wild, but in no way malicious.

'I think,' said the minister, 'that I can most easily enter into relations with him by means of his father.'

It was one forenoon about a week later, but before any reply had come to Mr. Kenmore's correspondence by way of the long roundabout of Clattering Shaws and New Galloway, that a young man, neatly booted and legged in hog-skin, rode up the glen and into our courtyard.

I saw him come, and ran upstairs to the mirror in my room to look for something. Before I had quite found it, he had tied his horse, walked up to the door, where he stood a moment uncertain, and then

knocked lightly with the knob of his riding-cane.

I went into the lobby where he could see me. I think he started at the sight. But surprise, not admiration, was uppermost in his mind. He was a strong, slenderish, well-set-up lad of three- or four-and-twenty, and looked as if he had been born in the saddle.

'Is this the house of the Dungeon?' he asked, courteously enough.

I replied that such it was. He could make no mistake. There was no other within miles.

'I have had a letter,' he said, hesitatingly, 'from my father, who writes concerning a friend of his who was once tutor in our family—I mean the Reverend Absalom Kenmore.'

'Yes,' I said, calmly, 'the minister of the parish of Riddlings, you mean!'

'I understood that he had resigned his charge!' said the young man, with a marked surprise. 'Is Mr. Kenmore here?'

'At present he is out on the moor,' I said, 'he is walking with my father, Henry Gordon. But, sir, if you are the factor for the Earl of Glasserton, I pray you not to say a word about—about business matters. My father is still very ill, and we have kept all knowledge of trouble from him. I beg of you, sir, to do the like—so long that is, as may be!'

He flushed scarlet, and taking off his hat with a kind of unconscious grace, wiped his brow with a handkerchief which he took from his sleeve. 'I should be very sorry,' he said, 'if any trouble should come to you, or to your family, by anything that it is in my power to avert.'

I threw a sunbonnet on my head, the brim of which, I knew, fell back becomingly, and we went

## ROSE OF THE WILDERNESS

out together. It was well-nigh noon, and the very midst of the finest season in the year. Never had the Dungeon looked so glorious. My eyes filled with tears at the thought of leaving it for ever. We stood alone among the cries of the plovers, wheeling in their parting flocks, and in a wilderness where the far-off bleating of a ewe calling her lost lamb sounded loud as the roar of a fast express in a tunnel.

‘You have lived here long?’ asked the young man.

‘Always!’ said I.

‘What, you have never been in London? Or abroad? Or at any school?’

‘My father taught me all I know,’ I told him simply. He took one long look at me and then said, as Absalom Kenmore had done before him, ‘Your father must be a very remarkable man!’

‘As to that,’ said I a little sharply, ‘you shall have an opportunity of judging!’

(There I was again! I could chatter easily enough with Muckle Tamson and the others, folk of the hills and the mosses, but when I talked English to any one as an equal, it sounded just like the books I had read. I knew, though I could not help it.)

But this young man did not seem to mind.

‘I understand that your people have held the Dungeon from the Glasserton estates for a long time?’

‘For over three hundred years!’ I said, with some legitimate pride. ‘Few titles in Scotland are so old.’

‘Ah,’ he said, ‘if only you were in Ireland now, that would constitute quite legal ownership. That is what it costs to be law-abiding. I am an Irishman, you know!’

I did not know it before, but I did not see the use

of replying at that moment. In fact, the strings of my bonnet had become untied. The light breeze lifted it and laid it at young Mr. Fitzgerald's feet. He gave it back to me with a bow in which there was something different from anything I had ever seen, not like Will Gillespie's eagerness, nor yet like Mr. Kenmore. But rather as if he had never done anything else in his life save recover ladies sunbonnets. Nor did the act seem out of place. Henry Gordon's daughter could not be other, and, well, merely to know Absalom Kenmore was to know a great gentleman. But yet, there was something curiously familiar and engaging about the youth's manner that gave me hope. He treated me as he might have done one of his own sisters. More I cannot say. Something of more modern freedom there was, certainly easy, offhand, but gracious too. Yes, I liked him, but through it all I felt that somehow I was of an elder world. 'Ned Fitz,' as his friends called him, talked to a girl as if he had played football in the same team with her. But I, living all my life among rocks lichened grey, and under the frown of the rugged brows of the Dungeon, was more in tune with the grave dignity of my father, and the quiet reverence of Absalom Kenmore, who would have handed me my fallen sunbonnet as if he had been laying a gift upon an altar.

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I took my father indoors so as to leave the two men, tutor and ex-pupil, together. They walked most of the afternoon on the moor, talking of I know not what, or, rather, I knew not at the time.

But the last words that I heard young Mr.

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Fitzgerald say as they returned were these:

'Of course, I have no powers. But, certainly the land is not included in the entail, lying badly, far out from our other properties. And if anything can be done with the Earl, it will be when he comes home, cleaned out, and ready to sell the very hair off his head to raise a sixpence!'

And upon this the two men shook hands.

CHAPTER TWELVE

MUCKLE TAMSON, SQUIRE OF DAMES

The negotiations hung in the wind, or at least out of them seemed to come no certainty for us. Yet Mr. Kenmore stayed on and on. The mountain air was doing him good. In the meantime he had allowed the secret to transpire that he had resigned his charge, and did not mean again to return thither. The people of the neighbourhood put this down to his ill-treatment at the hands of Andro Freelan, ex-pig-dealer, presently mighty in horses. Some of the Riddlings congregation spoke of running Andro out of the country, while a more practical philanthropist burned his stackyard.

Still the Earl of Glasserton delayed his coming, and till he came nothing could be settled. Or, at least, I thought not, which to me was the same thing. I had no idea of the uses of ocean cables as a practical means of communication, though, of course, I had read all about them in 'Chambers' Information for the People,' which I knew from beginning to end.

The winter passed slowly—a green, misty winter among the hills, no snow to speak of, and plenty of feeding for the ewes. To me Absalom Kenmore was kind, but it seemed that, after a certain point, something restrained him. There was more than ever a barrier between us, which I felt and resented.

About the lease of the Dungeon and his farther dealings with the Earl and his factor, he said nothing. Only he insisted upon paying my father a

certain sum for his lodgment on pain of leaving—and —taking his books with him, some of which, such as 'Gibbon's Decline and Fall,' my father had not seen before. Besides, there was the pleasure of high and continuous debate, to which I listened with somewhat less of patience than formerly.

But I got the real news from my old friend Muckle Tamson, who fretted dreadfully at the delay and spoke of again visiting Andro Freelan—this time with a shot-gun. From him I heard when the Earl's yacht put into Balcary, and when 'his Lordship,' for the first time in years, was really in his own house of Glasserton.

Thither I resolved that I would go and see the Earl for myself face to face. But, for all that, I could not escape the watchful eye of Muckle Tamson.

'What's on your mind, Miss Rose?' he would ask. And when I evaded him, he would only return to the charge, repeating steadily, 'Oh, I ken fine there is something—better tell Muckle Tamson!'

So, indeed, I finished by telling him of my intention to go to Glasserton.

'No without Tamson,' he said, 'no a yaird without Tamson!'

I was sorry to leave my father without informing him of my errand, but, to tell the truth, there was every prospect that he would never miss me. At any rate, Stoor had been charged to set his mind at rest, if he should manifest any uneasiness at my absence. This, however, I did not expect. For during these latter days he had looked at me with a curiously cunning look, as of one who could an he would! Though what the secret might be that he was hiding from me, I did not even try to find out.

Yet there was something quite unlike himself in

the way he watched me—perhaps, to my mind, likest a child hiding a stolen sweet, or a schoolboy conscious of a pocketful of unlicensed apples. Sometimes I thought I could distinguish the ghost of a chuckle. Yet for the life of me I could not imagine why he was so merry, and pitied him the more because of the trouble that was hanging over us all.

Full well I knew that if, as was most likely, we should have to settle in the back street of some little town, with not a bird or a sheep within sight, Henry Gordon would soon pine away and I be left alone!

To Glasserton, then, I went. It is a newish-looking, red-sandstone building, overlooking much varied woodland, and with, far off, the sky glimmering over Balcary Bay, and the sea-birds blown about it edgeways upon the autumn gusts.

As was his custom, Muckle Tamson had stopped at the lodge gate. I went up the avenue by myself, no one saying ‘Where goest thou?’

Half-way along I came upon two young men sitting on the ‘parapet of a bridge which crossed a deep ravine. They were in shooting dress, already familiar to me by our yearly invasion of grouse-slayers. At sight of me, one of these threw away his cigar, said something in a low tone to his companion, a smaller dark man, with curiously large and persistent eyes.

He continued to smoke and to regard me in a way that, if a town-bred girl, I might have counted either impertinent or embarrassing. But, being moorland bred, I cared nothing about the matter one way or the other.

Or, rather, I would not, if it had not been for the secret presentment that this man was the Earl himself.

The other, who came to meet me, was Mr. Fitzgerald.

'Miss Gordon,' he said, with something like a flush on his face and a rapid utterance, 'what brings you so far from the Dungeon?'

I did not leave him long in any uncertainty.

'There is no news of the new lease,' I said; 'the time is wearing short. My father yet knows nothing about it. He lives in a world of his own. We dare not tell him. The news that he has to leave the Dungeon would kill him. I have heard that the Earl of Glasserton is returned. Therefore I have come to find him.'

Mr. Fitzgerald indicated his companion with his hand, with the slightest unwilling sign of introduction. The young man with the languid eyes rose slowly, and said, holding his lighted cigar in his fingers, 'Who is this young lady?'

There was something indefinitely displeasing about the manner, and Mr. Fitzgerald was visibly embarrassed. However, he managed to smile and say, 'I fear, Miss Rose, that it has passed out of our power to be of any assistance to you or your father. The Earl has sold the Dungeon and the surrounding property!'

The Earl a moment stood curbing himself as if on the eve of saying something unpleasant, which, however, he thought better of, and abruptly turned on his heel and walked away. If he had been in my own rank in life, I should simply have set him down an ill-bred young man. But, being an Earl, of course, I am not competent to judge.

Mr. Fitzgerald looked after him with a curious curl of the nostril, but he seemed in no way intimidated by the ill-temper of his employer.

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'It bears somewhat hard on his Lordship,' he said, softening his tone; 'he feels it. But the money was simply not to be refused in these times when so many farms are on our hands. That was my own advice to him.'

'But, tell me, who is our new landlord?' I cried. For there towered up suddenly before me the threatening spectre of someone who might wish to come and live at the Dungeon. So strongly did this strike me that I put the question abruptly, and, I fear, even harshly.

'Whether the new proprietor decides to reside at the Dungeon or not,' answered Mr. Fitzgerald, with a faint smile, 'will depend, I should say, on only one person besides himself!'

'And who is that one person?' I said hoarsely. I felt inclined to shake the man.

'On yourself, Miss Rose!'

Now I knew that he was mocking me, or that he had—could I suppose such a thing—some idea of asking me to marry himself! Or, perhaps, equally unwelcome, and much more embarrassing, Will Gillespie. That his father had some money I knew, though I thought nothing like enough to buy the Dungeon, the Glints, and the Harkness, which were (with the Star) the portions of unentailed ground in the power of the Earl to sell.

'Do you play with me?' I cried, taking a step nearer him, 'tell me who has bought the Dungeon?'

He kept his eyes steadily upon my face and said simply, 'Mr. Kenmore, late minister of the parish of Riddlings!'

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To say that I walked down the avenue in a dream

is but the feeblest commonplace of expression. Yet it is true. The young men passed away I knew not how. The green walls of the hedges, the white lodge-gate—I was conscious of nothing at all till I found myself once more on the high road, with Muckle Tamson murmuring in my ear, in his thunderous bass, 'What's the maitter, Miss Rose? Hev they said onything misleared to ye, that ye look like that? Will Muckle Tamson gang in and 'mell' them?'

The Earl of Glasserton and his factor will never know, unless they happen to read this chronicle, how near they came to making acquaintance with Muckle Tamson 's leaping-pole.

'No, no,' I answered, 'nothing of all that, I assure you—Mr. Kenmore has bought the Dungeon, that is all! We shall have to flit. It was to spy out the land that he came there!'

Muckle Tamson stared.

'Flit, quo she—flit!' he exclaimed, 'there will muckle water run under brigs before ye hae to flit frae the Dungeon, I'm thinkin', if sae be that Maister Kenmore is the laird o't!'

I shook my head hotly, but there grew up a happy expression upon the face of Muckle Tamson, and he twirled his leaping-pole lightly and dexterously about his head like a juggler's wand.

'I'll sorry noo that I didna break his neck!' he said reflectively, turning an inward eye on the past, as it were in a kind of rapture.

'Whose neck—Mr. Kenmore's?' I ejaculated.

'Na, na, never Maister Kenmore's,' he said; 'far frae that—the necks of the three wratches that mishandled him, Gib Doan, Jock Malcolm, and the pig-dealer!'

It was the first time I had heard him own to the

assault of which the Weekly Intelligencer had made so much and such excellent copy.

But I had other fish to fry than to waste my time in rebuking such an incorrigible. 'My father and I cannot remain a day longer at the Dungeon!' I said.

As usual, Muckle Tamson chuckled like a green parrot.

'I'm dootin' muckle, Miss Rose, but that ye will hae to 'sit on' in the Dungeon for anither nineteen year whatever. I hae heard the minister and Henry Gordon conversin' thegither. And the day ye gaed to fish in the Gairland, there cam' a lawyer body frae Newton Stewart—a rael decent man, yin even Muckle Tamson could talk to. I never had the least impulse to crack his croon, whilk is no common. And as for him and Stoor, they chattered for hours about the gypsey folk and the gypsey ways!'

'Well,' said I, very short-like, as was natural, considering that so much underhand work had been going on immediately behind and about me, 'what did the lawyer man do when he was there?'

'Och,' said Muckle Tamson easily, 'they juist wrote and signed documents.'

'And why, Tamson,' I cried, 'did you let me make a fool of myself by coming all the road to Glasserton?'

At this Muckle Tamson scratched his head.

'How was Muckle Tamson to ken?' he said at last, 'they micht hae had to do wi' the Presbytery and the giein' up o' his kirk, for ocht that Tamson kenned. And—maybe it ran through my head, that ye had a kind o' hingin' e'e for the young lad Fitzger!'

'Tamson, hold your tongue!'

And indeed it was time, for there across the fields came the gentleman himself, in a great hurry, but not running any more after I had once seen him.

'I beg your pardon, Miss Rose,' he said, 'the Earl had no intention of being rude, but the loss of so much land sticks in his throat—specially to a clergyman. And as he says, 'Oh, the fine birds that I have shot on these acres, Fitz; but one fifty pound note is just like another!' Which it is—to him!'

To this I added that it did not matter in the least. The Earl's behaviour was nothing to me. But Mr. Fitzgerald would not take this reply, saying that it was a great deal to him if I bore any feeling about the matter.

'I hope,' he said, 'that you will allow me to come to the Dungeon sometimes, just as when I had an official position!'

'I think,' said I, 'that it will be some considerable time before I am back there again!'

I bade him good-bye before he quite knew what was happening, and betook myself back to Muckle Tamson, who, like a warrior kept too long out of the battle, had been looking at his weapons and hefting his leaping-pole, evidently considering it as a weapon of immediate offence.

As I had talked to Mr. Fitzgerald, Tamson was looking for signs of indignities, far, indeed, from the mind of the young man. In my own there were other matters. There had arisen the wind of a great anger. The blood of Nan Gilfillan boiled within me.

'If,' thought I, 'my father and the minister think that I, Rose Gordon, am to be made a subject of deeds and documents—to be thrown in along with a nineteen years' tenure of the land—they are far mistaken!'

'I am going to Edinburgh!' I announced, suddenly.

'Aweel,' said Muckle Tamson, as if he found it the most natural thing in the world, 'it's a guid thing

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that wee devil Stoor kens the hills weel, and that he has a couple o' dooms' guid dogs!

'But what has that got to do with it?' I demanded.

'Because Muckle Tamson is gaun to Edinburgh too,' he said; 'a bonny-like thing it wad be if the dochter o' Henry Gordon were to gang off jauntin' to Enbra, and never a responsible person to see that she wasna lichtlied by thae city folk!'

I wrote a letter to my father from Glasserton Station, telling him, without preamble, that I had made up my mind to make a visit to Mrs. Nan Gilfillan, and that he would easily find, in his dealings with Mr. Kenmore as to the farm of the Dungeon, my reason for this. Furthermore, as I was my father's daughter, I would certainly not be taken into market and handed over as the makeweight to a bargain. But I hoped that the love of the past twenty years would prove to him that, in spite of my decision, I was, as ever, his loving daughter, Rose.

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It was a curious party that waited for the Edinburgh through train at Glasserton Station. I had a smart enough dress, lately sent up from Dumfries. And as to my appearance, there was nothing to remark except my entire lack of luggage. But it was otherwise with Muckle Tamson. He refused absolutely to be separated from his leaping-pole, urging that ye never kened—that 'Enbra was a kittle place,' that he once had a cousin who visited that city, and returned the poorer, having apparently richly deserved all that he got there.

'But,' said I to Tamson, 'we will be a queer-looking couple, you and I, travelling in a third-class compartment.'

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Here Tamson interrupted me. 'Naething o' the sort, lassie—are ye no my maister's dochter? Ye shall gang wi' the rich and the braw—aye, the brawest o' the braw!'

And he pulled out a pocket-book very comfortably stuffed with bank notes of the classic dirtiness common to those who deal in sheep and their greasy fleeces.

'There's for ye!' said Muckle Tamson, triumphantly.

But I declined sharply.

'The money is your wages,' said I, 'hardly earned and much too scanty!'

'My wages!' he mocked, 'where wad Muckle Tamson hae been, and what sort o' wages wad he hae been gettin' if it hadna been for Henry Gordon o' the Dungeon? 'The Wages of Sin is Death,' he repeated, twitching uncomfortably, like a dog that has lain long in the sun; and again he quoted solemnly, 'Where the Worm dieth not, and the Fire is not quenched!' Ow aye, I ken,' he continued, 'that minister o' yours says that verse doesna mean juist what it says. But there wad hae been a fire and a worm in the heart o' puir Muckle Tamson this day if Henry Gordon hadna gotten him by the scruff o' the neck and yirked him oot—a' steamin' like a smeekeit bee-skep wi' the brimstane o' the pit. Wages, quo' she!'

He drew another paper out of his pocket and unfolded it with a kind of pride.

'Ye think,' he said, 'that only ministers and learned men can get papers frae lawyers to sign. But ken ye what this writin' is, that yon decent chiel oot o' Newton Stewart wrote for Muckle Tamson—aye, and has a copy o't in his very desk that he looks at

every day to see that it is safe. It's Muckle Tamson's will. And ken ye wha he has left a' this to—aye—this and a pickle mair? To you, Miss Rose! And sae ye shall hae first-class tickets—aye, if he hae to gang a' the road to the moon, ye shall ride first-class every yard!

'But then,' I repeated, breaking in on the flow of Tamson's excited eloquence, 'of what good would you be for protection—me in the first-class and you in the third?'

'I wad ride first too!'

But I represented to him that moorland leaping-poles were unusual articles of personal luggage in first-class carriages, and were liable to excite remark. Muckle Tamson grew warlike at the word.

'Let them try it on,' he said, 'juist let them try it on. If Muckle Tamson canna throw half-a-dozen o' thae wee creepin' blasties o' toon's folk through a window—even if it be but the wee side skylight o' a train—weel, it is time for him to lie doon aneath a kirkyaird stane wi' the inscription carvit ower him, 'Weel dune, guid an' faithfu' Tamson!'

Still, I carried my point, on the condition (of Tamson's own proposing) that he should sit in one corner and I in the other, and —pretend not to know one another!

It was a weird journey. By some ill chance the Earl and the factor were going up to town. Lord Glasserton had evidently been taken by one of his frequent uneasy fits. They both looked surprised to see me, but Mr. Fitzgerald, like the Irish gentleman he was, merely lifted his hat and passed on. Not so the Earl. He went and came, each time a little nearer to our compartment, in the corner of which sat Muckle Tamson gloomily nursing his leaping-pole,

which stretched nearly across the carriage—or rather crossways from under the seat to beyond the oil lamp, which at that date was thought good enough for Portpatrick line passengers. He passed and repassed, casting glances at me as he went. I could see the factor remonstrating with him, begging him to take his seat, and the nobleman telling his factor quite obviously to mind his own business. The stoppage at Glasserton was longer than usual. The engine, little and coloured blue of the deepest sort, lying close along the line like a greyhound at the gallop, needed a long drink at the leech-throated tank.

But, just as the train was beginning to move, the Earl laid his gloved ringers on the handle of our carriage and opened the door, only to find himself face to face with the murky eyes of Muckle Tamson and a pole that would have felled an ox.

He staggered back, so great was his emotion, while Mr. Fitzgerald, crimson even to the nape of his neck and the tips of his ears, dragged his master off to a neighbouring compartment, where they shut themselves in.

Now Lord Glasserton had slammed our door with unnecessary violence and haste.

'Will I slidder along the footboards and 'mell' him?' inquired Muckle Tamson anxiously; 'it wad be a lesson to him! Dod, wait till I catch him on the Dungeon—I will learn him behaviour, Lord or nae Lord!'

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'Henry Gordon's daughter!' cried Nan Gilfillan, running downstairs while I was yet parleying with

the servant. 'Come in—to think that you, Rose of the Dungeon, should be kept at my door!'

It was out Corstorphine way, an oldish house with gardens bowered among ancient trees, and a hill rising steep behind.

And Nan nearly hugged the breath out of me in her gladness at seeing me, without ever asking what had fetched me to Edinburgh, or where was my luggage (both of which omissions show her superiority to ordinary women). Then she caught sight of Muckle Tamson, like Jacob, worshipping upon the top of his staff.

'What did you bring that—that hippopotamus for?' she cried.

But Nan knew her way about with men, and when she said this in the hearing of Muckle Tamson, she smiled squarely back at him. He got it like a target.

'Come here, hippopotamus,' she said, still smiling. And Muckle Tamson came to her like a dog.

'I aye had a weakness for speerity women!' he murmured in explanation.

If she heard, Nan Gilfillan took no notice.

'Now, hippopotamus,' she said, 'what do you mean to do with yourself?'

'I was thinkin',' said Tamson, looking about him at the tangle of dropped flowers and fallen leaves, and rubbing his toe in the unfilled-up carriage ruts, 'that maybe ye wad be nane the waur of a guid-lookin' active man to gie your man-servant a bit lift wi' his wark. I see that ye keep but yae single man to be whiles gardener and whiles coachman!'

'That is true, but how on earth did you know?' flashed Nan.

'Oh, juist,' said Muckle Tamson, modestly, 'I

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haena leaved a' my life about the Dungeon for nocht— no to speak o' Ironmacanny!'

'Well, I daresay John Carstairs will be none the worse of a hand for a while,' said Nan, finger on lip; 'how long do you mean to spend in Edinburgh?'

'I dinna mean to bide in Enbra ava', said Muckle Tamson, 'I will bide here. And as for hoo lang— that depends on yoursel!'

'How that?' said Nan, who liked to speak broadly to the broad.

'Hoo lang ye tak' to bring the young mistress there to her senses!' said Muckle Tamson simply.

Nan did not ask what I had been doing, nor what of naughtiness the cryptic speech of Tamson might cover.

Instead she said: 'Here, hippopotamus lad, give me your bit walking stick. I want no heads cracked in my stables. I myself, Nan Gilfillan, will take care of it for you!'

And Muckle Tamson rendered it up without a word of objection.

'It's a weakness, I ken,' he said; 'but oh, it's you that are the speerity woman.'

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### NAN GILFILLAN, SPECIALIST IN MATRIMONY

'My husband!' said Nan Gilfillan, with a pride which she could not hide—not altogether, that is—though to hear her go at him you would have thought that he was the worst good-for-nothing that ever was, and made a daily practice of clearing out the bank till!

'The 'hippo' is outside doing up the leaves. Go outside and grunt at one another,' she commanded, after we had shaken hands. 'Dalna Whyte is coming, and we are going to try on each other's new hats!'

This, of course, was only to get him out of the way.

It happened on the evening of the day when he told me about the picnicing, or camping out in tents. Mr. Walter Gilfillan came from my own part of the country, and I found him a man very happy in his home, and in especial deeply devoted to Nan, who, to tell the truth, used him not much better than a dog. That is, before folk.

He was a great banker, everyone said. But in his own house you could see that it was Nan, Nan's cleverness, her wit, her driving power, her unexpectedness—Nan's Nan-ishness, in fact—that made him far prouder of being her husband, than of having risen from the position of junior clerk in Cairn Edward branch to that of general manager of his bank.

For the first two or three days Nan let me alone. She did not ask me a question. If I had anything to

tell her, Nan Gilfillan knew very well that I would tell it. But she took me to shops. In fact, we almost lived in Jenner's, where all the people smiled as they caught sight of her, and I declared that I had never seen so many people with good manners all collected together before. Nan said that was the 'note' of the place, and came from the chief partner's having married a Galloway wife. But I think she just said that to be nice to me.

At the end of three days, however, I could hold out no longer. I had to tell. Nan was lying on the sofa of her little room with a pillow under her head, halfway through the act of 'changing.' She had her fingers netted behind her head, and as she listened little fitful flickers went and came on her face as I mentioned this name and that. Nan was a woman of experience, and never hurried things, except when catching the train. She heard me to the end.

'I shall have to go down to your Dungeon and see about this,' she said, at the end; 'you and I can share a room. And the change will set me up before the winter season begins. We shall soon have concerts to attend here; and for me, really, stone-breaking is easier! Also, Walter has to entertain—or, rather, I have—mostly men who know the multiplication table up to ninety-nine times; though that, to tell the truth, does not interfere with their appreciation of our Pommery and Greno, extra see, ten years old!'

Every day she went out and superintended Muckle Tamson, who became more and more foolish about her, till, eventually, he made her a present of his long-cherished 'loupin'-stick,' the same with which he had 'regulated' Andro, the pig-dealer, and his men! It chanced on the fourth day that Muckle

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Tamson was cleaning up the leaves in front of the little empty lodge, the gardener, a man with a family, dwelling elsewhere. Suddenly, at the hour of afternoon tea, appeared Mr. Fitzgerald to call upon Nan, for, as it turned out, he was an old friend of hers; indeed, most people were.

But at the gate he found that he had counted without Muckle Tamson.

'Hey, man, what are ye doin' here?' demanded the Colossus with the big stable-broom.

Mr. Fitzgerald smilingly said that if the lady were at home he meant to do himself the pleasure of calling upon Mrs. Walter Gilfillan. At this Tamson leaned nearer to the young man.

'See here, laddie,' he said, 'I hae naething again you. But if yon ither loon is followin' ye up, and you no tellin' me o't, Muckle Tamson will tak' ye baith by the slack o' your trews and ding your hams oot again the waa!'

Mr. Fitzgerald understood but little of this address, delivered in a Doric far more ornamental than I have ventured to transcribe in this place. But, seeing that he had to do with a 'friend of the family,' he answered that he was wholly alone, and that Tamson might return peacefully to his sweeping.

I do not think that I had more than mentioned the name of Mr. Fitzgerald to Nan in my narrative. Nor on this occasion did he exchange a dozen words with me. But Nan had for other women that exquisite sixth sense which most women have in the matter of their own affairs, which, like an alarm-clock, tells long beforehand when it is going to happen, which makes them swear that never, never again, yet all the time knowing that as surely as the stars run in their courses that vow will be broken,

and that out of the very breaking will come that bitter-sweetness so beloved of women, as when the first boughs of the marah-tree splashed into the waters thereof. Nature perhaps meant this instinct to be protective, but women have made of it something infinitely finer— even self-deceptive.

After Mr. Fitzgerald had gone she took me by the hand.

'Rose,' she said, 'he will not do for the Wilderness. We must go back there, you and I!'

Yet I had said nothing. No, not a word. Indeed, there was nothing to say.

'Come,' said Nan, 'I will take the 'hippo's' present, and he shall teach me how to use it, if to redd up your love tangles, I must venture into these fastnesses of yours.'

So with that we went out and hunted up Muckle Tamson. He came towards us in three strides as soon as he saw the leaping-pole in Nan Gilfillan's hands. There was a hopeful look on his face.

'Has he been impident?' he said in a hurried whisper. 'Will I mell him yet? There is nocht to hinder. I could catch him easy.'

However, Nan calmed the arduours of Muckle Tamson, and led the way to the lower rose-garden, where, secure from observation, in the midst of his own outbursts of almost suffocating laughter, Muckle Tamson taught Mistress Nan the whole theory and practice of how to leap over a four-foot box hedge.

'But ye'll hae to kilt your kirtles before ye try the Cooran, my leddy!' he said, wagging his head at his pupil.

'What does he say?' demanded Nan, 'translate!'

'That your city skirts interfere with your freedom

of action,' I answered.

'Dear me, bairn,' cried Nan, 'we must indeed go straight back, or this hippopotamus from the Black Water of Dee will be teaching me tricks unbecoming the wife of a past president of the Actuarial Society!'

And as a matter of fact the very next day we went.

It was on the journey that I first saw how wonderfully clever Nan Gilfillan was. Older than I, of course, and having lived long in a city with hosts of admirers, she had kept through all a breezy freshness of manner, and acquired a certainty of judgment which I had hitherto supposed to belong only to those who had to do with black-faced sheep.

On the way she instructed me in the general out of the rich Golconda of her wisdom. Her subject was love and lovers—past, present, and to come. But she neither named herself, nor yet would let me name any particular person. If I did, she immediately called my attention to a large stone by the wayside or commented on the beauty of the day for the time of year.

But left to 'gang her ain gait,' Nan produced eggs of gold—that is, philosophically speaking. 'There is a time when you like boys,' she said, 'young officers and such like. They don't really care much about you, preferring your seniors and others. But they put up with you. They may even condescend to amuse themselves with you. It is as well to get this stage over as early and quickly as possible. It is the 'horned-moustache-and-brass-buttoned-period.' One dances with these beings. One gazes upon their incipient lordliness with admiration. But, with the mumps and the chicken-pox, they pass away.

True, the disease recurs at intervals, but after the first time the symptoms are of no importance. The

cure is radical, though I have known relapses, perfectly unnatural, at a very late period in life.

'But after this attack and recovery—listen, Rose—power is given to you. And as for these young men clad in scarlet and blue, riding upon horses like the Assyrian captains mentioned in the Bible, you have no trouble with them. You can lead them at your will, drum-beating, banners in air. Let them brown-polish your boots. Make them carry parcels. But as for the others—men, that is, ripe enough to be worth talking to—manage them as if each were a horse too long in stable. You have noticed how I do with Walter?'

I had noticed, and if ever the tambours rattled and the banners fluttered, it was when Nan Gilfillan led her Walter in duty's stern pathway. But the practice of the wisest agrees not always with their precept, specially after many years of marriage, as was Nan's case.

This time we travelled first-class, and Tamson, laying the leaping-pole, which was now Nan Gilfillan's, along the seat, went comfortably to sleep with his boots against the opposite window-blind, looking so like the Scottish national emblem and motto, that not even the Dumfries ticket-collector, a man used to all desperate deeds with Locharbriggs quarrymen, dared to ask him for his ticket with impunity.

If it had not been for Nan, I think I should have been somewhat shamefaced in thus returning home. But she never mentioned either my father or Absalom Kenmore. She took my visit to Edinburgh and herself as the most natural thing in the world. And I could see that she was going to represent me to my father as a kind of surprise-packet, filled with

all feminine irresponsibility, and brought to reason by the sage and savoury wisdom of his kinswoman, Nan Gilfillan.

With his usual forethought, Muckle Tamson had ordered in advance a 'machine' (which is to say waggonette) to convey us and our baggages—i.e., Nan's, and the leaping-pole—as far as the Clatteringshaws. Arrived there, we found that he had commandeered a couple of moor ponies to carry us as fast and as far as was possible towards the Dungeon. For me Muckle Tamson would have taken no thought, any more than for the two sparrows which are sold for a farthing. In spite of town boots—contemned of Tamson (except on Nan Gilfillan's feet)—he expected me to vault or find my way round all obstacles, as became a good daughter of the Wilderness. But it was different with Nan.

Considered as a 'speerity' woman, Tamson thought her able for anything in towns and public places, but she was taken up to the Dungeon like a swaddled babe.

Nan accepted all this as part of her ordinary superiority over the male sex. There was nothing abnormal in Muckle Tamson's bowing down and worshipping her. Did not her own husband, Walter Everard Gilfillan, do the same, after all these years?

My father came down the brae, halting on his stick to meet his favourite kinswoman, or for that matter kinsman either. I could see Mr. Kenmore, younger-looking because of the tan upon his face got from following sheep-tracks and fetching home the hay!—I could see him, I say, but he kept discreetly in the background. Perhaps he was ashamed of his new quality of landlord. Perhaps, on the other hand, he was conscious that Nan, as arbiter of hearts, had

been called in to consult upon his case.

His clerical manner also was plainly leaving him. It did my heart good to see him set his hand on the top of a stile and vault over, just as Will Gillespie might have done at my father's summons.

He came forward to greet Nan, his straw hat in his hand, the oaten-coloured hair shining in the low October sun, and, as it seemed to me now, hardly a grey hair to be seen. Yes, he looked handsome; a distinguished-looking man anywhere, even at Nan's afternoon parties, which filled up every good Saturday in the house and garden out Corstorphine way.

Though Nan smiled, I think Absalom was conscious that her kind, half-mirthful eyes were looking through and through him. There was a wistful look on his face as he glanced from one to the other of us, like a boy taken in a fault.

'Have you judged and condemned me unheard?' he seemed to be saying.

Whether my father had taken in the sense of my letters to him from Glasserton Station and Edinburgh, assuredly Absalom Kenmore had read between and around the lines.

But anything more reassuring than Nan, when she wanted to be, could not well be imagined. Dinner was hardly over—a belated feast, waiting for our appearance through the Nick of Dee—when Nan declared herself ready for a walk upon the hills.

'You, Rose, will have a great deal to tell your father,' she said, easily; 'Mr. Kenmore will perhaps show me the boundaries. Mind you, though, don't abuse me too much in my absence, or say that the poor man my husband does not dare to call his soul his own. It is true enough, of course, only don't say

it!’

And with these words Nan, in her prettiest short-skirted costume and crimson canoeing hat (the like of which had never before been seen between Dee and Cree), took Mr. Kenmore out for a walk. I declare that in the brief interval receiving Nan's commands and stepping out from the doorstep, Absalom Kenmore had changed his tie. He now wore one the colour of a mavis's egg, one which I had never seen before. He had never done as much for me, and really, as he went off by Nan's side, with his straight back and broad shoulders, he looked almost unnecessarily young.

‘They make a handsome couple!’ said my father, watching them go over the heather side by side, turning their heads now and again towards each other in speech, or Nan taking Absalom's hand in lieu of a leaping-pole when they came to little runlets she could have skipped over without a thought.

‘They would,’ I said in answer to my father's compliment, ‘be well enough if only they had been younger!’

I meant this to be double-edged, and so it was.

‘Yes, they are about the same age,’ said Henry Gordon; ‘let me see, let me see! Little more than half my age—aye, aye, a bonny couple, and a pity that Walter Gilfillan should come in the road; he is not half the man Mr. Kenmore is!’

I turned away. For the first time in my life I did not care about my father's conversation. He seemed ageing fast, and if his remarks did not improve in good sense, I really began to fear the approach of dotage!

I went up to my room and took a book, but, as it

happened, from the window I could still see the two figures upon the moor, which distracted me curiously. Of course I did not care what they might be saying. Why should I? I had far too much pride! But all the same, it is difficult to read Ben Jonson's 'Every Man in His Humour' alone in a room with a woman in a thoroughly bad one—I mean by myself.

Yes, I was, and I had a right to be! I was disappointed with Nan. Consulting physicians are all very well, but I did not bargain for so much applied science. I thought of the parable of the one ewe lamb—though I am bound to admit that Absalom Kenmore did not look in the least like that overpraised quadruped. Furthermore, I know about sheep, and it certainly was a disgusting habit for the owner to let it lie in his bosom, and be unto him as a daughter. He ought to have known better.

But that does not matter, though, all the same, it is quite true, unless it was some different breed from ours of the hills. Well, when Nan and Mr. Kenmore came back (for at last it occurred to them, better late than never), Absalom looked much liker his namesake, who took the hearts of Israel sitting in the gate of Jerusalem. He held his hat in his hand, and the sun struck level over the moorland of brown heather and golden bent on a head that shone like dull unpolished gold. It was the only time that the reddish colour came out.

He certainly looked—but no matter. Nan had no right to go on like that. I could not have believed it of Nan—a married woman, and over thirty. She had taken his arm! And he, actually, didn't seem to mind. He had lost his stoop, and walked proudly all because of that.

Such a thing is man!—oh, such a thing! And to

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think that once I should have—no, not that—but thought well of his intellect and his learning and his!

‘Rose, Rose, Rose!’ My name rang through the house in Nan’s clear voice. ‘Where are you, Rose?’

Then I could hear her feet, light and rapid, mounting our little uncarpeted wooden stairs. She burst in. I was crying, or, rather, I had just stopped. Now comes what shows Nan Gilfillan to be no ordinary woman. If she had been, she would have petted me, and baby-fied me, and so made me cry ever so much more. But she did not even notice—I mean, she did not show that she did. For, of course, she could not have missed such a thing, being a woman, not if she had been blind. She would have caught it in my voice with the very first words I uttered.

But she only rattled on, looking bright as ever, and taking not the least notice.

‘I’ve been out with Absalom—Mr. Kenmore, I mean. He has showed me everything—oh, everything!’

The little—falsifier! She had never looked at one single thing, but had kept glancing up all the time at Mr. Kenmore from under her lashes—I saw her. Not that it mattered, only it told me what to believe of Nan Gilfillan for the future.

‘Yes, and he talked so delightfully about his travels,’ she went on. ‘He wants to go abroad again—France, Italy, the Mediterranean—oh, everywhere! He knows all about the histories of these countries, too, and can tell about it in the most interesting way—so amusing! He made me laugh shamefully. I have asked him to go with Walter and me the next time we get a long trip.’

(Oh, you have, have you?)

## ROSE OF THE WILDERNESS

‘And he will make it far more interesting for me!’  
(He will, will he?)

Nan went on imperturbably.

‘Because, you know, Walter is a good fellow, but he does not care for going to places. He likes a book, a pipe, and a glass of something; says it rests him after the office. So Mr. Kenmore will be able to take me to the Boboli Gardens, to Fiesole to hear the nightingales, to Murano in a gondola, and, best of all, to the Lido to walk along the sandy beach and see the moon rise and shine upon Venice ah, what is the matter?’

For I had flung myself face down on the sofa, hiding my tears among the pillows.

But Nan did not waste her time on me. She went quickly to the window, opened it, and called out one word:

‘Absalom!’

Ah, she was a wise woman among the wisest women, this Nan. And (as she had foreseen) it was not with her that Mr. Kenmore saw the glades upon Arnoside, nor yet the moon rise upon the magic towers and palaces where Venice dips her feet in Adria.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

'ABSALOM — MY ABSALOM!'

Afterwards I asked Nan Gilfillan how she knew so well how to treat my case, and she said with gentle irony, 'Because I have learned to treat all cases!'

'What,' I said, 'men and women?'

'Men and women!' she answered without the least pride, as if she had merely affirmed a commonplace. 'Men are of the simplest, of course. You understand them, or ought to, by a half-spoken word. Women are more difficult.'

'I was more complex, you mean?' said I, hoping in some vague way that Nan had found me a difficult problem.

'Not at all,' she said, 'that is, so soon as I had seen. But I needed to be on the spot. I had heard of Absalom Kenmore. He banks with my husband, and also in a way I knew his family, which is a good one. Not that all that mattered greatly. A glance or two will show you, if you have the special sense of understanding man—special, I mean, like the antennae of an insect—of what sort he is. Then if is easy to treat him by contrast.'

'By contrast!' I repeated after her in surprise.

Nan nodded her head, crowned with a ripple of red-golden locks, together with a great coil of her own hair which she kept as a monument of folly, but wore occasionally to the admiration of her friends. She had wilfully cut it off in the day of small 'bobs,' worn low in the hollow of the neck, when her schoolgirl friends teased her because of her un-

Grecian amplitude of tresses. For, when she chose, Mistress Nan could be as foolish as anybody.

'By contrast,' said the Woman Wise in Counsel, 'yes, by contrast. There is a word concerning that which for a while you will not understand. It is that a man does not live by love's daily bread, but by its savouries. And it is the woman's part to see to it that these are duly changed.'

This I did not understand, and said so.

'No, I did not expect you would,' she said, 'but take Absalom. First consider what his life has been in the past. Banish it. Alter it—reform it altogether, not the spirit perhaps but the form, yet delicately and noiselessly like the coming of a new spring. Your mistake was (and I do not blame you —how were you to know what has taken me so long to learn) that you treated your lover as you had treated your father. You bowed down before his learning. You listened to the fountains of his words as if they had been falling upon a temple floor.

'Now,' continued Nan, 'the man was aching for lightness, for the happiness that some count folly, for the little masculine vanities of having you put on a new neck-ribbon or arrange your hair differently only to please him. It had taken him twenty years of his life to be able to read the Talmud in the original, and what wonder if he wanted a little while to spend over the colour of your eyes, which (when all is said and done) are not nearly so fine as his own.'

Here I agreed heartily with Nan.

'In return you must see to his clothing and keep him well up to the mark. Thus you will have a young husband for many years yet. His uncle's money has made him a moorland laird, but he is rich enough, intelligent enough, to afford a house in Edinburgh or

in London when it pleases you—I say you, not him. I advise Edinburgh because I should have you near me, and if need were, could give you a hoist over the awkward places—lift you over the 'lanes' with Muckle Tamson's leaping-pole, so to speak!

I declared that neither of us thought of quitting the Dungeon, that is, after our final marriage and settling.

'Final settling!' cried Nan, in high indignation, 'have I then been wasting my pearls? Am I not telling you that with such a man there is no such thing? The scientific people tell you that the body of man changes entirely every seven years. His soul, his life, his ideas, his 'Me' change much oftener, unless, that is, he is a grain merchant or a pork-butcher, in which case he is classed with the ruminants and doesn't count. But if the woman does not keep up with him and change likewise, she will find herself left behind!'

'And how? In what way?' I interjected, for it was good that a young soon-to-be-wedded bride should learn the wisdom from Nan Gilfillan's lips, 'and how about Mr. Walter Everard Gilfillan?'

'Oh, Watty?' cried Nan, knitting her brows like a modest specialist who recalls the details of an old experiment which, brilliantly carried through, has become familiar in its results to all the wodd. 'Watty is the direct opposite of your goodman—of Absalom, I beg your pardon. By nature Walter would be hither and thither all the time. Therefore I keep the house full of people whenever he is there, till he is so tired that he will beg 'a night off with just me' to spend in his slippers and dressing gown. And he thinks, actually, that he likes it when the people go away, and we old fogies can sit toasting our toes at the fire

and discussing them!

'Of course,' she added, 'there are Unruly Evils that no woman can tame—Wild Asses of the Desert, male and female after their kind, who snuff up the east wind and get fat upon it. But these grow rare and are generally due to bad cases of heredity. For such there is no cure, excepting children. After a woman has three or four children they become her husband. And he that was once her husband becomes at the best but a pleasant friend dropping in to afternoon tea, and looking after the family bank account!'

This was a touch of Nan's peculiar quality. For as I have said before, her tongue was a fountain that sent forth at once bitter water and sweet.

'And admiration—flattery?' I asked, willing to hear more. For I had read that there was no flattery so gross that a man would not take it down as the pike takes down the frog with the unpleasantly barbed steel cunningly hidden within.

Nan lifted up her hand.

'Finished, my friend!' she exclaimed. 'The spade, the trowel, even the palette-knife. To be flattered at your will and to the top of his bent a man must be a musician. For him you can lay it on with a spade. With unsuccessful writer turned critic, the trowel is good. The same with royalty, said Disraeli, but of this last I have had no experience! At best, however, flattery is a vulgar method, and not fit for such as you and I!'

And upon this truth, incontrovertible and Medo-Persian, Nan turned her back on me, and slept the peaceful sleep of the just and the wise.

It was a brisk, windless day in December that Absalom and I were to be married. The snow had not

come yet, and such a running to and fro as there was, such a turn-out of herds upon the Dungeon! It looked most like some great gathering of Covenanters at Friarminion or Shalloch-on-Minnoch. For all were glad they were not to lose me, and also of the news that the new laird of the Dungeon was to enlarge the house, make a 'carriageable' road, and spend a great part of the year on his own property—naturally with me to look after him.

For several days beforehand Muckle Tamson had gathered the heather folk under his command, and to each was given his appointed task. There was no arguing with Muckle Tamson, least of all on such a day. He was the man under authority, saying to this one 'go,' and he went, and to the other 'come,' and he came, and pretty fast, too.

The object of all this was to make sure that the newly-married pair, together with the officiating minister, should have a good road for their ponies, that is, as far as Craigencaillie. It was neither seemly nor befitting that so great an occasion should have its solemnity defaced by leaping-poles or four hands crossed cradlewise to convey the bridal finery over 'slump' or 'quakkin'-qua!

'They are to ride, lads, and every fit,' said Muckle Tamson. And there was more bog-oak dug up and used for bridging the 'lanes' that day than had been known to exist between Glencaird and the Garrary.

As for Absalom, he was away in Edinburgh, putting all things to rights, with the help of Walter Gilfillan, and, as I told him afterwards, flirting with Nan between times.

This he smiled at, but did not deny. In his lifetime he had known several severe-faced clerical

housekeepers, women who always added to their devotions a special prayer for the decease of ministers' wives, but he had never met anyone like Nan Gilfillan. Nor, for that matter, had I.

But I was not jealous. It was me he loved— me he was going to marry. And besides had not Nan a husband of her own?

However, during his sojourn she had taken him to a good tailor, and certainly the result was marvellous. Absalom arrived almost unrecognisable. Nan did not come to the wedding herself, having been, as she said, 'long enough away from this banker-man while settling your little affairs.' But she sent a hastily scribbled 'Bless you, my children!' adding characteristically, 'I have just found out that he has a middle name, 'Manor.' Now, I don't want you to hyphen it like some ignoble Jones who has married into the nobler family of Brownes (with an e). But for the sake of your big sister Nan make him write himself 'A. Manor Kenmore,' and call him by it as a Christian and Christianlike name! I have tried the experiment, and he takes to it very well, considering.

NAN.

P.S.—As Watty and I have no daughters of our own, I send you my engagement ring to wear as a 'keeper.' I know it will fit, for I took the size when you were in Edinburgh, and had it altered at McKay and Chisholm's.'

On the great day the minister came early. I was rather late owing to having to advise as to the marriage feast up to the last moment possible, Marion McClintock, our maid, sitting down and beginning to cry as soon as she was left alone 'wi' sae mony pots on the fire!'

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My father sat in the big three-legged chair in the parlour with a high glad look on his face, but the wrapt prophetic gaze was pretty well gone from the countenance of a certain A. Manor Kenmore, Esq., bridegroom-elect, once minister of Riddlings.

I tried to follow Nan's advice and not allow him to get too serious.

For instance, when he made reflections upon the wondrous solemnity of the event, I asked him if he had seen about the tickets. When he prophesied that two who loved each other as he and I would never have a quarrel all our lives, I told him that we should have one that very moment if he did not take the cans and go to the well for water.

This eased off things considerably.

Of course, I cannot describe my own wedding—at least, not on paper. The service, however, was simple and short, and nothing particular seemed to happen except our signing some documents with a very bad pen, caused by Absalom letting it fall twice, and then the minister shutting his eyes and moving his lips so that I knew he must be praying.

No, I am not irreverent. Only there was in my ears the sound of many waters—rushing they were and full of voices. And if it had not been for—for my husband, I should have fallen. For I had done much these last days, while he was in Edinburgh sitting at the feet of Nan and listening to her wisdom.

But now he was mine for altogether, and if he sat at Nan's feet, why I should sit there too, and hold his hand. Yes, silly—but I don't care!

The next thing I remember was the marriage feast. It could hardly be called a breakfast—which happened in the afternoon, though since I came to the city I have learned that a matinee generally

finishes after dark. Marion McClintock suddenly waked up, and, after saluting me with a resounding moorland kiss, she cried, 'Noo, Mistress Kenmore, I maun rin and see that the taties dinna burn!'

What was infinitely more serious, however, and gave me much room for thought was to hear a certain preacher of repute, who in the days of his pastorate never read a line of his sermon, break down miserably in his bridegroom's reply to the minister's stately greeting.

'I thank you, sir. I thank you, friends—on behalf of my wife and myself, I thank you! I had prepared something, but (with a vague gesture in the air) it is gone from me!'

'At that I do not wonder,' said the minister of Minnigaff, gallantly, 'since so much has come to you this day! What is it the lads call your wife—'The Rose of the Wilderness!' I warrant you, Mr. Kenmore, that today she could make a better speech than you!'

But indeed I felt in no mood for mirth, for I had seen Willie Gillespie slip out of the house and go down to the waterside to walk there by himself, his collie dog following his master with drooping ears and sympathetic tail.

Well, we do not live in Thibet, and here in Scotland a girl cannot content everybody who does her the honour to like her, especially up on the face of the Wilderness, where maids are scarce and there is much time to think on likings.

But all the same, foolish as he had been, my heart ached a little for poor Willie, walking off there by himself. I longed to send the prettiest lass out to comfort him. But he might not have taken it well. Besides, the prettiest there was May Macmillan, a

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farmer's daughter out of Barr parish. And May, I knew, thought too well of herself to be any man's do-no-better.

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The procession or (as they called it) 'convoy,' was a great sight to see. Never had so many men been seen together on the face of the Wilderness, not even at an old-fashioned funeral with five services of refreshments.

My father came but a little way with us, and then went back to his book and his chair.

As for me, I rode between my husband and the minister of Minnigaff. I tried hard to call him 'Manor,' but could not get my tongue round it somehow, perhaps not having the aplomb of Nan Gilfillan.

And at the new-made crossings the herds stood with their hats off as we rode across one by one, the minister, who was a heavy man, going first (as he said) to test the Theory of Strains as applied to herd-made bridges!

Then I went after, and my husband followed, our hearts all troubled, and yet grateful within us, for all these poor lads of the hills had done for us. And Muckle Tamson marshalled them, dressed in a new suit of homespun for the occasion.

Six times did the whole company of hill men drink the last stirrup cup before the road was reached, the made road, I mean. Then they gave us three cheers, and another, and yet another, till all the moorland rang.

The only cruel thing was done just as we were riding away. buchanWill Gillespie came up and

slipped into my hand a little parcel which, when I opened it after in the train, contained a little ring woven of his hair and mine, with which we had pledged each other on the green meadows of the Dornel, when he was seven and I was five.

Now I think that was mean. If I had been a man I think I would have kept that to myself. But, curiously enough, it had the effect of making me far less sorry for Will. I flung it out of the carriage window in a little fit of temper, a thing which is a fine specific against sentiment.

And when my husband asked what it was, I answered him in his own old style: —

‘A drop of the Waters of Marah!’

And he, in return, perhaps taking a leaf out of my book, asked me if I would not take off my hat and make myself comfortable! We had a long journey before us.

But all the same, as the train rushed onward with us, and we left behind the little stations with the familiar names, both of us fell silent. There was a silence that first drove us apart, and then insensibly drew us nearer again as the twilight began to fall.

Never had I seen him so young, never so handsome. In spite of myself I leaned across and drew down the head with the grey hairs threaded sparsely into the thickness of the gold. I kissed him—the first time I had ever done so.

‘My Absalom!’ I whispered, and passed my hand through the silk of his Hair. He might be ‘A. Manor Kenmore’ to Nan and others, but to me he was, and would ever be, ‘Absalom of the Golden Locks,’ the Father of my Peace, indeed, as the name meant in the Hebrew he tried to teach me, before I found a wiser learning for him to occupy himself withal.

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And the train bore us on and on, so far that it seemed as if there could be no end, and as I grew more tired, it so chanced (have you known the chance?) that I saw the gold threaded with grey curiously near to me. Then an arm, warm and strong, came about me. I seemed to be as nothing in that grasp. Let Nan manage her men by theory, as she will, and walk the world rilled with all the philosophies. I knew no better way than this.

I pushed my fingers under the first heavy lift of the waving hair where it leaves the brow, soft as a woman's, yet with, oh, such a different crisp and tingle under the fingers! Then I nestled down, weeping softly and gladly, on his shoulder. I do not know why.

‘Absalom — my Absalom!’

And through a night tingling with stars, Orion rising red in the east, the train sped southward into the darkness. But in our souls there was light and warmth, and such tenderness as when, outside Eden, Adam for the first time took Eve, to comfort her, in the hollow of his arm.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

LITTLE EMMALINE HOSANNA

As we went southwards the world opened out as if, above the Dungeon, the two halves of heaven had slid apart. Curiously enough, however, the Dungeon itself, the house even now going up there in addition to the old, Muckle Tamson in charge of the ewes, Stoor and the dogs, the chances of Tamson's 'melling' one or more of the harmless necessary masons and joiners from the 'Laigh Country,' divided our interest with the Louvre and the Boulevards.

I said to Absalom, 'I do believe that after all Nan Gilfillan was right. While I take more interest in the Louvre of the pictures and the statuary, you are always hankering after the other Louvre of gowns and frilleries. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, sirrah. Your reason, please!'

He smiled, if that were a smile which father shone in a quiet general radiation, that touched the repose of his lips.

'Well, you see, the pictures I have seen before, but,' he hesitated, as I thought for shame, 'it is the first time I have chosen hats and pretty things for a girl.'

This was a long way indeed from the parish of Riddlings and the stern, duty-driven man I had first known there.

'You are ashamed!' I cried, pointing my finger at his face.

'No, indeed, I assure you I am not,' he retorted

brazenly, 'nothing is farther from my thoughts. I like it even when the shop-girl turns to me and says, 'Does not Monsieur agree with me?'

'And Monsieur usually does,' I asserted, 'and that is why you always buy the dearest; because it is the young person's interest to sell you the dearest!'

'I don't care so long as they become you!' he ended, stubbornly holding to his point. And indeed you could get nothing more out of him. We usually walked home, and in comparison with him the Frenchmen looked like little strutting Gallic cocks, their arms spread akimbo and their noses reddened by the December wind. I liked to look up at the man beside me, so big that people looked after him on the street and murmured 'Anglais.'

Whereat I wondered what Muckle Tamson would have said if anybody had called him 'English!' Melling would have been common along the windswept streets and dusty boulevards in such a case.

I confided something of the kind to Absalom, and he said, 'There, if you like, is Tamson—no (as he came nearer), rather say the true France—the life of the country, its nobility!' A blue-bloused peasant and his wife, both well over six feet high, were marching solemnly up the long incline towards the Arc de Triomphe. They were fine old people, and the woman carried a basket over her arm. Sabots were on their feet, the first and last time I ever saw them in a French town. We sat on a bench together and watched these two dark silhouettes blacken and die out against the flaming west.

Then we returned, gladly enough, to our hotel garret-room, with its old-fashioned wood-fire and air of old-world comfort, like an inn-chamber in a

storybook during the stage-coach days, Absalom said.

I will not linger unnecessarily over the marriage trip. I am sorry to say that my husband distinguished himself chiefly by frivolity. He preferred a moonlight walk through Florence and lazily mooning by day on the bridges to improving his mind in the league-long galleries of the Uffizzi. At Amalfi, however, he was more at ease. He would sit for hours and listen to my chatter. It did him good to look at the sea, he said. And at Siena I had to find out all the churches for myself, and lead him thither afterwards to smell the stale incense, and, as he declared, 'to see my grandmother,' because in one small shrine far out in a northern suburb there was a little church all flecked marble, coloured and discoloured, of which the sacristan was a little fairy godmother of a woman —anybody's grandmother. Absalom declared she got a lira a day for being mine in particular, her soft Italian manner aiding thereto, and my hand having acquired the habit of taking from Absalom's side-pocket the white money and the brown. He kept a supply of both there for the purpose. I never had any of my own.

We went to Venice. We went to Milan, to high-perched Corona also, and the isles of the Ligurian shore. I saw the world was very large, and the people exceedingly diverse. Nevertheless, the hammer-hammer of the joiners on the roofs of the new house of the Dungeon, the chick-clack of the mason's trowels on the blue whinstone, grey granite, and purple slate, drew our hearts homeward.

It was April when we arrived. At our hotel in London we received a telegram from Nan Gilfillan telling us that if we happened to get home in time we

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were to come on at once to the marriage of Sylvie Whyte, Dalna's sister, and the bridegroom was—no other than Ned Fitzgerald, factor on the Glasserton estates!

On the heels of this, and while we were still making up our minds, unwilling to displease Nan, there came another despatch, this time from Walter Gilfillan himself, who had wired from his office:

'Do nothing of the sort. Stay where you are till it is over. Why should you suffer? It is bad enough for me. But don't tell Nan. She has been at it again. No R.S.V.P. Walter Gilfillan, Patriot and Martyr.'

This struck us as so delightfully characteristic that it made us feel at home at once, even more than the 'Any luggage, miss?' of the Dover porter, which, coming northward, one always hears with a start.

So, as Absalom shamelessly proposed, we did not 'let on,' but lay hid up, like the golden plates of the Mormon Bible till Joseph Smith found them in the mound. It was as well. In London I got some really suitable things for the hills, though I knew Nan would adore my Paris extravagances, or, rather, Absalom's on my behalf. We went out early in the morning and found a barber who was willing to cut my husband's hair according to directions. So I marched round and round, encouraging the operator or staying his hand, with a 'Woodman, spare that tree,' according to circumstances.

My father, too, was well, but he warned us against returning too soon. The Dungeon was in no fit state, he said. The house was still uninhabitable. All men were liars, particularly stonemasons and joiners. If it had not been for Muckle Tamson, who had saved two rooms from their ravages, and Stoor, who had developed (unaccountably) the knack of

making Henry Gordon comfortable and finding the book he wanted, my father said that he 'could not have managed as well as he had,' Personally he wearied for us, but it would be a couple of months before the Dungeon was fit for our homecoming. 'The McClintock lass' was doing very fairly, considering that her mother was no moorland woman, and her father—well, the less said about him the better. These things being so, the McClintock porridge was very passable, and her scones approached the miraculous. As for the higher things, he had new light on the Pauline interpretation of the Sacraments which he was sure would convince his friend Mr. Kenmore—(my father never condescended to diminutives or Christian names with an ex-placed minister, while 'Manor' would have seemed to him an outrage), or he was not the man he took him for.

All this eased our minds, and left us greatly more free. This may not seem quite like a story, but then, few people's lives do for the first month or so after they are married—for the first time, I mean. Afterwards they may get more used to it. I do not know.

But I yearned to get out of London, and one day, walking along a certain street in the west part of the town, I saw in a window the pictures of many houses to let by the month, or the year, or the century—or, in fact, anyway. Some were palaces, and would cost more in a month than we had laid aside to build the new house of the Dungeon. But at last we struck a bargain. We leased for two months an 'artistic' cottage residence near Beanford, in the Forest of Bere. There was something nice and Tennysonian about the sound of it, and just then I

think I could have called him Alfred at first sight, I knew the Poet Laureate so well. At any rate, it was something to go up the little turfy hill (with imitation heather upon it, no longer than the wool on a sheep's back), and see between the tall pine stems the Needles and the blue bight, where, behind the white cottages of Freshwater, his house lay.

Our 'artistic dwelling' was nothing much, all varnished wood and verandah, built clear of the ground, on short poles, like those you see in books of travel. You went up steps to get into it. And when you got there you went down more steps and through a glazed passage if you wanted the kitchen. Quite a different set took you to the larder, and indeed every room had its own method of approach. All was extremely artistic, of course, but to us two, used to the simple four-square architecture of Scotland—why, for the first few days we went stumbling about like a pair of bullocks. And laughing—at least Absalom laughed. I did not know that he could laugh like that before. But something I had never known before came over me under the pines. I was unused to their sougling, you see. There were none about the Dungeon, at least, not near enough for us to hear their noise in the night-time. It kept me awake at first when the wind blew. Though, even then, not for long.

The clear southland air, warm and yet heady off the sea, the scent of the fir-woods all about, two blessed months without a thing to do except read, take long tramps with Absalom, and go to sleep; oh, but I forget the eating. That was the crumpled roseleaf. The steps to the larder were in pale green picked out with wandering lines of red, as if veined like the old apple wood they used for staircases

before they got mahogany.

You see, we were over two miles from Beanford, and, even so, there was just the merest track through the forest. It was a lonely place, one would think. But yet, with its back to Portsmouth and the Solent, we had sometimes more 'poor, unfortunate sailors' and men out of a job (and at elbows) than we cared about.

Of course, with Absalom I was safe enough, and so was the house. We had arranged with a youngish, active woman, Selina Chugbridge, to come and clean up three times in the week, and even she made it a condition that we should walk part of the way home with her—in fact, till she got in sight of her own home.

'Them tramps!' were her horror. 'No right sailor men—not them!' she declared. Her own husband had followed the sea, and Selina knew, though she had long since lost sight of the original Chugbridge from whom she took her name.

Now, of course, born and brought up at the Dungeon, I understood housekeeping at a distance from markets well enough. But then, we had always mutton and lamb at hand, potatoes in the 'bing,' and eggs by the dozen, oatmeal and carrots—in fact, all the productions of a well-going farm, and, so far as the housewife was concerned, nothing to pay. Firewood, too, was stacked at the house end, protected by a zinc roof, plenty of peats and dried bog oak for back logs. Other things were brought up twice a year in quantity. The kitchen was hung from one end to the other with hams and sides of bacon. Hams, too, smoked in the great chimney, to the delight and terror of my childish days. For I firmly believed them to be dried-up naughty children who

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had bitten their nails, or gone wandering over the moor, as one less wise than Henry Gordon had warned me would happen to myself.

Such being the Dungeon housekeeping, life at Milford Cottage was a continual wonder to me. I loved the green woodpeckers, the black and white pies, the jays flashing blue, as so many bits of random sky! There were no flocks upon a thousand hills, as in our north country. A few sleepy donkeys, munching thistles on open spaces covered with grass as flagrantly imitation as the heather, were our only neighbours.

But all this while my heart had been growing curiously tender within me, I knew not why at the time, perhaps because I had never had anyone to look after me before in my life, perhaps also because of the white house among the woods above the sparkling Solent, which I took for Farringford. At any rate, I was easily moved. A nothing would set me crying sometimes.

I must say, however, that Absalom never showed the least surprise. Either by instinct or from the coaching of Nan Gilfillan, he seemed to understand and know how to soothe my most extraordinary whims and (yes, I will use the word) tantrums. For they were little else at that time, and I am sorry for it now.

Yet it was not temper. Absalom even has allowed that. Nor do I think that I was ever bad-tempered. To pass the time I made pets of a couple of wild grey rabbits that Selina's son, Tommy Chugbridge, brought me alive. That is, I did so till one of them bit me, and Absalom (I feel sure) let them both go in the night.

At least, the door of the little hutch was found

open, and Absalom's explanations of how it could possibly have happened were really unworthy of him.

We had no callers, which was just as well. We should have been at a loss what to do with them if we had had, excepting the squirrels, that is, and the wood-birds which, even in the summer time, were willing to accept crumbs, possibly because of the novelty.

Our larder was refilled in an exceedingly casual way when it grew empty, and it was often empty. It merely meant a walk down to Beanford through the Forest of Bere, with the chance of meeting Sir Launcelot, or even the fine Gawain,' who had always had such an interest for me. Then at the Beanford 'shop' I plowtered about, and loaded up Absalom with everything I could lay hands upon, he paying cash, and I pleasing the woman with my Scottish face and accent.

You see, she had had a cousin who once had failed in the Scotch tweed trade, and so she had kept a tenderness for everything connected with that country. Her cousin, it appeared, had made his fortune. And, according to the post-mistress, if he made so much by failing, what would he not have made if he had succeeded? Scotland, accordingly, was a good land, flowing with milk and honey for debtors and creditors alike. And to think that she should be kept here in Beanford stamping letters and selling penny postage stamps without even the poor profit of a penny in the pound!

I condoled with her, and I think she took to me greatly. It was indeed just as well. The very next Sunday, after spending all our morning in the woods, where Absalom listened to the voices of

nature, and read to me out of the books in the running brooks, and interpreted sermons in stone, he brought me home hand in hand with him, finding good in everything.

Never was there such a man as Absalom, I thought. No, I did not say it, so there!

But on getting back home, we found a man, wandering forlornly about our frail but artistic doors, not an ill-looking man by any means, who halted on one foot, and claimed to have been injured in a terrible accident on board one of her Majesty's cruisers. I forget what was the cause exactly, not being accustomed to seagoing ways. However, it was either the torpedo that blew up the torpedo-boat or the torpedo-destroyer that destroyed everything. I supposed they were pretty much all the same thing. The wounded hero talked to me for a good while in a soft south-coast voice, so different from our rude nor'land accent, and told me lots of interesting things about himself and his family. He had a sickly wife, an ailing baby, and he had just got back from a three-years' cruise— on the Pacific station, I think he said.

Absalom had not spoken a word to him. He had given one long look at the man, taking him in from head to foot, and had gone off into the little parlour to wait for me with a book. I don't mind owning that I thought it was a little—just a little cruel of Absalom. The man's story was so moving, it almost made me cry. He was really hungry, he said. He had not touched food for thirty hours. But what he wanted most was money: money to send to his little sick child, whom he had never seen, but whose name was Emmaline Hosanna; I think, really, he must have meant Joanna. But even the mistake

showed what a good and pious-thinking man he was naturally.

So I was moved, as who would not be? I went in, and with tears in my eyes, asked Absalom for a shilling to give the poor man. What was my surprise—you may dimly imagine it—when Absalom refused point-blank. He would not give a single farthing! He looked up from his book, and his face was very grave and calm, loving and quiet too. But somehow I knew then that I should never 'run' my husband as Nan Gilfillan did hers, and that, as far as the poor sailor-man was concerned, it was no use asking any more.

But I resolved that I would do what I could. There was at least the larder at the back of the kitchen, and Milford Cottage, being built in the shape of a sort of irregular Z—capital Z, I mean—I asked the man to go to the kitchen door.

I went indoors, but when I opened the door of the larder I remembered suddenly that after our late breakfast there had remained just one loaf of fine bread, shaped like a pork-pie hat (why not like a pork-pie, I don't know, but it was the hat it reminded me of).

'No money?' said the man, looking at the bread in my hand.

I shook my head. Gladly would I have given it to him, but Absalom had made up his mind, and the tramp might stay there all day—it would make no difference. I told him this.

He measured the distance from the parlour where he knew Absalom was sitting to the back door at which I stood. Then he took the bread, murmuring blessings—or, at least, what I took to be such. I was so sorry for him, and for little Emmaline Hosanna,

as he persisted in calling her. I never could have believed Absalom so flinty-hearted, when I thought how he had spent money on me—lavished it like water. I could not believe it was the same man.

I stood waving sad adieux to the poor man thus turned away from our very door without the shilling which would have bought Swiss milk, and so preserved the life of little Emmaline Hosanna. He shuffled slowly off. I shut the back-door and turned the key. Then I went along the covered glass passage which led to the house, and, as I was looking after him with the tears starting in my eyes, the father of little Emmaline turned suddenly round, and, with a dreadful oath, hurled the pork-pie loaf right at me, through the glass of the little verandah, and took to his heels.

It struck me on the face—the pork-pie loaf, not the glass, happily. And I stood stricken dumb, paralysed, amid the tinkling ruins of the window and a fallen debris of geranium pots. Such inconceivable ingratitude! Such a shattering of my ideals; I could only sink down on the nearest steps—luckily, there were plenty of them in our cottage. So I did not see what happened immediately after.

I may relate it, however, because I have been told.

Absalom had been looking at his book without reading it very carefully, but, as usual, his ear was cocked in my direction. He had resolved to let me learn for myself. But at the first jingle of broken glass he rose and ran out, catching up a solid stick in his hand. The man ran well, but Absalom ran better. The sailor-man (or whatever he was) crouched grinning with a knife open in his palm. The next moment this was knocked spinning from his hand. What happened after is best known to the

tramp. Absalom says that it was not fit to happen on a Sunday afternoon, still less to discuss afterwards. It was bad enough that it had to be done.

However, what happened, I don't think that the father of little Emmaline Hosanna enjoyed it. Absalom brought back the knife with him, and put it into the pocket along with my pence and shillings. He had told the man to apply for it at the Beanford Police Station.

Well, there was nothing to eat in the house, and Absalom thought it might be as well to go down and see the policeman at once. He certainly ought to know that there was a bad character in his district.

So out we went, hand in hand for the most part, till I got so fearfully sorry at the man's bad behaviour that I had perforce to cry. To think—only to think I kept on saying, 'And he the father of a child, a beautiful little innocent child!'

Even Absalom did not know how to comfort me till we came to a stream of running water, and then he pulled out his drinking cup, and bade me take a piece of the despised bread which he had fetched to show to the policeman.

Well, the first few mouthfuls brought me so much comfort that I ate it all up—yes, every bit. And what is the funny thing, I quite forgot to give Absalom any! He said after that he did not want any. But that I did not know. I was so sorry and crysome that I just forgot.

Upon the bridge as we came back out of Beanford we saw our tramp. He was sitting on a stone heap rubbing himself, as if he had rheumatism or something. He tried to run away when he saw us. But in spite of all his packages Absalom got in front of him.

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'Now, own to my wife that you are a rascal!' he cried; 'tell her that you are not married, that you are no sailor-man, and that there is no little Emmaline Hosanna.'

And under the chill of Absalom's eyes the tramp sullenly avowed that it was so. He had merely been lying. It was part of his profession. He made a lot, he said, that way, especially about Bournemouth.

'And you have no little child?' I cried; 'surely you could not lie about that too?' (For I was loath to give up the thought of what had moved me.) 'Tell me truly, is there no little Emmaline Hosanna?'

'Was that the name?' said he, with a grin, 'no, ma'am, there is no such person that I knows on!'

'How much for this knife?' said Absalom, holding up his spoils of war.

'Well, I bartered it with another chap on the Hard for sixpence,' said the man sullenly.

'Now I am going to keep it,' said Absalom, 'and give you half-a-crown if you run for the train that is just coming in from Southampton West. With that you can go on to Bournemouth, you know!'

'Half-a-crown does it!' cried the man, catching the flying coin, and starting on the moment. 'Bournemouth for ever, and the blessin's of little Emmaline Hosanna be on the kind lady.'

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

MISTRESS INNOCENCE-IN-DANGER

Whilst we dwelt at Milford Cottage, Absalom and I had time to study the manners and customs of Selina Chugbridge. At least I had, for after a while Absalom arranged with her to come every day, not so much because he thought I could not do the work, but because it cut short his time with me. Oh, the selfishness of the best of men! However, this did not last long.

But concerning Selina Chugbridge. Selina was meant to be a model servant, but fate had otherwise ordained it. In her brief youth she had married a wandering sailor-man, and to that day she could not give any reason for so doing, except— 'He came, and druv me to it!'

Chugbridge, A.B., passed away as he had come, and all the riches he left behind him was named Thomas. Yes, Tommy Chugbridge was a boy among a thousand, as you shall hear, but all the same he spoiled his mother's clear call, as Henry Gordon would have said. Selina's vocation was to be the last of a noble race—the last good servant in England. There might be hirelings after her, but never another Selina. Sometimes she forgot to ask for her wages on Saturdays, and Tommy had to come for them—Tommy, with whom we had been out all day hunting the shy wood blossoms and gathering clover-heads, or being taken to places where, if you kept quiet enough, you could see through the branches the sleek water-rat with all her family about her

teaching them how to swim and dive and disappear like a conjuring trick—or, on the willow twigs, the siskins swinging and scolding the tits in the pines above for throwing down pine-cone shells among them.

But, with quite another mien and accent, Tommy would come for his mother's money.

'Selina forgot it!' he would say simply, and hold out a paw, dirty, but dear to us because it was the same with which he had showed us the eggs of the dipper, and 'grabbled' (his own word) in the holes of the river bank for the nest of the kingfisher.

'Selina's money, if you please!' he would remark in a tone of severe displeasure, though he knew very well how every minute of our time had been employed. Still, we had no business to have forgotten, even supposing that Selina and Tommy himself had been equally forgetful—that is, up to the very moment of his mother's return home.

As I said before, Selina was filled with fears, now that the faithless Chugbridge, A.B., would never return from a watery grave, anon that he would, and perhaps carry off her Tommy to make him a vain, far-wandering, loose-living sailor like himself.

But though Tommy Chugbridge—if, indeed, such were his name, his sailor-father being suspected of having seen it first on the platform-board of a neighbouring station—was terrible on such occasions, he was a good boy in the main, and gave his mother no trouble. Nor, for that matter, his schoolmaster very much either, dwelling most days and all day long in the woods, only looking in at the school of Beanford when it suited him. After one trial the master knew better than to thrash truant Tommy. For he did not see him again for six weeks,

and compulsory officers were a vain thing to a boy who could lie coiled round the branch of a pine so close and still that the birds came and played over him as if he were part of it. Besides, he learned quickly, this hither-and-thither Tommy—when the fit took him, that is. And with two days' good attendance he would again be at the top of his class. As he was sure of passing before H.M. Inspector of Schools, it may legitimately be suggested that there must have been some curious and unauthorised marking of registers in Beanford School. For the day of surprise visits was not yet.

Only, so far as his mother's business was concerned, Tommy certainly harmed that. All the time we were at the Cottage, while I was dreaming over Tennyson and various other things which occupy the mind of a newly married woman, Absalom Kenmore had few things he could call his own. Certainly not his soul—that was mine, and I took delivery during all his waking hours. If he dared to dream of anybody but me, he carefully concealed the fact. While as to his shirts, his pocket-handkerchiefs, his socks, and underlinings of all masculine sorts, they were Selina's.

And so for that matter were my own bodily effects also—all—all were Selina's! I had white frocks—Absalom's choice, of course—and the green of the woods, the rain droppings, the grey moss of tree trunks were pitiless for such delicacies.

But Selina blanched not—or, rather, she blanched them. She even took it upon her to reprove me occasionally.

'If missus does not put on her white skirt, there will be but one in Monday's wash!' she said.

Such a disgrace was not to be thought of when

neighbours came to see Selina's clothes-line, which, owing to her boasting, they did from far. Frilled and 'lacey' things of all descriptions—from petticoats inwards, as one might say—were her especial joy. She loved them like a bride—I mean like an everyday bride—for in reality I cared very little about such things, only just because of Absalom.

(Since reading this Nan Gilfillan says, 'Hum, that is the ordinary excuse!')

But I looked at my foreign bills of Parisian blanchisseuses, and lo! what cost an utterly unreasonable number of francs on the banks of the Seine was done by the immortal Selina for pure love. That is, she would not accept any augmentation of the modest amount duly paid each week to Tommy Chugbridge.

And if an additional coin were slipped in underneath, he examined the contents of his fist with the same sharp eyes that spied out the wild bees' nests, and—fished out and returned the offender with the remark, 'I don't want to get smacked when I get home!'

Selina made us dinner in the middle of the day. Utterly, most utterly, she despised my cooking powers. And indeed well she might. I had actually never seen a 'range' before. A covered fire was to me unknown. A crane-like armature, a chain adjusting to various lengths, and some S-shaped pot-hooks made at the nearest smithy were all that I had ever used at the Dungeon.

It was part of Selina's creed that I was subject to recondite and possibly fatal diseases. She pestered me with shawls, which I made Absalom carry, and proved excellent for sitting upon when I wore my white dress.

## ROSE OF THE WILDERNESS

She whispered mysteriously in my ear of sage tea, and 'sarsy-prilly' was to her a word of grace. Her medical attainments were such as to give confidence to the most fearful of brides. She even took it upon herself to tell Absalom that he must be more careful of me! Long walks and fatiguing exercises (such, I presume, as climbing trees) were to be avoided. She would arrive early on purpose to remind Absalom of something else that she had thought of during the night.

Then Absalom would say, half under his breath, 'Oh, bless the woman—Amen!' Which to me seemed a feeble thing under the circumstances. At least, I am sure Muckle Tamson would have thought so.

But, for all that, Selina was full of fears—of tramps especially—objects which her son Thomas treated with scorn, knowing that he could outrun and out-climb the boldest tramp that ever took the Portsmouth road. But he could not persuade Selina, who, if reassured on the score of tramps, was equally afraid of ghosts and mice.

In vain Tommy laughed at her. In vain he got out his knife—formerly belonging to the father of little Emmaline Hosanna—and said, in a tone of bold confidence, 'Fetch on your ghosts—Tommy'll see the colour of their insides!'

No, Tommy was not refined. Few little boys in his station are, and most of the others only pretend so to be in presence of their seniors—which, on the whole, is perhaps the safest thing, considering that the world is not made for the over-dainty.

Well, Selina heard with a kind of marvel of the Dungeon and the new house there—the hordes of workmen, Muckle Tamson keeping order among them with his (or rather Nan Gilfillan's) leaping-pole.

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I think Absalom said all this to frighten her. But, if so, he was largely mistaken in his Selina.

'I should like to cook for them!' was what she answered with a sigh.

'And mend their socks!' she added, gravely.

'But are there no tramps there? No burying-grounds?' she demanded, suddenly.

As to tramps, I told her that we did not have above one or two in a century, and that we kept a bottomless pit on the property—called the Murder Hole—on purpose, as it were. So the thing (and the tramp!) went no farther.

As for churchyards, there was not one nearer than eighteen miles, too far for the moonlight promenade of any self-respecting ghost.

These things manifestly cheered Selina, and she departed with a brow charged with great new thoughts. She talked apart with Absalom, and when I asked him what it was all about, he said evasively that she had been abusing him and singing my praises—which last (save in matters of the kitchen) I could well believe of Selina Chugbridge.

Yet I could not help thinking at the time that either my husband had taken Selina's reproof a little too much to heart, or that her praises of me had seemed to him somehow misplaced.

For his brow also was heavy, and this time I knew it was not owing to the Augsburg Confession, the follies of the Supralapsarians, or anything like that. Absalom was a new man, and now read his Bible simply, like any other book, with as much of the learning left out as he could manage to forget. And he says now that that was a good deal—but it was all my fault. To look after me was enough responsibility for any one grown man, willing, but

absolutely destitute of experience.

And when I came in with Tommy, after having discovered a belated nest of the long-tailed tit, I found him again with Selina, both of them apparently brooding over the sorrows of the world.

Now Selina was a good-looking woman enough, but somehow I was not jealous.

Not so Tommy. He told his mother abruptly to 'come away from there.' The washing was to hang out. The white things would be over-blued. The chickens down at their place wanted feeding, and—he had never known such a mother.

However, I took Tommy in hand. In return for the nests he found, and the shy, wild creatures of the wood that he showed me going and coming about their errands, I told him stories. None of these creatures minded Tommy in the least, and even I, being properly introduced by him, was taken on suspicion—suspicion which gradually became sufferance, and lastly confidence. So that the rabbits, grey, white, black, and ring-straked, played undisturbed about our feet, even leaping over our legs in their games of tag and 'catch-as-catch-can.'

'I did that,' Tommy Chugbridge explained in confidence to me as we sat waiting, hardly daring to move. 'I put in a white one and a black one, and now I am looking for a red one to shove into that rabbit-hole as well. Then there will be something worth seeing.'

'You will take a caravan and go round the country with a show, eh, Tommy?' I said, laughing.

He looked at me with the air of one who has trusted an unworthy person.

'No,' he said, very coldly, 'I shall come here and look at them! By myself!' he added, meaning that he

would leave me behind.

I felt the implied reproach, and immediately set myself to interest Tommy by telling tales of the Dungeon. He listened intently, especially to all that concerned Muckle Tamson, his prowess, his deeds of derring-do, and his powers of leaping.

Next day he came home 'wet as a sop,' his mother said, owing to an ill-advised attempt to leap Bere Water with a pole cut from a willow sapling.

After this failure his admiration for Muckle Tamson increased almost to the point of worship. My father appeared to him to be a man much like 't'owd parson,' while Stoor, being of his own breed and understanding, seemed somebody he would have to lick if he could. He was not, however, sanguine about that, but he would do his best.

'Anyway, if he's got the dogs to help him,' he said, 'I've got little Emmaline Hosanna's knife!'

It was, indeed, almost settled—how I do not know, because for the first time my husband did not wholly confide in me—that Selina and Tommy should form part of the enlarged staff at the Dungeon. This being so, I could see that there were new experiences awaiting almost everybody—I mean among the little circle of folk we knew.

But just at this time, when Absalom was growing more and more thoughtful, and I was afraid of him slipping back into his old self, grave, serious, and self-contained—a being dwelling apart from me—there came a letter from Walter Gilfillan.

I suppose he had found out at the London hotel where we were—got the address, that is.

'DEAR TURTLE DOVES (he wrote),—Too much solitude a deux is not good for man and woman — not at first, at least. Please write and tell Nan where

you are. Say that you are recluses, and so happy in each other's society! Then she will instantly want to go down and see what it is like. I shall come too. It will be a kindness to an honest labouring man who never did you any harm. I presume there are no marriageable women in your neighbourhood for my wife to exercise her talents upon.'

I went myself to the telegraph office in the village and wired, 'Come along—only Selina!'

Back came the answer, while I waited.

'Who is Selina?'

'Chugbridge!' I replied, wasting Absalom's money, a sixpence at a time.

'Right!' replied Walter Gilfillan, 'I would go anywhere to see a Chugbridge!'

So, considering the affair as settled, I went and wrote a long letter to Nan. I even made it purposely mysterious. I looked up Tennyson for adjectives to describe our happiness. I also threw in the name of Selina two or three times, as if, by the way—how 'we saw a great deal of Selina.' I remarked, apropos of my husband, 'Absalom appears to delight in her society. As for me, I solace myself with Tommy Chugbridge. He and I take long walks in the woods. It is all very delightful!'

Altogether a very pretty mystery to set fermenting in the brain of Nan Gilfillan, which at no time needed more than a suggestion to set it off.

The letter, as per order, worked beautifully. On the third day the Gilfillans disembarked at Beanford Station, having, like the faithless A.B., passed Chugbridge Junction on the way.

'Ah,' said Nan, pointing to the narrow oblong of blue and white enamel, 'it is well we came. This Tommy Chugbridge is doubtless the scion of a well-

known local family. These may even be his estates!

And while Nan, her heart filled with sudden vengeance against the whole landed gentry of England, got into the feeble occasional Beanford shandrydan, Tommy projected the baggage upon the footboard. Finally he climbed up there himself, sitting like an image of Buddha on the top of Nan's all-precious hat-box, with the air of a freckled Puck.

Of all this Nan, however, was innocent, and as for the banker, he made merry on the subject of turtledoves. Nan glanced at him several times in contempt. She was familiar with the tragedies of parted lovers. She knew Jean Ingelow's verses by heart, not only the famous 'Divided,' but other less known lines. Something like this it ran in Nan's mind: —

*My true love fares on yon great hill, Feeding his sheep for aye; I looked in his hut, but all was still — My love had gone away. To think I should come to this my home, And yet — be still alone.*

Nan was not quite sure of the last two lines, but I could see by the compression of her lips that great thoughts were burning there. She scrutinised me, and her eyes were cold. But anon, a warmer, kinder expression entered them. After all, I was young. I was ignorant. I had dwelt all my life on the Dungeon side. What was I to know?

Doubtless this handsome young Tom Chugbridge, of an ancient Forest of Bere family, had dazzled a young girl's inexperience by gallantry and motorcars! But here Nan's face grew grim. Her thick, dark, straight-ruled eyebrows nearly met in the concentration of her thought. She would save me. She remarked again the innocence of my face. Yes, she was in time. As for the miscreant, Thomas

Chugbridge, Esquire, of Chugbridge, wait till she, Nan Gilfillan, got him under the fiery lash of her tongue. She would teach him what it was to trouble the peace of young and happy homes!

As for Selina and Mr. A. Manor Kenmore—well, after all, that was only natural. She did not believe any ill of him. She could not—perhaps she only wished she could. It was not well for men to be too unnaturally good. But she knew her Absalom, and Selina might prove, after all, an ornament, perhaps even the crown to Nan's gallery matrimonial.

We reached the door of Milford Cottage. The little gate stood invitingly open and we drove in. Silence was all about. There was even no gravel for the wheels to crunch upon—only the hard-packed, saffron-coloured sand of the Forest.

With his new agility Absalom sprang to the ground, and before even he helped out his guests—not to speak of me—he called out in all innocence, 'Selina! Where are you, Selina?'

I saw Nan look unspeakable things. She was in her mind's eye the skipping of a dainty maiden down the stairs, golden locks flying like tendrils, and the sweetest of sweet smiles on the reddest of red lips.

Selina appeared in the doorway. She was tying on a clean apron. The frying-pan was in her hand, to be conveyed to the trough beneath the pump.

'Dinner is ready!' she said, 'and a hard job I had of it without that boy. Tommy,' (she raised her voice), 'Tommy Chugbridge! Now where's that dratted boy got to?'

Tommy, the aforesaid 'dratted boy,' was at the moment on the far side of the shandrydan getting down the luggage. But he answered his mother's summons, capless, his hair in a tangle, his face long

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guiltless of soap and water, but nevertheless smiling cheerfully as a loch smiles back at the clear sky.

'Yes, mother!' said Tommy Chugbridge, 'been hikin' down them packages!'

Nan Gilfillan got out without help. The banker followed, slowly and guiltily. She turned upon him sharply.

'This is your doing, Walter Gilfillan!' she said in a low, earnest tone; 'oh, don't prevaricate—I know. But I'll get even with you for it—ever so even! You wait!'

And the banker looked as if he knew it all too well.

Then she turned to me.

'Also with you, Mistress Innocence-in-Danger!' she said. 'I'll teach you both what it is to play tricks on Nan Gilfillan.'

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

NAN'S CAMPING OUT

Once on a time I got from the Newton Stewart lawyer and Gilmour the doctor, Walter Gilfillan's friends, the minutes (as it were) of their first midnight seance at the Dungeon after they had got rid of us, that is, of Nan and myself. It was before I knew Absalom. Nothing, perhaps, shows more exactly what sort of comrade was Nan's 'banker-man,' and how admirably one suited the other. Being a girl I might write for weeks without bringing this out so well as it appears in the untrammelled talk of these three men.

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'Well,' said the banker on the evening of the day after his arrival, 'I suppose I must tell you fellows the news. Yes, Joe Kane has got married. He is a married man now! You know Joe? Dried stick of a fellow on a stool, bent over his books, and ran if he saw a woman in the remote distance—that was Joe!

'Well how?' says you, very naturally.

'For details you had better ask my wife, that is, if any of you like to risk being shown the door. Nan Gilfillan does not understand men's pleasantries upon such subjects. Consequently, you have got to take my word for it, unless you'd rather not.

'You know what a fellow Joe Kane is—was—I was going to say 'will ever be.' But he won't—. He's married, and if any of you chaps want to get married

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likewise, turn over a new leaf, begin to lead a new life, stop smoking and — (Gilmour, your glass is empty; the decanter is at your elbow — pass it along!) —you go camping out, that is, with somebody else than me, Walter Everard Gilfillan, and Nan, my wife, in the thirty-fifth year of her age and tenth of her match-making, as they say on tombstones. She has been a nipper at getting other folk married ever since she said 'I will' in church, with the air of one who says 'I won't,' or 'I'll see you—hem, farther—first!'

That's Nan, and though we are all big men in our way, and at the bank I take no back-talk even from a director—well, I don't deny it was a good day when I walked down the aisle to the strains of that holy weariness of the flesh, 'The Voice that breathed o'er Eden!'

'Now,' continued Walter Gilfillan, 'you, I, and the rest of men can have several ideas in our heads at one time. Nan, my wife, has only one. But that one has got to be carried out before there is room for another. It is, too. So all you little boys get out of the way. I also, on such occasions, endeavour to find an engagement in another direction.'

'Now this last summer Nan's idea was camping out. We had no cubs—children, I mean—to complicate matters or dictate where or when we were to spend our banker's short three weeks. If Nan is sorry about that, it is in the night, and nobody but a bank-manager has his sleep disturbed because of it. Still, that does not happen once in a blue moon, and between times Nan is so busy arranging for other people's family circles that she has no time to mourn about having only me to make up her own. Sometimes, however, at the seaside,

when she sees a pack of the young pests making sights of themselves among sand and sea-weed, she grabs my arm and sort of gurgles in her throat, 'Oh, Everard!' And I know what she is thinking of, (Gilmour, pass the decanter.)'

'Ah, well, the Lord didn't give, so the Lord can't take away! That's the way I comfort Nan. Sometimes it works—sometimes not. Anyway, we can't help it, that's certain, and we have the fewer postdated cheques to draw on the Bank of Futurity!

'Boys, you should have seen Nan some weeks before 'the eventful day.' She was as tickled and excited as a dog at a cat show. You know how nicely her hair lies about her head—no, I'm not getting poetical—well, for a good three weeks it stood erect in permanent bristles. She would rise in the night to look at the weather, returning to awake me with cold feet and the entirely superfluous information that it was an easter 'haar,' or that she could hear the drops on the window-pane, or that the moon was full and beautiful—none of which things really bore on our holiday, which was still three weeks off! But, of course, if you know Nan, you know that it had to be so.

'See, here, Watty,' she would say, 'I've been thinking!'

'So I knew that I was in for it, and said obediently, 'Yes, dear!' . . . trying hard not to think of something else. For that is no go with her. Nan can catch the slightest symptom of wandering attention. Same as if a clerk has been trying to write love-letters between the back pages of his ledger in office hours, you can read guilt on his face—at least, I can.

'So I gave Nan my undivided attention. I have always been a good husband!

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‘And as an uncle, fully tested and approved by many of Nan's pretty nieces and cousins—why, you have to go back to remote antiquity to find my equal. And even then you would be hard put to it, eh, Doctor?’

‘Look here,’ said Nan—Mrs. Walter Gilfillan, that is, so far as you fellows are concerned. You can keep thinking of it that way, but, as for me, I can't get my tongue round it. ‘Look here, Watty,’ Nan said, ‘we can't go to Switzerland, though I know a heavenly spot just outside Coire in Canton Orisons that I loved as a child. It would take too much time coming and going.’

‘And the fares!’ I suggested. But Nan swept on, and took me with her.

‘Then, you know, Watty, Dalna Whyte is coming with us!’

Nan said this in so matter-of-fact a tone that any of you unwedded wild asses would have thought she had mentioned it before—in fact, discussed the topic threadbare.

I remarked that I was glad of the information, but would be interested to know who Dalna Whyte might be, and why any human and demi-semi-Christian parent could have given a girl (presuming it to be a girl) such an uncanny name.

‘Now Nan does not approve of any form of humour when directed against herself, and answered sharply, ‘If you had any sense, Walter, you would know that Dalna Whyte is my cousin two removes on my mother's side, and that she was called Dalna after Dalnaspidal, a place in the Highlands, where she was nearly born.’

‘Nearly?’ I demanded in some surprise. ‘Yes,’ cried Nan, indignant at my stupidity, ‘it's a railway

place, you see, pretty high up, and the engine stops to look at the view or something— stops a good while — almost too long, indeed, on this occasion. However, my poor dear cousin managed to get as far as Perth, where Dalna was really born.'

'Why, then, not call her Perth?' I said. That seemed obvious, if they wanted to place her, as it were, territorially.

Nan flung one indignant look at me. I knew what it meant. It said that I was a man.

'Call a girl Perth Whyte!' she cried, hotly, 'have you no sense, Watty? Why, they would think she came from the dye-works!'

Then she added with great dignity, 'The child's name is Dalna, and there's an end to it!'

I remembered to have heard something like this read out of the Bible in the lessons for the day, but the quotation was vague, so I did not obtrude it.

'Dalna Whyte is coming with us, then,' I said meekly, 'well, that will mean another tent!'

'Why, of course it will,' she said. 'I have it all arranged. They are out on the back-green now!'

'Who? What?— Dalna Whyte and the tent?' I cried.

'No, you silly,' said Nan, pushing me back into my seat, 'the two tents!'

'And suppose,' I said, 'that Dalna gets frightened in the night? All alone in that vast solitude, at least three feet from the nearest living mortal!'

'Oh,' said Nan, simply, 'I have thought of that, too. You are to ask Joe Kane!'

'She nodded her head, defiantly and doggedly. A 'highly commended' bull-dog is not in it with Nan when she really takes hold.

'Yes,' she said, 'Joe and you are to have one tent

— the small one that I borrowed first. The rain comes through a little, but not very much, that is, if you are careful not to touch the canvas with your heads!

‘Joe and I are, as you know, both well over six feet! My wife continued:

‘Dalna and I are going to have the big square tent that I got the loan of last summer from Major Harper—it has the two iron bedsteads. So we shall do all right, and you and Joe can rub along. It will brace you up, sleeping on the ground, after all that office work you are always grumbling about! Why, we shall be just like soldiers on the battlefield.’

‘I thought of saying that Dalna and she, with all Major Harper's military equipment, would be much liker the real article if they took the small tent. Only I refrained. Nan dislikes irony, and there is no use in a man introducing dispeace into his own household. I knew that we should have to have Dalna. My secret hope was that Joe Kane would refuse. He was a bachelor of some thirty-five years' standing, and had long been permanent best man to all the weddings in four insurance offices and three banks.

‘But I suppose Nan had been on the trail before me. At any rate, he had been got at—that was clear. He actually said that he would 'be delighted.' You could have knocked me down with a feather-duster. Joe Kane, mind you! Why, I would as soon have expected him to spend his summer vacation in a creche!

‘But when I got home, Nan said, before I got time to hang up my hat, ‘Joe's coming!’

‘Yes,’ I answered, to give her a taste of my quality, and in my best 'No-Overdraft' manner, ‘yes, Mr. Kane has expressed his willingness to join us!’

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‘At this Nan laughed heartily, and said, ‘Of course he has! Catch a banker not knowing on which side his bread is buttered—other people's too.’

‘Well, we went down to that Galloway which is wilder and cheaper and prettier than the Highlands. We found a place called Clachanpluck. I knew it because I had been born not far from there, and I am a devoted member of the Clachanpluck Societies of Edinburgh and London, of Glasgow, too, for that matter, but (unless I have Dr. William Bruce, of the Herald, to tell me my way about the meats and drinks, and cheer me up generally), Glasgow is a long way to go for a dinner.

‘We had sent our tents down before us, and a local expert had pitched them. Nan's and her friend's installation had a wooden board floor that took to pieces, but Joe and I were to prove our manhood by a strict adherence to the rules of the game. We found the tents pitched among a cluster of fir-trees, on pretty dry ground. Still, it was best to make certain, so after an attempt made by ourselves, which only resulted in blisters, Joe Kane and I again set local talent to work to dig a trench round both tents to carry away the surplusage water, especially the unearned increment of our own bell-tent.

The whole place looked 'ant-y,' and I could have bet on midges. However, I said nothing, for I did not want to blunt the first simple and innocent joys of camp-life.

‘Joe joined us at Lockermaben junction. He was in a grey suit, and had his moustache curled up at the corners. He was guarding his luggage as if it had been bank property, and pointing with his umbrella to the several parcels as if he had been Black Rod in

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Waiting. He was a noble sight, well-nigh a landscape in himself set up on end. He had cut off his side whiskers—why, I don't know, unless it was that that vixen of a wife of mine had given him the tip as to Miss Dalna's likes and dislikes!

'We had picked up Miss Dalnaspidal at the Edinburgh Caledonian station. She was, like most of my wife's favourite relatives, young, agreeable, but prettier than most. Nan says that, when she gets a bit older, she may try her hand on settling the plain girls. But at present she prefers to have pretty ones about her. So do I, for that matter. I suspect, also, that Nan likes changes. 'Small profits, quick returns'—that sort of thing! I notice that if a girl does not benefit by the chances that Nan gives her—if she doesn't know enough at least to make good running—Nan usually does not ask her again.

'I like a girl with spirit!' she says for all explanation, but she says it emphatically. And then, having arrived, the play began. Nan could cook. I was odd-man-of-all-work. In which position I had all the abuse and no privileges, like the last-joined clerk. I had to be always on the spot, that is, where Nan was. I had to peel potatoes, and be sure not to throw the peelings about. I had to undo all manner of parcels when our luggage came, and bury the paper wrappings. Nan would have a clean camp, or know the reason why. I wished to go down into Clachanpluck and buy a waste-paper basket, as the simplest remedy. But the very suggestion aroused a torrent of wrath, at the thought of which I still tremble! (Doctor, the liquid refreshment is under your hand!)

'So, of course, Joe Kane and Dalna had to go down to buy provisions in the village, furnished with

a list as long as my arm—my wife's share—and three one pound notes— mine!

They do not understand gold in Clachanpluck, and send for a policeman if you persist in offering it to them.

I warned Joe of this, but he did not show me the ordinary deference which he is accustomed to do in the bank.

'Oh,' he said, 'I shall make that all right!'

But to see him going off with Dalna was worth camping out in rain for—yes, even doing all the scrubbing and cleaning up. Dalna was pretty young, as well as young and pretty. But, being a relation of Nan's, I would be prepared to wager that she was not nearly so shy as she looked. None of that family wear their hearts on their sleeves.

But there was no mistake about Joe Kane. He was shy as a new boy at school who joins in midterm. He felt his holiday-making blue shirt and red tie heavy as a bag of salt on his shoulders—I mean about his neck. I stood and laughed, jerking up and down in my joy like a sand-hopper, till Nan made me stop—'for decency's sake,' she said. You should have seen Joe edging off whenever the road was a little wider, every now and then being recalled to the narrow path of duty by bumping into a pine tree, or catching the leg of his thin summer trousers in a hoop of bramble that knew what was expected of it.

I could have betted that not three words were exchanged during the first part of the way, and that Joe was aching to introduce the Theory of Banking or something about the Actuarial Values of life in such primitive villages as Clachanpluck.

But Dalna—whether coached by Nan or not, I

cannot say— did not help him a bit. She let him fathom the deepest depths of his own idiocy, satiate himself with it, wallow in it, and then with a quick look at him from under the brim of her hat, and a shake of the yellow roses that decorated it, she began to chatter. 'How do I know? Well, I know, that's all!' To say that Joe was grateful is to say little. I don't know what Dalna said—not word for word, that is. But I know her cousin. I know the breed. I have always been a shy, difficult man myself, awkward and diffident with women, and I don't believe that anybody but Mrs. Walter Everard Gil-fillan could have overcome that inborn— you needn't laugh, you fellows! As the poet says: — *'Man knows but ill his fellow-man— Still worse, his fellow-woman.'*

I shall not soon forget the first night in camp. Neither will Joe. As for the girls, Nan and Dalna, of course women never forget anything except the last two-thirds of their promise to 'love, honour, and obey'!

'Now Joe Kane is not a fool. And if anybody had told me beforehand that he would get into a fuss just as I was dozing off lest 'Miss Whyte' and 'your wife' might not be comfortable, well, to say that I should not have believed that man, is to take a mild view of the case. But Joe actually said these words, and, what is worse, he made me get up and inquire.

It was my wife who replied, and I am glad that the clerks in the bank did not hear what she said to me. It would have been utterly subversive of discipline. So I told Joe that if he had any more such anxieties, he had better satisfy them himself. Then a brute of a dog came and nosed about, barking and running away again. Murmuring gently, I got down a

wooden mallet which had been brought for the tent-pegs. I stole out, my light evening dress streaming out like the banner of all the Bourbons on the breeze. Then I learned a great lesson. If you go out to chase dogs, it is better not to chase at all than to throw things and not to hit. The brute grew perfectly infuriated when the mallet whizzed harmlessly past his head. Seeing me weaponless, he returned and hovered in the vicinity of my legs in an exceedingly cowardly fashion.

Then Joe came out and told me 'For goodness' sake not to make a noise else I might disturb the ladies!' I asked him if he thought that it was I who had been barking? I said, also, that if he liked to tramp about and discourage all the dogs in the country, he could do it. Joe said that the right way was to speak kindly to dumb animals. So he told the beast to go away, and to my surprise and disgust it went.

'Now you see!' he said, triumphantly, rubbing it well into me.

'Ridiculous brute!' I replied, rather nettled— and Joe thought I meant the dog.

Then the wind began to blow. At first I lay listening to the low ground-swell of the pines. Their song was soft and low, like Mr. Whittier's on Ramoth Hill. But soon afterwards it increased into a roar, and I understood that sleep had fled my eyelids. It began to rain also. At first the sound of the storm without was soothing. I thought of the waves breaking on the beach, of the sough of tropical forests, of heavenly choirs, of Nature's music heard by possible long-tailed ancestors among the tree-tops. Yes, I thought of all these at the time— I did not make it up afterwards. I scorn the suggestion.

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'All was punctuated by the 'pitter-patter' of the rain, and the readily rising roar of the storm.

Then I heard a scream. So did Joe. We both started to our feet. I seized my revolver and Joe his stylographic pen. Thus we sallied forth full-armed. It was a wild night and we were not clad for any Arctic expedition—I less so than Joe.

The cries continued. I distinguished Nan's voice. As the clouds passed rapidly over the tree-tops and a late moon began to give us a little light, Nan's screams came louder to my ear.

'Heavens!' I thought, 'if any ruffian dares,'

I precipitated myself in the direction of the other dwelling. But it was no tramp, no wandering burglar. Insecurely fixed by hands inexperienced, the tent had swayed almost to its downfall, while our simpler bell-pattern had but creaked and swayed and laboured. Another burst and it was flat!

The cries from underneath became something desperate to listen to.

'Come on, Joe!' I cried. 'Help, help!'

'No ! No!' I heard Nan's voice clear above the hoot of the tempest, 'not Joe! Don't let him dare! Only you, Walter Gilfillan—do you hear? Tell me that you hear!'

I informed Nan that I was still blest with hearing.

Then you go to the side where the storm is coming from, and hold up the tent by the ropes till Dalna and I get— ooh, Walter Gilfillan, you are not holding it up! I did think we should have been better looked after when we came out camping—and with two men in the party!'

It seemed an eternity that these women took to 'get some things on,' with me hanging on like a steeple-jack at the end of a rope. Other ropes with

pulled-up tent-pegs battered and bombarded my calves, and from the darkness Joe's dog made rushes at the white things he saw banging about on the windy side of the big wall-tent. Well, I could hardly blame him. After all, Nan's tongue was worse.

I thought of the adage of the village carpenter who had installed us the night before.

'Aweel,' he said, with a look at the sky, 'some folk does tak' a deal o' trouble to make theirsels' uncomfortable!'

'Altogether it was a strange position for a man with the latchkey of a comfortable dwelling-house in his pocket—that is, hanging up against the tent pole where my trousers were.

'At last the girls did come out, and, instead of being grateful, Mrs. Walter Everard Gilfillan abused me like a pickpocket, as if the whole thing had been my idea, as if I had been the god of the winds and maker of the rain. So much, of course, I had expected. That was all in the day's work. But when Joe came on the scene and lent a hand at knocking in the pegs of the wall-tent in a new and firmer way, no gratitude was good enough for him, no words of thankfulness warm enough. Even when he nearly smashed my finger with the mallet, that also was wholly my fault! I did not know how to hold anything properly. I could not even be trusted to hang a picture straight. And me to bully them into camping out, and lead three trusting souls into this weary and desolate wilderness!

I did not reply. I am a married man of long standing. But I hoped Joe would take a warning.

'At last we got all taut and snug, and I was still more astonished when Joe Kane and I got inside the tent, to find that instead of taking warning, he was

proud of his performances. He even gave me advice — me, mind you, who did the first camping out ever seen in this country.

‘On the morrow, Nan was grateful, Dalna Whyte was grateful—to Joe Kane!

‘Yes, we had three solid weeks of it—never a cloud after the first night. I worked like two niggers and an Irish navy. I was steadily abused. Nan alternately mounted guard over me, and sent off the other two on the most barefaced errands. I told her that Joe would end by seeing through her. But I will not lessen the respect in which, I trust, you hold me as a busintss man and a magistrate by telling you what my wife said to me in reply.

‘Doctor, I have come home a wreck. You will find your work cut out for you to patch me up! I went to sleep in the office chair to-day from sheer tiredness. Next year I am not going camping with any more of my wife's relatives. No, I am going to change off with our office-keeper, and do the summer cleaning of the whole bank building single-handed while he goes camping out!

‘And Joe Kane and Dalna?’

‘Oh, they are married, and stopping at the Grand Hotel, Paris. No more camping out for them, either!’

‘And four times a day my wife says, ‘Didn't I tell you so from the first, Watty?’

‘And when I reply soothingly that she did, she adds, so as to curb my pride, ‘It would have happened much sooner but for your stupidity!’

‘Oh, yes, certainly, you can ask Mrs. Gilfillan about it if you like. She has another version—prettier and more romantic. But this that I have given you is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Ask any fellow who has camped out if

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it isn't?'

And Dr. Gilmour, who has camped out, says it is true. So does the lawyer from Newton Stewart.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

‘UNTO US!’

The ‘banker-man’ and Nan, his wife, came to Milford at the gayest time of the year. All the orchards ran back from the sea in a surf of blossom, mostly creamy white, above the grass, like the sea breaking on rocks of serpentine.

Nan did not immediately proceed to avenge herself, but she fought shy of discussing her old subjects of men and how to manage them. Her mood was the wholly bitter.

‘My dear,’ she would say, ‘don’t try to manage men. They are not worth the trouble!’ But both the banker and I knew that Nan had us ‘on her list.’ She was waiting her chance. She was even long in appreciating the virtues of Selina, till one day she had a touch of toothache, whereupon the ready Selina made her a poultice of herbs, which, being applied to the gums of the offending tooth, not only removed the pain, but gave the wise Nan a taste for Selina’s pharmacy.

‘A reg’lar drenchin’ with Sarcy-prilly!’ was, according to that authority, what Nan wanted. Also what Nan got. For in his own distempers your regular practitioner is particularly accessible to quack remedies.

‘If,’ said Absalom, who had watched the process of Nan’s conversion, ‘you hear anyone denouncing a person or thing with extreme or unnecessary vehemence, be sure that he is secretly attracted by that person or thing—if a sin, by that sin. Hudibras

was wrong. Men and women, particularly women, do not 'damn the sins they have no mind to.' They are too wise. They denounce what, secretly, they are inclined to. Take it from me. Every inordinate denunciation covers a secret sympathy, perhaps even an affinity!

Absalom said a lot of other things, as he always does when he has got a theory firmly on the string. Well, I let him. He has a fine head for theories, and really it was time now that he should stop being frivolous. For one thing, Nan took up a good deal of his working hours—that is, Nan and Tommy. For the versatile Tommy had evidently made an early conquest. He was not a pretty boy, nothing like so much so as the pagan Stoor. But he could look at you with two blue eyes, luxuriously framed in dirt and tear-tracks half wiped away, till you (or at least Nan) thought him the most fascinating of human beings.

I suggested to the banker that he ought to be jealous, but he only replied with intention, 'Absalom will look after them!'

I asked him why.

'Oh,' said he, negligently this time, 'I knew Abe Kenmore as a boy. I would trust him in Mahmoud's paradise—or a nunnery!'

But as for me, I was not quite so sure. You see, I knew more of the recent Absalom than he did, and the man Absalom was neither the boy Abe he had known nor yet the minister of Riddlings whose acquaintance I had made.

However, all Nan's plans for taking vengeance, at least on me, swiftly and silently ceased. After a talk with Selina it happened, but what they said to one another I do not know. However, Nan came to me

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with a face quite changed, quite motherly, all the sharpness gone clean away. I remember it was in the little orchard garden behind, which, being chiefly sand, produced nothing in particular, but always looked cool and picturesque.

Nan found me on a stone bench with a book, and hurried me back to the verandah, where she installed me in a canvas chair, put a hassock under my feet, a shawl about my shoulders, and then asked 'If I felt comfortable?'

Of course, considering Nan's kindness, I had to say 'Yes.' But I had really been ever so much more comfortable on the stone bench in the orchard. Then she crooned over me and mooned over me. You never saw such a fuss. You would have thought I was a royal princess—or ever so much more than that—so quickly did Nan change her tune.

She took charge of me at once—that is, she and Selina. I must only walk so far—I must rest on a collapsible three-legged stool that some artist had left behind. I must take Selina's washes—things so mixed and various that it is my belief Tommy Chugbridge took his biennial bath in the original brew.

Then, again, Nan took charge of Absalom. She showed the two men how to walk on tiptoe—how not to enter the house 'like so many cantering camels'—her own picturesque expression. She forbade the 'banker-man' to 'Haw-haw!' out loud within half a mile of the house, telling him where the nearest common was. He could 'Haw-he-haw' there all he wanted to, in company with others of his species. But Walter Gilfillan did not care so long as he was left under a tree with his back to a pine-stem, and one of his two daily pipes between his lips. Nan said

smoking was a filthy habit, but she permitted it as being good for the temper—only she made Watty wash out his mouth with eau-de-Cologne before coming in, under penalties too horrible to relate.

The banker communicated to me the secret history of all this. He said it was a warning never to promise unless you are in a fit state of mind. Especially in this connection he warned me against love and drink and opium.

It was owing to the first of these he had suffered the Greater Excommunication.

'One afternoon,' he said, 'when I did not yet know Nan, but greatly wanted to, I was alone in the office. It was buzzy with flies and hot, though all the windows were open. There was no business doing to speak of. So my mind got into that state when a man may commit any crime—even poetry. I did not go that length, chiefly because the word that rhymed never fitted the sense of what I wanted to say. It does not often happen in our business. You can get so far, but you are sure to be pulled up.'

Yours of the third of May Duly to hand this day,  
Contents noted—BUT, We do not see our way, To  
accord further delay, ('Tut,' cried the banker, 'TUT!'  
Most unbusinesslike, I say!)

'However,' Mr. Walter Everard Gilfillan went on, 'in making love, no doubt it is different. A man has all sorts of poetic ideas, and if he starts putting them into words, he is done for. Look at me. I had lived a quiet and unresisting life all my life. I had always paid my taxes and voted Conservative. I never had my cash out when a cashier, nor asked the price of a single ticket to the Argentine when a manager. Then Nan came along and upset everything! All my peace of mind gone in a minute! I

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wanted to kiss her, and she—(don't tell her I said so)—she encouraged me. Well, merely to have a mouth and smile like that is encouragement enough—at least, for a man like me. One night we were coming home from some fool of a play to which I never attended. I was taking Nan home to her mother, owing to a happy indisposition which prevented that lady from accompanying us. As for her brother, he had fish of his own to fry! W-e-l-l!' Here the banker sighed a long sigh, in which regret strove with pleasurable memories.

The play was called *The Man on the Housetop*, and what it was all about I'll wager Nan has forgotten as completely as I have. Her brother may remember, though I doubt it. He sat with his right shoulder fixed upon *The Man on the Housetop* the entire evening. Perhaps the lights dazzled his eyes. Perhaps also it was something at the back of the box! We got into one of these offences to morality miscalled hansoms—Edinburgh ones especially. These are either so small, the hansoms, I mean, that you are jammed all up like two postage stamps you have carried with you while playing golf in August, or else you are rattled about from side to side like peas in a pod. And the tender mercies of the Edinburgh pavements are cruel. I told the man to drive slow.

'Slower still!' I ordered a little farther on.

'That I canna,' said the cabman, 'not unless I lean him against the wall.' We were going down *Canaan Lane* at the time—near *Sam Bough's* old house—you know the place? Well, no matter. The cab lurched to one side, then banged to the other! And when she came on an even keel, I was holding Nan tight, and—well, I suppose *Abe's* forwardness has led you to

suspect what we were doing. No fault of ours, mind, on the faith of a banker! Just that infamous driver and his recklessness in Canaan Lane! Furthermore, had I not warned him?

'Well, that was all right, and after seeing Nan to the door and watching the street clear of policemen, I gave her another 'to seal the compact,' as I told her. Nan made no objections. Indeed—but there, I will tell no tales out of school—I may remark, however, that she was interested rather more than passive in the matter. No harm in all that, you say. Right! Very well! But on the morrow, think what a fool I was. I actually went round to Nan's house as soon as the bank closed, after discounting a bill for a man notoriously unsound, and almost insulting three of the bank's best customers—I saw Nan, and I started off all the silly sentiment that had been mixing itself up with 'Fraser on Banking' in my head all day.

I told her that, having once touched her sacred lips with mine—never, never again would they be defiled with so vile a weed as tobacco!' I came near saying that I would never, never, never again wash my face. But I knew that Nan would draw the line at that—as also might my directors. But the tobacco — that was my great mistake. Never to smoke again! The delicate aroma of the cigarette—that airy, fairy Lilian of tobacco—the stout cosmopolitan cigar, the dear familiar pipe—all—all were to be banished for life—and for what ? Because of a few idle words idly spoken. Thus do our follies, even more than our sins, come home to roost! (Extract from the writings of some person or persons unknown.)

'However, Nan was immensely touched by my giving up smoking. What a sacrifice! And for her

sake! Ah, there was a man worth living for! I put on her brother to tell her how I was suffering in health. She told him to mind his own business! And that if it did make me a little leaner, it would do me no harm. Nan is not a person to argue with.

Yes, true—I have in a sort of way reconquered my poor freedom. But ah, the wasted years, the smokeless, melancholy years! And, even now, it is only by making myself objectionable and ill-tempered that Nan allows me a fixed quantity per diem, and causes me to wash my teeth in eau-de-Cologne if she catches me so much as looking in a tobacconist's window. I am the scorn of my fellow-men. But does Nan care? Not she! I am a worm and no man! But Nan tramples on the worm and cuts him down to two pipes a day, or four cigarettes. Cigars are altogether contraband, because they smell the window curtains even if you smoke them out in the gardener's tool-house!

‘And all this for a few foolish words, repented of as soon as spoken. Ah, what they have cost me! I might have been a nobler man. I might have been a model husband, a better banker, a well of English undefiled to my clerks—I might even have been an Elder of the kirk, but for that fatal, fatal speech!’

And the banker bowed his head on his hands and sobbed. After all, a banker is but a man. I saw no tears, but Walter Everard was evidently disturbed in his mind.

‘Watty Gilfillan!’ cried a voice which made us both look up pretty briskly, ‘what lies are you telling Rose?’

Of course it was Nan, and I thought the banker would have been put out. But not he.

I was only telling Mrs. Kenmore a few home-

truths—giving her a few parental warnings, my dear. Our subject was the danger of hasty speech! That was all!’

Nan regarded her husband suspiciously.

‘Was that all, Rose?’ she demanded. I answered that it was, delivered somewhat at length. The banker’s eye had in it a piteous appeal, which said as plainly as possible, ‘Be my accomplice in this—a little thing and innocent—and some day I will do as much for you!’

So I stuck to it that Walter Gilfillan had only been giving me a few friendly counsels.

‘And was he not talking about me?’ she insisted. ‘I felt sure that I heard my name as I was coming up.’

Then I had a happy thought—a true one, too—which at once pleased Nan and earned me the undying gratitude of the ‘banker-man,’ as his wife called Walter Gilfillan.

‘Do you think, Nan,’ I said, ‘that he could keep your name off his tongue at any time for five consecutive minutes?’

Nan looked at her husband. The banker met her eyes squarely. There was a kindly glint in both pairs that only comes of long and intimate knowledge. Nan went up and patted her husband on the bald place on his head, which is a sine qua non for all bankers who have wish for promotion.

‘No, Watty,’ she said, gently for her, ‘I do not think you could.’

Walter Gilfillan looked so grateful that I thought he was going to use demi-semi-parental privileges towards me. But he only said—afterwards, that is:

‘If they had any such things as bricks up at the Dungeon, I should say that you were one! And if a Rose could be a Daisy, I should call you that! But,

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as it is, I will only say that I hope Abe Kenmore deserves his luck! If he doesn't, tell me—and—I will refuse to bank for him!

Very quiet and pleasant were these days. We had spent so long a time abroad that the English ways, and the very English silence—quite different from that of the Dungeon, tempted us to remain. Besides, my father, in words which I felt to be not quite his own, kept putting off our return to the Dungeon. If it did not happen to be the stone-masons, it was the plasterers, or the slaters, or the painters. These last annoyed him the worst. He called them 'paur craiturs—mere slaisterers o' coloured dirt.' So I knew his feelings must have been deeply moved. But every letter ended most unpaternally with a request for us yet farther to delay our coming.

Walter Gilfillan went back to his office work, and his wife stayed on at Milford Cottage.

'I shall find him yellow as a guinea and as cross as two sticks when I get back!' said his wife. 'You see, Watty always smokes too much when I am not there—to make up lost time, I suppose. That is what clubs are for—bad places, clubs—never let Manor belong to one. They are for men to smoke and be as bad-tempered in as they please!'

But for the present, at least, there was no fear of Absalom or 'Manor frequenting clubs—nor ever, as I told Nan, unless led away by Walter Gilfillan.

'Oh,' said Nan, 'make yourself easy about that! Watty and I have two hearts that beat as one, of course, but his takes the time from mine!'

And so the days passed, and the silence of the house deepened. Walter had established a pony and trap—which I thought a dreadful expense. But he explained that Nan could not stay on without a

rapid means of getting to the station or telegraph office if he needed her. I must say that Nan, whilst she was at Milford Cottage, manifested no such ardent desire for frequent domestic communication. She was, on the contrary, calm beyond words in the matter of her husband.

'Oh, Watty!' she would say, comfortably, 'he'll get on all right! If he does not, he won't be a great while in letting me know.'

But the pony and trap were stabled in the little outhouse near at hand, and Tommy became coachman—under the direction of my husband, who, of course, knew all about it, his former parish of Riddlings being a wide one.

Slumbrous, beautiful days they were—restful and peaceful as paradise. However early I awoke in the morning, it was only to find Absalom already on foot. Silently he had opened the window, arranged a screen to keep off the light, lest 'the winds of heaven should visit my cheek too roughly'—or I should take cold.

Then all the forenoon one or another would talk or read to me, till I fell asleep—as to my shame I sometimes did, even when they were reading Tennyson. Nan had a hammock fitted up, a supreme incentive to laziness.

In it I lay long hours listening to the calm rise and fall of Absalom's voice reading 'In Memoriam' till he made me cry. Whereupon Nan stopped him and sent him about his business. She herself tried the 'Pickwick Papers,' but the fun seemed somehow to have gone out in that dreary air and under the souging of the seaward pines.

We had to fall back upon Jane Austen, which, when feeble, I liked best of everything—'Pride and

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Prejudice' especially—also Nan's exclamations that if only— if only—she could have had 'that D'Arcy' to herself for a day or two, she would have taught him quite a number of things

I laughed low and softly, and so as softly fell asleep. I was not in bad health, because a doctor friend of Nan's said so. He came all the way from Edinburgh to see her—a tall, beautifully dressed man, with the quietest manner in the world, yet who thought nothing of riding forty miles to Southampton on his beautiful bay mare Dolly. He was company for Nan and a lifelong friend of Walter Gilfillan's. My husband and he also became great friends. But, most of all, I think Selina and Mr. Ellison pleased one another. I could see her hurrying out of the kitchen with a glass of milk and something on a plate 'for the Doctor' two or three times a day.

Then my head ached, and I felt so tired that I had to go indoors so as to rest properly. It grew hotter till about four, when, regular as the clock in these days, a thunderstorm used to come up the Solent, blotting out Farringford, greying even the nearer shore towards the Needles, and striking with a roar upon the Milford woods.

And then came the patter of rain, the gush upon the tiles, the blessed quiet, coolness, and sleep.

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And at last one great day, after the thunderstorm (as it seemed) had shaken the whole world, and me also—I awoke from a dream to see the Doctor, Nan's friend, with a little babe in his arms! And by the bedside was Nan, standing with a blanched face, and my husband kneeling at the pillow, his face

hidden.

Then Selina, the tears hopping unreprieved down her cheeks, stooping over, motioned to the doctor, and put the babe into my arms.

'What is to be the little girl's name?' she said, thinking to cheer me.

But seeing it was they who needed cheering, I whispered, with what of force was left to me, 'Why not call her 'little Emmaline Hosanna'?'

'Hosanna! Yes, if you like!' cried my tall husband, rising to his feet with his hand outstretched as if for benediction, his face shining.

Nevertheless, in spite of all, they called her Rose—the second Rose, born so far from the Wilderness—yet of it, and mine, and his.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### 'GUID AND FAITHFUL TAMSON!'

It was fifteen months since I had seen the Dungeon. Tommy and the blessed Selina had never seen it before. And, indeed, after we had passed Boat o' Rhone, Tommy Chugbridge thought so little of what he did see, that it was with difficulty he could be kept from escaping southward whenever the train slacked a little.

But the promise of a pony to ride and of being taken on the hills to see how sheep-herding was done cheered him much.

Also he knew that there was another boy at the Dungeon, a boy without any initial 'Tommy,' or 'Johnny,' or 'Charlie' to his name, a state of things which clearly ought not to be allowed. So Tommy, in the secret of his heart, promised himself a good fight with that boy. Stoor was cherishing much the same hopes with regard to the 'rank south-country Englisher'! Their only fear was that the other 'would not stand up to it.'

All this, of course, I learned afterwards. The boys knew better than to reveal their warlike intentions at the time.

The road was made, and a new waggonette (to which in winter weather a covering could be superimposed) stood outside the little station, harnessed to a pair of sturdy moor ponies. Muckle Tamson, too, was there, with Stoor at the heads of the horses. He ordered the porters out of the way at his pleasure.

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'Haud oot o' Muckle Tamson's road this day!' he cried, 'let Tamson see the bairn!'

But Selina would have nothing to do with wild-eyed, rough-haired, bearded giants who wanted 'baby' —a word till then never heard in the moor country.

'Babby,' said Muckle Tamson, scornfully, 'what is the woman claverin' aboot? Keep your 'babbies'! See haud o' Rose Gordon's bairn!'

But Mrs. Selina Chugbridge defended vehemently.

'Go and get a 'bairn,' as you call it, of your own, and don't come botherin' me!' she cried.

This alarmed Muckle Tamson, both because of the suggestion made to an unmarried man, and also because he knew that the nearest policeman was at least nine long Scots miles away. Perhaps this determined woman, with the unintelligible south English speech, had a policeman concealed in the luggage van.

But at any rate it would never do to spoil Rose Gordon's homecoming. In Galloway when a bride returns to her own home she is only called by her husband's name by courtesy on state occasions, and always with an underlying irony, as if the thing were somehow fundamentally funny.

So, though Absalom was liked and respected all through the hill country, the second Rose was only 'Rose Gordon's bairn.' 'And a pity it's a lassie!' some would add, to the great indignation, however, of all the true moorland folk.

'Laddies grow on ilka briar bush!' they would say; 'but to get a bonny lassie is no that easy. This minister-man has dune weel!'

For the proportions of the sexes are reversed in high-lying districts. The lassies seem to know

beforehand that they will have to do a boy's work and more. And so, to avoid complications, they get themselves born boys, and so 'wear the breeks' from the beginning.

It was a wonderful drive up among the mountains. The hills which had seemed like bits of cloud from the station now kept dropping into their proper places and proportions. The scents came gladsomely from the heather not yet in bloom. Last and greatest sight of all was the new road, on which so much money and labour had been spent, on either side all the pageant of the moorland. There were scents of childhood that made me cry, that of the 'gall' or bog-myrtle, chief of all; wonderful sights, too, there were, the most joyous of these, Muckle Tamson, in his pride of place, giving the reins to Stoor, and jumping down in order to show off some wonderful feat of engineering.

'My ain idea, Miss Rose, my very ain!' he would cry. 'The silly road-makin' fowk kenned nocht about the hills and the winter storms up here. But Muckle Tamson had biggit sheep-rees in his day, and he kenned! Aye, he kenned, baith how to cairry aff the water and how to tak' a turn about the green bogs. But for him yon gentry that work by the day wad hae been fillin' up a' the holes atween here an' Australly!'

Both Absalom and I urged our Jehu on, telling him that Henry Gordon would be wearying, and that perhaps he might even be uneasy lest some evil had befallen. But this latter suggestion Muckle Tamson received with scorn.

'What,' he cried, 'wi' Muckle Tamson on the box-seat? Na, na! Henry Gordon kens better!'

All the same, finally, and after many pauses, we

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came in sight of the house of the Dungeon. My heart gave a great leap at the sight. I wished Nan had been there to understand, because she, too, was born in the purple, that is with the love of the heather in her veins. But she had left us at Carlisle to pursue her way Edinburgh-wards to see what that banker-man was about.

She quitted us with the injunction to behave, and the threat that as she had wasted too much time on us already, for the future we might 'e'en drie our ain weird.'

At the door of the Dungeon my father came towards us, limping less than I had seen him for many a day. He did not kiss me. He did not even shake hands. All his eyes were for the bairn, the thrice-desired bairn. Tamson, knowing the difficulty of detaching the child from Selina, lifted the pair down bodily from the waggonette. He set Selina on an open-air settle, or garden-seat, he had made of bog-oak. She was still in the seated attitude which she had occupied in the 'machine.' Selina was surprised, and looked with wide eyes of astonishment at the giant who did marvels so easily. Vainly Tommy kicked his shins for lack of respect to his mother. Muckle Tamson did not notice. He was looking at the babe laid in Henry Gordon's arms, for, most strange to say, of her own accord Selina had given Rose the Second to her grandfather. Now she lay asleep, her little pink hands clutched tight on the fairy gold of the unseen world out of which she had come.

And Henry Gordon, his beard sweeping so low that he made Rose's little tip-tilted nose wrinkle, pronounced the sacramental house-greeting of Abraham and Edward Irving, 'The Lord bless thee

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and keep thee, the Lord make the Light of his Countenance to shine upon thee and give thee Peace!’

Everyone, except Muckle Tamson, said ‘Amen.’ But he said, apostrophising himself, ‘Tamson, that’s what ye should hae said at the station had ye no been, as ye are, a mere muckle hulkin’ brute! There’s for ye, Tamson!’

Then all of us went in.

What was my astonishment (and Absalom’s triumph) to find all the chambers duly arranged, all in order, all a present from my husband. His money, Nan Gilfillan’s taste, Muckle Tamson’s power of language, had chosen and bought in Edinburgh, had delivered at New Galloway, from whence by dint of whip, tug of horse, and force of expletive they had been brought safe to the Dungeon, without so much as the leg of a chair being damaged.

‘There was, hoosomever, a Balmaclellan carter that came near gettin’ his neck broke!’ commented Muckle Tamson, gravely, after the tales of the perils he had passed on the New Road. ‘Lucky it was for him that I hadna my loupin’-pole! As it was, I had only my bare knuckles to argue wi!’

And these indeed would have convinced most people.

There were not so many at our home-coming as at our way-going. Of course, this time no invitations had been issued. Only the herds and neighbourly farmer folk had come of their own accord to give us welcome back again. Yet it seemed that I missed no one except Will Gillespie, of whom I had hardly thought, since the moment he had tried to spoil our wedding trip by thrusting the old knotted hair ring of our babydom into my hand. But when I asked

Marion McClintock, she said that Willie had gone a trifle 'queer' since our departure. He would walk for hours by the burnside talking to himself. Moreover, he had not come near the house, even to see it when it was finished, a capital crime in the McClintock eyes.

There was no scarcity of building land up at the Dungeon, so the house was not encumbered with many staircases, except above the old part. It was mostly long and low and rambling. Tamson had planted young fir-trees all about, chiefly Scots fir and larch, in such a manner as to preserve the view and yet be in time a shelter from the north and east, our coldest winds among the hills.

All this, I fear, will not interest any but housewives and those who have set up a home for themselves for the first time. My father insisted on having his own separate establishment. His meals were to be taken at the old long oak table, at which he was wont to preside, his bonnet on his head, taking it off to say grace. Lower down were all the herds and underlings in their order, with Muckle Tamson at the foot as the dispenser of law and order, and Elizabeth and Marion McClintock joint dispensers of meats and drinks.

But with us in the new house Selina reigned supreme. We offered to find her a 'lass' for the odd jobs. But this Selina declined emphatically. Like Mr. Gladstone, when, after 1880, he undertook (practically) all offices of State, answered all questions, made all speeches, and was in his sole person the Government of the country, Mrs. Selina Chugbridge 'hated to see things made a hash of. She would rather do them herself.'

Which was also, no doubt, the statesman's idea.

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As Tommy had foreseen, he began by a battle with Stoor, in which, for the first three rounds (time kept by Muckle Tamson, and the collies prevented from assisting) Stoor wiped the surface of the country with Tommy. But after the third the science of the Southlander, learned behind the Forest of Bere Arms at Beanford, evened things up, and the battle-game ended in friendly fashion 'all square.' After this little necessary blood-letting, Stoor and Tommy showed each other round, Tommy teaching Stoor how to ride, and Stoor initiating Tommy into the moorland lore of ewe and lamb and dog, sheep-washing and clipping. But Tommy, for all that he had never seen a hill in his life, knew more about the birds and wild things of the Dungeon than did Stoor.

They fought most days, it is true, but they loved each other like brothers. Stoor made Tommy wash himself for very shame, and Tommy cured Stoor of his habit of sleeping with the dogs.

As for Absalom, he had the boundaries to ride. He gained a new health and perhaps also some small pelf by putting himself under Muckle Tamson, and visiting all his possessions, wide, but not particularly valuable, save for the sheep that wandered every way athwart them. For me, Rosa Secunda took up all the time that Selina would allow me. In a way it was difficult, even hard.

'My baby!' said Selina. And I dared not contradict her, though I had reason to believe the contrary. But as to her capacities and experience, there was always Tommy Chugbridge to cast in my teeth. What did I know about babies? And what did Selina not know, that Tommy Chugbridge could teach her?

I had in consequence but a limited responsibility

in the Rose of the Wilderness—Number Two. Selina cooked on the new range. She informed Muckle Tamson when she would need more coals to cook with. We loved the smell of peat in the other rooms, but Selina would make no terms with it in the kitchen. And Muckle Tamson obeyed, driving them all the way from the station. Selina washed with fixed tubs, Conklingville Washers from the Woodwork Company, and Sundown Soap. But at all times she had little Rose with her in case she should cry, also in order that she might be able to make up her bottles promptly according to the Selinian pharmacopoeia. When I did this, Selina declared that the child took 'hiccoughies,' a trouble from which, as it appeared, the infancy of Tommy Chugbridge had been singularly free.

Conclusion—I had better leave the filling of baby's bottles to the expert!

However, the time came when Selina had something to think about on her own account. It was a day of early summer, as I remember, when every male thing, including the collies, was on the hills; only my father remained in his part of the house deep in a book. Absalom had been absent since early morning.

I had been extruded from the kitchen, on the plea that I talked and distracted baby. So Selina remained alone, with the child in her cradle. Selina was also baking, doing some fine ironing, looking to the dinner, and a few odds and ends like that, each ordinarily capable of taking all a grown person's time. But Selina moved among these things as if she merely stage-managed them, and they did the rest themselves.

Suddenly I heard a voice outside which I thought

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I knew—I mean that I had heard before. Soft, a little drawling, not with the clanging consonants and broad gusty vowels of Galloway. No, it could not be. It was impossible. And yet, I never was mistaken before in a voice.

Could it be the father of little Emmaline Hosanna?

I went to the balcony—the only one in all the Wilderness—large enough for three chairs to be set out upon it at a pinch. I looked out and over.

Yes, there, upon the step of the back-door, stood the man who had thrown the pork-pie loaf at me in the lobby of Milford Cottage kitchen. His aspect was now lowering and fierce. Before him stood Selina, with—yes—with little Rose in her arms.

‘So I have found you,’ he was saying. ‘Good morning, wife! A happy New Year to you, Seliny. You did not look for to see Chugbridge, A.B., here to claim his lawful wife so soon—or at least her wages, did you? No? Answer me, Seliny!’

But all that Selina found to say was merely, ‘How... how...’ in a kind of hoarse whisper. The man laughed.

‘I knew you had gone with them folk. I followed. I got the address at the post-office, by saying I had something to send to you that you had lost. So I had—me, me, Chugbridge, A.B. And I want my lawful money!’

‘Not a farthing,’ cried Selina, finding her voice; ‘you are a scoundrel—a drunkard.’

‘Well, then,’ said Chugbridge, ‘I will take the baby; that will always help me on my way. Nothing like carting round a kid for greenin’ the softs!’

And in a second he had Rose—our little Rose—in his arms, and was making off down the avenue (if

such it could be called), which, bordered by a few spindling pines, extended out as far as the New Road and the heather.

I screamed wildly and ran. Henry Gordon started from his chair, and by a sort of instinct took down his gun. But he could not run and, besides, he might have shot the child.

All had happened, as it were, whilst one cracks finger and thumb together. Chugbridge had evidently occupied some point of vantage during the night and morning. He had spied. He had seen the men go off to the hills. What his idea was it is hard to say; ransom, or at least blackmail, in some shape or form, that without a doubt.

But though he might have succeeded well enough on the levels of Sussex, where the towns of the seaboard almost lean one against another, it was a quite different thing up on the Dungeon.

He did not know that there the old desperate blood survived, or that in doing what he did, even with the half-excuse of a gin-soaked brain, he was running the danger of his life. He had emerged upon the New Road; but, watching from afar behind the old March Dyke, Muckle Tamson saw a man running.

Something, therefore, was not right. Why should a man run on the Dungeon? The New Road had not been made in the sweat of Tamson's brow and the language of his mouth for such as this outlander to run races upon.

Tamson let the dogs go, encouraging them with voice and example. And then there was seen on the face of the Dungeon such a chase as told on winter evenings, has become epic. Tamson had been over by the Cooran looking for stray sheep, and naturally

he had taken Nan Gilfillan's leaping-pole with him. It must have been an awful sight for the father of little Emmaline Hosanna, who had come so far to blackmail his deserted wife. Two dogs, rough and huge, tearing after him, and behind them this immense, ill-defined bulk that ran a few steps and then rose in the air, making immense leaps, and coming straight across water and morass to cut him off.

Chugbridge, A.B., thought that his best chance was to stand close by one of the darksome 'lanes' that seam the Wilderness.

'Come an inch nearer,' he cried, 'and I'll throw the child into the water!'

'Throw awa',' shouted Muckle Tamson, eating up the moorland in twenty-foot strides; 'I will get her oot; but the dogs will tear you to bits!'

Chugbridge thought better of it. He surrendered at discretion.

Selina was soon on the spot, and to her Muckle Tamson confided the babe.

'Noo,' said Tamson, in a solemn voice, 'prepare to meet thy deevil! Tamson is gaun to mell ye!'

In a broken voice Selina besought, 'Let him go—he was my husband!'

Muckle Tamson stood in amazement, his leaping-pole poised to strike, the man instinctively guarding his head with a right arm that would inevitably have been broken at the first blow.

'That!' he cried. 'Your man! Never!'

More closely Selina clasped Rose, recovered from such great danger.

'He is my husband,' she said, 'do him no harm; but tell him never to come back again.'

Muckle Tamson nodded.

## ROSE OF THE WILDERNESS

'If it werena for the hangman in Kirkcudbright, I wad gie him a bit o' a convoy. As it is (he put his hand into his pocket), 'there,' he said, 'A 'tak' that half-sovereign and obleege the warl' and your puir wife by drinkin' yoursel' to death! And the sooner the better! But if ever ye put a nose past the Nick o' Loch Dee, ye shall never see the morrow's morn; no, in spite o' a' the judges, the pollissmen, and e'en the hangman in Scotland! Deed,' he added thoughtfully, 'I ken yae judge that farms doon by Ardwall, that nicht no only let me aff for riddin' the halesome earth o' siccan scum, but wad say, like the words on my tombstane, 'Well dune, guid an' faithfu' Tamson!' Aye, that wad he! Yon's the richt buirdly kind o' a man to be a Lord o' Assize! Noo, ye are warned; tak' the road, my man, and smertly!'

And so, as it happened, the second Rose of the Wilderness came very near to being named in all good faith 'Little Emmaline Hosanna.'

But as for Chugbridge, A.B., his end was not yet.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

### MUCKLE TAMSON'S FORGIVENESS

After the departure of Chugbridge, A.B., Muckle Tamson brooded. He came in sooner off the hill to see that all went well with the house, with me, with Rose the Second, and with her nurse Selina. At times I caught Muckle Tamson looking at Selina a little wistfully. I think he was sorry that he had not 'melled' the rascal whose name she bore on the spot, buried him in some moss-hole, and taken his chance of the fine judge, him that farms doon about Ardwall!

But this does not mean that there was more than a certain wistfulness for an opportunity lost in the mind of Muckle Tamson. By nature he would not have set his foot upon a worm, and when he 'melled' anyone, it was as completely in the cause of justice as if he wore her Majesty's blue coat with silver buttons.

I think I said that Selina was a buxom woman, even down in the Forest of Bere. But how much more so now, after the fresh mountain breezes had begun to blow about her, and she felt, or thought she felt, the great still security of the Dungeon settle about her spirit.

But the sudden apparition of Chugbridge unsettled her. She feared now to let little Rose out of her sight. I think she went armed with a kitchen knife, and every Saturday, when the Cairn Edward Weekly Intelligencer arrived at the Dungeon, she scanned the local columns (especially the list of

petty crimes) with something like hope.

In the chronicles of the Sheriff's Court of Kirkcudbright she read how Peterson Grier had received three months 'without the option' for unprovoked assault; how Hab Dabson, supposed to come from the border country, had stolen three hens from the poultry yard of the Reverend James Pitbye, M.A., Easyosy Manse, to the great grief of the wife of the latter. (Fifteen days.)

But the name she looked for she did not find, and Selina Chugbridge waxed thin and her rosy cheeks grew 'peaked' with much looking to the south. There was no word of Chugbridge, A.B; no, not in the police news of three counties.

Tamson brought suggestions, and gathered what news he could. But he felt he was fighting against something that he could not 'mell.' Leaping-poles and fists were of no avail when it comes to quenching the sorrow and allaying the constant fears of a woman.

'Oh, if I had only 'melled' him where he stood,' he groaned, 'and then gane quately to my Lord and explained things, I dinna believe He wad hae telled on Tamson!'

And as for me, I do not believe it either.

For days Muckle Tamson moved apart. There was a cloud on his brow—not of thunder, but of thought. I never saw a man spend more actual physical energy on the process of thinking than Tamson. The sweat pearly on his brow as he wrestled with each idea. It was perhaps thus that Adam earned his first day's bread after 'the woman' had got him turned out of Eden. 'And,' says Nan, 'lucky for everybody that she did! For the lazy hulk would have been quite content to moon about inside, doing nothing

all his days!

To call the progenitor of all our race 'a lazy hulk.' No one but Nan Gilfillan would have dreamed of that. So let her bear the blame. I said to Nan, 'What would you say if you met Adam in the hereafter?' Nan tossed her head, and intimated that she at least would know exactly how to manage him.

'He would have made a fine banker, I can see that,' she said; 'they let you taste one per cent, of the fruit to see it isn't poisoned, and then keep all the rest for themselves! But at least Eve made a decent gardener out of Adam when she got him where he had to work for a living.'

It was after the lambs had been weaned from their mothers that the trouble began. A plaintive bleating was heard from hill to hill; Ramah calling for her children and refusing to be comforted, because, though she could hear them, she could not reach them.

But in spite of all care lambs began to disappear from the Harkness, the Buss, the Dhuloch, and other administrative ovine departments.

Sometimes these would be found sunk deep in some moss-hole, their throats cut, the red drops mingling with the dull Vandyke brown and sepia of the peaty water. But in all this no plan, no reason, no attempt at sale, no lifting of fleeces—vengeance, and the act of a madman, were all we could make of it.

To me such cruelty took away that great wide gladness which had always made the peace of the Dungeon. For the first time since I had had my baby (that is to say, Selina's) I felt lonely. But I said nothing to Absalom, knowing that he had enough on his mind. As for Muckle Tamson, his intentions were

plainly murderous.

To the shepherd of sheep his own and his neighbour's flocks are sacred. No wonder that till quite recently the sin of sheep-stealing was wiped out, even judicially, in blood of the culprit.

'To think,' said Tamson, 'only to think that there exists sic a man. Certes, but if a kind Providence wad only let Muckle Tamson catch him at the job, aweel, Tamson wad rebuke him!'

But it was generally believed in the uplands that this was an under-statement of the case. And as for me, I saw an awful Red Judge on the bench of High Justiciary, putting on a black cocked hat of antique pattern which he had smuggled in under his robes, and the awful words of his peroration, 'This is pronounced for doom'

I begged Muckle Tamson, even if he caught the evil-doer, to do him no harm. He could not possibly be responsible.'

'Neither wad I, neither wad I!' cried Tamson; 'responsible,' quo she—do ye think I wad be responsible for crackin' the croon o' a man that wad cut the thrapples o' his neighbour's yowes, no to speak o' the bit lambs?'

I pointed out certain texts in Scripture which seemed to me to bear upon the case.

'Aye, aye, ow aye!' said Tamson, critically, 'Vengeance is His,' nae doot. But the bill is drawn at ower lang a date! Tamson will attend to the current accoot!'

And indeed it would have been a bad day and a worse night for the sheep-slayer had Tamson got him in his present mood. Absalom looked harassed and anxious. He had known what it was to stand the hatred of a man like the Riddling's pig-dealer.

But that at least was open and overt.

‘Why does hatred pursue us?’ he asked me one day. ‘After all, have I done wrong? Yes, perhaps I have done wrong in quitting my parish. Perhaps, having put my hand to the plough, I sinned in looking back! But have I? No, I have only looked forward, and, the Lord be my witness, I do more good to these scattered souls up here on the Wilderness than ever I did in the parish of Riddlings.’

Nevertheless Absalom bethought himself, and resolved, with the approbation of the minister of the parish, to hold a service every Sabbath day, at four o'clock in summer and two in winter, for the herds and hill folk of the neighbourhood. It was like the sudden shining of a light upon the land.

‘I have been thinking overly much of a few sheep— of the material loss, I mean,’ he said to me one night, as we lay awake talking, ‘now every Sabbath day I have at least a chance of speaking to their hearts. Words carry far on the moorland, and mayhap a chance word may change the heart.’

Indeed, the new barn of the Dungeon had apparently been erected with some such purpose at the back of my husband's head. At least, it was twenty times too big for our scanty harvest, mere patches and gussets of arable land. The new barn was seated comfortably enough with school benches, brought from Edinburgh by rail and the New Road. A table with a decent white cloth and a bible completed Absalom's simple equipment.

On the first Sabbath of the regular service there was a great audience—that is, for the Wilderness. Men of leathern skin, tanned with wind and sun, their dogs in attendance, gathered in the big new

## ROSE OF THE WILDERNESS

empty barn where never yet had there been a sheaf laid. There were skylights above in the roof, and the day was so dreamy and warm that the two great doors were also open. Bumblebees boomed out and in, looking at the faces of the congregation and passing away with a whirling 'woof' of dissatisfaction.

It was a day solemn and sweet. The peculiar peace seemed to have come back to the Dungeon. For once I had Rose in my arms and she was quiet with me. Selina, busied with her pots and pans, almost permitted me to feel that I was a mother. But often and often during the service she looked in at the door cautiously, ready to come to the assistance of my inexperience had the need arisen.

The grave lift of 'Kilmarnock' struck the keynote, scarcely marred by the assistance of a collie under the seats, a dog with an undeveloped sense of music, or perhaps one too fine. In any case, the offender was quickly kicked into silence, or, if he persisted, outside, where he sat disconsolate upon a knoll and wondered what kept his master from the hill and the sheep on such a day.

Absalom gave out his text.

'Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it!'

'Friends,' he said, 'I have done wrong. I have built me a house. I sat down and counted the cost. I have satisfied the earthly dues, but I have never yet dedicated it to the Lord, for me and my children; for those who are here and for those that may come after us!

'But for this forgetfulness, as for every backsliding, I am stricken in conscience, the conscience which is God speaking within us!

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'But I must first speak of recent events, memorable to all here present.

'It may be that unwittingly I have done some of you an injury, if so, I knew it not. But if so, I will make amends! I bid you tell me.'

And, beginning with Henry Gordon, he asked my father if ever he, Absalom Kenmore, had done him any injury or hurt—in thought, word, or deed ?

And my father, rising in the midst, his hair now white as the driven snow, tremulously lifted up his hand and answered, 'The good man is not yet perished off the earth, his steps are ordered by the Lord. Such I have found Absalom Kenmore, to whom as a proof I have given my daughter.'

And then my husband asked each of them, if they had aught against him, to declare it there before that little church gathered out of a great and weary Wilderness.

All denied, but as the question came nearer to Will Gillespie I could see him shift his seat, and begin to turn his bonnet between his fingers. Suddenly he started up and made for the door. Muckle Tamson barred it.

'Bide and answer your question like the lave!' he said, as if it had been the Shorter Catechism of our youth that Absalom was asking them.

And Will Gillespie had perforce to bide till his turn came.

Now there was a spirit of anger, perhaps also of madness, working in him. For when my husband asked him if he had aught against him or his house, he shook all over like a leaf dithering on an autumnal gossamer.

'Wrong!' he cried, thrusting out his clenched fist at Absalom, 'aye, the greatest wrong!'

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'This man who calls himself a minister, is a thief,' he shouted, in the great silence which followed. 'He stole from me the love of Rose Gordon. We were wedded to each other by the burnside long ago, when she was little more than three spans high. I have loved her ever since. I love her now, and I shall die loving her. Wrong? Harm? Evil-doing? What are they but words? Is there any wrong which I could do this man so great by the hundredth part as the ill he has done to me?'

'I have done you no wrong,' said Absalom, calmly, 'as a child my wife played with you on the meadows. As a girl and a woman she not only never loved you, but she told you plainly that she never could love you, years and years before she ever heard my name!'

'Liar! Liar!' cried poor Will Gillespie, striving to unclasp a knife and reach Absalom Kenmore. 'Yes, I will do you what harm I can. It was I who killed your sheep. I would kill you. I would kill the child! Aaah—let me go, father—hands off there, you others. I have nothing against you, only against Absalom Kenmore!'

For his aged father had risen from among the people to try and lead him away.

But Muckle Tamson still barred the way.

'Oh,' he said, 'it was you, was it, that killed oor bits o' yowes and their bonny lambs? It was you that wad do the like to the verra bairn that never did you a harm.'

'It did — it has!' cried the madman; 'was it not born to these two?'

And his voice rose to a shriek.

Tamson caught him by the collar, but the madman tore out the piece with a jerk, and with the

haft of his unopened knife he sent Tamson's head against the wall, broke from the barn, and ran across the moor in the direction of the Nick of Dee.

In a moment the herds were all out after him, buzzing like an angry swarm of bees. Their first sacred day with a minister to themselves was spoilt, or so they thought. Of course they could have pulled the fugitive down with dogs. But Absalom forbade them sternly.

'The Lord hath touched him,' he said, 'he is mad. Let it not be said that on a Sabbath day on the mountains of the Dungeon they hunted a man with dogs!'

His father and some of his relatives went after poor Will Gillespie, but upon the invitation of Absalom the rest entered within and took again their places in the barn.

'Let not the wrath of man hinder the praise of God!' he said. 'That also shall praise him, according to the promise.'

And he proceeded calmly to give out his text again—

'Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it!'

'This day the finger of God hath been pointed,' he said, 'first at myself for my forgetfulness, and mayhap because I have placed the creature before the Creator. And again the second time it has been pointed at a poor man, in whom, as in Saul, the anger of jealousy wrought bitterly. Yet, be not offended because of this, friends. As Saul was the chosen of God, so in the end may he be who went from us a little while ago in wrath.'

But under his breath Muckle Tamson, whose religion was of a more primitive sort, spat blood by

the barn wall, from the wound where the deer-horn haft of the knife had come in contact with his upper lip, and growled—

‘Aye, aye, vengeance or no vengeance, the lang Scripture words are right eneough for Maister Kenmore. They are his duty, maybe. But when Muckle Tamson catches Wull Gillespie—hech— but it will be a sair day for his front teeth!’

However, neither Tamson nor his father and cousins could come up with him, even when mounted on the best moor ponies in the Dungeon stable. He broke away and escaped out of their hands. When they thought they had him most securely cornered between the Long Loch and the Dungeon face which rises above steeply as a precipice, yet he went up it as a sailor climbs a mast, and disappeared amid the mists that girdle the trackless granite wastes of Enoch.

Meanwhile Absalom went on with his little sermon. He spoke of God's house on earth—God's house which is the heart of a man—the edifice that is never completed till he lays himself down in the Everlasting Arms which men call Death. Of these he spoke long and fervently, swaying the people beneath him like wind among growing corn.

And as for me, I wept with little Rose in my arms, partly because of the sound of Absalom's voice, and partly because of pity for poor Will Gillespie, wandering out there on the bare hills with murder in his heart.

Then we all rose for the benediction.

But instead Absalom said, ‘First let us pray for those who are yet in the great tribulation, whose souls know no peace!’

And all present knew well that he meant Will

Gillespie.

Just then little Rose wept aloud on my bosom, and my husband lifted up his hand and laid it on Rose's head, because I stood close beside him at the high table.

'The babe prays for him, too, and perhaps with more effect than our petitions!' And he quoted a text very solemnly: 'Their angels do always behold the face of God.'

'She is nearer to the Throne than we,' he said; 'let all the people say, 'Amen.'"

And the shepherds filed out silently from the first service in the barn of the Dungeon, saying 'Amen' in their hearts; while above, on the cliffs of Enoch, poor Will, tracked like a wolf, rent by the evil spirit within him, cursing the day he was born, watched the scattering of those who had worshipped God, as it were, in His newly-consecrated house of the Dungeon.

But already Muckle Tamson, leaping-pole in hand, was creeping among the scattered rocks and six-foot heather, nearer and nearer to the unconscious sentinel.

For Tamson held by the Elder Law, the law of Moses and of all law-givers before the coming of the carpenter's son—of tooth and claw and give and take.

'I'll learn Wull Gillespie,' he growled, 'to let oor sheep alane, the cowardly hound. Gin he had wanted plain fechtin', wadna Muckle Tamson hae gied him his belly full o't ony day o' the week? Forgiveness! says Absalom Kenmore! Ow aye, Tamson will forgie him when he has 'melled' him till he doesna ken his richt hand frae his left.'

And thus was my husband's first moorland

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sermon thrown away on at least one member of his congregation.

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

ABSALOM'S LOCUM TENENS

Not often does anything disturb the quiet of the Wilderness. The news, carried from farm-town to farm-town, that John Macmillan of the Bongill has had one of his best lambs drowned in the Dhu Loch, that his wife has got her a new carpet to her parlour floor, or that the herd of the Merrick has been seen going over the hill in the direction of Glencaird with obvious designs of calling upon the bonny servant lassies there—such items suffice to keep the ball of gossip rolling from the Glints of Dromure to the Loch of Cree, just as satisfactorily as 'Mayfair Echoes' in a London society weekly.

But something really tragic stirs the moor-folk in quite a different way. Two men on the hills—one a madman, and the other a dangerous Vagrant—changed at once the prospect of purple slopes and blue peaks in the Lands of the Black-faced Sheep.

Visiting was almost at a stand-still between farm and farm. Herds took the hill in couples. A few bold fellows who could be trusted, helped Absalom and Muckle Tamson with the Dungeon and the neighbouring farms. Nevertheless, in spite of all, we lost sheep—always killed in the same way, with intentional cruelty, always sunk in some moss-hole—sure token that the madman was still spying upon us.

Selina also received letters of threatening. She must send money to Chugbridge—money, and yet more money—on pain of death, not only to herself,

but to those she served. It was, in fact, a terrible summer in the hill country. Some blamed it on the comet or the prevalence of sunspots, and some said it was the Judgment of God upon pride and vainglory—the pride being Absalom's in me, the vainglory the gowns he had insisted on buying for me in Paris—the fame and jealousy of which filled the land.

But whatever the cause, the moor-folk went in fear, and our sheep disappeared one by one, sometimes two in a night. Muckle Tamson would find one all warm and gasping, turning up meek eyes of protest against the cruelty of men. And there is little doubt that, had Tamson caught the author of the deed at such a moment, he would have given him short shrift, and but little time to bid the world adieu.

Happily, Muckle Tamson was always just a little too late. He could only stand and grip his pole—yes, and sometimes weep, partly with pity but mostly with rage—rage at his own impotence! He would threaten the dogs Tweed and Tusker for not laying him on the track of the malefactor. But then, again, he would remember that Will Gillespie had been a 'herd' like himself, and so no collie on all the Dungeon would touch him.

But such a state of things could not last for ever. It put too great a strain on all of us. Muckle Tamson lost sleep and weight promenading the hills, with, on his face (as it were) the shadow of death.

It was a Sabbath morn when the end came, yet another of them, for in that sad and terrible year events seemed to happen all contrariwise. Ill things appeared to take a pleasure in breaking the peace of the holy day. The Spirit of Darkness had been

permitted a breathing time in the upper air, and he was making the most of his time, ere he went back to his prison-house to be bound for another thousand years. That, at least, is what Henry Gordon said, and he knew better than most. My husband said nothing, but I noticed that he spent longer than usual at his prayers.

Indeed, he had remained in the chamber which was ours, or rather in the little garret above, where he kept most part of his books. I did not interrupt him. He was, I knew, preparing for the service at four in the afternoon. I had taken him up his meagre breakfast of tea and toast, and then left him alone with his Bible and a few slips of paper. I remember that I turned once at the door to assure myself that all was well and that he needed nothing.

I descended the stairs as quietly as I had come. I could hear Selina hushing the little Rosa Secunda in the kitchen, with information to the effect that

‘Toffee-drops for baby-love, She had them in her hand.’ a clear and manifest mis-statement, because I could hear her grinding at the coffee-mill with her unoccupied arm. Rosa Secunda, who had awakened early, was blinking off again to sleep to the drowsy ‘sooth’ of that melody. I went to the door to look out at the wide landscape simmering in the morning sun. The mist was rising blue from the hollows, I remember, and lingering in dissolving wreaths about the scarps of the Dungeon and shrouding for a brief ten minutes the Spear of the Merrick itself.

Suddenly before me, as if risen from the ground, stood up Will Gillespie, his clothes in tatters, his hair tossed, his face stained with the peaty juices of the marsh.

He held a knife in his hand, with something

stained dark upon it towards the haft.

Almost I had fainted away at the sight, but I knew that if I did so there was nothing to hinder him from rushing upstairs and surprising Absalom upon his knees.

So somehow I found strength to speak.

'What are you doing there, Will Gillespie?'

He laughed a wild laugh of triumph, holding the knife forward for me to see.

'A good day to you, widow!' he cried. 'I have slain the interloper. Look—this is his blood. Nothing shall keep you from me now! Will Gillespie has kept his promise. The Black Water of Dee has his body, and I have had my vengeance upon Jacob the Supplanter—on the man called Absalom Kenmore!'

I did not know what to reply. Could it be that he had climbed up to our garret chamber, a thief and a murderer in the open day?

'And now for the brat,' he whispered, 'then all will be finished, you shall be mine—all of you to me alone!'

I could hear from the kitchen the clatter of tinware and the murmur of Selina:

'Apricocks and lay locks, Gooseberry and peach,  
And Babsom with the blue eyes Shall tell me  
which— which?'

A moment longer I kept the murderer at bay. He put out one hand to seize me by the shoulder, but I thrust it off, and lifted up my voice. I do not know what I said. But happily Tamson heard—Tamson, who had not yet taken the hills, as was his custom early every morning, except that of the Sabbath, strode across the straw-covered square. He came from the barn. Doubtless he had been putting it to rights for the afternoon service.

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At any rate, Tamson was there. I gave a great gasp of thankfulness when I saw him.

'Oh, He has killed Absalom,' I cried, and as I sank down, I saw the madman turn, lithe as a trapped fox. He rushed at Tamson. But the big man, equally adroit, guarded with his leaping-pole, then struck sideways. Something bright rose, glittering in the air—Will Gillespie's knife, struck from his hand.

Then I heard steps on the stair and Absalom came down, his face pale, to find out why I had cried, and to take me in his arms. He raised me up, and commanded Tamson to stop. The giant already had the leaping-pole raised again. He had smitten once already, dully, sufficiently, a blow that would have felled an ox. Will Gillespie lay stretched on his face, his arm turned under him like a broken branch. He was pitiful to see. Yet Tamson, mindful of the slain ewes, the pride of his heart, and the quaint, innocent, black-faced lambs he had seen mutilated in the moss-holes, was loath to let his prey go. The author of all was under his hand, and he had to be called off, reluctant and growling as a dog from his kill.

Absalom took me upstairs. For what followed was (so they said afterwards) no sight for women to see. First of all they brought him to, making his feet secure, and Absalom, who was learned in such things, binding his broken arm. Then they sent for his poor father, to whom Absalom and Henry Gordon told all that had happened. It followed as a matter of course that Will must be taken all the way to the great asylum at Dumfries. Absalom and his father went with him—yes, though it was the Sabbath day, and relays of horses would be needed at least twice on the road. It was judged better that

Muckle Tamson should bide. Will Gillespie was rambling in his speech when they yoked the ponies to the waggonette to take him away, and Tamson's presence might still more anger him.

'What do you want here?' he said to my husband, 'you, Absalom Kenmore, are dead. Ghosts do not walk so soon—after four-and-twenty hours maybe. But it was at midnight that I killed you with this knife—the knife I had kept for you, sharpening it each day a little keener, ever since Yon Day of the marriage. Man, I slew ye yestreen when the moon was rising late. By the Fords o' the Dee they will find your body. Get away, get away! For now there is nothing but a ghost between me and Rose!'

He made a motion with his bandaged arm which ended in a scream.

'Begone, ghost!' he cried.

Yet Absalom counted it his duty to go all the way to the Crichton Institution with him, because the old man, Will's father, was feeble and of a poor understanding. Ere he went, however, he put a written sermon into my hand.

'Rose,' he said, 'I leave you in my place today. Be strong! You know my handwriting, and can read the sermon.'

'Not to the congregation?' I said, shrinking back. For to a moorland trained girl the public offices of religion seem peculiarly sacred.

'As I have done all for you, do this for me today, Rose. Speak for me!'

'But the prayers?' I cried, almost in agony, 'shall I read them too?'

'Read the prayers—never!' he said, with a flash of his old Presbyterian severity. 'If the Spirit be not given you, then perhaps Henry Gordon will offer up

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a prayer! If both fail you, it is better to be silent.'

And so, since they needed him without, he left me. I went to my father. But already the people of the house—McClintocks and others—had been over long-tongued. He knew all already. The thought of blood and death about his quiet house weakened him still more. He lay back on his bed, and said, 'Rose, Rose, surely there is a curse upon us!'

'Well, then,' I answered him, I own, a little sharply, thinking that he was blaming Absalom, 'let us bear it among us. Say nothing to the people, and let us keep even the shadow of it from falling upon our little Rose!'

'Aye, aye,' he said, and he recited his favourite Aaronic benediction as if she had been present—'The Lord bless her and keep her!'

'Yes, father,' said I, 'but meantime we must all do our parts!'

I could easily see, however, that whatever was to be done that day I must do by myself. My father would afford no help. He was greatly shattered, and indeed I bade the McClintock lassies serve his meals in his own chamber, for fear of what some herd or 'hefter' might blunder out before him, to alarm him still more.

News spreads rapidly, though often incorrectly, across the Wilderness, and the news ran from hillside to hill-side athwart great gulfs of air. Something had happened at the Dungeon! So much was known.

At first it was simply a vague rumour of disaster, but it was quickly magnified into something definite—assault, death, MURDER!

Murder, the word, terrible always, ran like wildfire across that world of heather and bent. The whole

men-folk of the high places started towards the New House of the Dungeon to inquire. I think some were disappointed that the whitewashed walls were not blood-boltered and a harvest of death laid out in a swathe by the barn-door, like corn from the mowers' scythes.

Instead they found a quiet place, stiller even than usual. Muckle Tamson with his Sabbath face was there to usher them in to the granary arranged for service. The table was draped in white, the Bible laid thereon, and the chair placed for the minister.

Had any one told me before that I should not have sunk through the floor, it would have seemed that they mocked at me. But the thought that Absalom had left me in his place upheld me. For that day I was his *Locum Tenens*.

If seems now at this day a strange thing that; instead of praying for strength to go through with what lay before me, as Absalom would have done (and as perhaps I ought) I was mainly preoccupied by what I should wear. This was, no doubt, foolishness, or may seem so to a man. Of course, I ought to have worn black of the simplest. But Absalom had a horror of that colour, and would have none of it in my wardrobe. So as his will was law, I had not so much as a black skirt to my name.

Then I remembered my white marriage dress, Nan Gilfillan's taste, made of fine white wincey of Aberdeen, and as simple and well-fitting as money could make it. Yes, that was the only alternative. I put it on, and then entered the barn with Absalom's sermon in my hand, sitting down beside the table in my usual place.

It seemed as if I never could turn about and meet that array of silent faces, of eyes that had known me

from my infancy—eyes that knew, more or less accurately, the sorrows of our house. But the thought of poor Will Gillespie, and Absalom ministering to him all that day, nerved me.

Yes, I would do my duty. Absalom had trusted me. That was enough.

So I rose and said in a voice that faltered, 'Friends, my husband is absent on an errand of mercy. You all know, I do not doubt, what is the reason. But he has charged me with a duty—that I should read to you the sermon he had prepared for this occasion!'

I did not mount upon the little platform. I did not sit in the minister's chair. But standing on the floor of the barn, with one hand upon the white cloth, as if so far to claim a part in these things, I gave out the psalm to be sung.

*'I to the hills will lift mine eyes, From whence doth come mine aid. My safety cometh from the Lord, Who heaven and earth hath made.'*

And never has the old, sweet-sounding tune of 'French' been sung with more tenderness or quainter ornamentation of grace notes than in the barn of the Dungeon that day.

And then the moment of all others that I had been dreading came.

'Is there any one in this house,' I said, 'who can put up a prayer?'

Doubtless there were several, many (as indeed I knew) who were in the nightly practice of family worship. But they lacked courage before so great a company.

Therefore I nerved myself, bowed the head, and said, 'Let us pray,' thus casting myself on what Absalom would have called 'the promised aids of the

Almighty.’

I know not what I said, at least, now I cannot recall a phrase, no, not even a word. But I heard, loud as the Gairland in spate, the sound of the congregation setting themselves back into their seats.

I opened out the sermon and smoothed the leaves with my hand.

‘They shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy!’

And at the first sight of the words and sound of my own voice in my ears as I read them, I flushed crimson. To think what I had done! Shame on me, I had thought of my dress, and never so much as glanced at the sermon I was to read!

They would believe I had done it on purpose. What would Absalom say? Ah, never was a poor Rose of the Wilderness more shamefacedly red—never worthier of her name.

But I need not have been so conscious of self. Not the flicker of a smile passed over these earnest, rugged countenances. I was their ‘Rose.’ I had always been theirs, known by that name all my life. And if I had put on my bride's dress, it was to do honour to the place and the occasion—what more natural? Besides, they were all waiting for the sermon!

I suppose I read it well enough. At least I was told so afterwards. But, indeed, I forgot myself in the desire to be ‘worthy.’ And I stood there on the barn floor and read the call of the Christian apostle to a cold-hearted people; with every word I charged myself, and in taking the application to myself, I brought it home also to these who hearkened. At least, so for months I was told. After that the love

and gratitude of these simple folk were knit wondrously close about us. And, though the world might misunderstand, they knew very well why it was that Absalom had given up his rich parish—to feed his scattered moorland lambs, to serve tables, and, above all, to abide with the woman he loved in the wilds of the Dungeon.

I closed the short service with the Lord's Prayer, and let them go their ways, while I went to seek my father. I found him somewhat recovered, and when I told him what I had done, he laid his hand on my head, repeating over and over, 'They shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy!'

I offered to read him the sermon, but he would not, saying that at his age the text was enough.

'They shall walk with me in white,' he murmured. 'Aye, aye, that is better than any sermon. It is from the Great White Book—the Revelation, which none save the aged can understand, and they only when standing on the brink, their hands clasping the White Stone, and before them the White City in which is no need of the sun, neither of the moon.'

But there was one thing that troubled me. I had missed Tamson directly the sermon was finished. When I asked him, Stoor told me that Muckle Tamson had gathered half-a-dozen limber lads about him with their dogs, and was off he knew not whither—but he thought towards the Fords of Dee.

'And why did not you go also?' I asked of Stoor.

'Because Muckle Tamson bade me bide here!' he said, sullenly; 'if ever there is a thing worth doing to be done, it's aye Stoor, keep an eye on the hoose, or take a walk up by the sheep to see that a' is richt. And the worst o't,' continued Stoor, stamping his foot with rage, 'is that yon villain Tommy has ga'en

wi' them. He keepled oot o' sicht till it was ower late to order him back. And so he'll see a' that is to be seen at the Fords o' Dee!'

'Why at the Fords of Dee?' I demanded.

Stoor looked uncomfortable. He scraped the scattered litter with his toe.

'Ye heard what Willie Gillespie said, mem,' he stammered, 'yon about killin' a man at the Fords o' Dee. Weel, Muckle Tamson thinks...'

'Muckle Tamson thinks what?' I cried, beginning to shake—I knew not why. My husband was safe. Could it be that poor mad Willie had slain some stranger in his place, taking him for Absalom Kenmore ?

'Tamson thinks what Tamson thinks,' said Stoor, doggedly; 'he didna tell me. But wait till that Tommy comes hame—juist willna I bat him? Aye, that will I.'

But Stoor did not. He stood aghast by the sight of Muckle Tamson's home-returning face, grey and terrible, as it met him coming up the little loaning off the heather. The herds his companions had gone to their own homes.

Tommy Chugbridge went directly into the kitchen to his mother, and there, rinding her alone, he spoke.

'Selina,' he said, 'you are a free woman. We found him—dead and drowned. There was a hole in him, too. And the place where mad Gillespie had watched the ford. We found that too. He had struck in the dark, thinking it was Mr. Kenmore. But Muckle Tamson and the rest buried him, and I said 'Our-Father-Which-Art' when the men were not looking. Maybe it will do his soul no harm. He was my father. I hated him when alive, because he was cruel to you, mother—and when I saw him lie dead, I danced!

But, all the same, the prayer could do no harm, could it, mother?’

Selina was silent.

‘Mother—mother!’ said Tommy Chugbridge, anxiously, ‘was it wrong to pray for such a man? Say the word, and I’ll go straight into the barn and tell God that I take it all back!’

‘Let be,’ said Selina, dry-eyed and grim, ‘it will take many prayers to make any difference to a man like Chugbridge!’

‘But the minister said, if it was a little boy, the Lord—Him up yonder—might hearken!’

But Selina sadly shook her head. She did not want to damp Tommy’s young faith, but she had known Chugbridge in life.

‘They buried him, you say?’ she broke out suddenly, ‘but will not the police find him?’

‘No,’ said Tommy, ‘he’s ower deep, and there’s no police for such as him. They sank him in a hole that has no bottom, so they say. And Muckle Tamson made a speech to the lads and told them that for the sake of Will Gillespie’s kith and kin—I think he said—they must never speak of it. And they promised they would not. Only I had permission given me to tell you, Selina!’

‘Thank you!’ said Selina, and went on preparing baby’s bottle, the last for the day.

Tommy lingered, a little embarrassed—awkward, perhaps, rather than unhappy. He wished that his mother would speak to him. Suddenly she looked directly at him.

‘You are not to answer to the name of Chugbridge any more,’ she said, ‘I wish never to hear it again!’

‘What other, then?’ Tommy demanded.

‘What need of any other?’ said his mother. ‘Stoor

## ROSE OF THE WILDERNESS

has no second name!

'That was what we fought about,' said Tommy, stoutly; 'I said it was a disgrace.'

'Well,' said Selina, 'choose for yourself, Tommy! What name will you take?'

The boy's face lighted up with a kind of glorious joy at the permission.

'Can I really, mother?' he whispered, hoarsely. The thing was incredible.

His mother nodded, eager at any price to be quit of the loathed Chugbridge.

'Then Tamson!' cried Tommy triumphantly. 'There's nobody like Tamson! But maybe he will not let me!'

His mother smiled quietly.

'Oh, yes,' she said, 'Tamson will let you!'

## CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

### MUCKLE TAMSON'S CITY VISIT

After the death of Chugbridge, A.B., and the taking away of poor Will Gillespie to the Crichton Institution at Dumfries, Nan Gilfillan asked us both to come to Edinburgh for the winter. As our party, however, might fluctuate in size, we decided to take a house of our own in Roseleith Gardens, just round the corner from Nan. This was Absalom's plan.

You see, there was my father. Him we had persuaded to come in order to consult the most famous Edinburgh doctors; also, invited by herself, there was Selina, who refused to be separated from little Rosa Secunda.

She could never trust her, after all that care, to city hirelings. It was not to be expected of her. I promised myself some amusement when Nan Gilfillan should come on the scene to dispute the right of sole possession with Selina. Both women, each in her own way, regarded the baby as theirs. My own rights were overlooked on account of my youth and inexperience. Even Absalom was thought of as only a necessary evil, having something to do with the 'registry' office. He and I somehow made it right and proper for these two women to be found in complete possession of a child of the female sex, aged eight months, and that was all the use we were.

Nan's long experience in setting couples on the way for the occurrence of such events, Selina's more particular and personal experiences with Tommy—

now by his own poll-deed Thomas Tamson the Lesser-put Absalom and myself so completely in the shade, that we took to playing golf to give us a valid Edinburgh reason for deserting our child.

Nan had gathered about her some few choice spirits, the rare nantes of the whirlpool of society-at-second-hand and Parliament House self-sufficiency which calls itself Modern Athens. There was, for instance, a certain slight, fresh-visaged man of the law, who generally played with the children if there were any, or talked to his hostess about them if there were not. The children grappled in his coat pockets in search of good things, and the very smallest announced him as 'Mistr Innest — he pulls hair!' Brilliantly clever and of a comfortable fortune, he had spoken too little and written too much to be eligible for a judgeship. But all men knew the judgment, delicate and sure, the finesse, wit, and charm as of another century, that marked out Theodore Innest, who, according to the children, assuredly 'pulled hair'—yes, sometimes even when the victim did not know it.

With him, more occasionally, there came his friend the Great Preacher, simple and docile as a little child. His hair, though it lent itself to the operation, Mr. Innest never pulled. He had lapses of fine silence, after which he might either begin to speak of Dante or grasp his staff in his hand and hurry off to the bedside of a poor dying woman somewhere 'down by Fountainbridge.'

There were professors also of all sorts, young legal men, who, dropping their pas perdue buckram, came to take Nan's advice and drink her tea. For Nan pleased herself in her friends, and had every one of them there because, either she liked them, or,

since Nan was very human, because they liked her.

Women dropped in also—pretty and attractive rather than particularly clever or teeming with ideas. Nan was charged with liking the society of men better than that of her own sex. Well, so do I, for that matter. And Absalom, who never does things by halves, says that it is the duty of every right-thinking woman so to do.

Such women as there were may have understood Browning, but certainly it did not affect their appetites or their taste in hats. Nor yet did they say anything about it. They may have read the riddle of the Sphinx, but they preferred ordinary pussies. They knew where to find Procyon in the midnight sky, but liked fox-terriers better. Lastly, Nan told them that they must take to me. And I think they did. It was, indeed, a *sine qua non*.

Of course, Absalom and the Great Preacher had mighty 'set-to's,' urged on thereto by the skill of Mr. Innest. But Absalom drew the line at occupying the most celebrated pulpit in Scotland. The Barn at the Dungeon suited him better, and, in fact, he would often run down there, starting early on the Saturday and returning on the Monday to Edinburgh, so that the poor, kindly herd-folk of the uplands might not be too long without 'the means of grace.' Of course, my husband was careful to explain that these they had with them always, and that he was only 'one who served tables.'

Nevertheless, so deeply is the love of 'The Sermon' engrafted in the Scottish heart, that I fear most of his counsels passed over their heads.

And, besides, I will not conceal that the Sabbath service was pleasing to himself. Absalom loved the hush of the settling congregation, the honest, prick-

eared collies, seemingly as intelligent and attentive as their masters—the goodwife, shawled in finest Paisley (it was her great-grandmother's), a white mutch upon her head, and her bible wrapped, as in Erskine Nicol's picture, between two folds of fair white napkin, with a sprig of southernwood slipped between the covers.

My husband told me he even liked the smell of the wet shepherds' plaids on rainy days, but that, though hill born, I admit to be a cultivated taste.

In fine, he yearned for the Dungeon, and, save for the libraries, Edinburgh was to him a weariness. Henry Gordon was somewhat less wearied, because—last infirmity of noble minds—he had set himself to the writing of an historical commentary, with prophetic applications to the future, upon what he called the 'Great White Book'—that which ordinarily bears the name of the Revelation of St. John the Divine.

My husband brought news of the Dungeon which made my heart ache to be back again—sometimes a sprig of white heather, hardly touched by winter, just browned a little in its dry shelter under the 'brow o' some bunker.' Once he fetched a whole peat in his bag, which caused me to weep because I could not start back immediately. Nan said that he should have had more sense, but I could not help it. I laid the peat reverently in my room and smelt it every day. When I went, I would take it back where it belonged. Its aromatic fumes should not be lost in any foul Edinburgh chimney. They would 'pew' out sweetly from the old kitchen hearth, and what part of them was not dispersed among the hams and smoked puddings on the rafters, would be wafted back to where they belonged, trailing over the bog-

myrtle, and losing themselves little by little across the miles of Dungeon heather, the reddest and the most long-lived in all the country.

But Selina and Nan Gilfillan disappointed me.

They took to each other with the wink of a couple of augurs meeting.

Their bond of union was to keep Rose from me!

What would happen to her if I were to take charge, heaven alone knew—and that, probably, but imperfectly! They whispered together, and their subject was the folly of young, inexperienced mothers, who never knew what was good for their children.

Every time I went up into baby's nursery, I felt that I needed to be introduced! I got out of the habit of asking questions, and into that of expecting to be snubbed. I dared not tell Absalom, for he had never really been 'down' with Selinomania, the disease which had prostrated all the rest of the family. Absalom was quite capable of sending her and T. Tamson, Jr., straight back to Milford, now that Chugbridge, A.B., had found his last berth in the green moss-hole by the Fords of Dee. But there were reasons, known as yet only to myself, why this could not be permitted. Still, as an ordinary mother, I should have been glad of a little—just a little—of the society of my own child.

'Assert yourself!' exclaims every mother, as a matter of course.

Very well, but then they did not know Nan Gilfillan, and—they had never seen Selina in a kitchen. She rocked the cradle, darned the family socks, wiped baby's mouth, prepared a dinner of seven courses.(I am speaking of Roseleith Gardens), and sang Tennyson's 'Half-a-league' treated as a

lullaby, all without turning a hair.

Such a cook she was that the 'banker-man' begged for lessons. He said that certain sauces would certainly perish with her. But after the third day she flung him forth—saying that he never would be able to frizzle bacon, let alone boil an egg! Nevertheless the disgraced one praised her method of serving game so much that he got her to write it down in detail. But the final result was nil. As well ask Paganini to leave the receipt for his music to be sold along with his violin. Selina simply did not know how she did it. It came to her to do everything right, at the proper time, and once for all—just as in any other of the great creative arts. An essay by Milton on the Art of Poetry would not enable any word-chopper to multiply the supply of 'Paradise Losts'.

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It was a bask February day, the ground clear of snow, but the horizon behind the Castle leaden with the promise of it, when at the door of Number 66 Roseleith Gardens appeared Nan in company with a solemn-visaged man in yellowish-brown tweeds, shoulders apparently a good yard across—and the leaping-pole. Muckle Tamson! Yes, the same invincible Muckle Tamson as ever was.

Certain of the smarter sort would dearly have liked to ask him, as he progressed from the Caledonian Station along by the Cathedral, where he had left his bear. But Tamson, plus the leaping-pole, did not seem a good subject for jesting. He called first at Nan's, which was on his way.

'I cam' to let you see your bit o' oak,' he said; 'it has crackit a croon or twa since you set e'en on it.

But it's nae the waur o' that! Faith no! Every time I hae rubbit it weel wi' the best olive oil, and noo it's a fair wonder. Folk that ken what's what, comes twenty mile to get their heads broke wi' Mistress Gilfillan's bit o' timber. But I'll no bide—I juist looked in to mak' sure that ye were a' weel, Mistress, and'—here he hesitated— 'at the next hoose.'

'The next house?' said Nan, in astonishment, 'oh, ye mean where the Dungeon folk live?'

Tamson wagged his Jovian beard.

'Aye,' he said, 'that's it—and Selina—is she in good health?'

Now, if Muckle Tamson had asked for me or for Absalom, he would have been permitted to find his way alone to Roseleith Gardens. But, all unwitting, Tamson had touched the spring—the spring of springs.

Nan put on her hat and went with him, leaping-pole and all. In like manner she would have accompanied the King, or a crossing-sweeper in whom she had an interest. Nan was Nan. No wonder, in spite of her ignorance of Greek, some very wise and learned men thought her the greatest woman they had ever known. I, though of Nan's own sex, agreed with them.

'Will I mell on the door?' said Tamson, seeing that it looked solid and stood shut.

Nan represented to him that the pressing of a little button sufficed, and a bell concealed below stairs did the rest.

'What's thae steps for?' said Tamson, pointing downwards.

'These are for the tradespeople who have business with the cook!' Nan explained.

'Aye, d'ye tell me sae?' said Tamson, 'and what for

that? So as no to gar the puir woman be aye rinnin' up stairs? Weel, there's sense in that. And does folk that has business wi' the bairn's nurse gang doon there too?'

Nan admitted that such was usually the fact.

'Aye, noo than,' he continued, while a small crowd of message boys began to collect, to which, however, neither of them paid the least attention, 'what might be the nurse-woman's name?'

'Why, Selina, of course!' said Nan, astonished at his seeming ignorance.

'And the cook's?'

'Selina!' repeated Nan Gilfillan; 'do you think for one moment?'

But Muckle Tamson interrupted her.

'And the kitchen-maid's name, and the parlourmaid, and the hoose-maid, and the flonkey's?'

'Selina—Selina—Selina!' repeated Nan, breathlessly.

Tamson thrust his leaping-pole into her hand.

'Hae,' he said, as her small gloved hands clasped themselves unwittingly on the smooth oak, 'tak' haud o't! I hae a message doon the area stairs, and Selina winna let me bring a thing like that into her kitchen! But ye are different! Ye are no parteeklar—like Selina!'

And so, while Muckle Tamson dived for the area door like a rabbit into its appointed place in the warren, the spectacle was seen in the front of a grave Edinburgh New Town street, inhabited by householders who consider themselves but little (if anything) lower than the angels, of the wife of 'one of our most prominent bank-managers, leaning upon the top of a pole and laughing till she sobbed, and

sobbing till she laughed.'

Walter Gilfillan had to explain next day to at least a dozen of his most intimate and official friends, all of whom either coveted his post or envied him his wife, that as a matter of fact he had not put Nan out of doors with any weapon of offence. Nor had she been compelled to seek refuge with her intimate friends and distant relatives, the Manor Kenmores of the Dungeon.

But Walter Gilfillan, thought a clever man, could not explain away Tamson. And feeling that he was leaving the dock with a stain on his character, he told them, singly and corporately, to ask Nan—if they were not satisfied with his explanation.

On going home, for once in his life Walter Gilfillan rebuked his wife.

'You must not, really, Nan,' he said. 'I am looked upon by many as a mixture of Nero and Othello. It is very well for you—you are not in business, but for me there are the directors.'

'Oh, bother the directors!' said Nan Gilfillan, 'I will soon settle them.'

And she asked the entire Board of the solemn Royal Caledonian Bank to meet Muckle Tamson at luncheon!

From this ordeal Walter Everard Gilfillan emerged without a stain upon his character, though Tamson—being unaccustomed to the trifling character of Edinburgh cutlery, particularly forks—had several upon his waistcoat.

Still, all was a remarkable success, and a rich and prominent capitalist congratulated Nan on the 'remarkable originality of this interesting type.'

'Don't let Tamson hear you call him a type,' said Nan mysteriously; 'we don't want a vacancy on our

Board!’

Nan's real interest, however, lay elsewhere. She wanted to find out what had brought Tamson to the city. My husband could give her some information, but not much.

‘I hae comed to report,’ said Tamson, ‘that the yowes are a’ weel—except them that has the ‘sturdy’—likewise the pownies. It has been a fine season, whenever the weather hasna been baad! The wind blew aff some sclates frae the byre, but naebody was hurted. And Tamson had them a’ on again the next day, better nor ever.’

In themselves these could hardly be called good and sufficient reasons for undertaking the long journey from the Dungeon at his own expense.

As for me, I could hardly furnish any better. Certainly Tamson had not confided in me.

I asked him if he had killed anybody with the leaping-pole.

‘Not to say killed,’ he said, as if turning various little matters of the kind over in his head.

‘Tamson,’ I said sternly, ‘you have come up here to get the advice of my Lord of Ardwall—I’ll wager there’s a man down there wi’ a broken crown!’

‘Maybes! For the broken croon I wadna juist like to say, but nocht to trouble my Lord wi!’

‘Tamson, what is it?’ I demanded. ‘I have a right to know.’

‘I ken that, Miss Rose; I’m no sayin’ to the contrar! But, ye see, the fact is there’s juist a when impident folk doon about Blinkbonny smiddy, and when Tamson gangs doon to get the ponies shod or for a pleugh-iron fettled or ony bit thing like that, they will be settin’ up their lip at him!’

‘You should pray for grace to be patient,’ said I,

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talking Absalom's talk to Muckle Tamson as best I could.

'Na, na, Miss Rose,' he answered, 'that winna do for Tamson. I hae tried till I swatted three sarks till ye could wring them oot, praying, as your guidman said, to hae patience under affliction! But it aye ended wi' a mellin.'

'You were not hurt, Tamson?' I asked, more earnestly, 'you have not come up to see the doctor?'

'Wha? Me? Tamson? Miss Rose,' he cried, 'it's an awfu' thing to have grace, if it puts thoughts like that intil your head! Me get hurt! Lord sakes alive—the last time I cleared the smiddy oot frae end to end, and brocht them to again by emptyin' the smith's temperin' cauldron on them!'

'But what can they have against you, Tamson?' I asked; 'you have never provoked anyone that I know of.'

'Na, nor I haena noo,' said Muckle Tamson, 'it's juist that Tamson canna stand yon low-country sods settin' up their ploughman's lip to him!'

And that was all I could get out of him at the time.

But I heard afterwards. It was Selina who told me, and she had some right to know.

'You see, ma'am,' said Selina, 'it's on account of that boy of mine. The name of Chugbridge he shall not bear! It is a curse, and he has chosen to call himself Tamson. Now at the smithy, as I hear from Tamson, there are ill-behaved yokels who try to make mischief, asking about his eldest son, and how many brothers and sisters Tommy Tamson has! If I were a man, I declare I could not stand it myself!'

Selina was silent a while, but not idle. She marshalled her dinner things. She glanced at the

roast, then at the pudding. She picked up Rosa Secunda, and with three twists and a jerk had restored comfort to that young person, who was just beginning to whimper.

'Please, ma'am, what am I to do?' she said, appealing to me for the first time in her life, 'Tommy and I are dead against any more to do with Chugbridge. Do you think, now, that Mr. Kenmore, your husband, would object to having Tommy known by his name?'

On this point, at least, I had particular clearness of vision. On no account would Absalom permit such a thing. I took it upon me to answer for him.

'Well, well,' said Selina, with a sigh, 'what do you think of the surname of 'Guelph'?'

I said that doubtless it was a very good name in its way, but that usually, in this country, it had been connected with royalty.

'It is a pity,' said Selina; 'but doubtless there will be found a way out! There must be families that would be glad of a smart boy like Tommy to bear their name.'

I hastened to reassure her maternal pride.

Personally I should have loved to have Tommy called Kenmore, but she could easily see for herself that as it was, such a thing would either cause dispeace, or provide us with too large a family. 'For instance,' said I, 'Selina, how would you like to have 'Master Stoor Kenmore' sitting at the parlour table and answering to his name?'

'Enough said, ma'am,' said Selina, 'I understand! Please to go upstairs and tell the master and your father that the dinner will be on the table in five minutes!'

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It was Tamson himself who found the way, and at the same time fully explained the purpose of his journey to all concerned, and to several who were not, except perhaps by reason of their broken heads.

'Selina,' he said, when he found himself alone with her in the kitchen, 'you are a poor lonely weedow-woman. I might hae melled that Chugbridge, and at the time it seemed a kind o' holy act. But noo I'm glad I only buried him afore witnesses. But ye need a man, Selina, to carry in the water and exercise your tongue upon. Well, here's me—Tamson. I willna talk ony silly bairnly nonsense, but I took to ye frae the first, Selina. It's God's truth I never saw a bonnier woman, no even in a waxworks. I dinna ken if ye are inclined to like Muckle Tamson or no. But if ye consider that giein' you my name will maybe prevent the sheddin' o' bluid doon at Blinkbonny smiddy, forbye makin' it easier for the laddie, maybe, ye will tak' a kindly thocht on Tamson!'

Selina was pale, but went on with her work. An organ-grinder rang the area bell, but retreated at the sound of Tamson's deep-throated 'golder' of rage. He tried the other side of the street, peopled mainly by maiden ladies, as being safer.

'Selina,' continued Tamson, 'tak' a thocht. I wad mak' ye a guid man. The bit cottage at the loan-in'-head is empty, and we could do all that we have been in the habit of, you in the house of the Dungeon, me on the hills with the sheep. Will ye be Mistress Tamson, as it were, to prevent bloodshed?'

And Selina, finding herself unexpectedly tender of heart for the lads of the smithy, answered that, strictly for the purpose of preventing the shedding of

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blood, she would e'en become Mistress Muckle Tamson.

'But,' she said, 'no more melling! Mind—I stand by that!'

Tamson weighed the alternatives long and seriously.

'Weel,' he said, regarding Selina, 'Tamson 'ill tak' you, and gie up the mellin!'

'But' (here he sighed as the magnitude of the sacrifice he was making dawned upon him) 'it's a kind o' a peety too. Tamson will be a sair-missed man on a Keltonhill fair-day! There were twa-three doctors that lookit to him to provide their daily bread. But women-fowk hae nae consideration—you, Selina, nae mair nor the lave! Sorra am I to say it.'

## CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

### THE FOUNDING OF CLAN TAMSON

We bought Selina's wedding 'braws' before we left Edinburgh. I need not say that in this also I had no freedom of opinion. Nan Gilfillan chose them, and I told her repeatedly that she would end by making Selina refuse to put them on.

But Nan had no fears of this kind. She said I was a mere baby, who ought to have a nurse to think things of that kind.

I replied with some heat that I had a baby and would be very glad to be its nurse, if only some people would let me!

Nan looked at me with a sudden startled air and exclaimed, 'Why, who is hindering you?'

Then I began to cry, a thing Nan never could abide, from others at least. I poured out my woes. I had never been a mother owing to Selina. I was hardly allowed to handle my own baby. If I so much as tried to arrange her feeding-bottle or hush little Rose the Second in my arms, she was snatched from me! It was unbearable. It was a shame. There!

Conclusion most lame and impotent! But I could still cry, and I did. For I could see plainly that I was making Nan Gilfillan uncomfortable.

'And pray,' demanded Nan, 'who hindered you?'

'Selina!' said I, not daring, even in my excited state, to lay upon Nan her share of the blame, which, however, she had richly deserved since our coming to Edinburgh.

Then a singular expression came over the face of

Nan Gilfillan.

'I think,' she said, slowly, 'that you may safely leave your happiness in the hands of Muckle Tamson!'

Of course I could see what she meant at once. Muckle Tamson would occupy so much of the affection of Selina, so draw to himself her thoughts and actions, that she would have no time to trouble herself with my baby. Of course I knew that. For you see that was the exact way I loved Absalom.

I told Nan this, knowing that she would agree with me. For all her pretending, I was well aware that she loved the 'banker-man' with all her heart. Nan looked at me keenly for a moment. Then I saw the tears gather in her eyes, slowly, surely.

'Nan,' I cried, much alarmed, 'what is the matter? You are crying!'

'No, no,' she said, hastily dabbing her eyes, 'I had forgotten baby; it is time for her third bottle. I think that Selina has forgotten. I do not hear her moving about the kitchen!'

And she fled, leaving me in a greater astonishment than ever. Was it possible that I, who knew man like twice two is four, should yet not understand my own sex? Why had Nan—Nan Gilfillan, mind—why had she cried? Mystery!

Tamson did not stay long in Edinburgh. Having done his business, he went down to look to his master's sheep, and—to break the news to Tommy.

As usual, I heard about this later. It was Tamson himself who told me.

'Aye, it threatened to be a hard job,' he said; 'ye see, I had promised her that there should be nae mellin'. And, sakes alive, I was fond o' the lad, half because he's her bairn and half because he had

siccan a baaad faither! I had yin o' the same bunch mysel'. Man, it's an awesome thing to gang to fair or market, and hae every wastrel tryin' to borrow money aff ye because he is a half-brither o' yours. And you no be able to ken whether he's tellin' the truth or no! Maybe even there will be a bit noise, impidence, and the neives fleein' richt and left. Then in the interests o' peace, ye will maybe hae to mell your ain flesh and blood. Mony is the time I hae wished that my faither hadna been born, especially when I got a nicht in gaol because o' him! That's what made me sae vexed for Tammy!

'But after a' it wasna wi' Tammy that the trouble began. Tammy was as pleased as Punch. Na, believe me, an' ye will—it was Stoor. He said first that if I married Selina, and that loon Tammy had a richt to my name, he wad gang and howk up Chugbridge and— bring him to the waddin'!

'A bonny like thing that wad hae been!

'But I telled him that, first and foremost, he couldna find Chugbridge, him bein' thirty or forty feet deep in black peat glaur by this time. And then what did the young deil's brat up and say?'

I shook my head, but did not interrupt.

'That he wad gang and droon himsel' in the Links o' the Cooran or in the Murder Hole. He wasna gaun to hae Tammy swelling aboot the hills wi' a handle to his name, and him be caaed plain 'Stoor'.

'Never could I hae thocht there was that kind o' auld desperate gipsy bluid in the callant!

'But, certes me, he was camsteery and ill to deal wi'. And the third nicht he got up, quait as pussy gaun veesitin' the mice. I hadna been in my bed mair nor half an hour, when I awakened wi' a presumption on me—no, Miss Rose, that's no the

word—'

'Presentiment?' I suggested.

'Aye, that's mair like it. English is an awesome language for whaup-nebbit, pheasant-tailed words. Weel, then, Miss Rose, as ye say, I awaked wi' a pregumption on me.'

This I let pass, for indeed the word was a good one, both in sound and sense—from the Scots point of view, that is.

'That Stoor—deil pyke his banes—had ta'en the road, and even noo he wad be half road to the Murder Hole. Ye ken that's the auld warlock-haunted bit near the lochs whaur the Faas, the Marshalls and ither raider folk pat awa' their prisoners lang syne, when they could get nae mair ransom oot o' them!

'Certes, I was on my feet in three ticks o' the clock. My hands took haud on Mistress Nan's loupin'-pole and, faith, it saved Stoor's life.

'He's a fearsome callant, yon—no to meddle wi' — ony mair than me when I was young. I'm guessin' that the faither o' him maun hae been 'a warmer'.'

'Claes? Breeks? Na, Miss Rose, there was nae time for ony cleadin' save the sark that was on my back when I raise frae oot my bed. If I had waited to pit on a coat and tie, or to black my shoon—faith, it's Stoor that wad hae been at the bottom o' the Murder Hole!

'Ye maun mind, Miss Rose, that the gleds and peewits on the Dungeon are nae sae particular as the folk on Princes Street in Edinburgh Toon. Na, na, it was Tamson in his sark that nicht—or naething!

'Certes, but Tamson didna touch the heather often atween the Dungeon and Neldrichen, and

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yince he left the maist feck o' the skin o' his taes stickin' in a craig. But he whurled on, loupin' like the black deil comin' through Athlone, as the Irishers say.

'Only ye see he was a white deil—no to say angel—what wi' his sark and—but there, if Tamson doesna mind, his descriptive poo'er will be rinnin' awa' wi' him.

'Sufficient is it to say that he fand Stoor on the edge o' the Murder Hole. The foolish laddie had tied a great muckle stane to his feet, and was ready for the jump. Mair nor that, he had started to crawl on a' fowers, or rather on threes, for his feet, being tied thegither, made but yin!

'Aye, through the fleein' carry o' cluds, that ran in wisps across the mune, Tamson saw Stoor. He grippit him. And oh, Miss Rose, I was that glad to see him that I nearly clouted him dumb and blind. Faith, I'm thinking I learned him what it was to frichten Tamson. But he never grat! Na, no him!

'He only said, 'Find me a name, or if ye dinna, I'll droon mysel' yet, that I wull! Never will I hae that Tammy caain' himself Tamson and castin' it up to me that I am named 'Stoor' like a dowg! Oh, cuff me if you like, Muckle Tamson, but I'll rin awa' and droon mysel' just the same!'

Terrible queer things, boys! Here was Stoor, had been content for near on to saxteen years juist to be caaed 'Stoor'—no a syllabab mair. And a' because Tammy was to carry Tamson after his name, the silly loon maun rin aff to droon himsel'!

'I'll no hae him castin' it up to me,' he said, 'so there, ye are warned, Muckle Tamson!'

'So I says to him, 'Stoor, I'm no a man o' great combustion—oh, bother, I forget the word, but I

minded it then, it meanted juist sense—but it was a fine word, and garred Stoor gape wi' fair astonishment. 'Stoor, lad,' says I, 'haud on for five minutes and then ye can droon yoursel' as often as ye like and Tamson will stand by and gie ye a pork doon wi' his loupin'-pole, to save ye needless suffering as it were!'

'But as for Stoor, he said naething mair. Me sayin' that, sort o' calmed him down. For he kenned that Tamson wad do what Tamson said.

'Then I sat on the edge o' the Murder Hole and thocht. Did ye ever try to think when the life of a fellow-craitur depended on it—you sittin' on a travelled stane in your sark, wi' your feet a' scarted wi' comin' across the Glints o' the Buss at a hunder mile an hour! Hoots, what am I sayin'—of coorse, Miss Rose, the like o' that is no to be thocht o' for a lassie. But, at ony rate, that was what Tamson had to do.

'And the wund was in the North; Tamson was about as caller as a laird when he meets on wi' yin o' his tenants that hasna paid his rent for three or four terms! There's places in the Arctic whaur they say whusky freezes (Lord, talk o' your peppermints, what a sweetmeat that wad mak' to tak' to the kirk wi' ye!). Weel, I'm tellin' ye—sittin' on the edge o' the Murder Hole wi' the North wind gusting doon oot o' the Hass o' Enoch, wad hae frozen a barrel o' whusky as big as that they drooned the man in. Ye'll hae read aboot it in the history buiks, nae doot—him that was pitten to death in a muckle cask of Glen-leevit, and, bein' a Wast Country man, died wi' thae memorable words on his lips, 'This is no sae bad, but Lang John's the stuff!'

'Howsomever I saved Stoor, though I nearly

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becam' a block of ice doin' it, there bein' neither Glenleevit nor yet Lang John handy, mair's the peety. I said to the laddie, keepin' my airm firm roond him, and in his lug the promise o' a broken heid if he steered. That's a funny thing, too. Here was Stoor, the gipsy laddie, determined on droonin' himsel', and yet sitting as quait as a moose for fear o' a broken heid or a 'wapp' on the chafts frae Muckle Tamson.

'But I talked sense to him—oh, sense was nae name for't.

'Stoor, says I, 'here's me—I never had ony ither name in my life but Tamson. Or if I had, I hae clean forgotten it. Though I mind folk caain' me 'That young Deevil Tamson.' If ever I had anither name, sic as Robert, I wad gie ye that and welcome. Ye nicht caa yoursel' 'Stoor MacRobert,' but I suppose 'Stoor MacDeevil' wadna serve ye—onyway, no juist sae weel?'

'Stoor shook his heid. There's nae contentin' some folk, ye see, so I had to bethink me again. Ech, how, Miss Rose, it was weary wark! I wad raither hae ploov'ed the Merrick, though plooin', to a herd, is eediot wark onyway ye tak' it. But it's nocht to thinkin' on a name for a lad that wants to droon himsel'.

'And Stoor didna help. He just sat and sullened, wi' his knuckles in his e'en holes, and the wind aff the North playin' 'jook-my-joe' atween my sark and my back-bane! I could hae thocht it oot a deal mair comfortable in my bed. But it wasna to be, so I drave on wi' the thinkin'!

'See, here, Stoor,' says I, 'I hae it this time! The folk that drooned ither folk in this Murder Hole were named Faa—for the maist pairt, that is, or sae I hae

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heard. A man wrote a lee-buik about it, and the rate thae raider-fowk o' his nippit about the country wi' their nowt-beasts was something remarkable. Noo, Stoor, ye hae tried to do the like, and had it no been for Tamson's lang legs, ye wad fairly hae drooned yoursel' in this same Murder Hole. What hae ye, then, to say against the name o' Faa, that was yince sae great—lords and earls o' Little Egypt, as I hae read!'

'I will hae nae gipsy name—hear ye that, Tamson?' muttered Stoor between his knuckles.

'Ye ungratefu' wee messan!' I cried, 'and Tamson sittin' here like a short-shrouded ghaist waitin' for Gawbriel to blaw his trump—a' on account o' you!'

'I will hae nane o't,' says Stoor again, dogged as auld Wull Batchelor, 'I'll droon first!'

He made a move in the direction of the Murder Hole, but Tamson's richt hand made anither movement—contrarywise, as yin might say. And then Stoor sat him doon, and grat and grat, juist because he wasna allooed to droon himsel'! As if Tamson was paid over-time to freeze his marrow, and hae a' the puddocks in the Murder Hole crawlin' ower his bare feet juist to gie a gipsy wastril like Stoor the pleasure o' droonin' himsel'! He micht hae kenned better, haythen as he was!

'Then I had a thocht—oh, a fine grand idee, worthy o' a minister. Says I to Stoor, 'Stoor, lad, I never was ony the waur o' haein' only yae name mysel', but since ye are set on it.'

'Ye hae twa names,' Stoor sobbed, 'doesna a' the world caa' ye Muckle Tamson?'

'There—I had it! It was a grand idee, I tell you.

'Stoor,' says I, 'twa names ye shall hae, and if Tommy is to be caa'ed Tamson seein' I'm to mairry

his mither.'

'It's a peety,' moaned Stoor, 'that I hae nae mither for ye to mairry. Ye could hae had her and welcome. And then I wad hae showed Maister Tommy wha wad hae had the first pick o' names! But purr Stoor has nae luck!'

'What for are ye a' sae set on being caa'ed after me?' says I. 'A' my life I was never a man to make or mell wi' the baptism' o' laddie bairns? What's a' your fret noo?'

'Because ye are Muckle Tamson and that strong!' says Stoor.

'Weel,' says I, 'Stoor, see here, 'Muckle' in the North and East country, aboot Lochfoot and Irongray, is juist Mickle. Noo, that's a guid Scots name. Whiles they spell it Meikle or MacMeickle.'

'Aye,' said Stoor, taking his knuckles oot o' his e'en at last, 'when I was up in Perthshire wi' the caravan we drove through miles o' Meikles. It's nane siccan an ill name!'

'Hooray,' I cried, grasping Stoor and swinging him on to my back, 'ye shall be Meickle and Tommy shall be Tamson. Catch a haud—no o' my beard, ye skinny-shankit wee runnagate—tak' Mickle Tamson decently by the hair o' his heid. Frae this day forth I shall not be callit 'Muckle' in my hearin'. 'Mickle' Tamson shall I be. And faith, if ony miserable misleart hound sets his tongue to onything else, I'll mell him—that is, if ye promise no to tell Selina!'

Thus did Muckle Tamson become in his own right presence Mr. Meickle Tamson, and Stoor, Master Stoor MacMeickle, which gave him the advantage of one syllable more than Master Tommy Tamson, and sufficed upon occasion to provoke that daily duel, without which both of the boys would have been

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singularly unhappy.

'Oh, wae's me, but if a man has a' this trouble afore he is marriet,' mourned Muckle Tamson, 'what will it be after? The hale pairish will be wantin' to caa' themsel's Tamson. I will found a clan. I will be like Abraaham, and unto me shall be gathered the twall pairidges o' Israel!'

## CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

### TAMSON'S MARRIAGE FEAST

There were gay doings at Tamson's wedding. So much goes without saying. Naturally, when I married a minister, there was a certain decent restraint upon everyone. But on the occasion of the marrying and giving in marriage of Mr. Meickle Tamson and Selina (late Chugbridge) there was a general desire, inexpressed, but felt, that the 'house folk'—that is to say, my husband and my father—should go early to bed. For me, I did not matter so much, but I went all the same.

Provisions had been laid in. Tamson was going to do the thing handsomely. Absalom had, indeed, offered to bear all the expense, but there were sundry little casks and big bottles, which perhaps might not have entered into Absalom's more ascetic scheme of things.

To begin with there was almost a hitch. It had been taken for granted that the dancing should be in the barn. For the lasses of the moorland were to come from far and near. They had been practising their steps for weeks before. Now Tamson and the others, being Scottish of the Galloway Celtic stock, saw no reason why the barn should not be danced in one night and divine service held there the next. My husband, like them, regarded not times and seasons—neither very much places. Yet even he hesitated.

'Tamson is right,' he said; 'yes, I acknowledge it. He has the true fundamental sense of the early faith,

which we, who have so much studied, must work so hard to get back to, often without succeeding. That man bearing a pitcher of water, who led Peter and John into the large upper room—the guest-room—where they made ready, by permission of the good man of the house, the first sacrament, did not lead them into a ‘temple.’ They did not ask to what use the upper room had last been put to. No more ought I!

‘Tamson is in the right. The wine poured out at the marriage of Cana, in Galilee, spoilt not at all the nights of prayer on Tabor rising above it! All the same, because man is more deeply influenced by his prejudices than by his reason, I will not have them dance in the barn where our Sabbath services are held. The big hay shed is empty. They shall have that. Send Tamson to me.’

Absalom ordered up a supply of hanging lamps and lanterns. He hung the sides with canvas and sheeting, off the ricks, till, when all was lighted, it looked like fairyland.

But Tamson and Selina were married in the barn before the white table with the Book laid thereon, and Tommy and Stoor were best men. We dispensed with a best maid at the urgent request of Selina.

‘I would like no one but yourself, ma'am, and that kind lady Mrs. Gilfillan, who has come so far.’

‘Yes, you are honoured indeed, Selina—it is more than she did for me!’

‘You must stand close to me with a watch to tell me the time,’ said Selina. ‘You see, I shall not be able to be long away from baby! And you have been so kind—so kind!’ And here Selina quite unexpectedly burst into tears.

We comforted her, but I will admit that a chill

struck through my veins. Nan, however, was delighted with everything. She had brought a wonderful collection of furniture, hangings, and miscellaneous 'truck' from Edinburgh to set up the newly married pair in the Gate Cottage.

Muckle Tamson thanked her in words, but looked with awe at the furniture, fingered the curtains gingerly, and secretly provided 'some chairs to sit doon in.' But Nan was charmed with the bride, the dear little house, and especially the views over the moor. She pointed out these advantages to Muckle Tamson.

'View?' said he. 'What's a view? I dinna see't!' and he glared through the window as if he expected to see a circus procession with a brass band in front moving across the face of the Wilderness; 'yon's nae view. Yon's juist the Glints o' the Dass, verra poor feedin' for sheep!'

'But is it not beautiful to look at?' cried Nan, clapping her hands.

'Umpha—aye—maybe,' assented Tamson, doubtfully, 'but I see nae View. The Glints look juist the identical same they hae aye dune—neither mair nor less!'

So, whistling on Tweed and Tusker, he strode away up there to make the ewes 'scatter' out a bit. It was not good, according to Tamson, that so great a number of sheep should be allowed to 'pack' on such poor feeding as the View.

And from that day he never alluded to the Glints of the Dass (when Nan was not there) save sarcastically as 'The View.'

'I wish we had a deal fewer o' them Views aboot here,' he would say. 'Tamson wad swap a' the Views in the Dungeon for yin or twa of the bonny holms o'

Palgowan!

It was, of course, a great and marvellous wedding. And Nan, though she sent me early to bed in my quality of young wife (and a minister's at that), declared her intention of staying up till four of the morning and of dancing every dance!

But one great joy stayed secretly in my heart. At last, at last, on the evening of Selina's marriage day, and with Nan occupied in entertaining all the world, I should have my baby. With this thought, I went even gleefully through the service. The minister of Minnigaff had come up by the New Road, all to marry Selina and Muckle Tamson. He was to accompany the newly wedded couple back to the station on their honeymoon. The ponies had been fed up and given little to do for many days, so as to do honour to the road and the occasion.

Tamson said nothing. He did not even inquire what a honeymoon was—Selina, who had had experience, though of a sad kind enough, came from England, and would doubtless enlighten him. At any rate, the two took the matter very calmly.

But when after the wedding Selina went upstairs and put on her everyday dress, and Tamson threw his plaid about his shoulders and took the hills with the collies, Nan nearly wept. She had prepared the travelling sandwiches, put them up together with a piece of the bride's cake, so as to remind them they were really married. All was neatly folded in silver paper with her own hand.

So when she saw the minister drive off alone, no wonder that she wept altogether. But Selina informed her that in her class of life it would never do for a bride to go off before the dancing. Tamson had said so, too. Besides, there were some lambs

that needed looking to away on the Buss Taps. He had seen them rubbing themselves against the stones too often to please him.

'I'm sure I don't know what he means by that,' said Selina; 'perhaps he is afraid that they will wear away the stones. Yet, goodness knows, there are enough of them up there! I do not see why Tamson should mind the poor creatures rubbing the stones!'

Continuing, she comforted Nan Gilfillan with the intelligence that after she had baby bathed and 'attended to' generally, she would put on again her 'dress'—the marriage robe—which must not be soiled by the pre-nuptial embraces of Rosa Secunda, then in the fretful crisis of teething.

Absalom and I were graciously permitted by the mistress of ceremonies to peep into the new hayshed when all was in order. And you may judge of our astonishment when we saw the hangings and carpets arranged with the taste of a gipsy and the learning of a savant. (Nan was both.) The place was lighted with Chinese lanterns, in a land where nobody had ever heard of China save in connection with crockery. If Nan had ordered down the sun, the moon, and the seven stars, she could hardly have made a greater sensation.

Muckle Tamson, with Master T. Tamson, Jr., and Master Stoor MacMeikle, did the manual work of fixing. Outside the wedding guests pressed, but these were not to be admitted till the proper time. Indeed, to prevent anyone taking unfair advantages, Nan's 'loupin-pole' stood handy, and whenever there was a suspicious 'knob' (the shape of a peering human head) on the canvas, Muckle Tamson called out inhospitably, 'Noo then, Stoor!' or 'Your turn, Tommy, lad!'

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Then Stoor or Tommy, with a joyous bound, would smite with the leaping-pole. A howl and a laugh followed from without, the first proceeding from the smitten, the second from his joyous comrades. Then some experienced person would feel the afflicted head, and remark gravely and a little contemptuously, 'It wasna Muckle Tamson that ever made that lump!'

Whereat the newly wedded one within would shake his head regretfully, 'Lads, ye see what it is to be married. The very fly-by-nights oot yonder ken Muckle Tamson's maister-hand wi' the oaken cudgel. It's nae bit pigeon's egg that he raises. But there—I hae promised Selina! And Tamson's a man o' his word—this nicht, at ony rate.'

A certain McWhurr, from Creetown, and Lang Sandy, from New Galloway, had been trysted to supply music upon the fiddle, but one had been 'laired' down about Trool Lodge, while the other—but perhaps the less said about the other the better. He was at present accommodated on a heap of straw in the traveller's chamber, later to be removed to the byre, so as (Muckle Tamson's word) 'to be in the company o' the ither beasts that perish!'

Then Nan, who could do everything, suddenly broke the ice that was forming over an assembly already awed by the Chinese lanterns dangling from the roofs, and the blue and scarlet table-cloths of the hangings, the gilt stars, cut out of paper, on the crossbeams. There was an awkward moment till Nan led out the bridegroom while she whistled, clearly and sharply, the first bars of a dance tune.

'The Wind that Shakes the Barley,' it was. And, indeed, never was barley more shaken than the herds and muirland lassies that night to the music

of Nan's natural pipe. Then as she grew tired, Tamson, with the force of a steam-engine, gave them 'Duncan Grey.' After which a shy herd was discovered with a penny whistle concealed about his person. It was all ten times better than the fiddle, and has been memorable ever since on all the face of the Wilderness.

Nan was incomparable. The fact that (being 'a town's woman,' as they thought her) she could whistle and dance at the same time was counted to her for exceeding righteousness—save by one croaking wretch of a down-country ploughman out of Sorn parish, who quoted, for the last time in his life in public the dictum that—

*'A whistling wife and a wing hen, Wad find themsel's in the deil's ain den!'*

And in a minute or two thereafter the Sorn ploughman found himself, with a severe headache and a perfect ignorance of what had happened to him, on the straw beside the drunken fiddler.

At a nod of the head from Muckle Tamson, a dozen herds had thrown themselves upon the leaping-pole, scrambling for the honour of 'melling' the Sorn man. It was done after a fashion, but, as Tamson remarked, 'It was a terril thing to be marriet, and see mellin dune like that—like a Willie wag-tail playin' flick-flack wi' its hinder-end.'

The Sorn man, however, benefited by the difference, and departed the next morning a wiser and a better-advised man. He quoted no more proverbs.

But he told the most fearful tales of his usage in the hill country, and advised all law-abiding men to keep in the lowlands, for fear of a certain man named Muckle Tamson dwelling up there, who

cracked crowns and married wives with equal impunity.

Absalom and I left early. Absalom made a little speech, which was not too long and did not too severely restrain the mirth. Nan Gilfillan marshalled us in and out, held the youngsters in due subjection while we were there. I did not dance, though dearly I should have loved it—only Absalom found me ‘not yet sufficiently strong.’ And, indeed, I was not by any means anxious to bide long in that Babel of tongues.

You see, there was a warmer thought in my heart. At last—at last I should have my baby—my baby all to myself! It was Selina's marriage night. Nan was whistling in a way that would have surprised (and possibly delighted) the Actuarial Society. So—Rosa Secunda would be mine at last. For the reasons which I have already set forth I did not say anything to Absalom, but the thought of her dear white arms nestling about me, troubled my heart and filled my eyes.

It was a good thought of Tamson's or of Nan's—or of whomsoever had brought the marriage about. I hoped they would be as happy as I was.

The house was dark, save for the red glow of the ‘grieshoch’ in the kitchen fireplace. That would do to warm Rosa Secunda's milk upon. With what a glad heart I set about it, seeking the ‘pingle’ in the back kitchen, where the careful Selina kept everything as in the cabin of a ship.

Absalom had gone up to his garret room to read awhile till I should have finished. I filled the bottle carefully. It seemed a different one, somehow newer, and with a tube less flexible. But, after trying it, I found that it worked all right. Now for it! I was so

glad I felt almost guilty.

Slowly and cautiously I mounted the stairs to give Rosa Secunda her first maternal succour. She had a way of waking with a sleepy murmur, half of indignation at being aroused, half of nestling happiness to find something comforting between her lips. I smiled already as I thought of it—with only me. No Selina to find fault, to say that I knew nothing about the matter, or that I could not even hold my own baby properly. Ah, it was sweet. I paused at the nursery door, still smiling to myself. I could hear the 'hoochs' of the reel-dancers in the barn.

Looking out through the dark window, I saw the bride and bridegroom being escorted down to their cottage by a band charged to see them safely to their own door. For the only time in the lives of most moorland couples, the wife took her husband's arm. Some swinging lanterns had been unhooked, and Stoor and Tommy conducted the joyous rout. For once Tamson did not speak of 'melling' anybody. It was a pretty sight, and I waited there, conscious that baby's bottle would be cooling, yet unable to tear myself away.

I saw them return, having conducted Selina and Muckle Tamson to their destination. All seemed of the ancient time, and I thought of the 'bridegroom's pottage,' which he was required to eat hot and in haste. But this ceremony had fallen into a happy oblivion. Besides which Muckle Tamson, above all on his wedding night, was not a man to play tricks with.

Before the great doors of the barn were closed, I saw Nan's shadow conducting a schottische, gay and debonair as the chief of a band of nymphs on an

old

Greek vase, like what Absalom has pictures of in his classical dictionary.

I smiled again, yet more happily.

I could do without even Nan that night. 'My Rose, my little girl—my baby! Mine at last.'

I was still smiling when I opened the nursery door, smiling when I tip-toed across the floor towards the cradle. I would kneel beside her. She would awake to find her own mother's arms about her. She would surely know the difference. Something would tell her—whisper in her heart.

But—where was the cradle? The cradle was not there!

Where was baby? Baby was gone!

In a moment I understood. Everything was clear to me. I knew why Selina had refused the marriage trip which my husband, at my suggestion, had offered her. Why she had put on again her old frock! Why she had gone so early to the cottage at the end of the loaning!

She had taken baby with her!

I think that for five minutes I was almost out of my mind. I had never been really angry before. If I had had Selina then, I think—yes, I do think that I would have—shaken her!

In a moment I was out again and hurrying, leaving baby's bottle on the hob, to the cottage. All was still, save that in the little 'ben-the-hoose' a light burned. And—yes, there was no mistaking it. I heard the steady rock-rock of Selina's old nursing chair. Then I heard Selina's voice, 'Was it, then? Did it, then?'

A light moved from one end of the house to the other. I burst into tears. I could not help it. I did not

cry like that often. But then I could not help it.

I knew we could not do without Selina. I liked her. I loved her. But—I wanted my baby so! I laid my head down on the window-sill and sobbed.

This, then, was to be the end. Selina had taken baby with her to her new abode. All my hopes had been in vain. Oh, of course, every mother will say that I was weak and foolish to allow such a thing. Well, perhaps—but they had not been so ill as I—they had not come through so hard a time, what with Absalom's hurt and my father's weakness and all! I knew Selina's worth, her high motives, but—but

Softly the window opened, and a great hand came seeking out into the darkness.

'Miss Rose!' Muckle Tamson whispered in astonishment, 'what are ye doin' here at this time o' night—and greeting? What for are ye greeting Miss Rose?'

'My baby!' I moaned, 'I want my baby! Selina has taken it!'

'Wheesht!' he said; 'she be in the ither end o' the hoose gettin' its bottle. Bide a wee!'

And stepping to the cradle, he took up Rosa Secunda in his arms, and with her apparently the whole gear of the bed, excepting only the mattress.

'There!' he said, passing Rose hurriedly through the window.

Luckily baby never moved as I took her, a little swathed bundle, into my arms.

'But after?' I said in a low whisper to Tamson, 'after, when Selina finds out?'

'Oh, after!' he answered, lightly, 'do not let that trouble ye, Miss Rose! Hame wi' you an' the bairn! Leave the rest to Tamson!'

## ROSE OF THE WILDERNESS

I fled. The bottle on the hearth was still warm.  
Assuredly Tamson was a remarkable man!

## CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE

### THE SULKS OF SELINA

I was happy that night, perhaps even happier than Absalom. Having Rose to myself at last, I felt as if there were no need for me ever to sleep again. But though my husband was all that was good and generous, he could not be expected to take quite the same view of the case.

Baby was a little, a very little fretful, but after I promenaded her up and down a good while, she dropped off. It was then that I felt the want of the cradle which Tamson had not handed out of the window along with its other contents. However, I made up a couch for Rose on my husband's little sofa up in his garret library. There I hushed her a second time to sleep, my heart filled with a quiet thankfulness, very strange to me. And when I was sure that my husband was at last sleeping below and my baby as peacefully above, I cast a checked shepherd's plaid about my shoulders and sat me down on a chair.

Long I stayed there, never taking my eyes off Rose's face. She slept peacefully, cuddling her bottle, into which I had now inserted a solid tube. Ah, and how happy I was, only a mother can know.

Towards the end I think I must have slept. I was certainly sleeping in my chair when Nan appeared, coming in like a whirlwind. She had been attracted by the light, and was all on fire to tell me about the dancing in the barn.

But the sight that met her eyes in the garret

## ROSE OF THE WILDERNESS

library stayed even her tale of Muckle Tamson's marriage feast.

'Rose!' she cried.

Awaking suddenly, I stopped her, finger on lip, pointing with my other index at little Rose lying white and pink under Absalom's great-coat.

'What does this mean?' said Nan, aghast at the sight.

'I went for her,' I explained; 'Muckle Tamson gave her to me through the window. Then I ran back!'

'And Selina?' she said, with the same thought which had passed through my mind. I told her that Muckle Tamson considered himself a man sufficient for all things—even for Selina, robbed of another woman's baby.

Nan thought a minute, and then a smile overspread her face, a tribute, doubtless, to the will-power of Tamson, who in such circumstances could calmly undertake to control even Selina.

Then Nan recovered herself, as suddenly as she had lost her habit of command, at the unexpected sight of me asleep in my chair by the side of little Rosa Secunda.

'This will never do,' she said; 'so far as you are concerned, I mean! What is your husband thinking of to allow it?'

I said that Absalom knew nothing about the matter.

'No, I thought not,' she said; 'bring the brat to my room, if the sleep of your lord and master must not be disturbed!'

I answered that perhaps Rose might disturb her.

But Nan said if I had danced and whistled as much as she had that night, it would take twenty babies to keep me from sleeping. So I slept with

Nan, or rather I lay beside her, looking at the stars passing slowly across the window, and stealing out occasionally to see that Rose rested quietly on the couch which Nan had arranged for her at my side.

Yes, it was one of the happiest nights of my life, when, for the first time, I lay apart from my husband, and felt myself not only a true wife, but what is warmer, sweeter, reaching farther back into the springs of humanity—a true mother as well.

Nevertheless I wondered greatly what would happen on the morrow. So did Nan. She was quite prepared for Selina's dramatic resignation of her position, carrying off in her train Tommy, if not Muckle Tamson himself.

Well, next morning, to our joint surprise, nothing happened at all.

Selina was in the kitchen—we never thought of locking doors in the Dungeon, except during the Chugbridge scare. Before six of the morning she had prepared breakfast—porridge for my father, tea for me, and coffee for Absalom. As for Nan, she slept like the Seven Sleepers I have read about—I forget where they came in—not in Tennyson, I feel sure. I rose and went downstairs, where I found Selina. She returned my 'Good morning' civilly enough, though with reserve. But she never referred to baby, and when Tamson came up from the cottage with the huge cradle in his arms, she pretended not to see him as he passed through. Tamson set it down in our chamber, empty at present, my husband being already out upon the hills.

This was the sign and symbol of much.

Just on the other side of the passage Nan slept, her arms bare and her hands clasped behind her head—a dishevelled, Bacchantic Nan, fit to be the

presiding genius of our mountain revels. I thought that thus she looked more charming and younger than ever. No wonder her 'banker-man' loved her, seeing her so.

From the range boiler I drew the water for Rose's bath, and carried it upstairs without a remark or an offer of assistance from Selina. She could even bear to hear baby's shrieks of delight at the luxury without coming upstairs. What self-command on Selina's part was required to accomplish this will most likely never be known, unless she does me the honour of collaborating in these memoirs, so large a part of which is occupied with her husband and herself.

Wilfully I lengthened out the joy, drawing down Nan's blinds and folding the curtains about the bed. At last—at last! There was Rose ready for the day, bright as her name, still laughing and twisting herself downwards to dip tiny hands in the bath water, anon crowing with joy on my arm—all my own at last!

As I passed through the kitchen, however, I learned that there was a price to pay for all this. Selina took not the least notice of baby, even though I sat down at the end of the ironing-table and ostentatiously shifted pins and improved the 'sit' of her apparel. Selina had come from her own house a changed woman. She never even glanced at little Rose or criticised my manipulations. Though I knew very well that her fingers were itching to snatch the babe, and that she had to bite her tongue to prevent herself crying out.

But she beat me, going about her baking of farles of oatmeal cake with the simple inevitable precision of a piece of machinery. Certainly, if he had

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conquered Selina, Muckle Tamson was a man of remarkable will.

All the same, I was 'outs' with Selina, as Nan would have said, and, in fact, as she did say a little later.

'No harm. It had to come!' she added, however, to cheer me. 'But' (here she spoke out of the deeps of her experience) 'I shall be interested to know how Muckle Tamson takes it.'

Very philosophically to all appearances.

The idea of a wedding trip, if not wholly given up, was put aside to be 'read this day six months,' or, perhaps, more exactly, to come up for judgment when called upon.

At dinner-time Tamson came in off the hills, and took his place as usual at the table opposite to my father, with the other herds and the laddies, with Stoor as their captain commanding sandwiched between. The two MacClintock lassies did the service before sitting down. My father simply nodded at Muckle Tamson, and added a special petition that peace might reign in the new home.

'Dinna you trouble the Aalmichty aboot that, Maister Gordon!' said Muckle Tamson, gravely, as he addressed himself to ladling out the broth from the great antique tureen of wood.

When Nan Gilfillan finally decided to awake and don her everyday gown just in time for mid-day dinner, she took in the situation at a flash. For me, I was chiefly occupied with Rose, and responsibility was heavy upon me. However I felt myself quite capable for all my duties, and certainly baby made no objections. She went to sleep when she ought, awoke with only a due allowance of tears, and was particularly recognisant of my finger rubbed for

hours on her gums after having been dipped—the finger, not the gums—in warm milk.

Something approaching a snort passed the lips of Selina at seeing me thus employed. It was a complicated vowel sound, and, taken in connection with something as like a shrug of the shoulders as could be expected from a self-respecting English domestic, it expressed the fact that while I was giving my attention wholly to baby, and so obtaining apparently respectable results, it had been the wont of Selina herself to do fifty things at once with an equally good outcome and no particular effort at all.

‘There is war in the camp,’ said Nan to me as she watched my marchings and counter-marchings with a wakeful Rosa Secunda, ‘war, but yet not the noise of it down at the cottage. Tamson will have none of that. Selina is sulking, as I was sure she would. But at that game it will be the stronger and not the more patient who will win!’

I did not quite understand what Nan meant, and told her so.

‘Oh, I know by Walter!’ was all the explanation she deigned to favour me with.

‘I bet on Muckle Tamson!’ said Nan.

I had every good wish for Tamson's victory, and for the complete subjugation of Selina, but I had my fears also. Selina was no mean foe when it came to sulking.

‘Ah,’ Nan answered, sharply, ‘that is just where it comes in. Tamson will never sulk. He will act. It is the strong hand that carries it. I know by Watty!’

Now among successful business men, Walter Gilfillan was counted a man of almost supreme action.

Yet thus, in moments of confidence do even their

closest bosom friends speak of the wisest and the best of men.

That very night Tamson asserted himself by an act of strength which, in my indignation, I proclaimed to Absalom to be mere cruelty.

Tamson took his place again in the vacant bunk in the stable-loft, leaving the beautifully fitted cottage at the loaning-end to Selina.

Absalom, who observed much without saying a word, answered that it was bad at all times to meddle with other people's business, and so far as his experience went, a particularly thankless task in the case of husband and wife.

'No two dogs, no two boys,' he said, 'can dwell together in amity till it is decided which is top boy or—superior dog' (here Absalom sketched the verge of slang!) 'And in the longer alliance, which is marriage, the matter had better be settled beforehand or it leads to trouble afterwards, as you see!'

'But it never was settled in our case, Absalom?' I remonstrated.

He stooped and kissed me smilingly without saying a word.

'Keep your baby,' he said; 'let Tamson and Selina redd their own tangled skeins. It will be the better for them now than later.'

This was no easy thing for me to do. But, of course, I did not think of disobeying Absalom, who was sure to know best. Nan Gilfillan was ready to go. The 'banker-man' persistently reclaimed her, but he had perforce to arrange as best he could with hope deferred. For the sporting instinct in Nan was awakened, and she was ready to raise her first offer of 'two to one on Tamson' (in new hats) to the

tempting figure of ten to one!

However, the second night, Tommy declared his intention of following his parent-by-marriage. Selina let him go with the single word, 'Ingrate!' Then it appeared to me a good thing that I had refrained from betting. It is an excellent thing to have principles—and—I knew the price of Nan's hats.

Tommy had been in bed upstairs before Tamson had 'cleared' the night before. In the morning he had been informed by his comrades that his pride was gone. Tamson had returned to 'them.'

He has had enough o' your mither,' said Stoor. 'Oh, that I had had a mither o' my ain. She wad hae keptit him langer than that at ony rate!'

And there, on the spot, befel the biggest fight that had ever taken place in all the chronicles of the wars of Stoor and Tommy, now called Tamson the Lesser. Both combatants carried about with them for weeks various black eyes, split lips, and other adornments, without the fact in the least interfering with their friendship.

I was profoundly sorry for Selina, but she rejected my advances crudely, with the severe attitude of one wronged in her tenderest feelings.

She even spoke to me in the third person, to my face, a reminiscence of some pre-Chugbridgian 'place,' when Selina who was the finest 'general' in the world, had for a time thrown away her talents as a mere table-maid.

'If madam will deign to signify madam's orders, they shall be carried out!'

This was amazing, heard on the Dungeon, and the accent and proud humility of it would have made the lower jaws of the McClintock lassies drop had they been present.

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'Weel, mem, and what's yer wull!' being the amount of 'mainers' that could be expected of them.

So Selina abode alone by night in the cottage, moving about during the day with the air of a martyred saint. Sometimes I was afraid that she would run for it and drown herself in Dee Water! It frightened me to look at her.

But Nan said, 'No, leave it to Muckle Tamson! He will give her plenty of rope and then bring Selina up with a round turn.'

Well, perhaps—but I could not for the life of me think how Tamson was going to do it. Perhaps neither could Tamson. Only he felt himself instinctively the stronger, and was content to keep an eye on the game. He certainly kept one on Selina.

He had, as usual, his two watch-dogs, Stoor and Tommy Tamson, now generally known as the 'Ingrate.' For me I had my baby, but Nan was wholly absorbed in the problems of the unknown. She went about whistling unexpected and uncanny ditties picked up from street boys with baskets on their arms, as if she were wholly unconscious that it was not the Old Hundred which was proceeding from her lips.

But the Unknown was slow in revealing itself, as is its fashion. The 'banker-man' must wait yet awhile. Nan Gilfillan was going to see it out. None but hill-folk can tell how full the summer days were, how fast they went, and what absolute peace rested on all—on all, that is, save upon the soul of Selina alone. It was a case of Pharaoh hardening his heart. Tamson had gone from her, upholding me in my iniquity. Tommy, the son of her youth, had followed, and Selina was widowed indeed. But save for the

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paler face and an occasional twitch at the corners of the mouth, you would never have known it. Truly a pair well matched and mated were Muckle Tamson and his wife Selina, late Chugbridge. I began, after all, to wonder if there was not something to be said for the 'sometime Chugbridge.'

CHAPTER TWENTY SIX

THE WALKING OF CHUGBRIDGE, A.B.

Now the stillest and most glorious days in the Wilderness have the longest and finest gloamings. And, indeed, it is the gloamings there that make life worth living. At least the lassies think so. The lads come from far to see them. Each scrambling wind-blown thorn, with contorted limbs sprawling crab-fashion over the peaty turf—a scanty overcoat of green leaves pulled about its hunched back, apparently to its very ears—becomes a place of sacred trysting.

There secrets are whispered which the wind itself cannot catch, while as for the 'bit scrut o' thorn,' it is too old and deaf and disgusted with the world generally to care. It can hardly produce a single 'haw,' much less like Jove, laugh aloud at the lovers' perjuries uttered beneath it.

Selina grew more hopeless than ever. She went about her work (as Muckle Tamson said) 'like a new-wound-up watch.' But it was evident that her heart was still hard and bitter within her.

'What's the meanin' o't, Tommy?' said Tamson, 'laddie, ye should ken your mither. What's gotten her?'

Tommy, altogether heart and soul with the enemy and deep in his counsels, could only scratch his head.

'I think,' he said, slowly, 'that she used to go in fear—and now.'

'Now what?' demanded Tamson, 'oot wi' it,

callant!’

‘I think,’ said Tommy Tamson, philosopher after his kind, ‘that when Selina was feared o’ Chugbridge, she could ... be made anything of. But now!’

‘She’s dour and she’s headstrong!’ said Tamson, tentatively.

‘She’s my mother, but I will not deny it,’ said Tommy sadly. He honoured both his present parents, Selina and Muckle Tamson, but he knew that Tamson was in the right. It is hard for a boy thus to judge between his parents.

He sought Stoor, at present reconciled, for the reason that the lobe of Tommy’s ear was bigger than his own swollen lip. They were accustomed to take counsel together upon the affairs, ordinary and extraordinary, of the farm-town, so nobody minded them.

Stoor was seated on a mound trying to learn to whistle like Nan Gilfillan.

‘You silly coot!’ cried Tommy, as a greeting, and he dodged to avoid the ‘gob’ of mud that was immediately thrown at his head.

‘Silly yourself!’ cried Stoor, making room for Tommy after these necessary court ceremonials had been gone through.

Accordingly they sat down together, and having produced a pipe, formerly used for innocent bubble-blowing, they filled it with a chopped mixture of used tea teaves and those of the blaeberry, which latter, in time of need, have enabled many a herd upon the hills to make himself believe that such a thing as tobacco existed in the world.

‘She smokes easy!’ said Tommy.

‘Correct,’ nodded Stoor, who was having his turn.

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'A fine flavour!' added Tommy, 'delicate and rich yet full!'

'You're a fool,' said Stoor, with obvious intent to provoke.

This uncalled for aggression produced a temporary interruption of traffic, as it were. But finally they finished by smoking the pipe of peace, which bit their tongues so venomously that they found they had little time for internecine strife. Having corrected this with peat water, they sat cross-legged, spitting amicably among the heather, and thought what real great men they were.

Having convinced themselves, not each other, of this, they gave their attention to Tamson's affairs. Stoor heard the story of Selina's wrong-headedness, and it was on the tip of his (still tingling) tongue to say, 'If I had had a mother, she would not have gone on like that!'

A proposition which, save from circumstantial evidence, Tommy was certainly in no position to rebut.

But luckily Stoor restrained himself. That taunt would do all right for another time. It had, indeed, served before. It would again. In the meantime, perhaps a council of war might lead to something interesting. One never knew.

'Maybe after a', Tommy,' said Stoor, 'ye were ower hasty like in puttin' Chugbridge oot o' sicht in the Murder Hole!'

'What d'ye mean?' demanded Tommy Tamson, suddenly starting up. 'I never want to see his face again. He was not bonny to look at!'

Tommy now spoke a kind of bastard dialect, half Scots of the Dungeon, half untamed Forest-of-Bere. The result of the mixture was curious, but it is quite

beyond my power to indicate on paper, save in the vaguest manner.

Stoor wagged his head wisely.

'See here, Tommy,' he philosophised, 'ye say that the fear o' Chugbridge made your mither behave. Weel, Chugbridge is in the Murder Hole. Noo, suppose we resurrected Chugbridge—you and me, Tommy—it wad be fine for Muckle Tamson—and, oh yes, for your mither too!'

'I couldn't! Oh, no, no! Ye have no idea, Stoor!'

'But,' proceeded the tempter, 'think of the guid it wad do. Your mither wad want Tamson to protect her. I wad get his bed in the stable laft. It has a mattress, no a common cauff bed to sleep on.'

'Oh, bother,' said Tommy, 'Chugbridge is no your father.'

'He micht hae been for aught I ken!' cried Stoor, strong in an unclimbed genealogical tree.

'Tommy, see here! Let us get down the grappling irons that hang in the byre, and fetch Chugbridge up!'

'No,' said Tommy Tamson weakly, 'after all is said and done, he was my faither!'

'Then your name is Tommy Chugbridge—hold on till I finish before striking—I want you to be Tommy Tamson, same as I am Stoor MacMeikle. It's a terrible fine thing to hae a guid name a' to yoursel'. Dinna forget that. And it will be rare fun, grapplin' at night in the Murder Hole, for the body o' a deid man and him your faither. I'll wager ye are the only laddie in the world that has ever dune sic a thing!'

'But I have not promised!' said Tommy, obviously wavering.

'Ye are feared!' sneered the wily Stoor.

'Feared! Me feared!' cried Tommy, 'if it was

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another day I wad prove it on the banes o' your face, Stoor MacMeikle. As it is, I tell you that I'm none feared. But it will be the nicht-time, and you have not seen 'yon.' It had a hole in't and!

Here Tommy made the identical physiological observation which was also made by a relative interested before the raising of Lazarus.

'No,' said Stoor, sagely, 'Chugbridge is deep in the peat. I hae heard the minister say that he would be the same for hundreds of years. They found Covenanters—that's men that let themsel's be shot by Lag and Claverhose lang syne—and they were that fresh when they cam' oot o' the moss, ye could hae made mince collops o' them!'

'Stoor, ye are a pig! A low gipsy swine pig!'

'Maybe,' said Stoor modestly and self-righteously, 'maybe. But at ony rate, I am trying to heal family quarrels and to do what guid I can in this world!'

The doer of good in this wicked world watched his patient cautiously out of the corner of his eye. It was working.

'And what wad we do with It when we had it grappled?' said the proper heritor of the object referred to.

'Lay it across a powny,' said Stoor, easily, 'and then—stick it up at Selina's bedroom window!'

'Oh,' said Tommy, 'you beast, Stoor! I'll mell ye, Stoor!'

'I'm doin' it for a guid motive, Tommy!'

'It would surely send my mother out of her mind!' said Tommy, tragically.

'Is she so greatly in her mind, noo?' inquired Stoor, ironically, 'the way that she is treatin' Muckle Tamson? Answer me that!'

The war thus carried into the enemies' country,

Tommy surrendered—upon terms, however. These were briefly, that all blame spiritual was to be put down to Stoor's account. The recording angel was to see to this. Holding up his right hand, Stoor was to declare himself completely and personally responsible both for idea and for carrying out. Secondly, they were merely going to fish in the Murder Hole. There were believed to be good eels there—also, as in the 'Offisher's Pool,' many greedy geds. For these they were to angle with grappling irons and without bait—at the dead of night. To all this, Stoor swore. Indeed, it would have been difficult to devise any form of words to which Stoor would not have subscribed by formal oath, rather than give up his cherished plan of resurrecting Chugbridge, A.B. Lastly, but by no means of least importance, it was arranged (and duly sworn to) that as soon as 'they had hooked their fish' Stoor was to bind Tommy's eyes with a napkin provided for the purpose. After that Tommy was to become a mere lantern-carrier, and Stoor was 'to do the rest.'

Thus Tommy, always, be it remembered, in the interests of Muckle Tamson and under the persuasive eloquence of Stoor, became accomplice, before, during, and after the fact of this ghastly affair. However, he made a last appeal.

'It's wrong—wrong,' he repeated, 'I am sure it is wrong; I feel it here, Stoor. But if it's for Muckle Tamson, I'll do it, if I have to hang for it!'

Thus does the fascination of greatness conquer youth at its most heartless age.

Slowly and with subtlety, wafted abroad finer than the perfume of the honey in heather-bells, there spread over the Dungeon and all the Wilderness the news— that Chugbridge walked!

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The end of Chugbridge was known exactly to only a few. But there was a vaguer, rarer knowledge, a kind of sub-consciousness, as Absalom says, that kept belated herds wide of the Murder Hole. These hill-folk of Galloway were kin to the Celts, who, by clans and country-sides, can keep secrets for a hundred and fifty years.

Yes, true it was, Chugbridge walked! He had been seen—gliding along paths where hardly the mountain sheep could find their ways, scaling perilous crags, easier to him now in his new profession of ghost than even as an A.B. Chugbridge was abroad on the Dungeon once more. And Fear came with him.

Only Muckle Tamson openly scoffed. Yet even he did not accept the challenge to watch all night by the Murder Hole, where lights had been seen moving and the sound of wailing voices plainly heard.

He said that he would be more comfortable in his bed in the stable loft. And then all the Dungeon knew that the thing must have some foundation, because Muckle Tamson was afraid. Some there were, who (not, be sure, in Tamson's presence or neighbourhood) took it on them to cast doubts on the legality of Selina's second marriage.

In his capacity of general foreman, head shepherd of all the hills, Muckle Tamson had, in the days of his bachelorhood, been put in possession of a little private room, a kind of cabin-chamber roughly boarded off from the rest of the long dormitory, but with a window in the gable with a sash opening inwards, such as is common throughout the south country when there is no room for a double frame of the ordinary guillotine type.

Directly I have no information, of course. But it

was whispered among the lads, conveyed to the MacClintocks, and so finally to me, that Muckle Tamson was in the habit of putting out his candle and sitting long watching the light (which was Selina's) moving to and fro in the solitary cottage at the loaning-end.

'Whiles,' said one of the MacClintock lasses, 'they say that he never takes aff his claes—far less sleeps!'

'Who told you so?' I demanded impatiently, tired of mysteries.

After a little hesitation May MacClintock owned that it was a certain young herd, working the outhill of the Buss, by name Duncan Duff, who had told her.

This yet more softened my heart towards Muckle Tamson, and made me so angry with Selina that she would sometimes go a whole long day in our domicile without any one addressing a word to her. Yet I was pitiful for her, too. But if a woman with such a temper will not learn, it is well for her to be taught. So, at least, Absalom says.

The lay and outland reader will please remember that all our countryside, twenty years ago, was under the fear and the spell of ghosts and apparitions. These, indeed, are so many and so distinctive that they need their chronicler. There is, for instance, that famous ghost in Kells parish which regularly prevents the letting of one of the best mansions in the most beautiful part of the Glenkens. There is the grisly spectre of the hanged man a-swing and a-gibber in a ripple of phosphorescent light from the 'hanging-stane' of Thrieve Castle. On the Laurieston road near Blates Mill are the Bogle Thorn and the Green Man—not to dilate upon the winged spirit which haunts the dark

loaning opposite Springfield in Crossmichael—oh, and a dozen more, all with their proper histories and legends to be inquired into!

With us on the Wilderness, there had been hitherto only harmless Cameron, sitting on his own green grave, and shifting the coppers from one ghostly trousers' pocket to the other, his pack on his back, and an ancient cocked hat on his head. The 'Wife of the Star' who poisoned the 'hefter' needs a chapter to herself, but not even she had ever troubled the repose of the Wilderness like the Walking of Chugbridge.

So it came to pass that, in the small dark moonless hours—when something falls from the heaven (or rises from 'another place') that tingles in the blood of the greatest unbeliever, at once chill and thrilling like the wind, which, about that hour, strikes from the north—a woman came to Muckle Tamson's window. It was at least twelve feet from the ground, but the farm lads, for their own convenience of entrance and exit in the courting season, had built a lean-to, cone-shaped peat-stack, well-sodded down, against it.

So up this the woman scrambled, wild-eyed and gasping. She rattled at the little square of four panes.

'Tamson! Tamson!' she cried, 'Let me in! Oh, let me in!'

And it was a mercy that Selina was a slender woman in those days, for Tamson, sitting there with his light out, had the window open, and Selina in his arms in a moment.

'What is't, what is't, Selina?' he said, hoarsely. He knew that some great trouble had befallen.

'Chugbridge!' she cried, 'Chugbridge! I saw him.'

He was at my window!

Then Selina fainted away, but as the herds in their beds down in the dormitory recalled her voice, they shuddered. Yes, they had known it a long time. Chugbridge walked!

Muckle Tamson lighted his candle. He splashed water and slapped hands, and so in time brought Selina round. Telling her hastily that the lads would keep watch, he laid her in his own untouched place.

Then seizing his leaping-pole he went out into the darkness.

Alive or dead he would not have this happen to Selina. Chugbridge might walk, but Muckle Tamson could run. He was down at the cottage, as it seemed, in twenty strides and a few aerial flights such as only Tamson would have attempted.

But, as it chanced, it was not a case for 'melling.'

The first that we in the new house heard of it was Muckle Tamson's voice calling on my husband. He asked for the loan of his cane— 'that supple fancy cane that ye fetched frae London wi' ye. Tamson has need o't!'

Absalom handed it out at the door, but as was his custom, asked no questions.

That malacca was never seen again, neither on heather nor on grass, on hay nor yet on stubble. It had been dispersed, worn threadbare, handle and supple shaft had parted company. Simply, it was not, when Tamson had done with it.

And those who knew most about the matter said least. To wit, Stoor and Tommy.

From information received, that is, after they were able to sit down, or indeed to move about at all, with any comfort, I made out the general sum of things as it appeared to them, which I set down here as

briefly as possible.

'Ye see, Miss Rose,' said Stoor, 'we grappled and grappled at the Murder Hole till we lost the grappling irons, and broke the lantern. But deil a Chugbridge did we hook. Never a nibble, though I fell in twice. But Tommy kenned where there was a suit o' his auld faither's auld claes!'

'He's not my faither!' interrupted Tommy, indignantly.

'Weel, onyway,' continued Stoor, 'we couldna find Chugbridge, faither or no faither. But we made a face oot o' a big turnip and pented on whiskers and moustache to shine through wi' a candle inside. Then I went doon to Selina's window.'

'You young wretch!'

'I did it for the best,' said Stoor, philosophically, 'and it acted juist fine. It did, indeed, Miss Rose! Selina willna let Tamson oot o' her sicht noo, no for a' the sheep on the Dungeon. Whiles she even gangs to the hills wi' him—to keep him company, she says!'

'And after—what happened?' I inquired.

Each rubbed himself thoughtfully.

'Oh, that,' said Stoor, 'that was—what is it the books say, Miss Rose? Aye, aye, a painful experience—that's it. Tamson didna ken, ye see, that we were doin' it for his guid and Selina's. He wadna listen. He garred our skins pay the price. But, eh, it was worth the money—was it no, Tommy?'

And Tommy, who had returned to the comfortable cottage at the loaning end, rubbed his more outstanding troubles, and admitted that it was so.

Thus once and for all ended the Walking of Chugbridge.

CHAPTER TWENTY SEVEN

THE FORWARD GLIMPSE

One morning there arrived at the Dungeon a letter for my husband, brought by a herd from Loch Dee. He had his hat on his head. His staff was in his hand, and he stood ready to whistle up the dogs and be off to the hills. But I could see in a moment that the delayed letter gave him the utmost inquietude. However, I knew better than to ask. If the matter concerned me, Absalom would be sure to tell me.

He went up to his own room after brusquely ordering Tamson to 'put the ponies in.' He had need to go to the railway station. It was a long journey and was not often undertaken except on the gravest occasions of necessity. But then nearly always, either Stoor or Tommy acted as coachman, and with the 'machine' awaited the return of my husband at the nearest friendly farmhouse.

On this occasion, however, Absalom said briefly, 'I want you to come with me, Tamson!'

'And Selina, sir?' said Tamson perplexedly.

'Selina had better come up to the House of the Dungeon and occupy her old place till you return!'

Tamson looked unaccountably startled.

'Would ye mind steppin' roond to the kitchen and tellin' Selina that yoursel', sir? '

Tamson said 'sir' to my husband. For me, I was 'Miss Rose,' of course, and my father 'Henry Gordon,' or on rare occasions 'the auld maister.'

But alone of men, Absalom Kenmore was 'sir' to Muckle Tamson. Which meant that he had to be 'sir'

also to the other herds. Indeed, in spite of his rather reticent, though kindly, dignity, and perhaps more especially because of his Sabbath services, he was wonderfully looked up to by all in the Wilderness.

To go downstairs and inform Selina seemed to Absalom a simple thing. And so it was—to him. The secret was that he commanded. He did not ask as a favour. He had the habit of command, the influence of a reverence grown habitual to him everywhere, which enabled him to say simply, 'Selina, I have need of your husband for a day or two. You will come up to the house and take up your old chamber, while awaiting his return!'

'Very well, sir!' said Selina. And there was no more about the matter, because it was Absalom Kenmore who, hat in hand, had stepped into Selina's shining kitchen, and, his business done in a word, had stepped out again, with a smile and a bow, leaving (so strange a thing is the heart of a woman) Selina fairly beaming to be permitted to take her orders from him.

The letter which my husband had received was from the chief doctor at the Crichton Institution, and contained the news which darkened so quickly my husband's brow. Here it is as I have copied it out, with Absalom's permission, from the files of his correspondence, which he keeps with the method of a lawyer's office.

DEAR SIR (said the notable physician in the cure of minds Ceased),—I am aware of the interest you have taken in the case of William Gillespie, as evidence by your visits to myself, and also, very practically, by the liberal manner in which you have provided for him ever since his entrance to here. I have to inform you that the dangerous homicidal

mania, from which he was first suffering, yielded to treatment, but gave place, as often happens, to a profound melancholia. So much I think you knew. But now this, in turn, has gradually passed away—though, I fear, only in the measure in which his physical health has weakened.

Now, in the opinion of my colleagues, as well as in my own, the young man is sane, but dying. He will not live many weeks. I do not know how you will look upon the matter of his request—it concerns your work as an expert in spiritual matters more than mine as a mere mental physician— but, in my opinion, you, or his relatives, will run no risk by acceding to his request. Apparently, from what you tell me, it is useless to consult the young man's father, in the feeble state of his understanding. The letter, therefore, which he has written to Mr. Gillespie, senior, I, using my discretion, now send on to you. You will let me know, what is your decision. He can very well die here. But you, sir, who have studied the souls of men, know better than I what a satisfaction it would be if he could spend the last days (perhaps hours only) of his life among the surroundings for which he yearns. You will know if this is practicable.

Very sincerely yours,

J. ROLLO BROWNE, M.D., F.R.S.

Willie Gillespie's letter was enclosed. It had been scribbled with pencil, feebly but generally distinctly enough. In places, however, it was almost illegible, but here Absalom, with his usual care, had written the interpretation above in his clear, print-like hand.

DEAR FATHER (so it ran),—I receive every attention in this place, and I know well that it is my own faults and follies which have brought me here.

But I am quite well now in my mind. I know that hitherto this has not been so, and regret the trouble I have given you and, from what I hear, to others also. They have told me how Mr. Kenmore has behaved, not only to me but to you, about the farm and sheep.

Well, he is a noble man, I doubt it not. But still he owed me something for Rose. No, do not be afraid—I have no longer the old bad ideas. How can a man like me have such? Father, I am still a young man, and I am to die. You would think this to be hard, but to me it is less than nothing—that is, not in itself.

Do you remember the time mother died, and you laid your head on my shoulder and said, sobbing as I never thought to hear you: ‘Will,’ you said, ‘I have only you now!’

I have been a poor ‘all’ to depend upon. I have given you many griefs. But at least I would not have the curse upon me of bringing down your grey hairs in sorrow to the grave. I want you to see me, for these last days, as I am now—as I was before! Do not be afraid. I am again the little boy who herded the sheep on the knowes of Trool, and guddled for trout under the stones. I am the child whom you rode upon your knee, who learned ‘The Lord is my Shepherd’ sitting by you in the great chair on Sabbath days. Do not fear for me.

Only, father, go over to the Dungeon. See Rose and her husband, and if she has any fear of me left (which I pray God she has not), I will bow the head upon the pillow and pray that death may come soon to me.

But if she has no fear—I know she has no anger—I should like to come back among you for the little

time that is left. I would like to see the Dungeon once more. Oh, the hills— the hills, to which in my dreams I lift my eyes! And Rose, perhaps I shall see her once more also—yes, perhaps, if God is very good to your poor boy, whose life has been a light thing as useless as blown thistledown, but who, during the darkest night, has not ceased from being, dear father,

Your faithful son,  
WILL GILLESPIE.

Now I will show you what a wise man Absalom Kenmore, my husband, is. He understands high things. He understands also things so low and unequal as the hearts of men and women. He does not despise me because, in comparison with him, I am weak and foolish.

Now he read this letter and that of the great brain physician, and he saw through and through, above them and underneath them too.

Even while Tamson was getting the ponies ready, he had despatched Stoor to the Black Dullarg for old William Gillespie. The old man had not far to walk to the new road by which Absalom and Muckle Tamson would pass. Having done this, Absalom Kenmore passed round the corner of the house of the Dungeon, and entering by the door through which I had so often gone and come in my youth, he penetrated to my father's chamber.

Now I had better explain how it was at this time with Henry Gordon. Ever since little Lila's death he had been a different man. He saw visions and he dreamed dreams. More than that, he believed in them. He would sit for hours in the dark, waiting, as he supposed, for the spirit of little Lila to speak with him. Once (so he averred) she had tapped at his

window, and he had heard her voice. And never in the greatest winter storms had that window been shut since. I had, indeed, to provide a screen on purpose to keep the draughts off him. For through the best-built houses on these wild hills the wind speeds like galloping horses unless every aperture be closed, while at such times the fire roaring in the chimney supplies the best and sole ventilation.

Now to me it would have seemed as vain to apply for direction to my father, as to seek old William Gillespie of Black Dullarg. But Absalom Kenmore, learned in the lore of souls, and having also within him the spiritual instinct, went as straight to my father as he had gone to Selina in her kitchen in the new house of the Dungeon.

To Henry Gordon he read the letters. My father wrinkled a broad meditative brow over the great doctor's epistle. But he smiled and nodded when Absalom came to that of Will Gillespie. His spirit leaped to meet the suggestion which, without words, my husband had made to him.

'Will Gillespie must come here,' he said, without the least hesitation; 'here to me in this house. It is no use sending him to the Dullarg to his father. He could not be happy. He would neither live there nor die there.'

'That is what I was thinking,' said Absalom quietly.

'Yes,' said Henry Gordon, almost his eager old self, 'Will shall have the chamber nearest to mine—most likely it will not be long. His father can see him when he likes. He can even bide at the Dungeon, an he will. There is the old gable-room, ready, empty, and the MacClintocks willing to serve. You are going to fetch Will, Absalom?'

My husband nodded.

'I thought that would be the way you would see it,' he answered gently; 'the ponies are already yoked.'

'You are taking Muckle Tamson with you?'

Absalom Kenmore pointed through the window, where Tamson, already on the box-seat, was arranging certain provisions and cloaks.

'Blankets?' said my father, nodding approval, as at that moment Selina brought out a closely wrapped pile.

The two men understood one another almost without speech, but Henry Gordon, being nearer the Infinite, saw more surely.

'He will be weak in the body,' affirmed my father, 'but his soul will see far.'

So Muckle Tamson and my husband drove to the end of the little moorland track, where Will's father met them, an old done man quavering upon a stick, who kept saying, 'I see not the use! He will never work mair! Better let him bide!'

But Absalom read him first the doctor's letter and afterwards his son's. Then, with his air of authority, he intimated what arrangements he had made for the home-coming of poor Willie.

His father nodded his head with a certain appreciation, almost unnatural, when he heard he was to be brought to the Dungeon.

'It's juist as weel,' he said, 'for, to tell the truth, since Willie's way-going we have put the fleeces in his bit chammer at the Dullarg, and it wad be an unco' troublesome thing, especially at this time of year.'

'Do not disturb yourself,' said Absalom Kenmore; 'all the arrangements have been made. There is no

more to be done, except to be kind to him while he is with us. Remember,' he added solemnly, 'speak kindly to the lad. I will do the rest!'

'Indeed, it is maist kind o' ye!' said Willie's father, relapsing with the easy selfishness of the aged into the relation of his own troubles with rheumatism and his ill-luck with last year's lambs.

I do not know that Absalom listened much, or that old William expected it of him. At any rate, it made no difference. He talked ceaselessly—in the train, on the way to the institution, and right up to the door.

'Now,' said Absalom, turning on him suddenly, 'listen to me: say not a word to him but only I am glad to see you, my son Willie!'

'Nothing but that? There's heaps o'-news—'

'No, nothing but that,' commanded Absalom Kenmore sharply, 'but that you can say as often as you like—and always take his hand when you say it.'

'What for should I take his hand?'

'Because I bid you!' said Absalom Kenmore.

'Verra weel, sir! I'll do it since ye bid me!' said the elder Gillespie.

The return railway journey was over. The ponies were midway to their second halting-place ere Will spoke. He had been laid in the bottom of the long waggonette among the blankets. His father sat beside him, taking his hand at intervals and uttering the single sentence he had learned from Absalom.

'I am glad to see ye, my son Willie, and I tak' your hand!'

The poor doited old man had, as it were, incorporated the stage direction with the text. He would be faithful, even more. But the repetition was not wearisome to poor Willie Gillespie—rather the

reverse. He was so fatigued bodily, so worn to a shadow, that he could only look with eyes of gratitude at his father and then drop off again. He had hardly spoken to Absalom, but he had extended to him a hand—no longer that of a herd hard with the leaping-pole and the hill-clickie, stained under the nails with tar and with a finger or two 'chirted' in dyke-climbing or among loose stone-slides—but a hand slender, white, and fine as a lady's. However, it was the token of amity and a sane mind, though hardly yet of friendship.

After that Will Gillespie had lain in a kind of stupor till the ponies, turning sharply into the New Road, and snuffing the breeze that blew from their own stable door, started into a livelier gait. Perhaps also something of his own home country reached the wasted lungs and sent the blood faster to feed the wearied brain.

At any rate, he started upon his elbow suddenly, as if transfigured. There came a glow upon his face. Like my father, he, too, saw visions and dreamed dreams.

'The hills! The hills!' he cried. 'And the whaups and the heather—yes, and Rose! And to think that they have been here all the time, just the same, day after day, night after night, when I was shut up yonder!'

He seemed to drink in all he saw. Yet Absalom says he is not at all sure that Will really saw the outline of green Corscrine, clean and free (when seen from the west) as a far-thrown salmon-line. Neither did he notice the battered cliff-fortress of the Dungeon face as it looks outward from Enoch.

As from the earthly Jerusalem, across the gorge of the sea called of Death, the traveller sees the purple

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mountains of Moab, so Will saw before him other mountains and another world.

'I have been long away,' he said gently; 'I have been blind, but now I see!'

Absalom Kenmore had enough of the Celt in him to understand that he must not interrupt Willie Gillespie while the vision was upon him. He waited for Henry Gordon, who in his weakness and age also began to have 'the sight.' These two would assuredly commune together.

'What, you are not taking me home!' he said suddenly, as the carriage passed the little road-end which led up by casual-looking sheep-tracks to the steading of the Black Dornal.

'Yes, Willie—oh, yes, my son Willie!' said his father.

But the worn, yet keen, intellect worked true, He looked past Absalom and round as far as he could see.

'Yes, you are taking me to the Dungeon—where Rose is. Yes, that is home!'

And Absalom did not contradict him, though he knew well that it would be where Henry Gordon was, that Willie the younger seer should find his true home.

My father met them at the gate. I stood back in the shade of the orchard. I was only to come forward if they had need of me, upon a sign from Absalom. It rent my heart to see Willie thus—he who had once been the bravest and the daintiest dressed lad upon the hills. He was lifted bodily out of the machine by Muckle Tamson. He stood, the very shadow of his former self, between the huge man and my tall Absalom. His poor old father wandered about, tottering on his staff, still trying to take his son's

hand and murmur his single sentence of greeting.

But suddenly Willie Gillespie came face to face with Henry Gordon. It was (how can I express it?) as if the lightning, long imprisoned, leaped suddenly from the east to the west. As he looked Henry Gordon murmured a strange word. Just a name it was, 'Lila —Little Lila!' he said.

'What's that?' said Willie, suddenly shaking off his father's importunities and standing erect. He seemed to hear a new language.

Henry Gordon turned a little, as if to look towards the Nick of Dee, by which one funeral had already passed.

'I spoke,' he said, slowly and softly, 'the name of one who was alive and is dead. She had that same look on her face!'

It seemed to me a pitiful, a fatal thing to say. But my father knew better. He had not conferred so long with saints and confessors—or better, with the high things of his own soul, to be mistaken now. Absalom made me a sign to remain where I was, and leave them twain to it.

'Ah, then,' cried Will, a quick radiance of joy on his countenance, 'then I have indeed come home to die!'

A step nearer and Henry Gordon took him by the hand. He led poor Willie to the ancient log of moss-oak, on which in old days he had often waited in vain for my coming out.

All stood back, leaving Henry Gordon and the man from whom the seven devils had been cast out, to speak eye to eye in the nakedness of their spirits.

'Yes,' said my father, yet more gently, 'doubtless it is true, lad. You have come home to die, and as for me, I abide to await my passing on the spot where I

was born. But, Will Gillespie' (here his voice took on a clearer tone), 'you are one highly favoured by God. Your time of suffering you have passed on the earth. When the blue up yonder opens and you pass through—to the place of spirits tried in the fire, redeemed, approven, regenerate—you shall not be without a friend. No, I will give you a message for one who is there before you.'

'I know,' said Will, with a faint smile, 'if I do pass in, I shall seek her—Little Lila, you mean—Lila Kemp?'

I had not heard the latter name for years, and I own I started at the sound.

'Yes,' said my father, 'the Lily that came to our Wilderness, but could not bloom in our rough weather. At first you may not know her. She will be changed. In the winds of God, she will surely have bloomed!'

'I shall know her!' affirmed Will, gently, 'that is, if they let me in. What is your message, Henry Gordon? It is well that I should know it now—my time may not be long.'

'I know,' my father continued gravely, 'that in heaven, in the place where worthy spirits meet, there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage. If there were, perhaps, I would not ask you this. But such being the written word, I ask you to find Little Lila, and bid her to wait for me by the Gate!'

'By the Gate—yes, I understand,' murmured Will, 'but are you sure they will let such as me in?'

Then in a low and moving voice Henry Gordon recited snatches of his favourite parable—that of the Far Country.

'He was lost and is found! Yes, they will let you in, Willie! Doubt it not!'

## ROSE OF THE WILDERNESS

Will Gillespie closed his eyes and smiled. I cannot get that smile out of my memory. Nor indeed will I try. It was as if in his ear the voice of Henry Gordon fell as the voice of God. I am glad I saw that smile. It was as of one greatly forgiven. It was not, as it pleased my father to think, really like Lila's smile. For she went hence with no guilt of blood upon her hands, or any other guilt. But I will not deny that I remarked the same welcoming shine upon these two early doomed faces.

'Poor Will!' I said, unconsciously speaking aloud from under the shade of the orchard trees. Will heard, and I know not what he thought. But the voice of Henry Gordon had the greater power upon him.

'Hush,' he said, 'carry him to my room. Place him where the bed faces the open window. Push it up close, and lay him down. This will not last for long!'

The ears of the dying man seemed hardly to hear. He had indeed come home to die. My father followed behind, murmuring his words of sacredest consolation, probably the only ones which reached that hovering soul.

'I have sinned against heaven—against thee— I am no more worthy.'

The eyelids of the sick man quivered. 'No more worthy!' he repeated.

'But when he was yet a great way off, his Father saw him and had compassion on him!'

He was lying now on my father's bed, his face turned towards the marvellous prospect of the Dungeon lochs and heather, never lovelier than now. At Henry Gordon's final words, and perhaps also at the ceasing of all movement, Will opened his eyes. He might have seen, but did not, all the Highlands of

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the south, from the green Kells Range to the shaggy lion's breast of Curlywee. But instead he beheld (I doubt it not) the majesty of the heavenly spaces.

'The door—the door of heaven is open!' cried Will, and he raised himself on his elbow. 'I can see—I can see!'

'Yes, yes,' said my father, bending eagerly as if to look also, 'and what do you see within, and whom? Tell me, Will Gillespie.'

'The doors are open! The doors of heaven!' repeated the dying man.

'Aye, I know,' said Henry Gordon. 'The doors that no man can shut. But what can you see? Oh, man' (he burst out impetuously), 'what can you see? Do you see Lila? Tell me, can you not see Little Lila Kemp?'

At his bidding Will appeared to concentrate his attention. A light burned a moment in his eyes. He searched hopefully, as one who in a crowd passes his eyes from face to face seeking that of a friend.

'I see Him!' he whispered, with an awful reverence, but apparently without the least fear.

'Can you see Lila—look closely—again, Willie, again?'

The light on his face wavered, dwindled, flickered, and went out.

'I do not know,' he said, wearily, as he lay back, 'for a moment I thought—but no—I could not be certain.'

He leaned stronger on his elbow, striving yet once more to lift himself up. My father, kneeling behind, held him on his knee. He thrust a haggard face forward. Both looked at once, and eagerly. It was a strange thing to see. One man was trying to compel the other to see into the futurity they were both soon

## ROSE OF THE WILDERNESS

to enter—both looking, among the throngs of the faithful, for a woman!

'You see Lila now?' asked my father, his voice low in the ear of Will Gillespie.

But in the very effort the light was gone. The moment had passed. Will shook his head. The flash of insight, or onward-sight, granted to the dying had passed. I watched Absalom. He stood a little apart, gravely sympathetic, yet with the air of one who knows that with God all things are possible— even what men call insolently 'miracles.'

Will dropped his head on the pillow, looking about, moving his hands the while bewilderedly.

'They walk in white,' he said, and again, 'they walk in white!'

Perhaps it was some old faint reminiscence of the sermon I had read the day he was taken, the sermon he could only have known by hearsay.

'They walk in white,' he repeated for the third time. Then, quite sharply and suddenly, 'Where is Rose? I cannot go without seeing Rose. Without her, I am bound to the earth—to this body of death.

I want to go and cannot. Send for Rose that she may loose me!'

Absalom motioned me forward.

'You forgive me, Rose?' he said, looking up.

And my streaming tears forgave poor Will.

'Kiss me, Rose, this once—and let me go!'

I kissed Will Gillespie, and lo! in a moment his bonds were loosed.

'They walk in white,' he murmured, smiling up at me.

And so—he went.

## CHAPTER TWENTY EIGHT

### THE BLOSSOMING WILDERNESS

My father stood, murmuring gently, at the front door of the Dungeon on the day of Will Gillespie's funeral. It was lovely, as, indeed, were all the days on the face of the Wilderness during that summer.

Nan and I were left behind, being women—sad enough, but not too sad. It was a good end. Selina went about, suddenly beautified, in the kitchen, because on the eve of 'lifting' Muckle Tamson had looked in to see her. She had thought him looking so handsome in his blacks! Now she was content not to follow him about, at least, when Absalom had need of him.

As I say, my father, being thus left behind with us, continued to murmur to himself. I listened—Nan also.

'Yes—yes,' he said, 'Will saw Lila, because for him the heavens had been opened. He was caught up. He saw and heard things not lawful to be told. But for me, who desired it so much more—the time is not ripe! It is not permitted! No, it is not permitted!'

He watched the funeral procession, a long black snake twisting across the face of the moorland, following the sinuosities of the New Road.

Now they were near to the Nick of Dee, where we should lose them.

'But Willie has my message,' he continued, 'he will bear it faithfully! Lila will wait cheerfully by the Gate. She will know me when I come!'

He paused a while, and then, turning away, said,

## ROSE OF THE WILDERNESS

with a lift of his hand (but whether sadly or no I could not make out), 'Neither marrying nor giving in marriage! No, it is written!'

I read Nan's glance as our eyes encountered. Her thought was mine. To Henry Gordon my mother had been as one that had stayed a time and then passed, leaving for trace only one poor Rose to bloom as best she could on the face of the Dungeon.

Yet fainter still, faint as the earliest morning glow, a name indeed 'writ in water,' had seemed little Lila! Yet, so strange and unaccountable—so wonderful are the hearts of men, that Henry Gordon had grasped at Lila as at the shadow of a cloud on the Dungeon peaks. More wonderful still, he had caught and kept—her memory, though not Lila.

I have heard Absalom say that even God himself cannot separate two such, who have so joined themselves together.

'Stranger than any tale,' said Absalom, 'deeper than any sea, higher than the roofs of heaven, harder to win into than the Darkest Continent—such are men's hearts. But when once a woman is installed there, in the centre and axis of his life, God must take the two—or damn them together! Even He cannot separate them!'

Not a man to mince his words, Absalom Kenmore, my husband!

I do not think Nan really liked these high things. At least, she tired of them easily. She even tried her powers on Absalom, but he practised what he preached, and the one woman installed in his heart was not Nan.

Nor did Nan wish it to be otherwise. No, but she thought that we were all getting too transcendental— 'all four feet in the air,' as Nan

expressed it. With this in her mind she summoned her 'banker-man' to come and camp out in our spare room. He could have his month then as well as any other time. So to Edinburgh wrote the imperious Nan.

'We are of age to develop into uncles and aunts, you and I, Watty,' she wrote, 'and it is time that we began to accustom ourselves to the duty, since we cannot arrive elsewhere on our own account. Come and help nurse baby, Watty!'

But the 'banker-man' could not run away just then, and leave his 'great corporation' to itself. He had to wait for the return of his general secretary, at present climbing the Matterhorn and living on tinned soup and hotel glory, at the easy Swiss rate of twenty pounds a day.

So Nan had to cast about her for something to do in order to cheer up the House of the Dungeon. Walter wrote, indeed, that if she did not come home he would let their Edinburgh house to 'the summer Americans,' and betake himself to the club. Nan replies in perfect good humour that he could do as he blessedly pleased—only in that case she would come to the club too. She knew clubs.

I do not know that Nan actually tried any of her wiles on my father. That game flew too high even for her. But I certainly did catch her pouring over the Encyclopaedia, and even marking the place (first of all deadly sins) by turning down the corner of the leaf. Afterwards she posed Absalom, coming in hungry from the hills, with her questions. And then I knew from whence arose this sudden passion for study. But Absalom discussed with equal freedom the 'crape ring' of Saturn, and the prayer-wheels of Thibet, which he declared to be more sensible and

more to the mind of God, turning up there amid the splash of hill water and under the open sky, than most liturgies and church services !

I judge that the strain of Absalom's conversation was too much for Nan. So she proceeded to develop a friendship with the good-looking farmer of Bongill, which might have given anxiety to the 'banker-man' had the culprit not liked his wife better. Of course, Nan had long ago made a devoted slave of Muckle Tamson. But, curiously enough, on this occasion she did not give him any of her society, reserving it all for Selina in her kitchen. Selina took kindly to Nan, as indeed she did to most masterful people.

Selina even showed her how to make raspberry jam, and she taught Selina much that it was good for Selina to know. About this time Selina's affection for her husband was of the 'in-the-moon-or-the-midden' sort, as Nan told her very plainly. That is, either Selina would not speak to Tamson for a fortnight, or she would follow him about till some herd got his head broken for laughing at her for so doing.

Accordingly Nan counselled what she called 'the Philosophy of the Porridge-Spurtle.'

'I feel just the same towards Watty sometimes,' she would explain. 'At times I could be hung for him, I am so angry with him. At others I could eat him, as if he were made of pink almond sugar. But I stir the mixture up. I do not let him know that he has been in peril of his life, nor yet that he should be done up in a box and sold for Fuller's candy. No, I use the porridge-spurtle, and the result is a fairly equable domestic temperature all the year round. Except, that is, sometimes when he teases me! But he knows the consequences of that before he begins—'

so has only himself to blame!

As for me, I took my father out on the hills when he would let me. I do not remember that we spoke much. But we moved silently along, my head happily full of Absalom. And if he took my hand sometimes, I am quite sure that I walked so softly and let it lie in his so stilly that he never found out the difference—that is, between the reality and his thought.

Still Selina did not always act up to Nan's precepts, even if she understood, which is little likely, the 'porridge-spurtle' philosophy. She was awkward and temperish at times, anon full of tenderness and sudden bursts of tears, when she asked to be forgiven of her husband with exaggerated humility.

Tamson, however, took it all as he took the showers from heaven out on the moor-face, a sort of minor visitation of Providence. He did not understand, he endured. But a light dawned somewhat suddenly upon him when the young doctor from the distant burgh-toon drove up by the New Road, and next day the minister 'stepped over' to see his sick parishioner. Nan personally conducted them both, and flirted impartially with each—writing, however, a description of both campaigns to the 'banker-man' as a kind of spur in the flank of flagging domesticity.

What Walter Everard Gilfillan wrote in reply, I know. For Nan read me the letter.

'DEAR MORMONIA' ('he calls me that,' she explained, 'because it is Actuarial for the apple of his eye'), 'DEAR MORMONIA, —For the credit of Scottish banking, this must not go on! I heard of your whistling again at the last herds' dance. It was really

most unseemly. Once in a way at a marriage it was perhaps forgivable, but I have warned you not to repeat it. And now, with grey hairs showing in your top-knot, you continue your malpractices upon men of rural tastes and respectable professions. Madam, I am ashamed of you. All is over between us. I am coming the day after tomorrow.

Your obedient servant,  
‘WALTER GILFILLAN.’

Nan mused— ‘Your obedient servant’—yes, in the strictest sense—that is true— dear Watty!’

And her eyes grew grey and misty as she thought. ‘I wish it had been today!’ she said.

But as it turned out it was as well indeed that it was not so. For that night and the next morning there was racing and chasing over the face of the Dungeon. Tommy and Stoor, seeing the actual end of the old and the beginning of the new, hugged each other and danced round till both fell into the horse-pond—a miniature Dhu-Loch among the heather.

Tamson had to be dragged from an ignominious hiding-place in the cart-shed in order to have a small and squalling red object placed in his arms. On that day Nan was omnipresent, well-nigh omniscient— certainly omnipotent. For she ordered the Doctor about like a collie dog, and as for Tamson, she told him what she thought of him. Tamson would have been surprised if any capacity for surprise had been left within him.

As it was, he regarded his son and heir with fear and ill-concealed alarm.

‘Will it no break?’ he asked, when required to carry ‘it’ into the kitchen for the MacClintocks to see.

Immediately after Tommy and Stoor were kicked

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out, in a dim whirl of dogs and boys, for yelling 'Thank God, it's a boy-bairn.'

This was accounted insulting to our little Rosa Secunda, and so an example had to be made. Tommy and Stoor complained that it was always they who were made examples of. Whereupon it was replied to them, by one speaking the language of authority, that that was what they were for. They had no other reason for existing.

When the 'banker-man' arrived next day, he had had to hire a 'light cart' from the farm near the station and make the journey in that. No one had thought of him in the hurry of the great event which made Muckle Tamson a singularly unproud parent.

The 'melling' prohibition had to be lifted for some weeks, or Tamson would have burst. When anyone (except those like Absalom, whom he knew and respected) asked him as to the health of his firstborn son, he suspected at once the Galloway joke, and replied, 'Selina's bairn's weel, for aught that I ken. Noo, nae mair o' your lip!'

The face of the Dungeon is not changed, but the memory of most things grows dim—save only in my father's heart the memory of Little Lila. The purely spiritual bond has outlasted that of the flesh. Yet he has brightened a great deal since the coming of our second boy, Henry Gordon. Sometimes he even deigns to lift down that runnagate vagabond Absalom the Younger, caught up, not by his hair (which is short as sheep-shears can crop it), but by the emptier parts of his trousers, among the branches of the pines and larches which Absalom planted behind the house of the Dungeon—now no longer New, though, like the road, always conserving that designation.

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Yes, Henry Gordon waits bravely, but, as he says himself when some local gossip is related to him, 'he minds higher things.' We know that he is watching for the opening doors which Will Gillespie saw, and the first glimpse of Little Lila by the Gate.

Perhaps she who was my unknown mother may also wait there smiling, even though Henry Gordon's first glance does not seek out her face. For (said Absalom, when I wondered concerning this) in the Place of Souls there shall surely be love infinite, but no jealousy, for that is of the earth, earthy. Well, as for the things of the heavens, I do not meddle. I leave such-like to Absalom and my father. But I know, and Selina knows, and Muckle Tamson knows, that there is no place on the wide surface of the world so happy as the Dungeon, whether the Wilderness be white with whirling snow or purple with bells of heather.

Nan Gilfillan says that if only her 'banker-man' would settle there, and there were multitudes of nice girls to marry to equally nice young men, she would think so too.

She adds in a postscript that she has someone in her eye for little Rosa Secunda.

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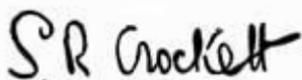
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'Mayhap that is the best fortune of all – to be loved by a few greatly and constantly, rather than to be loudly applauded and immediately forgotten by the many.'

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S. R. Crockett". The letters are cursive and slightly slanted to the right.

