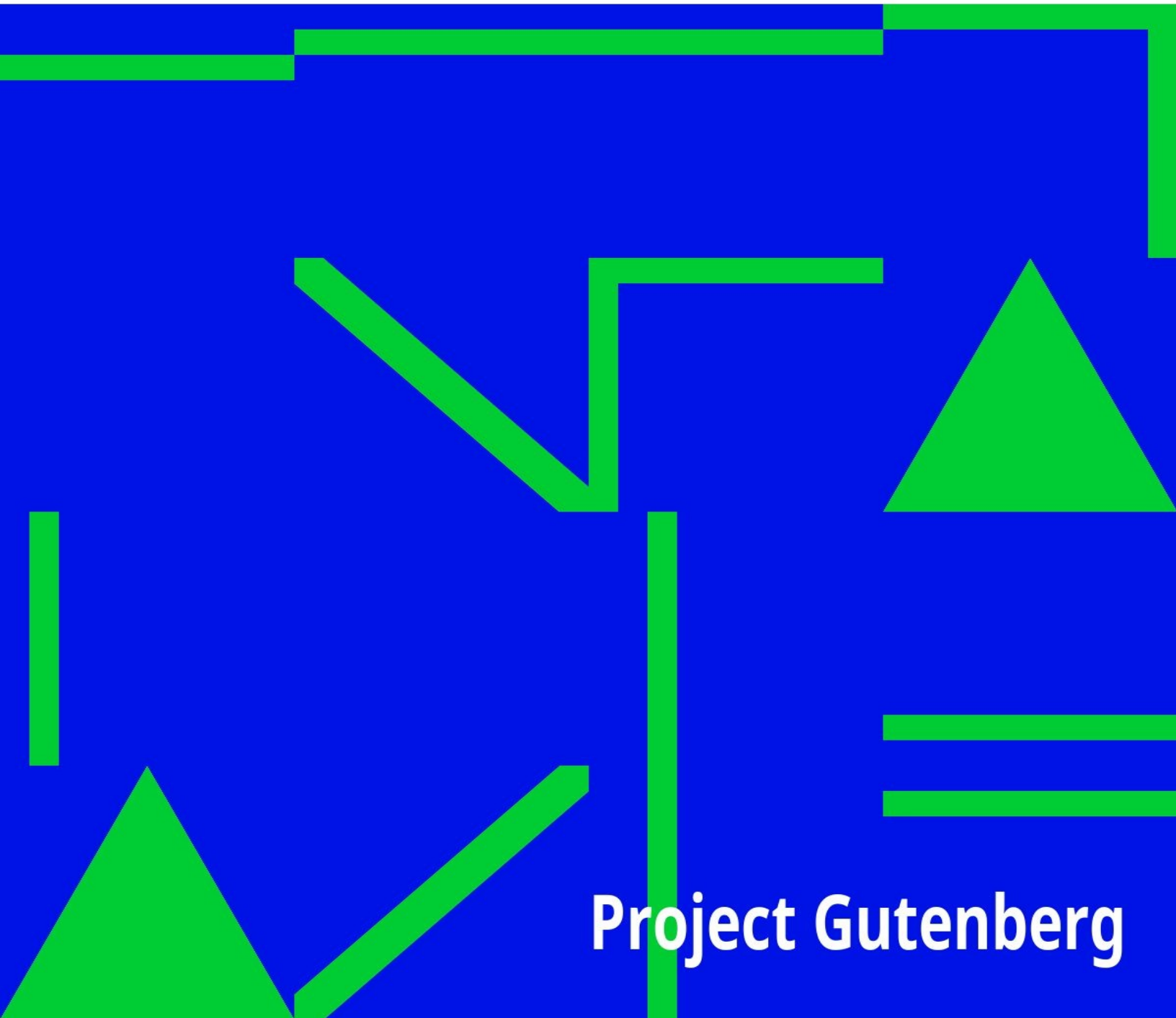
Deep Moat Grange

S. R. Crockett



Title: Deep Moat Grange

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Release Date: October 1, 2010 [EBook #34017]

Language: English

Produced by Al Haines

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DEEP MOAT GRANGE

By

S. R. CROCKETT

HODDER & STOUGHTON
LONDON
MCMVIII

Butler & Tanner, The Selwood Printing Works, Frome and London

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CHAPTER I

THE EMPTY MAIL GIG

I was only a young fellow when these things began to happen among us, but I remember very well the morning when it first came out about the Bewick carrier. He was postman, too, but had got permission to keep a horse and cart so that he might make a good little bit by fetching parcels and orders from town. Town to us meant East Dene, and Bewick, to which Harry went, lay away to the east among the woods and hills. It was a lonesome place, Bewick, and, indeed, is still, though now they have got a railway coming within eight miles or so. But the mystery of the Moat Wood happened before there was any talk of railways.

Harry Foster was his name—the carrier's, I mean—and a common one enough in Northumberland. Many a ride have I gotten on his cart, which was a light one on springs—blue body, orange shafts, panelled with red, and the shafts lined red. You could tell the cart anywhere. At least any of the Breckonside boys could, quite a mile away. And if it was too far to see the cart, there was no

mistaking Dappled Bess, the carrier's horse, which was bright orange colour with white patches, like the circus pony the clown rides. You've seen that pony. They have one like that in every circus that has ever come to our town, and there's few that pass Breckonside—Seager's, and Lord George's, and Bostock's, the Original and the Real Original, both, and in old days, so my father tells me, Wombwell's itself. Oh, a great place for circuses is Breckonside!

I will tell you about it. Breckonside, where I live, is a good big village about ten miles from the big town of East Dene, where there are docks and a floating landing-stage, and a jail—everything modern and up to date—with railways and electricity cars, and a theatre every night almost, and tramcars that you can hang on behind, and mostly everything that makes a boy happy—that is, for a day.

But still, give me Breckonside for steady. Why, there's only one policeman in Breckonside, and he owes my father for his grocer's bill—oh, ever so much! I shall not tell how much, but he knows that I know. More than that, he always tells his wife what he is going to do, and where he is going to go, and she tells Mrs. Robb, her neighbour over the hedge, and Mrs. Robb tells Mrs. Martin, and Mrs. Martin's Tommy tells me, or else I lick him. So we know. We like our policeman in Breckonside. He can make lovely whistles out of bore-tree, and his name is Codling.

You can see the sea from Breckon Hill, which is wooded to the top, only by climbing up a tree. And away to the north, Scotland way, you can make out the hills called Cheviots, like a long, low, blue cloud.

But about the Bewick carrier, Harry Foster, the thing is just this, and it is a Mystery. I saw the red and blue cart come in—the piebald pony lame, and the splashboard all leaves and blood, but no Harry Foster to be seen anywhere.

It was catechism morning, when the school had to go in half an hour earlier, and the Dissenter folk could keep away their children, if they liked; and that always made Mr. Mustard, our schoolmaster, very mad—hopping, indeed. He did not admire Dissenters anyway, at the best of times, because they had voted against him when he wanted to be parochial officer, or something. And it was just gall and squirm wood (as Elsie said) for him to see Ned Tiger, the Wesleyan minister's son, playing "plunkie" and "ringi" with marbles, when he, Henry Powell Mustard, a good Churchman and parish clerk, had to be teaching catechism to half-empty benches. He would glower and rap with his cane on the

desk, and find fault—all the time with an eye on Ned Tiger (his real name was Wheatly) and Ben Overton, who was a Baptist, and Peter McNab and Sandy Auld (who, as you can see by their names, were Presbyterians, and hit anybody who called them Dissenters, being of the Scotch kirk and good fighters).

Mr. Mustard taught us our duty, how to walk humbly in our sphere, and so forth, with a supple cane, and he whipped the girls, too, till I stopped him. But that comes after. He whipped us all that morning, without forgetting one, and at every good shot of Ned Tiger's alley-taw he would scowl worse than ever and discover one more unfortunate to wallop.

Yet he was a good teacher, and made good scholars; kind, too—out of school, that is. But as we only met him *in* school, and with a black frown running across-ways between his eyes, we declined to believe in his kindness of heart, at any price.

"You are my subjects, great and little, bad or good," he used to preach to us. "In Breckonside school only the king, the head of the Church, is greater than I. Like him, I reward the virtuous, and I punish the naughty!"

We thought within us that virtue must be scarce in Breckonside school. For as yet but few of the rewards had come our way. Of punishments there was never any lack, as our skins well knew.

"Some rascals were in my garden last night," said Mr. Mustard, "to the overturning of my potted geraniums. The size of his boot was a number six, like what are sold at Provost Yarrow's shop. I will flog all the boys with number six boots bought at The Shop, unless the culprit confesses. Show boots."

We showed them, putting them, as commanded, on the wooden desks with a clatter that made the ink leap in the dirty bottles. We did that on purpose.

"Quiet, boys, till I compare them," said Mr. Mustard. "Stand out, you—Tommy Bottle—you have on number six!"

Tommy Bottle dug his knuckles into his eyeholes and whined: "Please, sir, I was——"

"Don't answer me, sir!" cried Mr. Mustard; "how dare you? Bring me the long cane!"

"But, please, sir, I——"

"Thomas Bottle, your punishment is doubled!" shouted the master, bringing the pointer down across Tommy's legs, as a kind of "lick and a promise." He needn't. Tommy knew well enough what was coming.

"If you please, Mr. Mustard," I called out, "it was me that sold Tommy's father that pair of boots this morning in my father's shop, so Tommy couldn't have broken your flowerpots last night, with these boots on his feet!"

"Eh, what!" cried the master, turning upon me; "well, Tommy is excused. But the rest——"

The others provided with our sixes were, to wit, Frederick Allen, Widow Allen's boy; Bob Grey, Eben Pringle, and Dorky Cobb—all poor boys.

But before punishment began I put my own before the master's eyes. *They were number sixes.*

"If you punish Fred and Bob and Eben and Dorky, you must whip me, too, Mr. Mustard," I said. "And I shall have to tell my father, and he won't like it, because nobody will come any more to our shop to buy boots, if they are to be punished for it at school!"

I always called him Mr. Mustard, because I was the only boy in the school who dared do it, and I knew he hated it. But, you see, he was afraid of my father. Most people in Breckonside were afraid of my father.

So I got them off at that time; but presently the master welted Bob Grey for making a noise, though he knew perfectly well it was I who had done it. And the lesson was not over before he had got even with the lot of them—Fred and Eben and Dorky and all—except me, of course.

I was always first on my bench; and that was the highest in the school. You see, I wore the best coat, and Mr. Mustard got all his provisions, his stationery, his coals, his bacon from my father's shop; and he was supposed to settle his account once a year. He gave my father a little honey in exchange, when it was the time to draw the sections off from the hives, but he never paid very much money.

So I could stay away from school when I liked, and so long as my father did not find out, no harm ever came. Mr. Mustard never asked a question. He took it for granted that I had been sent somewhere to look after some of my father's little businesses. The boys knew this, and used to get me to take them into school if they were late or had been "kipping"—girls, too, sometimes; though they did not play truant regularly, as we did. It was a good thing in Breckonside to be my father's son.

Just after Scripture reading and catechism, if the vicar did not come to examine us—which was not often—we had half an hour's play, while the "Dissenters" had multiplication table and Troy weight, to keep them aware of themselves. So, while Mr. Mustard was rubbing his spectacles and telling us not to be longer away than half an hour, I took out my quill gun and cut a smart pellet with the end of it out of a slice of potato. Then I cut another with the opposite muzzle, and with my pretty, tiny ramrod I shot it under the desk. It took the end of Mr. Mustard's nose neatly, making a red bull's-eye, for which Freddy Allen was promptly whipped, because his mother was a widow and had no influence with the School Committee.

Now I had promised *my* mother to go to school that day, and not make my father angry again. Well, I had been to school, and had been *dux* of the catechism, which was surely enough glory and honour for one day. So soon, therefore, as we got out I made a rush down the street towards the bridge where was Elsie's house—a little cottage by the bridge end, all covered over with Virginia creeper and roses, though Nancy Edgar, the "outworker" with whom she lived, was quite poor, and the neighbours said it was a disgrace that she should make such a flaunting show, for all the world as if she was rich and could afford to buy plants from a nursery-man. But everything that Nancy had given her, or found thrown out as of no use, seemed to do with her, and grew to a marvel.

"I expect it is because I love them!" she said. But privately I thought it was because of Elsie. She was ever such a nice girl, Elsie Stennis, and I had kept friends with her, steady, ever since she came to Breckonside from Thorsby. For she is a town girl, Elsie, and her father and mother are dead. But no nonsense about her—no love and stuff. She was what they call pretty, too, but not set up about it in the least, the way girls get. You would have liked her just as I did. Nearly every one did—except her grandfather.

Well, when I got to Nance Edgar's cottage, which stands back a bit from the

road, with a joiner's yard at one side, and the road to Bewick stretching away on the other, I saw Elsie at the gable window. She had a book in her hand, her finger between the leaves. "Come down, Elsie," I called up to her. "I'm not going to school to-day. Come and see the new greenhouses they are building over at Rushworth Court. I can get you a ride in a dogcart all the way. Our man Jake is going with a cargo of paint. Father has the order."

But Elsie wouldn't. She said that it was all very well for me, who was going to be as rich as ever was, to "kip," but that she meant to learn, even though Mr. Mustard was a brute.

I said that was nonsense, and that I would give her half of all I had. At any rate I urged her to come down now. And just at that moment as I was speaking, she pointed over my shoulder. From the gable window she could see something I could not.

"Do look—what's that?" she cried. And her voice sounded pale.

It was Harry Foster's wagon, and I could see in a minute that something was wrong. Oh, it was easy to see that, even for a boy. My ears sung and I felt suddenly old. But by a sort of instinct I got the piebald pony by the bridle, which was trailing among her forefeet. And I could see she had been down, too. Her knees showed that. Poor Dappled Bess never tried to get away. She had terror in her eye, quite like a human it was. And she seemed to limp with all her feet at once. I was sorry for Bess. She and I were friends, you see. I used to ride her about in our pasture on Sundays, to keep her from feeling lonesome.

But it was Elsie who cried out. She had looked inside the mail cart.

"There's blood!" she gasped. "O Joe!"

She didn't faint just when she was needed to do something, though she did put her hand to her eyes, and, faith, I don't blame her. She came and said very quietly: "I'll take the horse's head, Joe—you look. I can't!"

Then I looked; and just as soon as I put my foot on the step I turned sick. But I didn't let on, being a big fellow and getting on for seventeen. There was a big, darkish pool, sort of half dried, under the seat, and there were cuts that had been made with an axe scattered all about, even on the soaky bottom of the cart. The whip had been cut right off three or four inches above the black japanned holder,

and the lash lay over the splashboard of the trap, which was all reddened, too, and half covered with leaves. I saw some flyfisher's hooks stuck in the leather apron. There were no mail bags, no parcels for Bewick Upton—nothing at all in the post trap except what I have told. And it was quite enough for me. I got down, and we all took the road to the police station as quick as the pony could limp. I did this because I knew it was the proper place to go—not because old Silver-buttons Codling was the least good.

And in the crack of a thumb I had the whole village after me—asking questions, and wanting to look. But I kept going on, calling out to the folk to get out of the way.

Then my father came, and I stopped for him, and he looked the trap all over very carefully, as if it were something he was going to take at a valuation.

Then he said out loud: "This is a bad business; this is no accident. It looks to me like murder!"

"MURDER!"

The vicar had bustled up. He and my father almost tied for the first place in Breckonside, and so it was a settled thing that if my father thought one thing, the vicar, without any ill feeling, would take the opposite view.

"And why, Mr. Yarrow, why, may I ask? An accident is much more admissible—in this quiet parish. The horse has run away. See how lame he is, and the postman has cut wildly with an axe or other sharp weapon in order to—to—to rid himself of the furious animal—to get loose, in short, a foolish thing to do, I admit, but in such circumstances—I do not see——"

"No, Mr. Alderson, that is just it, you do not see," said my father. "There is this whip handle cut through six inches from the holder; what do you make of that?"

"Well," said the vicar, looking for arguments in defence of his parochial quiet, "there is the lash. There has been an accident, you see. Perhaps poor Harry went suddenly out of his mind. There is insanity in the family. He may have cut himself. That would account for the—the substance of a fluid nature resembling blood, and also for the lash cut from the butt of the whip!"

My father took the stained thong in his fingers. It was curiously braided, plait laid over plait, rather flat than round, and exceedingly neat.

"This is not the lash of Harry Foster's whip," he said. "I ought to know, because I sold him the whip. This is a worked lash, and if I mistake not I know the fingers that wrought that pattern."

CHAPTER II

POACHER DAVIE

There was no more thought of school that day—neither on the part of Mr. Mustard nor of any of his scholars. All the world (but not his wife—by no means his wife) must needs go in search of Harry Foster and his probable murderer. It was the first real mystery ever known in Breckonside.

Now the missing carrier and postman had no open enemies. He was a quiet, middle-aged man who had lived long in the village, a widower without children; no man's foe, not even his own; a steady, trustworthy, kindly man, "and," said Miss Harbishaw, the postmistress, "to be trusted with untold gold," or, what was much more (departmentally), with unsealed mail bags.

The telegraph was no doubt working hard to bring up officers from East Dene, Clifton, and Thorsby, the big towns to the south. Meantime, however, all the male population of Breckonside poured northward. But Elsie and I got away the very first.

I wanted her to stay at home, but she would not. She would be more frightened alone in that house by the Bridge End, she said, than with me. So as I could not refuse Elsie many things, of course she had to have permission to come. Besides, she would have come at any rate, permission or no permission. It was difficult to be even with Elsie. So I was very gracious and let her.

As soon as we were clear of the village and across the bridge, Elsie and I came out upon Brom Common. This is a rare place for Saturdays at all times of

the year, but specially in autumn, because of the brambles that grow there. Now it was all green and yellow with gorse bushes. Artists painted it, coming all the way from East Dene and Thorsby to do it. And Elsie and I found it good to bird-nest in. There were two roads across the waste. One to the left struck off just past Elsie's cottage, and the other went to the right; that was the road which Harry Foster must have taken the night before. He had no calls to make on the way. The letters for that district would be delivered by the walking post carriers going to Bewick Upton, and taking the farms and houses on their way.

"Let's take the short cut—you know—the footpath over Moor Clint," said Elsie, pointing with her finger to a long low heathery ridge through which the grey stone peeped. A pale grey thing, like a piece of twine, wimpled up it and ducked over the top.

"Very likely," I cried, "and miss anything that is on the road."

"We shan't miss anything," she said, giving me a look of disdain; "don't you remember the leaves in the cart? Where do you suppose they came from?"

I had not thought of that. Yes, of course, there was nothing of that sort on the Bewick Upton road nearer than Sparhawk Wood, where the big Moat Forest throws a spur across the Bewick road. On the left-hand road it was quite different. There were trees nearly all the way, right from the Bridge End of Breckonside. But then, as official postman, Harry Foster had his route marked out for him, and there was nothing to take him toward the left—indeed, nothing but farms and trout streams all the way to the Cheviots.

So, like dogs on a live scent, Elsie and I stretched across the moor by the Moor Clint footpath as fast as our legs would carry us. The rest of the search parties from the village kept to the road, going slowly and searching minutely. But I was sure that Elsie was right, and that whatever there was to find would lie beyond the array of dark-green fir trees which stood like an army across our path.

It was kind of quaky, too, I admit, going along, getting nearer and nearer all the time. For, when you came to think about it, there might be a murderer any where about there, waiting for you. But Elsie did not seem to mind. Elsie always knew just what to do, and wasn't at all backward about telling a fellow, either.

I forget if I have ever told you what Elsie Stennis was like. Well, nothing very

particular at that time—only a tallish slip of a girl, who walked like a boy, a first-rate whistler, and a good jumper at a ditch. She always had her hair tied behind her head with a blue ribbon, and then falling all in a mess about her shoulders. It wouldn't stop still, but blew out every way with the wind, and was such a nuisance. I would have had it cut off, but Elsie wouldn't. It was yellowy coloured.

In spite of this, Elsie was a first-rate companion, nearly as good as a boy, and just no trouble at all. Indeed, I generally did what she said, not because I didn't know as well, but because it kept her in a better temper. Her temper was like kindling wood, and I hate being bothered, unless, of course, it is something serious.

You mustn't think we were so very brave going off like that to find out about Harry Foster. Only, you see, we had always lived in the country, and didn't think that any one could run faster than we could. In town I was scared out of my life lest I should slip in front of a tramcar, and even Elsie went pale the first time she went on one of the ferry steamers. But in the country we were all right.

Well, nothing happened till we got to the edge of Sparhawk Wood, where we came to the road again, the road along which poor Harry had come with his load of letters and parcels very early that morning, and where, no doubt, the village people were even then searching for his body. I do not deny that when we felt our feet on its smooth, white dust we went a bit slower, Elsie and I. So would you. We didn't really mind, of course, but just we went slower. And we saw to it that the back track was clear. Elsie picked up her skirts. She was a good runner—better than I was. She said, after, she would have waited for me, but—well, no matter.

We saw the long road like a gray ribbon laid across the brown and yellow moor. There was nobody there—no black heap, nothing. Before us we could not see far. The highway took a turn and plunged into Sparhawk Wood very suddenlike, and got dark and gloomy. We stood on the stile a while in the sunshine—I don't know why, and presently we got an awful start. For Elsie declared, and stuck to it, that she saw something move among some bracken down by the burnside.

I got ready to run. Perhaps I had even started, when Elsie called me back.

"It is only Davie Elshiner, the night poacher," she cried. "I can see the patch on the left knee of his trousers. Nance Edgar sewed it on. I saw her."

And as neither of us were in the least afraid of Davie Elshiner, alive, dead, asleep, awake, drunk, sober, or in any intermediate state, we hailed him. But he did not answer our shouts. So we went to look. And as we went I said to Elsie, "What if he has been a witness to the deed and they have killed him, too!"

"Come on," she said, grabbing me, "let's see, any way—we can't stop now!"

"*But suppose they should kill us!*" I could hardly get the words out. I was not frightened, only I seemed to lose my voice. Funny, wasn't it? Elsie hushed me down quick, and said, nastily, that if I was afraid I could take her hand or go home to nursie.

Afraid! Me afraid! Likely! Would I have been there if I had been afraid? But it was Davie, right enough, and we were both relieved. He had a good backful of fish, regular preserved water beauties that never could have been got except in the Duke's pools on the Bram Burn. They were all done up in fern leaves, as nice as ninepence, and as freckly as Fred Allen's nose. But Davie had stopped by the way after catching them. A flask and the remains of a loaf told why.

"Davie," said Elsie, shaking him; "wake up, man, we have something to ask you!"

Davie opened his eyes. He was dazed, not so much at the bright sun and the heather—he was used to that—but at seeing us. And he looked all round about him to take his bearings.

"What are you doing so far from home?" he asked, sitting up on his elbow. "The dominie will thrash you!"

"Davie," said Elsie, "did you see Harry Foster this morning?"

Davie laughed with a funny chuckle he had, but which sounded awful just then. "Aye," he said, "I was in his cart, lassie. He gied me a lift to kirk or market—I will not be telling you which!"

"Davie," I said, "tell us. This is no joke. Harry Foster is very likely murdered, and all the Queen's mail bags stolen. A lot of money, too, they were sending

from the bank in East Dene to the new branch in Bewick."

I knew that because I had heard my father say so.

Never did I see a man so struck as Davie. His face changed. The smirk went out of it and it got gray, with the blue watery eyes sticking out like gooseberries.

"Then if I cannot prove myself innocent," he gasped, "they will hang me!"

"But you are innocent?" I asked eagerly.

"Ow, aye, I'm innocent enough," he said, "but can I prove it? That's the question. There's a deal of folk, gameys and landlords, that has a pick at poor Davie for the odd snare he sets and the big trout he catches. They'll nail this on him. And I gave Harry two—three flies newly busked," he added hoarsely, "did you hear?..."

"Yes," said I, "I saw them. They were stuck in the leather apron."

Davie the poacher raised his hand in a discouraged way to his throat, and caressed it, feeling it all over like a doctor.

"I'm feared ye are no worth thrippens!" he said.

CHAPTER III

THE BAILIFF OF DEEP MOAT GRANGE

Elsie and I cheered him. We would do what we could, which truly was not much. But I promised for my father, whose arm was long in Breckonside, reaching even to East Dene. But the poacher shook his head.

"They will get poor Davie. They will put it on him—yes, for sure!" he repeated. And from this melancholy conclusion he was not to be moved. He offered to accompany us, however, on our search. And we were glad of that,

because we were quite sure of his innocence, and in such a case the difference between three and two is very marked. Two—you want to get close and rub shoulders. Three—you scatter and look the hedges.

We advised the old poacher to hide his fish under the bank, but, with strong good sense, he refused.

"They are Davie's only chance," he said, "there is just a possibility that there's an *aw-li-bi* in Davie's basket. He has catched so many of the Duke's trouts since three this morning that they may think he could not have had the time to make away with a man as well!"

As we went he told us how the post carrier had got his mail bags from Miss Harbishaw, the postmistress, on the stroke of three that morning—"a fearful sight in a mustard-coloured flannel dressing gown"—Davie described her. He himself had stood on the other side of the mail cart, well in the shadow.

"Did Miss Harbishaw see you?" Elsie asked.

"Well," said the poacher, "I would not just make so bold as to say. She might have seen my legs, mixed up with Bess's piebald stockings. But I keeped fairly quiet, not wanting her to spot the fishing basket on my back."

Davie was not stupid, and he saw clearly enough that it was the best thing he could do if Harry Foster were really dead, to go and help look for his murderer. So he came along with us, telling us of the talk he had had with the carrier in his cart.

"I was telling stories, and we were wonderful merry!" he admitted.

"How far did you go with him?" we asked.

"To where the road dives into the wood like a rabbit!" he answered. "Here!" he cried, suddenly throwing up his hand.

And there, plain enough to be seen, were the marks of Davie's boot heels as he had leaped upon the bank from the post gig.

"Then I crossed the dyke and went down to the waterside."

From that point, as you may suppose, we followed carefully the marks of the wheels. The pony had been going no faster than a walk. The tracks were deeply impressed, and as it was damper under the trees, you could even see where Piebald Bess had been sparing her lame foot, which, of course, she would not have the chance of doing when pushed to a trot.

Then Davie came to a halt, Elsie just behind him. There was nothing particular, only the ground was pawed and cut about in little crescent discs, as if a horse had got wearied standing and wanted to get on. Then beyond that the wheel ruts were much deeper than before.

"He has talked to somebody, he has taken other passengers here," cried Davie, "and I never heard them—fool that I was—thinking of nothing but the Duke's silly trout in the burn yonder."

Without speaking we followed on, till the Brom Water, slow, deep, and still, lay before us. It was strictly preserved, and we boys dared not visit it for fear of the fishery watchers and keepers, who were up to all sorts of tricks to catch us. Only old hands like Davie dared such a thing, and even they chose their time.

The road went across a bridge, a high-arched, old-fashioned structure, which I liked coming over in our light cart, because of the curious "hunch" it gave you as if you were on a swing. And close in by the bridge and on the near side of it, we came at last on what we had come out to look for—the signs of a struggle, the wheel tracks confused and partly up on the bank, the traces of many feet, very indistinct owing to the hard, dry ground, and (what took all our eyes) a dark irregular patch on the left side of the road, which had filled and overflowed the deep furrow of a track.

It did not need any doctor's certificate to tell us that that was blood, and we knew very well that we stood where poor Harry Foster had been foully dealt with. But of the carrier himself we could see nothing. The pony had bounded ahead at full speed, and for Davie's sake we thought it best not to go farther. Because the people who were coming along the Breckonside road might easily cover over the tracks or destroy them, crowding to see.

So we went to meet the first of them at the place where Davie Elshiner had wished his benefactor a good morning and jumped on the bank, with the last jest on his lips. We were just in time. Codling, our fat policeman, was there, and he

took up Davie on the spot, warning him that all he might say would be used against him.

"I don't care," said Davie. "I will tell all I know, and that's little enough—more shame to me for going after trouts with poor Harry so near his end."

The village men scattered to search the wood and the waterside, finding nothing but sundry "stances" where the angler had stood while fishing, and the nook in which he had slept among the bracken, with the marks of our feet as we went toward him from the stile.

We started off home without making any more discoveries, and as we went Elsie pointed up to the firs above our heads.

"What sort of leaves were in the cart when we saw it?" she asked me suddenly.

"Some kind of big, broad leaves—oak, I think," I answered, for indeed, I had paid no very great attention.

"Well," she said, "will you please tell me where big, broad leaves came from in Spar hawk Wood?"

And then I saw how true it was—the thing that she meant to say. There were only tall Scotch firs in the Sparhawk, and not a low-growing tree or one with a leaf upon it! Only pine needles and fir cones.

"We will come back in the morning," I said to Elsie, "and see what we can find. Piebald Bess never came back this road!"

"As, indeed, we might have seen before this by the single tracks," she added. And, indeed, it was no great discovery after all. But old Codling and the village men just took it for granted, and as many of the farmers and even my father came in conveyances there was soon no lack of tracks all over the road.

But Elsie and I kept our counsel and made tryst for the morning. It is terrible to get bitten with the wanting to find out things. The more you know the more you want to know.

Next morning it was still and clear, with a promise of heat. Elsie had asked

Nance Edgar if she could go, but I had dispensed with asking my father. Indeed, so long as he was assured that I was the cleverest boy in school, and at the top of the topmost class, he did not trouble much about me, having other things on his mind. And Mr. Mustard was always ready to tell him all that. Besides it was true. I was not so clever as Elsie, and I did not pretend to be. But I could lick everybody in Breckonside school into fits, and the master was cowed of my father. I think he would have let me sit on his tall hat!

This morning was a Friday, as I remember, and there were plenty of men searching the moor, prowling about the woods, some with picks and shovels, some just with their hands in their pockets. They were looking for Harry Foster. The East Dene police, too, were all about the edges of Sparhawk Wood, as important as if they knew all about it but wouldn't tell. One of them, posted by the big, black patch to keep people off, first told us to go back, and then asked where we were going.

Elsie merely told him that so far as she knew the road went further—on to Bewick Upton, in fact.

"Are you the kids that came across the moor and found this—and the prisoner?"

To make him civil we told him we were, but that Davie Elshiner was surely innocent and would not harm a fly.

"That's as may be," said the policeman; "what did he say when you woke him?"

We told the man that Davie was afraid of being suspected, having been last seen with the missing man, also how he was sure that because he was a known poacher people would not believe him.

"Aye," said the policeman, nodding his head dreadfully wisely, "indeed, he was right to say that. Ah, a bad conscience is our best friend! It is indeed!" And everything we could say in favour of Davie seemed just to tell against him, so that we had to be content with saying that he was the person least likely to do such a thing, because he would certainly be suspected, and that they might as well suspect us.

This last remark seemed to impress the policeman, who pulled out a fat

notebook and solemnly jotted it down before our eyes.

"It's a good rule in our business," he said slowly, "to suspect the least likely persons. Thank you very much for your interesting communication—thank you very much, indeed!"

"Ah, you're dotty!" I called out to him in a sudden fume of anger, and left him standing there and slowly buckling up the flap of the inside pocket in which he had stowed away his precious notebook.

Now I am not going to pretend that Elsie and I found anything very grand that day, for we didn't. But at any rate we knew for certain how Dappled Bess came home, and where the leaves came from. It was all simple enough and quite natural. The poor beast had got a fright by the bridge on the Bewick road. She turned off it, therefore, as soon as she could. We found the wheel tracks leading away to the left along a rough moor track. The cart had been going fast, evidently empty or at least very lightly laden. For there was little depth to the impression even in fairly mossy places, but the rocks and stones were bumped and scarred with the iron tire as the wagon rebounded from side to side.

We soon found ourselves making for the highway, which is known in our parts as the Old Military Road. It goes into Scotland to a place called Longtown, and beyond that, they say, to Edinburgh and Glasgow. But that I only knew from hearsay. At any rate it was old, and so were the woods all about it. Centuries old they were, and the fine old house among them was called Deep Moat Grange. It stood right in the middle, and had always been inhabited by rich folk. But, only a few years before, my father had done it all up for old Mr. Stennis, whom they called the Golden Farmer, because of the great deal of money he had made farming and dealing in cattle. He was living there now, and for that matter was Elsie's very own grandfather. We called him the Unnatural, because he would have nothing to do with her—all because of something her mother had done long ago, before Elsie was so much as born. But he was a lusty old cock bird, and being rich was much respected. He bred first-rate sporting terriers that brought in a power of money, my father said. We knew all about him, too, that is as much as any one knew, because Nance Edgar sometimes worked there by favour of the farm bailiff, Mr. Simon Ball.

Elsie and I were standing at the turn of the road looking at the tracks of the wheels which Harry Foster's cart had made in the grass, when who should come

up but the very man, Mr. Ball, the bailiff at Deep Moat Grange.

He knew me, which was nothing extraordinary. They say I am the image of what my father was at my age, and, of course, everybody knows him. If they don't, he tells them, and sees if he can do business with them.

Well, Mr. Ball came up and asked us what we were looking at, and when we had told him, he blurted out all in a gabble that he had seen the blue and red cart with the piebald mare come tearing over the moor road yesterday morning. He had been in the little "lantern" above the drying-room at the corn mill, which is so high that you can see over the tree tops and look right out on the moor. He thought it was a runaway, but when he had time to run down to the end of the avenue, he could only see it like a little square dab rocking and lurching from one side of the road to the other, and scraping trees and bushes like all possessed.

"And has nobody come to tell you that poor Harry Foster is murdered?" I said.

"I heard the men in the yard talking about some such suspicion," he said quite calmly, "but nobody has been here. You see, Master Yarrow, our old gov'nor, Mr. Stennis, has been up in London for three days seeing his lawyer, and he don't like folk coming about the Grange when he is from home!"

"So I have heard," said I, "and he keeps some fine dogs there, too, to see that they don't."

For my father had refused to deliver Mr. Stennis' goods, except at Mr. Ball's house, which was on the main road, and no tearing dogs kept.

"Very like—very like," said Mr. Ball hastily; "and who may this fine young lady be—your sister? She seems to favour you, sir."

"Elsie Stennis," says I, "and if she had her rights you know very well what she would be! Your young mistress!"

"Elsie Stennis?" he gasped, "not poor Bell's daughter—and Robin's?"

"The same!"

"Bell and Robin Stennis—I mind them well. But where, how——"

The bailiff stopped, all thrown out of gear, much more affected, indeed, than when it was a question of Harry Foster's death.

"Well," he went on at last, "it's perhaps as well not asking. I might blurt things out. But I hope—I may say that I pray—that the day may come when you shall have your rights, young lady, and I shall see yon crew sent about their business to a madhouse. That's the fit place for such as they! There they go. I must be off. They will be at their processioning again, and Mr. Stennis will never forgive me if they come to a mischief or go off the premises!"

We did not know then what he was talking about, but we could hear over the green tree tops the sound of a cornet playing a marching tune, and marvellously well, too.

CHAPTER IV

THE GOLDEN FARMER

But that same night we got the full story, so far as she knew it, from Nance Edgar. It did not help us any in finding out what had become of poor Harry the carrier and his mail bags, but because it involved Elsie's father and mother I will admit that it interested me nearly as much.

Nance Edgar was a weather-beaten woman of about fifty. She had lived nearly all her life in the fields, and was tanned like a leather schoolbag for carrying books. She was kindly, but you never could have told it on her. Only I knew because she had been kind to Elsie.

Afterwards I found out that often she would go supperless to bed that Elsie might have something to eat when she came home from school.

But when Nance Edgar talked it was with the curious kind of quiet I have noticed about the speech of gentlefolks. The other field workers said that she kept herself to herself. But in the furrow, or on the rig, she was kind to young ones or feeble folk who were not up to their work. So Nance, in spite of her

aloofness, was not at all unpopular. She always had work, too, because she could be trusted with anything.

So that very night I said to Elsie: "Let's have it out with Nance about your people. Your grandfather is as rich as can be. There may be money in it, and my father says you should never let that go a-begging. Besides you ought to know about your father and mother. It is only respectable if you are asked."

"Oh, I know all that," said Elsie, mightily unmoved, "my mother married her cousin and her father was angry. She ran away. My grandfather can keep his old money. Who wants it? Not I! I am happier with Nance."

This was very well, but if Elsie was not curious, I was. So I cooed and besought round Nance Edgar that night, till at last she told us everything in her little kitchen, after the tea dishes had been washed up and the coal fire was beginning to catch—the flame paying bo-peep with the bars, and every now and then coming brightly out in a triumphant jet of light, unexpected like a cuckoo clock, shining on Elsie's yellow hair and Nance's calm, tired face as she told us the story—

"Breckonside was not a big place twenty years ago (she said), even less than it is now, but there is one house that is a-wanting. That was your grandfather's house, Elsie, him they call the Golden Farmer, that lives now at the Grange in Deep Moat Hollow.

"It was up yonder beyond the church, and in the summer mornings the tombstones were blithe to see, glinting rosy-coloured with the dew on them, and the long, well-nourished grass hiding the inscriptions. Now you may go up the burnside to the turn of the road where the kirkburn runs bonnie and clear down the hill. The heather and the breckon grow there together, and that they say gave its name to the village—Breckonside. At any rate, there where stood your grandfather's cottage—he was a poor man then—ye will see a kind of knowe or hillock, greener than the rest. But of the house not one stone is left upon another. The kindly mould is over all. The hemlock and the foxglove, what we used to call 'bloody fingers,' grow tall and red where lovers whispered cannily by the ingle nook, and of all that well-set garden plot where Hobby the Miser—that is now Mr. Howard Stennis—grew his weaving lint and dibbled his cabbages, only a single lilac bush looks over the corner of the broken-down dyke as you pass by!

"But at that time it was a heartsome spot. I mind it well; I was young mysel'." (Here Nance Edgar sighed and was silent awhile, looking at the pouting bo-peep of the little blue flames between the hearth bars.) "A-well, youth comes and youth goes, but at the last the greensward covers it like Miser Hobby's cottage.

"Long they dwelt there, Miser Stennis and his daughter Bell. She had the name of being bonnie to look on in her young days, and many a lover would fain have hung up his hat behind the kitchen door and taken his seat at Hobby Stennis's table as his son-in-law.

"But Hobby was a far-seeing carle and a plain-spoken. He had but one word for all such.

"'When I hae a felt want for ony sons-in-law I will put a notice in Editor Drake's weekly screed, or hae it intimated in the parish kirk!'

"There were ill reports even then about the miser. Lights were seen wandering up the hillsides above the cottage when the nights were mirk and unkindly. Hobby would be found far from home with a basket gathering simples and medical plants—that is, by his way of it. So he grew to be counted a wizard, and had the name of money which is so useful to a man in some ways, but more than all else makes the folk jealous, too.

"It was less than natural that Hobby should always have the best lint wherewith to weave the flowered tablecovers by which he made his fame. Why should he have early potatoes a clear fortnight before the rest of the Breckonsiders? But chiefly it was the ill-will about money that bred bad blood. Over the door of the parish church of Breckonside they had printed the motto, 'We serve the Lord.' But the right words should have been, 'We envy and grieve at the good of our neighbour.' For when the men thought of Miser Stennis's money bags they could have felled him, and when the women saw Bell Stennis's bonnie face smiling over her braw mantle, they set to work and bethought them what lie they could tell about her. All except me, and I was always by her side, as near as might be, loving her more than my own flesh and blood. And Bell told me all that was in her heart, because you see we had been at school together, sitting side by side on the same bench and sharing the same apple and toffee stick.

"So I was the only soul that knew it beforehand, when Bonnie Bell suddenly

took matters into her own hand and gave Miser Hobby a son-in-law he had never bargained for—a first cousin of her own, an ensign in a marching regiment. The two foolish ones ran to Gretna to get married—I with them in the coach. But I had to tramp it back on my own feet, with Miser Hobby's malediction on my head as well as on theirs. You see he had spent money on the young fellow's commission hoping to get him out of the road, as soon as he suspected what was in the wind between Bell and him.

"But the regiment stayed on in Longtown just over the borders, and nearly every day Frank Stennis and a company would come through the countryside with feathers waving bravely in their bonnets, drawing in the silly young by the glint of their accoutrements, or wiling them to list by the merry noise of the pipe and drum that went before them and set the pulses jumping even in weak women's hearts.

"But after Bell took the road to Gretna, and the white cat by the Breckonside was left lonely, the miser never uttered word, but sat with shut mouth at the weaving of the wonderful flowered napery, the secret of which he alone possessed. And if he could not weave himself a new daughter with all his skill, at least he kept himself so busy that he seldom minded the one he had lost.

"And then he took to leaving his weaving, which nobody could do as well as he, and trying a new trade—that of cattle dealing and droving. At least, so it was said. At any rate Laird Stennis would shut up the cottage, and the sound of the weary shuttle would cease by the waterside. He would be seen riding to every market, cattle mart, horse fair, lamb sale, wool sale, displenishing-roup within fifty mile, his shoulders bent weaver fashion and his thin shanks legginged in untanned leather.

"But what was the wonder of the folk of Breckonside to see Laird Stennis, who could hardly abide his own kith and kin, suddenly bring a great stalwart colt of a ne'er-do-well, Jeremy Orrin by name, home to his house. For the creature was hardly held accountable for his actions. He had once killed a man in a brawl at a fair and been tried for his life, but had gotten off as being half an idiot, or what the folk about the south of the Cheviots called a 'natural.'

"The two of them brawled together, and drank and carried on to be the scandal of the place, till something happened—it was never known what—but Miser Stennis was laid up with a crack in his skull, and the Mad Jeremy tended

him, gentle and tender as a mother they said. But so fierce with any one else that none, even the doctor, ventured near the cottage.

"Still your mother's name was never mentioned, and when others spoke to him of his daughter he would look round for fear of Daft Jeremy, who was jealous of her they said.

"And your father—well, I misdoubt me that he was no better than he should be. And my poor Bell had but a sorrowful time of it, following the regiment, and at last left behind when they embarked for the Indies. Then her father sent her word that having made her bed she might lie on it. She had no rights on him or on his money.

"So a year or two slipped by, and maybe another five or six to the back of that, and still no word of Bell. When, true as I am telling ye, who but Bell brought back word of herself. Faith, and it was strange word! I mind it clear as yesterday, for it was me, Nance Edgar, that am this day old and done, who gat the first glint of her.

"It was a fine summer morn, early in June, and the clouds in the sky to the east were just the colour of the first brier rosebuds in the hedge by the roadside. I came up the brae like a Untie and as free o' care, for my heart was light in those good days. There stood the cot of Breckonside before me, shining white in the sun. For the miser, though he spared most other things, never was a sparer of good whitewash. I was just beginning to listen for the *click-clack* of Hobby's shuttle, when down by the waterside methought I saw a ferlie.

"Fegs, I said to myself that surely the old times had come back again, and that the wee folk were disporting themselves once more in broad daylight. For, on the grass by the burn a bonnie bit bairn ran hither and thither waving its hands and laughing to the heavens for very gladness. The night had been calm, a 'gossamer night,' as the gipsy folk call it, and from hedge to hemlock, and from lowly bracken to tall Queen o' the Meadow, the silver threads were stretched taut like the cordage of some sea-going ship. The dew shone silver clear on ilka silken strand, and the blobs o' it were like pearls and diamonds in the morning sun.

"And aye the longer I stood the wilder the bairn ran and skipped lightfoot as a fairy herself. 'Bonnie—bonnie—oh, bonnie!' she cried, clapping her hands and laughing, 'see mither, mither, are they no unco bonnie?'

"Then, by the side of the beck, as if, being wearied with travel, she had set her down to take a drink of the caller burn water, I saw a woman sit. She was beneath a bush of hazel, and her head was resting tired-like on her hand. So, being back there in the shadow, I had not noticed her at the first, being taken up, as was small wonder, with the sight of that bonnie yellow-haired bairn flichtering here and there like a butterfly in the sun.

"Then the wee lass saw me and ran whatever she could to me. She took my hand and syne looked up in my face as trustful-like as if she ha' kenned me all her days.

"'Here woman,' she cried, 'come and wake my minnie to me, for I canna. She winna hearken when her wee Elsie speaks to her.'

"Hand in hand we went up to the poor thing, and even as I went a great fear gripped me by the heart. For the woman sat still, even when my step must have sounded in her ear. I laid my hand on her, and, as I am a living woman, she was clay cauld. The bairn looked ever up into my face.

"'Can you no waken my mither, either?' she said wistfully.

"'No,' said I. 'No, my puir, wee lassie!' For truth to tell, I kenned not what to say.

"'Will minnie never waken?' she asked again, bright as a button.

"'I fear not, bonnie lassie,' said I, and the tear was in my eye.

"Then the elf clapped her hands and danced like a yellow butterfly over the lea.

"'Then she willna greet any more! She willna be hungry any more. She will never need bite o' meat nor thread o' claes for ever and ever mair.' She lilted the words almost as if she had been singing a tune. 'She will be richt pleased, my minnie. For, oh, she grat sair and often! She carried me in her arms till her ain feet were hurted and she could gang nae farther. Late yestreen she sat doon here to wash them, and I sat, too, and after that she cuddled me in her airms. Are ye no richt glad for my minnie?'

"I telled her that I was glad, for naught less would satisfy her, though even as

I spak the words the sob rose in my throat.

"And as we stood there, looking at the woman sitting with her face on her hands, what should happen but that the auld miser should come hirpling to the door, and there, too, looking over his shoulder, was Daft Jeremy, that the village bairns were wont to cry at and call the 'Mounster.'

"'What hae ye there, Nance Edgar?' the old man cried, shaking his stick at me; 'keep away from my door with your doxies and changeling bairns.'"

"But I was civil to him for his age's sake, and also because of the witless man that was looking over his shoulder. For it is not good to cross such as the Lord has smitten in their understanding, and so do my own folk never.

"'It is a woman, Laird Stennis,' quoth I, 'that hath set herself down to die by your burnside.'

"'Die,' cried he, with a queer scream most like a frighted hen flying down off the baulks, 'what word is that to speak? A woman dead by my burnside—what richt had she there? Who has taken such a liberty with Hobby Stennis?'

"'Nay, that you can come and see for yourself,' said I, a little nettled at the carle's hardness of heart. So the auld miser, bent and stiff, came hirpling barehead down the path, and behind him, looking most uncanny, danced Daft Jeremy, combing his hair with a weaver's heckle and muttering to himself. The morning sunshine fell fair on this strange couple, and when she saw him the little maid let go my hand and ran to Laird Stennis. She would have taken his hand, but he pushed her off. Whereat, she being affronted, the witch caught at his stick and pulled it away from him before he could resist. Then she gat astride and played horses with it on the green grass of the burnside dell. It was like an incantation.

"But without heeding her the old man went to the woman, and, lifting up her head, looked steadfastly in her face.

"'God in his heaven be merciful,' he cried, 'it is my daughter Bell!'

"Then the 'mounster' laughed loud and long, and wrapping his 'heckle' in a wisp of paper, he played a tune upon it with his mouth, dancing round and crying, 'There's her right for ye—ye said she hadna a right, Laird Stennis! Ye

were that hard ye refused the woman room to die at your dykeside. But Bell has come hame to claim her own. Coffin and clay—coffin and clay! Sax foot of clean kirkyard sods! Faith, I wish a' Daft Jeremy's enemies had the same, nae mair and nae less. But it's as weel as it is, Laird Stennis—for Jeremy cannot be doing with grown women about the noose o' Breckonside. And it's him that has the say now, ye ken!'

"But the old man answered nothing, good or ill. He only stood and looked down at his daughter, muttering to himself words that sounded like 'Bell has comed hame.... My bairn has comed back to me at the last!'

"So in time the miser buried his daughter decently, and took the little lass hame to him to bring up. But when this came to be talked of in the countryside, there was a well-to-do woman in Dumfries toon, a Mistress Comly or Comline, that was some kin to Bell Stennis through her mother, and when she heard o' the bit bairn shut up in that lonesome house with only a miser and a daft man, she had heart pity on her, and as soon as she had shut her shop one Saturday afternoon, off she set to Breckonside in a pony cart that she used to bring her goods up from the port quay.

"It was but a coldrife welcome she gat at the white house of Breckonside, but sorrow a bit Margaret Comline cared for that. She tied up her sonsy beast, that was, like herself, fat as pats of butter, to the yettpost of the miser's garden. And when he came to the door himself, she did not take a couple of minutes in telling the auld runt her business, plump and plain.

"'I hae comed to ask ye to put away that daft man,' she said, 'and get a decent woman for a house-keeper, Laird Stennis.'

"'Meanin' yourself, Margar't Comline,' interrupted the miser, with a cunning smirk. He had shut the door in her face, and was conducting negotiations through a crack.

"'*Me* be your housekeeper!' cried the visitor, 'me that is a ratepayer and a well-considered indweller in the burgh o' Dumfries. Man, I would not cross your doorstep though ye were Provost. But I hear that ye hae this bit bairn in the hoose, and a lassie bairn, too (that's full cousin's daughter to myself). I have come to tell ye that it is neither Christian nor decent to bring up the wee thing but and ben wi' a kenned ill-doer like Daft Jeremy, that has twice been tried for

his life for the shedding of blood!'

"From behind the closed inner door of the cothouse there came a high-pitched angry cry that garred the very blood run chill as ice in Margaret Comline's veins. I mean that the thought of it did afterwards. For at the time she just looked about her to see that Donald, her pony, was not far away, and that the road was clear to the light market cart in case that she had to make a break for it. She had eke a sturdy staff in her hand, that the loons of the port kenned bravely the weight of.

"It was the voice of the man-wanting-wit, crying out to be at her, that she heard.

"'She has ta'en from me my guid name,' his words reached her through the very stone and lime of the house, 'and she wad take the bonnie siller oot of the black chest that you and Jeremy keep so carefully. Gie the woman the bit lassie bairn, Laird Stennis, and let her travel. For less will not serve her, and forbye a bairn is only an expense and an eating up o' good meat in any man's house!'

"And while the din was at its height in the cot, there came a sound to Mistress Comline's ear that garred her kind heart loup within her. It was like the whimpering of a bairn that is ill used and dares not cry out loud. And with that she for gat her fear of the strange fool, Daft Jeremy, and with her naked hands she shook the door of the cothouse of Breckonside till the iron stinchel clattered in its ring.

"'The magistrates o' Dumfries shall ken o' this or I am a day aulder!' she cried in to them. 'Gie me the lassie or the preventive men shall hear of the barrels ye hae hidden in the yard. Supervisor Imrie shall be here and search every inch high and low if ye lay as much as a finger on the innocent bairn!'

"And even as she cried out threatenings and shook the stout oaken door so that the leaves almost fell asunder, Margaret Comline heard a noise behind her, and whipped about quickly with her heart in her mouth, for she thought it was Daft Jeremy come out to slay her.

"But instead it was the wee lass herself that had escaped by a kind of a miracle through the window of the 'aumry' or pantry closet. For Laird Stennis had it closed with a board, grudging the expense of glass. The lass was greeting and laughing at the same time, feared to the marrow of her bits of bones, but yet crouse withal. Mistress Comline marvelled to see her.

"'I hae left the stead of my teeth in his hand, I wot!' she said, as Mistress Comline helped her into the light cart at the roadside.

"'And see what I brought with me,' she added as they drove away. It was a shagreen leather pocketbook like those which well-to-do farmers carry, or rich English drovers that come to the cattle trysts to buy for the English market. And Mistress Comline, struck with fear lest she should be taken for a thief, would have turned back, but that at that very moment, out of the door of the cot, there burst a terrifying figure—even Daft Jeremy himself, a great flesher's knife uplifted in his hand. He was scraiching out words without meaning, and looked so fleysome that the decent woman e'en slipped the shagreen purse into her reticule basket and laid whiplash to Donald till that pampered beast must have thought that the punishment of all his sins had overtaken him at once.

"The 'mounster' pursued after them with these and such like affrighting outcries to the very entering in of Longtown. And never had Margaret Comline, decent woman, been so glad to recognize Her Majesty's authority as when she saw Supervisor Imrie with two-three of his men come riding up from the Brig-End and out upon the green grass of the Terreggles Braes. But she said nothing, only gave them a good day in passing, and bade them 'beware o' the puir "naiteral," Daft Jeremy, that was in one o' his fits o' anger that day!'

"'Sic a fierce craitur should be in the Towbooth. He is a danger to the lieges,' said Supervisor Imrie, adding more cautiously, 'That is, were it no that he would be a cess on the burgh and pairish!"

"When Mistress Comline gat to her own door she first delivered Donald into the hands of her serving prentice, Robin Carmorie, as stout and blythe a lad as

ever walked the Plainstanes. But the wee lass she took by the hand up to her own chamber, and there she stripped her to the skin and washed her and put fine raiment on her, new from the shop—aye, and did not rest from her labours till she had gathered every auld rag that she found on her and committed them to the flames, as if they had been art and part in the wizardry of Laird Stennis, her grandfather, and the coming ill-repute of the white cothouse on the brae-face of Breckonside.

"But, fearing she knew not clearly what, she sealed the shagreen pocket-book up in a clean white wrapper and laid it aside in her drawer, saying to herself, 'If this be honestly come by the laird is no the man to forget to ca' in for his ain. And if no——" Here a shake of the head and a shrewd smile intimated that the contents of the pocket-book might one day be useful to its finder, little Elsie Comline, as she was now to be named.

"'And wha has a better richt!' the shopkeeper would add, perhaps to salve her conscience in the matter.

"But, indeed, it was but seldom, the pocket-book once safe in the drawer, that she thought about the matter at all. For Margaret Comline was a busy woman of affairs, having under her serving lassies and prentice loons, a shop on the ground floor of a house in the Vennel, and a well-patronized stall in the market. All day she went to and fro, busily commending her goods and reproving her underlings with equal earnestness and point. Sunday and Saturday the wrinkle was never off her brow. Like Martha in the Scripture, she was careful and troubled about many things. She read but seldom, and when she did her memory retained not long the imprint of what she read. So that our young monkey, Elsie, being fresh from the mischief-making of the grammar school, where she was drilled with a class of boys, used to shift the marker of woven silk back ten pages or so in the godly book over which her foster mother fell asleep on Sabbath afternoons. By which means Mistress Comline was induced to peruse the same improving passage at least fifty times in the course of a year, yet without once discovering, or for a moment suspecting the fact.

"For all that, she saw to it that Elsie did her nightly school tasks, recommending the master to 'palmie' her well if she should ever come to school unprepared. But, being a quick and ready learner, the young lass needed the less encouragement of that kind.

"As she grew older, too, Elsie would upon occasions serve a customer in the shop, though Margaret Comline never allowed her to stand on the street among the babble of tongues at the market stalls. In a little time she could distinguish the hanks of yarn and thread, the webs of wincey, and bolts of linen as well as her mistress, and was counted a shrewd and capable hand at a bargain before she was fifteen.

"All this time her grandfather, the old miser Hobby, lived on in the little white house up among the fir-woods of Breckonside, growing ever harder and richer, at least according to the clashes of the country folk. By day, and sometimes far into the night, the click of his shuttle was never silent, and, being an old man, it was thought a marvel how he could sit so long at his loom. And still Daft Jeremy abode with him and filled his pirns. Sometimes the 'naiteral' would sit on the dyke top at the end of the cottage and laugh at the farmers as they rode by, crying names and unco words after them, so that many shunned to pass that way in the gloaming, for fear of the half-witted, strong creature that mopped and mowed and danced at the lonely gable end. And they were of excellent judgment who did so.

"For Riddick of Langbarns disappeared frae the face o' the earth, being last seen within half a mile of Laird Stennis's loaning, and, less than a month after that, Lang Hutchins, who came to Longtown with all his gains frae a year's trading padded inside his coat, so folks said, started out of Longtown at dusk and was never seen in Breckonside again. There were those who began to whisper fearsome things about the innocent-appearing white cot at the top of the Lang Wood o' Breckonside.

"Yet there were others again, and they a stout-hearted majority, who scoffed, and told how Riddick had been seen in market carrying more than his load of whisky, and that as for Lang Hutchins, had he not dared his Maker that very day to strike him dead if he spoke not the truth—all that heard him well knowing that even as he uplifted his hand he lied in his throat.

"Nor was Elsie wholly forgotten by her only near of kin. Twice or thrice a year there came from the cottage a web of fine cloth, woven as only Laird Stennis could weave it, with the inscription written plainly thereon, 'To be sold for the benefit of the upkeep of my granddaughter, Elsie Stennis.'

"After his accident, which nobody could explain and, indeed, few dared to

ask about, Laird Stennis took a disgust at the Weaver's Cot by the burnside. He got his miserly money out, and with it he bought the estate of Deep Moat Hollow, that had been in the market for long—and they say that he got it for a song, the late owner's need being great and money terrible scarce. Then he and Daft Jeremy removed thither, and they had Jeremy's sister, a queer old maid (madder, they said, than himself), to keep house for the pair of them. Then the Laird Stennis rode ever the more to market and tryst, and waxed ever the richer, laying field to field, as is forbidden in the Holy Book. Then good Mrs. Comline died, and, though I was no better than a field worker, I posted off to Dumfries, and took ye home to dwell with me in this house which is my very own. All for fear that your grandfather would claim you and take you to bide in the same house as Mad Jeremy and his sisters. Oh, yes, there are more of them, and, indeed, by what I can see and hear the place is like an asylum. Such antics were never heard tell of, and the poor creatures going dressed like zanies out of a booth at the Thorsby wakes."

Then we both cried out to Nance to know if she had seen these strange people, and to tell us what they were like.

"Seen them? Of course," she answered. "Do not I work there week in, week out for Bailiff Ball, who is a good man and honest in his payments."

"Tell us about Daft Jeremy," we said, both speaking together, in a fashion we had.

"Jeremy Orrin," said Nance, thoughtfully, giving the fire a poke with her clog; "well, at times the creature is fairly sensible. They say he will talk of wonders he has seen on the deep, and in foreign parts—evil deeds and worse talk that makes the blood run cold to listen. To look at—oh, he is a wild-looking fellow, with long black hair all any way under his broad bonnet—something between a gipsy and a black-corked minstrel at a fair."

"And his sister?"

"Oh," said Nance shortly, "I know little of her. She is old enough to be the mother of the lot, and if any of them have any sense it is Aphra Orrin—or Miss Orrin, as Mr. Stennis makes all call her. She is sixty, if she is a day. But she plays with her brood of antic lunatics all about the gardens, singing and making a mock of religion. Grown women they all are, but like so many scarecrows in

their dress. Laird Stennis, they say, wanted their sister to send them to a home for such like. But she would not, and Jeremy was against it, too, so there they bide, a disgrace to all the countryside, though harmless enough, God knows."

Then Elsie's eyes met mine. We nodded as Nance finished her tale. Both of us knew that we meant to go and see for ourselves to-morrow what mysteries were contained within the Deep Moat in the Grange Hollow.

CHAPTER V

WE MEET DAFT JEREMY

The next morning, bright and early, Elsie and I were up and out. Indeed, I was throwing up stones at her window when she was already dressed and out in the little back garden feeding the hens. Of course I know I should have tried to dissuade Elsie from going on such an errand. But I knew that would only make her all the keener to go. And, indeed, once she had taken a thing in her head she would go through with it in spite of everything.

Poor Harry Foster and his fate was always in the background of my mind. But not so much, as I could see, in Elsie's. Now I like my father well enough, as fathers go. He is a grocer, not at all mysterious, but makes lots of money. Now if, instead, he were the Red Rover of the Seas—well, bless me if I would give twopence to find out about him.

But of course Elsie is different. She always was different from every one else, and now she was keen as a terrier at a rat hole to find out all about the Stennises, and the queer crew that was battening on her grandfather, old Hobby, the Golden Farmer of Deep Moat Hollow.

Before I saw her, Elsie had made Nance's breakfast, shared it, and seen her off to her work. Nance was in great demand. She could act as foreman or grieve on occasion, and people who wanted their work quickly done, like my father, used often to give Nance as much as a shilling a day extra for coming to them.

I don't think either of us had much thought of finding out about poor lost Harry Foster. How could we, with all those city detectives, from East Dene and Thorsby, even (they whispered) from Scotland Yard itself, ranging everywhere like pointer dogs over the heather?

Indeed we were almost like dogs on a scent ourselves, so keen were we to see with our eyes the mysterious Grange and all the queer folk there. I hardly think we would have turned aside to look at Harry Foster himself, had he been lying in his last bloody sleep, as plain as in a waxwork. But we were not tried. Nothing of the kind happened.

As we went across the moor, every low spiky arch of bramble and tuft of gorse was shining and sparkling. The wren and the gowdspink were preening themselves and shaking off the dews that fell on their feathers as they fussed to and fro about their nesting business. Then we dived into Sparhawk Wood, and came out again on the country cross-road along which Bailiff Ball had seen Dappled Bess plunging madly with her empty cart. The Brom Water flowed still as a canal on our left, down towards the Moat Pond. It was certainly heartsomer to be out under the sky and the crying whaups, with the blue Cheviots looking over the tree tops, than in Grange Longwood, where somebody might be watching you from behind every bush and you none the wiser.

But before we came to the Bridge End, where we had found the marks of the struggle that first morning, Elsie had an idea that if we struck across the road and kept round the edge of the Brom Water, we would escape the bailiff's cottage and stand a good chance of seeing Deep Moat Grange without being discovered by anybody.

When we got there it was only about six in the morning, and eerie enough in the gloomy bits, where you could not see a handsbreadth of sky, and nasty things, which you told yourself were only rabbits, would keep moving and rustling in the undergrowth.

I would have been glad to go back even then, because after all, it was silly. Just imagine—mad folks, and murderers, maybe, skulking in coverts! I am as brave as anybody when all is open and I have a chance to run. I am too old to believe in ghosts, of course; but for all that there are queer things to be seen in old green droopy woods like that of Deep Moat Hollow. The trees whisper and seem to know such a lot. After about an hour I get shivers down my back.

But it was no use arguing with Elsie. She went on first, and I guarded the rear—that being the most dangerous position. And I did it well, for I declare I got crick in the neck just with looking over my shoulder.

So we crept and crept, foot by foot, looking and testing everything. And it was as well. Because, quite without warning, the thick bushes ceased, and there we were on the edge of a deep trench with very black water at the bottom. The sides were steep and green with grass. But on the other bank all was green and yellow, with spreading lawns and Lent lilies growing, and a woman in a short skirt, coming and going among them, with a gardening spade in her hand.

Somehow I knew at once that that was Daft Jeremy's elder sister, Aphra Orrin, the one who was not so mad as the others, and kept house for Elsie's grandfather.

She came quite near. We could have tossed a dog biscuit to her feet—could, that is—somehow, I didn't want to. It might have startled the poor lady, and besides I hate making oneself conspicuous.

Over the lily patches and the flower beds we got glimpses of a red-tiled house, low and old, all overgrown with ivy about the gables and porches. It had small windows with criss-cross panes, and smoke was coming out of one of the chimneys, though it was yet so early. That I took to be the kitchen of Deep Moat Grange.

The canal seemed to go all the way round, and to join on to the pond which we could see glimmering beyond the house, looking gray through a fringe of willows.

The place was nested in woods and water, like a dabchick's nest, yet for all that comfortable and fair to see with its lawns and greenery set about it. I looked at Elsie to see if she was feared. But not she. Instead, there was a queer, eager look, and her eyes kept glittering, as if you could have struck a match at them. Then all at once it struck me that Elsie was going to be pretty; but I resolved to say nothing about that for the present.

It was thinking about her mother that did it, I expect. And that is a funny thing, too. For I care about my mother, and sometimes look eager, like Elsie; but it is when I tease her to tell me what we are going to have for dinner. Elsie was different. She said "S-h-h-h-!" whenever I moved; and once, when a stick

cracked underfoot, turned and gave me a look, which would have speaned a foal.

"You fidgety worm—*can't* you be quiet," that look said.

We went on watching the house and the woman watering the flower beds. Nance had told us that the old housekeeper always did that herself. No hireling was allowed to put a spade in the soil of the Grange garden. Very soon we had proof that she was quite mad. The Lent lilies grew about in great clumps, flourishing strong and high—a brave show. The gaunt old woman waved the rose of her watering can over each with a kind of ritual, like what I have since seen the priests use in Catholic churches. Then she kneeled down and prayed—yes, prayed to the lilies. Actually I saw her—and so did Elsie.

But that was not all. Out of the house there came a company of three other women, one behind the other. They had their hair down their backs, and long cloaks with gold and silver patches covered them. Each was carrying something narrow and black in her arms. At first they were too far away for us to see clearly, but as they came nearer, I gasped and caught at Elsie's hand. The long black things were little, tiny coffins, neatly modelled, and covered with black cloth all complete with fringe, name-plates, and cords. A little to the side, capering and dancing, flinging his legs high in the air, and blowing a merry marching tune on a soldier's clarionet, pranced Daft Jeremy. Every now and then he would stop blowing to give the brass instrument a shake. Then he would laugh and egg on the women with the coffins to dance also. But they went along quite peaceably, keeping their countenances wonderfully, and making quaint signs with their hands. They marched round and round, the idiot laughing and blowing while the elder woman with the gardening spud went on praying, paying no attention whatever to them, till they came to a rude altar, just two upright posts and a stone laid across them, quite at the end of the garden, opposite to where we were.

Upon this they laid the coffins down, and the women-creatures kneeled. But the monster with the clarionet leaped up between the coffins nimbly as a jackanapes, crossed his legs, and began to play.

Now I cannot tell whether it was because of the little elevation on the crossbar of the altar which enabled him to spot us, or if I moved; but in another instant Mad Jeremy seemed to spring down, swift and unexpected, and before we could move, he had jerked out a big "gully" knife, and rushed to the canal

bank, leaped into the middle, driving the black scum of the water every way, and almost before we could think he was upon us.

The madman made for me first with the big knife uplifted, and but for my ducking and running in, there would have been an end of me on the spot. We fell, and his weapon now being in his way, he let go, and I felt the grip of immense hands about my neck. That had almost been my last memory on earth. For though Elsie had seized the knife and was about to kill the madman, it would have been too late so far as I was concerned.

But out of the undergrowth, as if he had been watching, came a little quick-tripping old man, bow-backed and wizened, who called, "Jeremy! Jeremy!" in a high, piping key.

At the sound the madman lifted himself up from my neck, as if moved by a spring, and stood before the little man smiling and sucking his thumb—for all the world like a child caught stealing sugar.

The little old man pointed to the moat. "Go back as you came!" he said.

The "mounster" threw himself into the black water without a complaint. I saw him come out on the opposite side dripping, and with long threads of green scum trailing about him. He never looked round once, but made for the house.

Then the little old man turned fiercely upon Elsie and me, with a kind of cold hateful sneer on his face.

"And now, my pretties," he said, "what may you be seeking in Deep Moat Hollow?"

CHAPTER VI

THICKER THAN WATER

Now I do not deny that I was frightened out of my life by the sudden

appearing of the Golden Farmer. But it was different with Elsie. Perhaps it ran in the blood. For, though most people in Breckonside were feared of my father and his long arm, I am not—no, nor ever could be. And so, in that moment of panic, it was given to Elsie to be able to speak serenely to her grandfather.

Yet I could see that the little man was all in a fume of anger, and kept it badly down, too.

"What are the two of you doing here?" he cried, dancing about and shaking his stick at us. "Where do you belong, and what ill purpose fetched ye to Deep Moat Grange?"

"One question at a time," said Elsie, standing quietly before him, with one thumb tucked in a leather strap about her waist. "'Who are we?' say you. I will tell you, grandfather——"

"Grandfather——!"

You should have seen the little wizened man jump at the word.

"Grandfather!" he repeated in a kind of skirl, or scream, as of a bagpipe. "Ye are no blood kin of mine—-!"

"Am I no?" said Elsie. "I am Bell Stennis's daughter, and a daughter, too, of one Ensign Stennis, a British officer——"

"A devil—a black devil," cried the wizened little man, shaking his stick, as it were, at the four winds of heaven; "bride-bed or bairn-cot, shroud or bier, I have no word to say to any connected with Bell Stennis or the man that she counted her husband——!"

"Except to give her a decent burial, as ye did," said Elsie. "I have seen her name on the stone in Breckonside churchyard, and the space for your own beneath——!"

"Any one with eyes might have seen as much. But surely I am not expected to own you for a granddaughter just because ye have looked over the cemetery wall!"

"Neither have you a right to be angry because Joe Yarrow and I look across

the ditch at the flower beds of Deep Moat Grange——"

There appeared to be some hidden sting in this saying of Elsie's. For a moment the old man looked perfectly murderous. But he quickly recovered himself.

"Faith," he cried, "but it would have been telling your mother, if indeed she be my daughter Bell—if she had had the gift o' the gab like you! But that's no proof. I have ever been a silent man myself!"

"Maybe you had need, grandfather!" cried Elsie merrily, as if it were all a joke, even when I knew that our lives hung, of a certainty, in the balance between his goodwill and his anger at our intrusion. Certainly, however, Elsie had a curious power over the old man, and instead of getting angry, he actually laughed, a queer, crackling laugh, caught perhaps from living so long among mad folk. I have heard doctors out of lunatic asylums laugh like that. There is nothing so catching as crack-brainedness. A lot of people have it at Breckonside—maybe because the East Dene Asylum is so near. Perhaps not.

"I see," said old Mr. Stennis, "that you have upon your body day-linen of my weaving. That is a waste. I only weave now to amuse myself, and sometimes for the great of the land—because no one can weave like Hobby Stennis. Therefore the webs I have sent that old wretch Mrs. Comline in the town of Dumfries, and now yearly to Nance at the bridge-end, ought to have been put carefully away, and not cut up to make fal-lals for a daft hempie of your age! Nance ought to know better. She is old enough and ugly enough for that!"

"Then if I am your daughter's daughter, as I see you admit," said Elsie, taking his words as an admission, "let us go across and view the bonnie flowers over yonder, the bedded tulips, the Lent lilies, and all the flowers of the spring."

Then, for the first time the old man had a look of fear, almost of revolt.

"Lassie," he cried, "ye have no knowledge of what you ask. Bide where you are, and go your way backward from this side of the moat."

He bent toward us as if whispering, though he had no need, all being clear behind and around us for a long way on every side.

"There are folk that are not canny on yon side of the moat!" he said, with the

same curious shrinking look over his shoulder. "I can hardly manage them myself!"

"Nonsense," said Elsie, "take us across, and be done with it. Is it not your own land, your own flowers, and I your nearest of kin?"

"Aye," said the old man, shaking his head, "it will be true enough. Ye mind me of Bell's mother—my wife that was. God rest her soul—and her tongue! Ye are never a Stennis. And High Heaven pity the man that is going to run away with you, as I did with your grandam!"

Elsie indicated me with her thumb.

"Joe is," she said coolly.

The Golden Farmer turned and looked me over from head to foot, and I own that with the thought of all we had seen and all that we might yet see, I shook like a leaf. I never had Elsie's assurance, or, more properly, cheek, but followed obediently, and I must own that generally it came out all right when I did as Elsie told me.

"Then I pity him," quoth her grandfather, grimly; "but since you will, follow me."

And he led the way, first to the tree where he had tethered his beast, and afterwards to the narrow wooden bridge, like a drawbridge in chivalry books, which spans the oily black water of the moat.

I came behind with Elsie. All the time I kept putting my hand on her arm to stop her. For I believed that we should never, never cross that bridge again. If Elsie had no fear of her grandfather, I had! And besides, there was Jeremy Orrin with his big knife. Such at least was the idea that kept recurring to my disturbed brain. I could see him swimming the moat with it yet, wild to get at us. There were also the mad sisters, and all the linked terrors of Deep Moat Grange.

But not the least bit of notice did Elsie take. She shook my hand off her arm, and told me that if I was afraid I could go back to the school green and play marbles with the little boys.

So of course I said no more, but came meekly behind Elsie, and she followed

her grandfather. He was leading his horse, that lifted its feet gingerly at the crossing of the wooden bridge, not liking the noise, as horses are wont to do on gangways of ships and when they lead them into trucks at railway stations.

In another minute Elsie and I stood within the Moat. And turning round, what was my horror to see the bridge rising slowly into the air behind me, and in a little house at the side, bent double over a wheel, I caught sight of the "mounster," Jeremy Orrin, with a grin on his face and all his dark ringlets shaking and dancing.

As we went past he set his head out and called these words after us:

"Rats in a trap!" he cried, "rats in a trap!"

And I can tell you that I for one felt just as he said.

But Elsie followed her grandfather step for step and took no notice. You would have thought she was the crowned queen of the place.

CHAPTER VII

FAMILY DISCIPLINE

As nobody had seen Deep Moat Grange since it had been taken over by Mr. Hobby Stennis and the crew he had gathered about him, it may be as well to describe it as I saw it—now that it is swept from off the face of the earth.

The old, many-gabled, brick-built house was ivy-covered—in poor repair, but clean. Curious-looking, stocking-shaped contrivances cowled the chimneys, or such of them as were used. The Grange was set so deep in the woods that when the wind blew with any violence, and apparently from any quarter, it raced and gusted and whirled down the chimneys so as to blow the faggots out on the hearths.

But without and within the house, it was anything but dirty. That is, so far as I

—no great judge, mayhap—could make out. At times Jeremy Orrin, who now followed us, laughing and jeering, could work like a demon, clearing up some debris. And Mr. Stennis kept poking his nose here and there into the outhouses and cart sheds with a curious, dithering thrill of apprehension, not at all like a master coming back to his own house, or looking if his servants' work were well performed. Still, if he looked for dirt, he found none. No, nor anything else—except in the great barn, empty of everything (for the horse's oats and bedding were kept in the stable). Here Mr. Stennis, tripping along with his tread of a frightened hen, lifted a huge curtain of corn sacks, thick and heavy, made after the pattern of those at church doors abroad, and we went in.

As soon as we stood on the beaten floor of hard earth, we could not take our eyes from what we beheld at the upper end. There was a kind of altar, rudely shaped, with a table and a cross, all as if hewn with an axe out of live wood, and painted black. On the table were the little black coffins, each small as baby's toys, which we had seen the mad women carry through the garden. Each of these had now a candle burning upon it. But the central light, a little larger than the rest, was protected about the flame by a curious contrivance made of red paper glued upon bits of stick which gave it (from where we stood) the appearance of a crimson lantern.

For the first time, I think Elsie was now a little frightened. And no wonder, for suddenly we saw something appear in the dark of the big empty barn, amid a curious pervading smell that I took to be incense, but which might have been cockroaches. I liked bravely for Elsie to feel like that. For she had been just all too secure and cock-a-hoop up till now.

What we saw was a row of kneeling figures singing a strange wordless chant, something between the wind in a score of keyholes and distant dog kennels on a moon-light night. At any rate, it tried the little girl's stomach. Because, quite suddenly she pitched forward on my shoulder and cried: "O Joe, get me out of this!"

Then the next moment, just like thrusting a stick into a wasp's byke, each of the black kneeling figures had snatched her candle and made after us.

I don't know what might have happened. To me it was like a nightmare till we found ourselves in the open courtyard again. This had seemed creepy enough to me before. But now it was just like our own back green, as homelike and as

pleasant, with the open air and the waving woods and all.

Within the barn we heard elricht squeaks and cries, like those of bats. But outside the door, holding the heavy curtain back, so that we could get out easily, stood a tall, masculine woman with gray, smoothly brushed hair, dressed in a black blouse and skirt that had something under them which looked like the haircloth covering of the chairs in our second best parlour at home—the kind my father sits in and smokes over his books and cash-box. She was the woman with the short skirt we had seen watering the lilies when we looked across the black and oily moat.

"This is Miss Orrin, my housekeeper," said Elsie's grandfather automatically.

"Aphra Orrin!" said the lady, with a prim intonation, tossing her head like one hurt in her pride, "one who hath been raised up to be a mother to the orphan and the shelterless, to avenge the witless and those at whom fools make a mock! *Be quiet, you there!*"

She sent the door of the barn clashing into its place with her foot, and with the click of the well-oiled wards the screeching behind it redoubled.

The tall woman sighed and folded her arms across her breast. There was a certain weary dignity about her, and at first I could not believe that she was really out of her mind, as all in Breckonside averred. "They are worse than usual to-day," she said, with a careless nod of the head in the direction of the barn, "but that will teach them. They shall stay there till I come and fetch them out! No food for such as they!"

She turned about and called hurriedly: "Jeremy! Jeremy!"

Then the big black man with the ringlets, the onyx eyes and gipsy's skin, came bounding toward us. He seemed to arrive from the direction of the moat, but from much farther round and nearer to the house than the bridge by which we had crossed. He was grinning and holding his hands behind him, like a child who fears to be punished. I soon noticed that he was far more afraid of his sister than he had been of Mr. Stennis and his riding whip.

"Show your hands!" The tall woman spoke in a tone of command. Jeremy stood grinning before her. Then quite suddenly he began to cry. Big tears rolled down his face.

"I haven't—I haven't, indeed, Aphra!" he whimpered. "I have only been sailing boats on the moat! Indeed, I have!"

"*Show your hands!*"

She spoke so shortly that the great, cleanly built powerful giant fairly quaked before her.

"I will—I will!" he repeated. "Yes, Aphra!"

And all the time he was evidently rubbing them together as hard as he could. I could see his shoulders and elbows working. Then the tall woman, losing all patience, snatched at his arms and pulled the hands sharply forward. The marks of earth between the fingers and about the nails were obvious. But Jeremy still continued to rub off the little pellets of mould, raising his fingers and looking at them with an air of surprise, as if he wondered how in the world the dirt had got there.

"You have been digging again!" cried Miss Orrin; "this is the third time, and you are well aware of the penalty!"

"Oh, no, no!" cried the big man, catching her by the skirt, which she swept away from him, the tears fairly rolling down his cheeks. "Whip me, if you like, Aphra, but——"

"Go and shut yourself up in the dark hole," she said firmly; "see you shut the door tight. I shall come round and lock it after a little!"

The great lout went away *boo-hooing* like a "soft" schoolboy whom a sturdier comrade has sent home provided with something substantial to tell his mother. Anything more unlike the idea which we, in common with all Breckonside, had formed of the dreaded "mounster" of the Moat Grange, could not well be imagined.

Then his sister turned to us, and in the most conventional way possible she asked us to go into the house "to drink a dish of tea!"

It was hardly the hour for this, but our long morning's jaunt in the open air and varied excitements had not at all taken away our appetites. We were literally as hungry as hunters.

I think, if Elsie and I had kept all our wits about us, that we should have refused such an invitation. But children often do very bold things through sheer thoughtlessness and curiosity. And we were little more than children, for all our age.

But it all turned out well for us—indeed, even better than that. We had supped so full of surprises that day, that at this point I think hardly anything would have sufficed us or come up to our demands! Perhaps an introduction to a company of sheeted ghosts, or an invitation to take afternoon tea with blood-boltered Banquo, might have filled the bill of our expectation.

As it fell out, nothing was ever more dull and orderly, Miss Orrin showed us into a neatly arranged parlour, with the usual stuffy smell from unopened windows. She left us a minute alone to examine the knick-knacks, while she went elsewhere, doubtless to arrange matters with her erring brother Jeremy. We were still in the dark as to the crime he had committed, and, each remaining seated on the edge of a chair, looked about us curiously, with our ears at a permanent full cock.

Miss Orrin had pulled up the blinds, and through them we could see the wide green lawn, broken here and there by the dense plots of lilies, which almost formed groves in some places. The parlour was a large room, covered with faded yellow paper, bearing traces of a blue flower, perhaps wreaths of forget-me-nots, but all so faint that it was only a strong imagination which could again body them forth. The furniture was chiefly of old black oak, with an extraordinary number of chests with various ornamental work round the walls. These had been covered, presumably by Miss Orrin, with bright-coloured chintz of a salmon-pink edged with frills and furbelows which somehow cheapened the high, antique mantelpiece, the quaint corner cupboards, and the tall, high-backed open chairs ranged at equal intervals about the room.

I am not sure if I have described all this aright. For, indeed, the vague stuffy smell took us by the throats. Both Elsie and I were glad when Mr. Stennis came back and bustled about, sniffing, growling, and opening windows and doors.

One of these, that to the left of the wide fireplace, gave into a small room full of curious wooden machinery to which our eyes were instantly attracted.

"The old weaver's hand does not forget its cunning—the trade by which he

made his siller!" said Mr. Stennis, with a faint shadow of a smile, the first we had seen cross his anxious face.

He showed us beautiful pieces of ornamental fabric, upon one of which he was at present engaged, and even entered into a long explanation as to his methods of working. Finally he sat down before the intricate spider's web, and with a skilled click and wheeze sent the shuttle flying for our benefit. I stood back a good way, but Elsie remained close beside him. And I could not have believed it, if I had not seen it—how in the joy of work the "laird" died out of the man, and the little bow-backed weaver came again plain to the eye.

I turned about, conscious of some unknown interruption. There was a faint creaking of the door, and through it I could see Miss Orrin, a tray with tea dishes in her hands, glaring speechlessly at Elsie. The young girl had laid an unconscious hand on her grandfather's arm. She was asking him to explain something in the manipulation. But on the face of the woman who stood without, watching, I surprised cold Death, and as it were, Hell following after.

I felt that we had no real business in that house, neither Elsie nor I, and that the sooner I got her safe back to Nance Edgar's, the better pleased I should be. But Elsie was a difficult girl to shift till she took it into her own head. Then with a beaming smile Miss Orrin came into the parlour and began to lay the cloth.

"Ye will be hungry, bairns," she said, with a curious nervous laugh, which reminded us unpleasantly of her sisters.

"Yes!" we answered together. But somehow I wasn't. The hunger had left me.

CHAPTER VIII

MISS APHRA'S CURATE

We had scarcely started our tea, and hunger was still keen upon Elsie, when there came a noise of calling, quite different from the howling of mad folk, or the mocking laughter or ugly whine of Jeremy. Miss Orrin poured out tea with a

kind of grim *aplomb*. If I had been afraid that she meant to poison us—or at least Elsie, I was soon undeceived. The amount of tea that she poured down her own throat was astonishing in the extreme. There were, however, certainly several sorts of cake that she would not allow her master, Mr. Stennis, to touch, on pretext of indigestion, but which she pressed upon us. And it was all that I could do, by kicking her shins beneath the table, to keep Elsie from accepting.

I managed it all right, though. They might have been as harmless as my father's acid drops. But after all there was only one Elsie, and I was not going to run any risks.

There was a distant sound of calling across the moat, and at the noise, Mr. Stennis frowned, an ugly look coming over his face, while on the contrary the sound had a still more extraordinary effect upon Miss Orrin. Her eyes gleamed more softly, losing for a moment their iron-gray expression. Her hands went up instinctively to the thin little corkscrew curls which bobbed at either side of her face.

In ten seconds the fierce, angular old maid looked ten years younger. Love, vanity, self-consciousness—ye are wondrous things.

"If it's that interfering curate from Over Breckonton, I'll throw him into the moat! I'll have the dogs on him," growled Mr. Stennis, "always poking his nose in when he is least wanted!"

Then he turned to his housekeeper, and detecting her busy fingers, he said with a sneer—

"What, prinking again! I see. Only the beneficed clergy have any chance with you, Miss Aphra!"

"Beneficed!" she cried. "Ah! poor lad, I wish he were! If I had my will it would not all go to that lazy vicar, who never does a ha'pworth of good, but rides to hounds and preaches his father's sermons, because he cannot make one for himself."

"Ha!" cried the old man, "be off with you, young ones. Miss Orrin is going to receive spiritual direction and absolution."

The tall old woman started up, her right hand upon the bread knife, as if she

could have killed her master with it on the spot.

"Well would it be for you, Hobby Stennis, if you did the like!" she said, restraining herself with difficulty. "But there's Mr. Ablethorpe, and he must not be kept waiting!"

"Of course not, Miss Orrin," said Mr. Stennis sneeringly. "It were a pity indeed that he should—and he come so far to administer spiritual consolation to conscious sinners!"

Then the old woman was roused to fury.

"Sinner am I?" she said, going up and bending her body till her face came within an inch of two of that of the old man, who was seated, pretending to go on with his tea. "Sinner am I? Well, I do not deny it. But at least, if sinner I be, it is that I may find a home and a livelihood for those three poor things, whom God hath bereft of their reason! But as for you—for what do you sin—sin till the sand of the sea could hardly tell the multitude of your crimes, poured from the hand like water, a grain for a sin? For money—yes, for dirty gold! For money which you dare not spend, and for gear which you dare not show! Answer me that! And if sinner I be—I have never heard or read that the Gospel is not for sinners! Do I not need it the more, Hobby Stennis? And the young man is a good young man, and speaks to me of high things—such as I need much, and you more!"

"Have your shown him your Mumbo-Jumbo worship in the barn? Or your sisters, kneeling before the little coffins—all that flummery? You ought to be ashamed—you, Aphra Orrin, you, a woman of sense, and able to know better!"

"And if I told Mr. Ablethorpe all, he would understand," retorted the old maid. "He would understand that those who cannot know God must be content with such a God as they can understand!"

Mr. Stennis laughed, but there was a false ring in his laughter.

"Aye," he said, "doubtless there are a great many things which the good young man, Mr. Ablethorpe, cannot understand. Did you ever, by chance, try to teach him a little gardening?"

"No, and well for you, Hobby Stennis!" cried the woman, still threateningly.

"Well or ill," said the old man, "I go to see these bairns across the bridge and safe on their way home. Then to my weaving! Where is Jeremy?"

"How should I know were Jeremy is—on some of your errands, doubtless!" she cried. "Come, I will let down the drawbridge myself. Also I shall see to it that you offer no indignity to the one honest man who deigns to enter your house."

This quarrel between the two most sane inhabitants of Deep Moat Grange let me deeper into the secrets of that evil dwelling than anything else. At least, so I thought at the time. But I found afterwards that all I thought I knew had but lain on the surface. I had conceited to find Shallow Moat Grange, and lo! the name was no misnomer. The moat was Deep, indeed.

All the same, it was like coming out of a heated room, with many people therein, into the silence and chill of the winter stars, to get one's head outside that abominable house of the Grange. How good to pass by the lily clumps, and feel one's feet on green grass again! It seemed to me that even the dull and sullen moat could be crossed, if you only took it determinedly enough. We had seen Jeremy come over and return, and so surely could we, fleeing (if need were) for our lives.

But there was no need at present. Miss Orrin had thrown a white shawl about her head and shoulders, and drawn a pair of tight silk lacy "mits" over her bony wrists. She made straight for the drawbridge, walking at least ten yards in front of us—apparently that she might get the first word with the fine young man in clerical attire who stood waiting on the further bank.

"I am sorry to have kept you, sir," she said, in a voice which I could not have believed to be hers, had I not seen her lips moving as we arrived; "I will let down the bridge in a moment. Mr. Stennis has been entertaining some relatives of his own, and did not wish to be disturbed."

"I hope that I am not intruding!" called out the young man from the farther bank. "I can easily look in again. It will not be the least trouble, I assure you!"

"Not for the world," cried the old woman hastily; "in a moment the bridge will be down."

And she rushed to the little wheelhouse, to let go the chain with a relieving

motion of her foot. And immediately the ponderous affair came clanking to the ground, locking into the pawls at the other side with the pleasant *sloop* of well-oiled machinery.

Then it was our turn to be introduced. Mr. Ablethorpe came across the wood with the firm tread of an athlete. He held out his hand first to Miss Orrin, who bowed over it, as if she would have loved to raise it reverently to her lips.

Then he shook hands with Mr. Stennis, who took the matter cavalierly enough, immediately turning on his heel and going off in the direction of his weaving-room, which had an additional entrance from the front. The young curate was apparently well enough accustomed to such treatment, and thought nothing of it, but Miss Orrin bit her thin lips and looked daggers at the bowed head of the old weaver-farmer as he trudged away.

"Halloo, Joseph Yarrow," said Mr. Ablethorpe lightly, as he ruffled my head with his hand. (I understood well enough to take off my cap to a clergyman.) "Joe Yarrow, I know your father. And I think—yes, I think—" (he put a lot of accent on the *think*) "Master Joseph, you ought to be at school. Shall I tell your father, Joseph? If I did, I make no doubt that he would give you a coat of a few colours, mainly black and blue. Ha! ha!"

But he had that light way with him, which made us quite sure that he would do nothing half so mean as to tell either my father or Mr. Mustard the schoolmaster.

"And who is this young lady?" he said, looking at Elsie, who was tall, and when taken short like that had a kind of "distant" look which made people think she was haughty. But she looked very nice that way—what people call pretty and "chic" (whatever that may be). I could see that Mr. Ablethorpe was interested in her directly. I could have knocked his head off! Cheek, indeed!

"She lives with a poor working woman," said Miss Orrin, who had no doubt noticed the interest as well as I, "one named Nance Edgar, not very far out of Breckonside village. But not in your parish, Mr. Ablethorpe. Will you come this way, Mr. Ablethorpe? There is tea ready for you."

But Mr Ablethorpe had his own time of doing things, and with such a girl as Elsie in front of him, he was not in a hurry.

"Lives with a poor woman, does she?—Nancy—Nancy—what name did you say?" he went on in the tone in which people ask for additional information.

But I was not going to stand this—from Miss Orrin or any one, about my Elsie.

"This is Miss Elsie Stennis," I said, with what of dignity I could compass with my inches, "the only grand daughter of Mr Stennis, the owner of this property."

"But how?" said the young man, looking, as I thought, a little reproachfully at Miss Orrin; "I was not seriously aware that Mr. Stennis had any relatives alive."

"This girl has been represented as the child of his daughter Isabella," said Miss Orrin, "but Mr. Stennis, doubtless for excellent reasons, has never acknowledged her as such!"

"But the church records and the registrar have, though," said I. "You can speak to old Mr. Askew, if you like—he knows!"

"You can go now," said Miss Orrin, with dignity, cutting me short, "and remember that you are not to return till you have received an invitation. Mr. Stennis will overlook your conduct on this occasion, in consideration of your youth and ignorance. But you will know better the next time, and no such excuse will be accepted."

As Mr. Ablethorpe passed me he nodded his blonde curly head at me, twinkled his eye, and said: "Tell your father that I am going to look him up one of these days. I want a subscription for our Organ Fund, but I won't say anything about where I found you—I promise you that."

He looked at Elsie, too, as if he had meant to say something jokingly to her also, but thought better of it. Then he lifted his hat and passed away across the green lawn side by side with Miss Orrin. They wove their way among the clumps of lilies till they were lost to view, and I could see that they were talking earnestly together.

And from the barn, very lonesome across the black water of the moat, came the indignant hooting of the mad sisters still shut up behind the barred door, with the black altar and the little coffins.

CHAPTER IX

ELSIE'S VISITOR

It was a night or two after our first and (for the time being) last visit to Deep Moat Grange. Elsie and I had arrived back at Nance's, our hands and even our arms laden with flowers. For Nance had been at home all day, and so Elsie and I had been taking a holiday—I from lessons, and Elsie from looking after the house. We had gone wandering over the long whinny knowes which stretch away to the south, till, from the top of Brom Beacon, one can see the ships crowding into the docks of East Dene and Thorsby, collier and tug and tall sea-going brig, every ship after her kind.

It was a day to be remembered, and as a matter of fact neither of us has forgotten it. We crossed Brom Water where it was as broad as a lake. Our conveyance was a penny flatboat, running on a chain, which chain hauled itself up wet and dripping from the bed of the river. A little farther on we stretched ourselves out on the greensward upon a green knoll above a railway cutting. We talked. We were silent, and listened to the the wind among the leaves and the hum of insects among the lime trees and meadow plants. Mr. Mustard was not at all in our thoughts. Nor yet my father in mine. Only one thing troubled me—the knowledge that in the autumn I must leave Breckonside and go to college. College itself I did not mind about. There was a certain amount of fun in being a student—or so I had always been told. What I really did mind about was leaving Elsie.

It would be—I knew it by instinct—like cutting off a part of my own body to go walking lonely on Saturdays when we had so often loitered in company, thinking that the good days would never cease, wanting nothing better, nothing other than just what we had. Ah! I had a prevision that day that Elsie and I had better make the most of our time during this summer. For the winter would try our friendship.

What I did not foresee was how suddenly Elsie would grow up. Yet she had always done things suddenly—from boxing my ears to deciding to continue her

studies at home. She did the latter that very day, and in the evening she announced to Nance that she was not going back to school.

"Very well," said Nance, not in the least surprised. Indeed, with her own limited education, she had often wondered why Elsie had prolonged hers so unnecessarily.

It was pleasant in Nance's cottage by the Bridge End of Breckonside. The house was, as perhaps I have already explained, overwhelmed in a perfect show of creeping flowers, not all of them yet in their full bloom of colour, but always spreading up to the chimneys and throwing abroad reckless tendrils that brushed the face as one entered the little wooden porch.

Nance was busy with the supper dishes, and Elsie had come down after "giving her hair a tidy," as she had been commanded by Nance to do.

"Who do you think has been here the day?" said Nance suddenly.

And I knew in a minute, but Elsie guessed her grandfather.

"The young English minister from Over Breckonton."

"Yes," Nance went on to give details, finding that nobody exclaimed at her news; "as fine an Englisher as ever was, with a bit cambric handkerchief that wad hae been little use to a man wi' a cauld in his heid, and a black cane wi' real silver bands. Extraordinary civil he was, and bode near an hour talkin' to puir auld Nance, and speirin' where ye were, Elsie, and what time ye wad be hame!"

I looked at Elsie. She was busily engaged in tying up some sprays of early heath, which we had gathered on the steep sides of Brom Beacon. She did not seem to be listening. But she heard well enough, as her words proved.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Ralph Ablethorpe! Joe and I met him by chance on the way to my grandfather's the other day."

Now the vixen knew very well that there would be no more question of the "coming of the Englishy minister" after an announcement like that. Nance was all agog to hear of the wonders of Deep Moat Grange, which she had never seen except from the outside, and news of the mad people my lassie's granddad had gathered about him. Small wonder, either! For, indeed, no one had crossed the

Moat for years except the High-Church curate, who (as they said) went periodically to "confess" Miss Orrin.

Even such things as coals and provisions were brought by the bailiff to the end of the drawbridge in sacks, and from thence carried across on the back of the powerful Jeremy, the same Jeremy whom we had seen that day weeping like a child.

But it was then that I began first to understand what absence at college might cost me. I looked at Elsie. She was still tying up the little pink bundles of "bell heather," but her face was held down, and there was a little conscious flush upon her cheek. I had never thought it before, and it came on me like a judgment. Elsie was pretty.

I did not exactly wish she hadn't been, but oh, I did wish that nobody had been able to see it but myself!

That English curate, with his curly poll and clear blue eyes, rode me like a nightmare. I resolved to break his head, handsome as it looked—aye, if he were the best man that ever stepped in shoe leather, and had climbed all the mountains in Switzerland and given all that he got for doing it to the poor, as they said he had done. I did not care how good he was. I was desperate at the thought of losing Elsie. Not for love—oh no, thank you. I had more sense than that. But just to go about with, and be my little 'panion, as she had always said she would be, and as I expected her to remain.

But the curate did not let grass grow under his footsteps. It was only two days before he was back again at the little cottage at the Bridge End. Nance had work that day, and if I had not had the sense to play truant he would have found Elsie by herself, as no doubt he expected to do. But I was there seated on the table, swinging my legs.

He began at once saying how sorry he was that Nance was out, and that he had so much enjoyed the talk with her the other day. But under my breath I kept saying, "Liar! Liar!" Because I knew quite well that he was coming of purpose to see Elsie, and the thought gave me catchings of the breath when I thought of going to college. I wasn't jealous a bit, of course, only I couldn't bear to think of any other fellow being friends with Elsie.

But after awhile I began to like the parson better. He had heard that I could

bowl more than a bit, and he asked me to make one of the team he was getting up to play the second eleven of East Dene. I took to him more after that, and really he did not talk to Elsie oftener than he did to me. More than that, he did not make me feel in the way.

But it was all no go. From deep down in my heart there kept bobbing up the feeling that somehow I was to lose Elsie, and that this young parson with the curly head would be the cause of it. Of course, I was going on to eighteen, and a big fellow for my age, with a moustache you could see by looking for it. But this was a full-grown man of twenty-four at the least—for all that his shaven face and sort of painted-window hair made him look any age from that of a choir boy to that of a holy angel.

He asked about Elsie's grandfather, saying that he had struggled long and vainly to get him to come to church, or at least to communion, but without success. More than that, he seemed to be keeping Miss Orrin from attending the parish church of Over Breckonton. Miss Orrin, so it seemed, had good instincts —she was well affected toward religion, but something always seemed to hold her back. At a certain point she became silent, and he, Ralph Ablethorpe, could do nothing more with her. This resistance he hoped, however, to overcome one day. It was his duty to study the welfare of every soul in his parish, and also of those wandering and foldless sheep who were cared for by nobody.

I had it on my tongue tip to say that there were many who cared for souls when they were connected with comely bodies, for that was the kind of thing that my father was always saying. He took himself for an advanced thinker whenever he quarrelled with our vicar, but between times he was as good a conservative as anybody, and stood up for law and order like the chucker-out of a bar-room.

Elsie had not much to say about her people. She never had. But I told him, as I always did any one who asked, that her father had been an army officer, and her mother the only daughter of the Golden Farmer, only that neither the one nor the other of them could stand the old man's ways.

Then the young parson, as I found to be his custom, started in to defend the absent, which is all right when the "absent" is anyway decent.

"Yes," he said, "Mr. Stennis's habits are certainly eccentric. I cannot deny

that. But after all he does a lot of good in rather creditable circumstances. He gives shelter to four poor lunatics whom a sisterly love has preserved from the living death of a common asylum."

I told him plainly that I thought it would be much better for themselves, and infinitely so for the countryside, if they were all shut up in the nearest asylum under proper care.

"What do you mean?" says he, rather startled. For I could see by the changing of his countenance that he, too, had seen strange things. As, indeed, he was bound to do, if he kept his eyes open at all, going to Deep Moat Grange as often as he did.

But then, you see, he was a simple sort of young man, and never thought, or at least said, any evil of anybody.

Then he suggested that we would walk home together, and though I had meant to stay at the cottage all day, I actually went. But I soon got him into a hot argument with my father (who could argue the handle off the village pump) about doctrine and sacraments, and things that a boy has to learn about in school till he hates the very name of them. At least, if he has a master like old Mr. Mustard. Then I up and shinned out of the back door as quick as I could, lest father should ask me where I was going, and send me kiting all over the country with one of our delivery vans. I found Elsie looking out of the window and very pensive.

So I told her to her face that she was thinking of that curly-headed curate, and she answered me (as, of course, she would naturally do) that whether she was or wasn't, it was no business of mine.

Then I vowed I would make it my business.

"Then make it!" says she, and turned away very haughty and went and sulked in Nancy's little room, which was off the big kitchen. It was as much as I could do to keep from turning on my heel and walking away, never more to return. But I knew that it was wrong to yield to passion. So I was noble and stopped where I was.

Instead I began to sweep up the cinders about the grate and get everything ready for tea, even to scouring the teapot and things. I used coarse, common

powder, and this I moistened by a coarse and familiar method. The act brought Elsie out promptly. Just bounding she was. Mad was no name for it. She called me all the names she could think of, but she didn't sulk any more. I thought she wouldn't. That always fetches her. She knows I do it a-purpose to make her angry, but she can't help it—not one time in a thousand. Elsie is built that way, and from what I have seen quite a lot of women are.

It works far better than taffying up to them, or doing the dreadful humble. Get them spitting mad, and they will love you ever after, or at least for quite a while.

CHAPTER X

THE BROM-WATER MYSTERY

It is wonderful how soon a thing is forgotten, or at least put on a shelf in people's memories. Poor Harry Foster, for example! There was a man now—a man murdered in the discharge of his duty, if ever a man was. And after a month or two another man was travelling the same road with a new mail cart and new sacks of letters, as quiet as water going down a mill-lade. The only difference was that he started a while later in the morning than poor Harry, after it was daylight, in fact, so that the Bewick people had to wait, often till midday, before they got their letters.

And when they made complaint to the Postmaster-General, or some other big-wig, he up and said to them, "You Bewickers, it is open to you to choose one of yourselves to bring up the mails from Breckonside, running the risk of Harry Foster's fate and providing a sufficient guarantee for any loss the post office run by Her Royal High Majesty may sustain."

Something like that he said. But no Bewicker offered. Of course not—why, they had skin creeps at the very thought.

"So," says the post official big-wig, "you Bewick cowards, be good enough to shut up and take your letters when they are sent out to you."

Still there were people who kept thinking about poor Harry for all that. And I was one of them. Elsie did not seem to care so much, or at least so long. Did you never observe that you can't keep a girl long interested in the same thing, unless you keep on telling her all the time how much prettier she is getting to look? But I did not know even that much, not then. I was just mortal green—green as father's spare pasture field after three days' steady rain and one of May sunshine. And, indeed, to tell the truth outright, I thought altogether too much at that time about people, and too little about my Latin and Greek prose, as Mr. Mustard, who was a good classic himself, often told me. He said I should rue it. But I can't say I have ever gone as far as that. Not to date, anyway. Perhaps I may some day, when I start reading Latin to pass the time.

The adventure grew more interesting to me after the policeman and detectives had one by one all cleared off. The affair was "classed," as the French say in their crime books—I learned my French out of these, and a jolly easy way, too—that is, the police were not going to do anything more in the matter, unless something fresh turned up. And it would have to be something mighty fresh, too, to move them. They had all got so sick of the whole business.

There was just one thing that kept me back. That was, I was nearly sure that Elsie's grandfather had something to do with the whole series of crimes of which the death of poor Harry was only the last and the most senseless. Perhaps not Mr. Stennis directly, but somebody about Deep Moat Grange. So, of course, I did not want to bring Elsie into it if I could help it. Because if her grandfather was a murderer, and if all the missing drovers and absconding cattle dealers were laid to his account, and he hanged for it, it would be clearly impossible for Elsie to go on living with Nance Edgar at the Bridge End. And as I was not yet ready to make other arrangements for her (besides being mortally afraid of the curate), I said nothing to any one—least of all to Elsie herself.

I think I had suspected everybody for miles round in turn—from Mr. Codling the policeman to the vicar himself. As for poor Mr. Ball, I had him so completely under observation, and was so sure of his guilt, that when the unfortunate bailiff went out only to fodder the cattle, I followed stealthily in his footsteps, sure that the secret of the mystery lay in the range of cattle sheds or under the pigs' feeding troughs. In the end I only managed to get a welting from father for coming home all muddy from head to foot—and not pleasant mud at that.

But really I did not mind. I was always glad when I got home safe. Now I

know that I was taking my life in my hands every minute. Even then I had glimmerings of the fact. The folks of Breckonside might say, as they always did, that the killing of poor Harry was the work of some chance tramps, who would be far away by the next morning. But putting everything together, just as Sherlock Holmes used to do, I couldn't make it out at all. I had his spirit, but not his luck—no, not by any means his luck.

This, however, was what I made out. Harry had jogged on till he met with some one whom he knew, that is, almost immediately after he parted with Davie Elshiner, the poacher. He had talked, parleyed, and then accepted company. Then some one of these, sitting on the back seat of the dog cart, had covered up his mouth and butchered him most foully. After that no more was to be learned. The light vehicle which had bounded from side to side of the narrow drove-road had certainly been empty. I am no Sherlock Holmes, but my father and I know about horses and local conveyances. And we could see by the rebounding, the one wheel climbing the bank, and the other sinking in the slough, that if any one had been inside—nay any *thing*, the contents of the cart, be they what they would, must have been emptied out.

But Harry, the mail bags, even the parcels for Bewick, had completely disappeared. Nothing except the empty cart and the broad plane-tree leaves were ever seen again. It seemed so simple a thing to trace—a dead body, accounted no easy thing to make away with even professionally, a dozen bags of letters—many with negotiable values, of which the issuing bank had, luckily, reserved the numbers—tobacco in tins, cigarettes in boxes, sweets, sugar in cones, even a Stilton cheese for the old bachelor, Major Templand (retired), who cried out more about the loss of his Welsh rabbit than all the others put together. Clues—there were balls and wads of clues! Only, none of them led anywhere. Neither did the woods, through which there was no track of anything previous to those made by Mr. Stennis's pony the following day. Nothing either way along the road. No, I could put my hand on nothing and nobody. And I gave it up at last, sure nevertheless that it was somewhere about the house of Deep Moat that the solution must be looked for.

And, indeed, some light, such as it was, came from the last quarter from which it could be expected.

Mr. Ablethorpe arrived one fine summer afternoon at our place in Breckonside. I was playing in the backyard, half a dozen dogs tumbling over me.

It had been intended that I should go out that afternoon with a van, but somehow one of the men had got back earlier from his morning round, and had been re-dispatched as more trustworthy. Also idleness in a boy was bad enough, but in a man paid weekly wages—insupportable.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Yarrow," cried the curate in his hearty voice, loud but not a bit preachy—I give him that due—"can I have your Joe an hour or two?"

"Have him and keep him, the lazy whelp," cried my father from the back shop, where he was busy writing up his books in his shirt sleeves. Then, laying down his pen where it would not roll over the page (which always roused him to crisply expressed anger), he came out to meet the young curate from the neighbouring parish of Breckonton. Upper or Over Breckonton was still more dependent on my father than my native Breckonside. There were other ways of getting supplies at Breckonside, at least for a time. But Over Breckonton was wholly dependent on my father's vans, carrier's carts, and general delivery of goods.

They shook hands with some heartiness. For though my father had a standing quarrel with both vicars he was always on the best of terms with the curates.

"What might you want him for, Mr. Ablethorpe?"

"Oh," said Mr. Ablethorpe, "the farmers are busy with their moor hay, you see, and I thought if Joe and I——"

"Say no more," cried my father, "you shall have him. And if he does not work like a good 'un, you tell it to me, that's all! I see now why the farmers of your parish call you the 'Hayfork' Minister!"

"Oh, they call me that, do they?" said the curate, not at all disguising his pleasure in the nickname, "well, I'm no great preacher, you know. So it is as well to make oneself of use some way!"

"That's right—that's right," cried my father, "I hope you will put a little of that teaching into the lazy bones of my young whelp. Joe! Ah, Joe, you villain! Come here! Don't skulk!"

As my father did really know where I was (and also because I was an obedient boy with a reverence for the fifth commandment of the Decalogue), I

came immediately, greatly to the disappointment of the dogs, who thought themselves in for a good long romp. I found Mr. Ablethorpe explaining to my father that we were just going to call in at Brom Common Farm, to give Caleb Fergusson a lift with his hay—that Caleb was an old man, and would be the better of the assistance of two pairs of sturdy arms. Furthermore, it would keep Joe in training for the next cricket match—Breckonton and District *v.* Upper Dene Hospital it was.

"I don't know exactly how long we shall be, I tell you frankly," said the curate. "If old Caleb has nearly finished, Joe and I may take a walk before coming home. It won't do to have him getting slack, lying about the yard like this."

"That's all right," said my father, who was aching to get back to his books, and wished nothing better than to have me taken off his hands, "all serene! Don't you fret, Mr. Ablethorpe. Joe will be in good keeping along of you. I wish I could say as much of him always. He is a wandering, good-for-nothing wretch!"

That, you see, was my father's way of talking. He didn't mean anything by it. But the words just flowed naturally from him, and he could no more help abusing me, or, indeed, any of his men, than taking a snooze when sleepy in the afternoon.

The curate, who knew that barking keeps the teeth open and so prevents biting, simply laughed and said, "Well, come along, Joe! You are under my care and authority for this day, at any rate."

As for me, I was glad enough. For, but for Elsie, and the thought of my going to college in the late autumn, I liked Mr. Ablethorpe very well, as, for that matter, did nearly every one who knew him—except his vicar, who did not appreciate a young man being so popular; "stealing the hearts of his congregation from him," as he expressed it.

I was still gladder, because I knew that that afternoon there was not the least chance of seeing Elsie. She had gone up to read Latin and piles of hard books with Miss Martha Mustard, the dominie's sister, who was said to be far more learned even than he. At any rate, though not what you would call "honeysuckle sweet," she had at least a far better temper.

The curate and I set out. It was the selfsame road that Elsie and I had taken earlier in the year, on the May morning when we were the first to look inside poor Harry Foster's blood-stained mail cart.

But now the leaves were turning and drying, already brown at the edges, and splotched with yellow and green along the webbing inside. Soon our feet were on the heather, and I watched the curate to see if he would turn his head to take a look across at the little creeper-hidden cot at the Bridge End, where Elsie was not. But either he was on his guard, or he was as well aware as I myself of her absence. At any rate he never turned his head, but swung along with a jolly hillman's stride which it took me all my pith and length of limb to keep pace with.

And as we went he improved the occasion. Not like a common minister, who asks you if you have been a good boy and always tell the truth. Silly questions, as if the man had never been a boy himself!

But the curate said: "Now, look here, you are getting out of the way of going

to church, just because of your father's silly quarrel with the vicar of your parish. That may be well enough for your father. He is a grown man, and can judge about these things as well as you or I. But it is different with a young fellow. He gets into bad habits. Oh, yes, I know you go sometimes to the Presbyterian chapel" (he actually used the word chapel!), "but you do that because Miss Stennis is your friend, and though, of course, anything is better than nothing ——"

"It's as good as——" I was beginning hotly, when he interrupted me.

"Yes, yes," he cried hastily, "of course that is all right for those who are in it. But you are a Churchman and the son of a Churchman. *I* don't go hunting Presbyterians all over two parishes. But when I see a Churchman, and the son of a Churchman, in danger of drifting—well, I step over the line of my duty and speak my mind."

I answered nothing, for after all clergymen have a monopoly of that kind of talk. But I kept my wits about me. I thought he was going to ask me to come regularly to his church so as to keep me away from Elsie, but not a bit of him.

"What I want you to promise me is that when you go to Edinburgh you will lose no time in looking up a friend of mine, Harry Ryan, who has a church on the South Side. If you don't he will look you up. But I want you to go, on the principle of one volunteer being worth two pressed men. More than that, it will do you good, and if you have left any friends here in Breckonside they will, I am sure, be glad that you are being looked after a bit. I don't mean that your liberty will be interfered with in the least. It won't be interfered with half enough in these lecturing barrack-rooms they call Scotch universities. But any way, don't be afraid. Harry Ryan will see you through."

Well, I could say no less than that I would do as he said. And when I heard that Mr. Ryan was a good "cover," as well as a safe bat and change bowler, I thought I would risk it. Afterwards I found it would have been one of the best things I could do. Though, mind you, for all that there may have been some thought of Elsie in the back of Mr. Ablethorpe's mind. For there were heaps and heaps of pretty girls at Mr. Ryan's church, as I found out when I visited the city —all sorts, swell girls, villa girls, and shop girls (these last the prettiest). And he may have thought that among so many I would be almost certain to forget Elsie. He *may*, I say. I don't know that he did. Only—I should in his place.

Well, my curate, he went on like sticks a-breaking all about the difference between church and chapel, and how, though the Presbyterians were by law established in Scotland, they were only chapel people after all. And that there was only one Church, properly so called. Oh, a lot like that. And he got quite hot about it, because he had been in Scotland himself, and had been called a Dissenter by the parish minister. He had never got over this, and even now the remembrance of it made him ruffle up his hair like tossing moist meadow hay. Then he would start in to explain about it all over again.

I didn't mind, for I thought: "The more he cares for things like that 'Postolic Succession and 'Down with John Knox,' the less time will he have for meandering about Elsie." So I was pleased all right with what he said, though I didn't listen much. However, I promised to go to his friend's church in Edinburgh, and not to any of the Presbyterian "schism-shops." That was what he called them, for he pitched into them proper. Then he was as pleased as Punch, and looked upon me with a sort of air as if he owned me. I bet he took me for a brand plucked from the Presbyterian burning. You see, on the border of the two countries it is different from anywhere else. It is like drawing a chalk line, and both sides, Piskies and Presbies, spar up to it. They are always letting out at each other, while thirty miles inland they don't care a jujube about the matter, and even play golf together and smoke pipes on the sly after sermon. This is truth, and you can put it between the leaves of the Holy Book and swear on it.

Well, I told the curate I would go to his friend Harry Ryan's church—St. James the Less was the name of it. But I didn't say *how often* I would go! It is always well to keep a sort of anchor out, grappled in the hinterlands of your conscience, when you are promising in the dark, as I was that time.

All this time, when Mr. Ablethorpe was improving me and leading me in the way of the Thirty-nine Articles (no, not exactly—I forgot—he didn't like them; he thought he could have made much better ones, but in the way of the catechism and Prayer Book), we were legging it across big bare Brom Common. He would stop and argue, keeping me looking straight at him till the water came into my eyes. Then on he would go again, more set than ever on making a good Churchman out of me. I never saw anybody quite so certain that he was right as Mr. Ablethorpe. Why, he would have taken his Davy that even the best of Dissenters would only get into a kind of half-way house, back-stairs heaven, and might count themselves lucky if they were not sent flying altogether.

But all this got us over the ground pretty quick, and we were at old Caleb Fergusson's before we knew it. Then, just as we were going into the stackyard I remembered that old Caleb was a Presbyterian, and of the worst and toughest kind—Free Kirk elder right through to the back seam of his coat. So I asked curate how that was, and how he reconciled helping old Caleb with his conscience and all that he had been drilling into me.

But Mr. Ablethorpe only said, "Caleb Fergusson is a Presbyterian, it is true, and very obstinate and blinded. But he has a farm at too dear a rent, and has lost the only son who helped him in the working of it. So I go sometimes to give him a hand."

It was not a very logical explanation after what he had just been unlading into me. But all the same I liked him the better for it—jolly well, too.

We found Caleb just at the end of stacking his meadow hay, and very testy. He had his old wife out to help him. She was tottering on the edge of a rick, half-way up, and all the other help he had was a small boy grandson, whom he was making sorry that he had ever been born. I thought Caleb would have been glad to see us, and so I dare say he was. But his crusty Scotchness would not let him show it. Show it? No fear.

He let Mr. Ablethorpe take his fork, it is true, and ordered down his wife from the stack with the grumble that she had left "the hale affair as saft as saps!"

Then he turned and rated the curate for not coming earlier, if he meant to be any use.

"But it's just like you English Kirkers," he said. "Ye are at the fore wi' your chants and vain ceremonies, but when it comes to the halesome milk o' the Word—faith, but your coo's dry!"

I stood aghast. I expected such a volley from the fervid curate as would sweep the daring old man off the shafts of his red farm cart. But I did not know Mr. Ablethorpe yet.

"I am sorry, Caleb," he said meekly; "I meant to come earlier, but I had a few calls to make and a service to take——"

"Service, quo' he," snorted the old Free Kirker; "the rags o' Rome!"

"And besides," continued the curate, without troubling himself with the taunt, "there was so heavy a dew this morning that I did not think you would be leading till the afternoon!"

"Nae mair we wad, if Providence had left us the means o' waitin' till the hay was decently won. But what can a puir auld bereaved couple dae, hirplin' at death's door, baith the twa o' them?"

By this time I was on the stack, and the Hayfork Minister was sending me up armful after armful to settle into its place.

"Tramp, will ye!" shouted the old man; "that wife o' mine has gotten nae heavier on her feet than a cricket on the hearth, or a spider that taketh hold wi' her hands and is in king's pailaces! Tramp, laddie!"

So, as Mr. Ablethorpe forked the hay, I stepped sturdily round, till I, too, was fain to strip to my shirt, and even moisten the sweet-smelling bog hay with the sweat of my brow.

And while we worked old Caleb stood by, and, as he expressed it, "tightly tairged the Apiscopian on doctrine and the Scriptures." Mr. Ablethorpe was certainly at a disadvantage in a theological argument conducted from a hay cart (with a borrowed horse) against an assailant sitting crumbling tobacco into a pipe on the safe eminence of an upturned wheelbarrow.

"While we worked Old Caleb ... tightly tairged the 'Apiscopian' on Doctrine and the Scripture."

"While we worked Old Caleb ... tightly tairged the 'Apiscopian' on Doctrine and the Scripture."

But the humility with which he listened to the old elder amazed me. It was not that he agreed with him. He carefully guarded against that. But he accepted many of the old Scot's positions, merely gliding in a saving clause by way of amendment, to salve his conscience, as it were, between two forkfuls of hay. Even these, however, were of no effect. For not only was Caleb a little deaf, but he never waited for a reply, and by the time that Mr. Ablethorpe had added his rider Caleb was far into yet another argument destined to the final destruction of the "rags of Rome, and all sic as put their trust in them!"

When work was over for the day, Mr. Ablethorpe would not stay for tea. He

had to go farther, he explained, after dabbling his face in the water of the pump trough and wiping it with the fine white cambric handkerchief which I had so scorned.

Caleb accompanied us to the gate, and I looked for a profusion of grateful thanks. But I did not know my Scotsman. All he said was only, "The neist time ye come to gie a body a half-day fowin' (forking), come at an hour when we will get some wark oot o' ye!"

The curate laughed, and shook him by the hand cordially.

"A good old man," he said, as we walked off, "but dreadfully confirmed in his delusions."

"Why did you not tell him what you told me?" I made bold to ask.

Mr. Ablethorpe turned quickly and clapped me on the shoulder.

"I have not faith enough to remove mountains," he said, "but with a spade I can sometimes make a show at moving a molehill where it ought to go."

We continued on over the moor toward the Brom Water, where was the place that Poacher Davie Elshiner had done his fishing that morning of the loss of poor Harry Foster.

I asked Mr. Ablethorpe what we were to do there, and warned him that I had no wish to go nearer to the house of Deep Moat. So that if he counted on visiting his penitent Miss Aphra Orrin he would have to go alone.

"I am perturbed in my mind, and that's the truth," he said. "There is something strange along the branch of the river which flows into the Moat. I walked home that way yesterday, and I wish for your presence and assistance. Two can do so much more than one. Also, you know the locality, as well I know. I look to you to help me to solve the mystery which, to my mind at least, hangs over Brom Water."

CHAPTER XI

THE IRON TRAPDOOR

The Hayfork Minister, who had laboured with equal determination to save the crop of a true-blue Presbyterian and to make me a good Churchman, evidently knew his way about the precincts of the Grange. He stepped through a gap in the hedge, jumped a half-dry ditch, and wound his way through the scattering brambles and underbrush as if he had been in his own garden plot.

No coward, the Hayfork! It took me all my time to keep up with him, and I am a good jumper, too—nearly as good as Elsie.

We went down the side of the Moat Backwater. It is a curious place. It is not, you understand, the Brom Water itself. That comes down from the hills and wimples away across the plain, full of good fish, both trout and salmon, according to their season. But the Moat Backwater connects the pond or little loch which lies in front of the windows of the Grange with the Brom. Whether the connection is absolutely natural, or whether it was originally made by the hand of man, I cannot tell. Neither, so far as I know, can anybody else. But in some places it certainly looks like the latter.

At any rate, whenever the Brom is in flood, it "backs up," as it were, into the Backwater, and so runs into the pond. It fills the Moat itself like a tide, and I believe on a few occasions it has even been known to overflow the greensward where the clumps of lilies are, right up to the steps of the front door!

There is, of course, always some water in the Lane, which trenches the meadows and runs canalwise through the fringing woods. But at ordinary times the water in the Lane, as much of it as there is, finds its way toward the Brom, owing to the feeding of the Grange Pond by local streamlets. But in times of rain the current runs the other way. Then the Backwater runs brown and turgid into the pond till the lilies tug at their green anchor chains and the Moat itself is lipping full of black, peaty water from the hills.

To-day as we plunged into the shadow of the woods along the side of the Backwater, it held no more water than a burn in the summer heats—little and still clear, the minnows and troutlets balancing and darting, joggling each other rudely from beneath favourite stones, or shouldering into well-situated holes in

the bank, like people scrambling for seats at a play. Then a few yards farther on would come a deep brown pool with a curious greenish opal sheen lying like a scum on the surface, for all the world like two-coloured silk. This was the reflection of the leaves above. Very dense they were, so that the light could hardly filter through between. Along the burnside it was generally lighter. But the trees clustered deep and thick about the pools, as I suppose they do all the world over, whenever they get the chance.

"The water is lower than I have ever seen it!" I said, as it might be, just for something to say. But Mr. Ablethorpe did not answer a word. I could see him looking eagerly about him, evidently searching for something he had seen before, but for the moment could not find again.

I could not for the life of me imagine what it could be, nor yet why he had been so keen to have me with him. It was not that he was afraid. That was plain enough. For he had been this way before, and that quite recently. I knew by his spying this way and that for landmarks. And I knew quite certain that it was not just that I might give him a hand with old Caleb Fergusson's harvest that he had asked me off from my home work, or home play, whichever it might be.

All at once he stopped, sat down on a log, pulled out his knife and began to whittle at a branch of oak. Whatever it was he was looking for, he had either found it, or decided to give up the search.

We were sitting on a fallen tree trunk, close to the edge of the Backwater, and the pool beneath us was almost dry. The Lane ran out of sight, getting smaller and smaller in what I have heard called "perspective"—that is, straight as if ruled on paper with a straight edge.

Then the Hayfork Minister asked me if I saw anything particular about the water. I told him what I have just written, but I could not for the life of me remember the word "perspective." He understood all right, though.

"Good," he said, "and does that suggest nothing else to the bold and inquiring mind of my friend Joseph?"

After looking awhile I answered that it seemed to me as if somebody had cut the canal with spades just as Tim O'Hara and Mike Whelan did the ditching and draining on my father's forage parks the winter before last.

"Right again, Joe!" he said, pleasedlike, and rumpled up my hair in a way I don't let anybody do—except Elsie, who does as she likes, whether I like it or no. I pulled away my head angrily. But the Hayfork Minister never minded.

"I can't tell you whether this has been dug out with a spade or not," he said, putting a point on the oaken cudgel with his big "gully" knife (think of a minister with a knife like that!), "but this I can tell you, that the hand of man has been here or hereabouts!"

And with that he leaned over the edge right among the weeds and began scraping away at the bank. It was coated over pretty regularly with a greyish mud which had come down with the last emptying of the pond. This was done periodically, with the avowed purpose of clearing out the Moat and Backwater. Mr. Ball saw to it, under the personal superintendence of Mr. Stennis. And all that day the mad people at the Grange were kept within doors, and the policies were strictly guarded. For the scour of the water escaping down the channel brought with it multitudes of fish—not very large, it is true, but sufficient to be a temptation to every boy within miles. Such, however, was the terror inspired by the inhabitants of Deep Moat Grange, and especially by Daft Jeremy, that those who were bold enough to come at all, rather braved the dangers of the Duke's keepers at the infall of the Backwater into the Brom, than dared to set a foot within those woodland shadows where they knew not what terrors might lurk.

The Hayfork Minister went on knocking off big flakes of dried mud with the point of his stick. Then, whistling softly, he started to polish something with vigour. At first I could not in the least see what he was after, but soon a good big square of reddish metal was laid bare. It was not upright in the bank, but leaned a little back, was very deep set, and I could see that it had been intended to slide in grooves. At the time I had no idea as to why it had been put there. But now I know that it must have been constructed for purposes of irrigation.

There was, in fact, an old vegetable garden and orchard, still partly enclosed with crumbling walls, not two hundred yards off through the woods. And there is little doubt that it had been the intention of some former travelled master of the Grange to cultivate his table vegetables and fruits on the system of Southern Europe.

All, however, was now desolate.

Yet the iron plate in the bank, though mud-covered and rusty, had not stuck altogether. Indeed, looking at it closely, it was not difficult to see that it had recently been used. With the Hayfork Minister at one end of the oak branch, and myself at the other, we soon made it budge with a smothered heave-ho! and revealed a regularly bricked tunnel leading apparently into the bowels of the earth.

"That is where you are to go, my son!" said Mr. Ablethorpe.

"Me!"

Mr. Ablethorpe nodded, and scraping away some leaves behind the fallen tree on which we had been sitting together, he disinterred a coil of stout cord, not thick, but very strong, with a red thread running through it. "This has served," he said, "for heavier weights in more dangerous places!"

And without more ado he proceeded to knot it about my waist, as if he had been accustomed to nothing else all his life. But I objected. Indeed, I had reason. For suppose Mad Jeremy, or Aphra Orrin, or Mr. Stennis himself were to come while I was up there—what then?

"You leave that to me, Joe," said the Hayfork Minister; "there is not one of them that would dare to touch me—no, nor you—while you are in my company."

This was good enough to hear, and, in its way, comforting. But, somehow, at such a time the mind craves for proofs more absolute. Or to be somewhere else. Particularly the latter.

I think Mr. Ablethorpe saw something of my dismay on my face, for immediately he stopped what he was doing, put his hand on my shoulder, and said, "Joe, would I send you into any danger I would not be ready to share myself?"

"No, I believe not, sir!" said I. For though he worried me like fun about being the right sort of Churchman, he was a rare good sort himself, man and Churchman, too. At least I know about the first, and as for the Churchman, I am willing to take that on trust.

"Well, now," said he, "that's settled. In you go!"

"But what am I to do when I get in there?" I asked. For I had thought that he was going to give me a proper explanation of everything—the whys and the wherefores, and all about it.

"You are to crawl, Joe," he said, "because you can get in and I cannot, Joseph! That's the worst of going in for athletics at school, Joe—it makes you grow such a whopping size afterwards when you stop them. So you are to crawl up there for me, and as soon as you find anything, you are to give the rope a tug, and I will pull you out! For it isn't so easy as it looks to crawl backward down a hole of that size."

"But suppose," I faltered, my imagination rampant, and my voice failing me at the same moment, "suppose—that I should come on—on poor Harry Foster—with—with his throat cut—oh, what should I do?"

"You won't—more's the pity," he answered, quite coolly. "If Harry had been in there, and you and I sitting here, we should have known it long ere this. No such luck! Still, what you may *find*, is quite worth the trial. We shall at least learn something!"

Now I don't think that, since the visit Elsie and I paid to Deep Moat Grange, I was quite so eager to "learn something" as I had been. But it was no use being a coward with the Hayfork Minister.

"In you go, Joe," he said, lowering me by the rope to the black mouth of the passage, "in with you, eel! And if you find anything portable, gave a tug, and if you want to come out *very* suddenly, give two tugs."

I was halfway in as he said these words, and I instantly gave two tugs, but he only said, "Now, no monkey tricks, Joe. This is serious. Up with you. Remember I am here!"

I was not at all likely to forget it. But I had much rather he had been head foremost up that narrow tunnel, and I out in the green aisles of the forest waiting for him with a rope in my hands.

CHAPTER XII

THE BRICKED PASSAGE

Now I don't know whether you have ever been up a drain pipe which just takes you, and no more. I suppose you have—in nightmares, after supping on cold boiled pork and greens, or some nice little digestible morsel like that. But really awake, and with the birds singing on the trees, the winds lightly scented with bog myrtle and pine and bracken breathing all about you—to be told to shove yourself up a built rabbit hole, not knowing what you may come on the next time you put out your hand!—Well, Hayfork Minister or no Hayfork—I had the hardest row to hoe that time! I don't think any fellow, even if he has climbed all the mountains that are, has any right to let a boy in for a thing like that without telling him beforehand. And smiling about it all the time, as if he were merely sending you into Miss Payne's to buy butter-scotch!

I felt as if I could have killed him the first half-dozen "creeps" I took. And what was the worst of his cheek, he shoved me behind with the oak branch, which he had sharpened, and said, "Go on!"

If I could have got him then—up a drain—me with that same oak goad, I would have given it to him—cheerful, I would. Cheerful is no name for it!

Inside the tunnel the bricks were not all of the same size. Some had dropped a little and pinched my shoulders. Some were wanting altogether. And that fiend of a Hayfork, at the mouth, all safe outside with the rope's-end in his hand kept singing up to me, "A-a-all right—a-a-right—it will get wider as you get farther in!"

Much he knew! Had he been up, I'd like to know?

However, he was right as it happened—right without knowing anything about it. The passage did widen a bit. I found offshoots—smaller passages leading I don't know where. And I didn't put in my hand to feel, having a dislike to be bitten by water rats—or any other kind of rats. And it was an awful "ratty" place that, by the smell of it.

Also, for all that Mr. Ablethorpe said, I was in mortal fear of coming across poor Harry's leg, or of Mad Jeremy arriving and "settling" Mr. Ablethorpe,

without my knowing anything about it. And when I came out—I should find myself face to face with the oily curls, the sneering lip, and—specially, with the knife I had seen gleaming in his teeth when he swam the Moat to make an end of Elsie and me.

I wasn't frightened, of course. Only I just thought what a fool I was to be there. I am not the first, nor will I be the last to think the same thing—when, like me, they are doing something dreadful noble and heroic.

There were curious side passages, as I say, on each side of the tunnel along which I was crawling—oh, so slowly. Some of these were narrow and smooth, where a brick had fallen out, and smelled "rat" yards off. I did not meddle with these. But there were bigger offshoots, too, properly bricked round and as tight as ninepence—no rats there.

Well, it was in one of these that I came on my first treasure-trove. I felt a lot of things all tied together in a rough bag or cloth—heavy, too, and of course all clammy with moisture or mould or something like that. No wonder—I felt all green-mouldy myself, after only a minute or two.

I tugged at the rope, and, almost before I knew it, I was out again in the dancing speckle of the sunshine sifted through the leaves. Blinded by the sudden glare which sent blobs of colour dancing across my eyeballs, as if I had looked at the sun, I did not realize for a moment that I had brought anything with me.

"Let go!" I heard Mr. Ablethorpe say, and I was quite unconscious what I was holding on to. Yet what I had found was little enough to the eye—a piece of rough sacking, roughly sewn about a quantity of metallic objects which jingled as Mr. Ablethorpe cut the outer covering open with his big "gully" knife.

"Money!" the thought came natural to a boy; "have I disinterred a treasure?"

And for the moment I was all ready to go back again to look for more.

But the blade went on cutting, and presently the contents tinkled out upon the bank—about a dozen and a half of copper rings, rather thick, and each made with a hook at the bottom. I could not imagine what they were for.

But Mr. Ablethorpe bounded upon them, examining each one before putting it in his pocket. Lastly he looked at the piece of canvas in which they had been

wrapped, long and carefully.

"Ah!" he said, "that, I think, will do!"

And he closed the iron sliding door carefully, as it had been before, and thrusting his fingers into the shallow pool, he lifted up double handfuls of oozy mud and plastered it all over the entrance.

"When that is dry," he said, "it will take a clever man to tell where you have poked your nose this afternoon, Joseph!"

This seemed likely enough and satisfactory, from his point of view. But, as for me, I wanted very much to be told what it was all about.

So I asked him what it was I had found, and why he wanted me to crawl up there, at any rate.

"You found some copper rings and a piece of dirty canvas," he said, "neither more nor less. And I asked you to go up there because I was too fat to go myself. Were you nearly at the end, think you?"

I told him no—that the passage seemed to widen as it went farther on. I think that at these words he was nearly replacing the rope, which he had begun to coil, round my waist again.

But he looked at his watch, and shook his head.

"We have not the time to do it safely," he said; "but—let us see—if it widens as you say, Joseph, it is very likely that it has another opening."

He took a small plan out of his pocket, a tiny little measuring scale, nodded once or twice, and then began slowly to pace through the wood at right angles to the course of the Backwater.

All at once he dropped to the ground as if shot. I judged it best to efface myself, too, and that promptly. So I crawled behind a big pine tree, about whose roots the male ferns were growing tall, and, putting their thick scaly stems aside with my hand, I lay watching the heels of the boots which Mr. Ablethorpe wore.

He kept quite still, apparently intent upon something I could not see. Now, of

course (you will not have noticed it), but I am very curious about things that don't concern me in the least—not to talk about, you understand, but just to *know*. So, as the ferns grew pretty continuously, and the pines held close together, shooting their indigo-blue umbrellas into the sky, I wriggled along till I could lay my hand on one of the minister's boot heels.

It was a foolish thing to do, for it nearly made him cry out. I saw him set his teeth to shut in the sound. He had a nerve, the Hayfork Minister, but I could see from his look that he would give it to me after for coming on him like that. However, it was some fun to see him in a funk.

And, indeed, with reason! For not more than a dozen yards down the slope, between us and the wall of the old orchard, I saw Mad Jeremy, on his knees, digging with his fingers, eager as a terrier at a rat hole.

Then I called to mind the mysterious crime of which Miss Aphra had found him guilty, and her stern accusation, "You've been digging again!" the day Elsie and I were at the Grange. Last of all, his repeated denial, his attempts to rub off the earth pellets, his sentence, tears, and punishment. Yes, I saw him digging with his fingers just as his sister had said.

Jiminy, how I wished I was at home!

I might wish, indeed, but there we were stuck and had to wait—Mr. Ablethorpe and I—till Mad Jeremy, having finished his task, stamped down the sods he had edged up at either side, and set with care a great square flagstone in its place.

Then he stood rubbing his hands together and grinning for some minutes, evidently well pleased with himself. A voice far away called:

"Jeremy! Jeremy!"

At the sound the smile was stricken from his face. The madman looked guiltily at his hands, and seeing the condition in which they were, he made straight for the Backwater, passing us within (I declare) four yards. But the bracken was thick and tall, and we lay close, so that Jeremy failed to see us. Besides, his mind was evidently ill at ease.

The voice from the direction of Deep Moat Grange continued to call:

"Jeremy! Jeremy!" He did not reply, and we could hear him mutter, "What shall I say? What shall I say if she finds out?"

Then, having pulled round the long tails of his coat, one after the other, he dried his hands carefully, held them up to see that they were clean, and took his way up the side of the Backwater toward the drawbridge, whistling as he went.

For me, I was scared out of a year's growth. But the Hayfork Minister, lifting himself out of the ferns, and dusting lightly the knees of his black cord trousers, pointed to the great flagstone on which the turf showed ragged edges, and said gravely: "The secret is there. That is the other end of the tunnel!"

He meant, I felt sure, to send me in again, in spite of all that we had seen.

As for me, however, I resolved to keep very clear of the Hayfork Minister. He was a nice man, Mr. Ablethorpe, and a pleasure to know. But to be in a drain pipe for his sake, with the fear of Mad Jeremy meeting one face to face half-way up, put too high a price on his friendship. I resolved, therefore, in future to cut Mr. Ablethorpe's acquaintance.

CHAPTER XIII

MEYSIE'S BAIRNS

At the time I had no idea how difficult this would be. But at any rate I wanted to find out for certain what it was that I had found. He could give me no other answer than that I would know in good time, and that in the meantime we were going to old Caleb Fergusson's for tea.

Now I make no objections to tea at any time—that is, a proper sit-down, spread-table, country tea—not one of those agonies at which you do tricks with a cup of tea, a plate, the edge of a chair, and a snippet of bread. I knew that at the Fergusson's I would find plenty to eat and drink.

We slid back through the woods, rising higher all the time as the land trended

toward the moor. Then out and away across the road I could see far away to the right the roofs of Breckonside, shining like silver after a shower which must have passed over them, the winding Brom Water, the threaded roads, pale pink in colour, the dry stone dykes dividing the fields. Never had my native village seemed so small to me. Perhaps because I had just been in some considerable danger, a thing which enlarges the mental horizon. I looked for Elsie's house down there. But though I could see the silver glint of the water, I could not make out the cottage at the Bridge End. There was a mist, however, creeping up from the sea, so that in a little while, even as I looked, the whole valley became a pearl-grey lake, with only the tall ash trees and the solitary church spire standing up out of the smother.

We found old Caleb, an infrequent smile on his face, leaning over the bars of his yard gate.

"Them that hasna their hay weel covered," he chuckled, "runs a chance o' gettin' it sprinkled a wee!"

"Then," said Mr. Ablethorpe, "you owe me something for the afternoon's work I gave you!"

"Yon!" cried the old man, ungratefully, "caa ye that half a day's wark? But I'm far frae denyin' that, sic as it was, it helped. Ow, ay, it was aye a help! And at ony rate the hay's under cover—some thack-and-rape, and some in the new-fangled shed. But what's your wull? Ye are no seekin' wages, I'm thinkin'. Maybe ye want me to turn my coat and come doon to your bit tabernacle? Aweel, ye may want."

"Oh, no," said Mr. Ablethorpe, smiling. "I was just hoping that perhaps your good wife would brew us a cup of tea. I think both Joe and I would be the better of it."

You should have seen how the old farmer's face lit up. Hospitality was a beautiful thing to him. He rejoiced in that, at least. And if, as some folk say—not Mr. Ablethorpe—an elder is the same as a bishop, then the old Free Kirker had at least one of the necessary qualities. He was "given to hospitality." Whether he was, as is also required, "no striker," I would not just like to say, or to try.

But Caleb took us indoors out of the slight oncoming drizzle, which was beginning to spray down from the clouds, or creep up from the valleys—I am

not sure which. At any rate, it was there, close-serried, wetting.

Now heretofore I had only seen Mrs. Caleb when she was ordered down from the long stack under the zinc-roofed shed, which her husband was never tired of declaiming against as "new-fangled," yet to which he owed that night the safety of his crop.

Mrs. Caleb was a good twenty years younger than her lord, still, indeed, bearing traces of that special kind of good looks which the Scots call "sonsiness." Susan Fergusson at five-and-forty was sonsy to the last degree. Her husband, twenty years older, was sun-dried and wind-dried and frost-bitten till he had become sapless as a leaf blown along the highway on a bask March day, when the fields are full of sowers, and the roads cloudy with "stoor."

"Come ben! This way, sir—and you, too, Joe," she cried, opening a door into an inner room, "ye will no hae seen Meysie's bairns?"

As I had never even heard of Meysie, I certainly had not.

But the goodwife's next words enlightened me.

"Caleb, ye see, was marriet afore he took up wi' me. 'Deed, his lassie Meysie is maybe aulder than I am mysel'—and a solit, sensible woman. But this is the first time her bairns hae comed sae far to see me!"

She flung the door open, and there, sitting one on a sofa, and the other on a footstool by the fire, I saw two grown-up young ladies—so at least they appeared to me. And I began to fear that my tea was going to cost me dear. For at that time conversation was a difficult art to me with anyone whom I could neither fight nor call names.

The girls—twenty or twenty-two they seemed—oh, ever so old—looked just as if they had been doing nothing. That is, the one with the straight-cut face, very dignified, who made a kind of long droopy picture of herself on the sofa, was reading a book, or pretending to, while the other on the stool did nothing but nurse her knees and look out at the window.

That was the one I liked best, though, of course, not like Elsie—I should think not, indeed. But she was little, she had a merry face, and I am sure she had been laughing just before we came in. Indeed, I am none so sure that she had not

been listening at the keyhole and made a rush for the footstool.

"Bairns," said Mrs. Caleb the Second, "this is the Englishy minister, and a kind friend o' us auld folk. Though Caleb, your gran'dad, gies him awfu' spells o' argumentincation aboot things I ken nocht aboot! 'Deed, I wonder whiles that Maister Ablethorpe ever looks near us again!"

"Oh, no," said the Hayfork Minister, smiling, "it takes two to make an argument, and I never argue with Mr. Fergusson. I only receive instruction, as a younger from an elder!"

"Hear to him," cried the goodwife, "he doesna mean a word he is sayin'—I can aye tell by the glint in his e'e."

Then she introduced the girls in due form. One, the tall tired-looking girl on the sofa, was Constantia, and the little merry one was named Harriet. To my great astonishment they were of the same age, being twins.

It seemed as if I were to be left out altogether, but Harriet looked across at me and asked demurely if I were going to be a minister, too.

She was making fun of me, of course, and that is what I do not allow any girl to do. Only Elsie, and she is really too serious to abuse the privilege—not like this Harriet. I could see in a minute that she was a regular magpie—a "clip," as they say in Breckonside.

Meanwhile, Constantia did not say very much. She gave Mr. Ablethorpe her hand as if she were doing him a valuable kindness. And at this I could hear her sister gurgle. The next minute, Harriet was on her feet, and, taking me by the shoulder, she said: "Come on, Joe—Joe is your name, isn't it? That's good, for it's just the name I like best of all boys' names. Come on and help Susan Fergusson to get tea." That was the way she spoke of her grandmother—off-hand and kindly, with a glint of fun more in the manner than in the words.

"What's your other name?" I asked, because I did not like to call her Harriet so suddenly. Besides, I did not know how Elsie might take to all this. I was sure they would like one another no end. Because they were both the same kind of girl—jolly, so that almost any boy could get on with them. At least, that was what I thought at the time, not knowing any better.

"Caw," she said; "that is my name; same as a crow says 'Caw—Caw—Caw!' You needn't be surprised, I couldn't help it being my father's name. But it's short, and if you should forget it, you have only to go out and stand beneath a rookery, and you'll remember it in a minute. That is, unless you are deaf."

Then I told Harriet Caw my name, Joseph Yarrow, which she thought funny. And she gave me bread to cut while she stood by me and buttered it—doing everything so quickly, and talking all the time, that indeed it was very nice. And I wished Elsie had been there to laugh at Harriet's jokes, which seemed very funny to me then. But, oh, how stupid and feeble they seemed when I came to tell them to Elsie after! And Elsie wasn't a bit amused, as I had hoped. Girls hardly ever seem to get on with other girls as a fellow thinks they will. It is different with men. Now I got on first-class with Mr. Ablethorpe, even when I thought—but it's no matter about that now.

Well, it was a tea! The table was loaded from one end to the other. There were soda scones, light and hove up so as to make your teeth water. There were farrels of oat-cake, crisp and curly, with just the proper amount of browning on the side where the red ashes of the fire had toasted it. Four or five kinds of jams there were, all better one than the other. Old Caleb came in and ate quickly, sermonizing Mr. Ablethorpe all the time, and as long as he was there we were all as quiet as mice. But I am sure everyone was glad when he rose, tumbled things about on the window seat in search of his blue bonnet (which only he of all the countryside still wore), and finally went out to the hill. Before going he warned us to behave and to remember that, *such as he was*, we had one who deemed himself a minister among us.

But as soon as we were alone, up jumped Harriet Caw, and catching me round the waist, she cried, "Dance, Joseph—dance, Joe! He's gone. Never mind Granny Susan. She does not count!"

That was actually the way she spoke of her grandmother—or step-grandmother, rather. And, indeed, that good lady only laughed, and, shaking her head at the minister, repeated, what I afterwards found to be her favourite maxim—that "young folk would be young folk." The philosophy of which was that they would get over it all too soon.

The Hayfork Minister nodded back to Susan, and I was not sorry to see him (as I thought) much taken up with the picture-book girl, as in my heart I called

Constantia. For in our house at home, up in the attic, there are a lot of old "Annuals" and "Keepsakes"—oh, I don't know how old, all in faded watered-silk covers loose at the back—some faded and some where the colour has run, but choke full of pictures of scenery, all camels and spiky palms and humpy camels, with "Palmyra" and "Carthage" written beneath time about. But these are not half bad, though deadly alike. The weary parts are the pictures of girls—leaning out of windows before they have done their washing and hair-brushing in the morning. I should just like to see my father catch them at it. That was called "Dreaming of Thee." And there were lots of others. "Sensibility" was a particularly bad one. She was spread all over a sofa, and had a canary on her finger. She had saved it from a little snappy-yappy spaniel—only just, for two tail feathers were floating down. And there were two big dewdrops of tears on her cheeks to show how sorry she was for the canary bird—or, perhaps, for the spaniel.

Anyway, it was the only time I ever really liked a spaniel.

Well, I needn't describe the others. At any rate, if you've ever seen the "Keepsake" kind of young women, you won't have forgotten them. You will cherish a spite, especially if you have had to stay in one room and choose between looking at them and flattening your nose against the window-panes, down which the water is running in big blobs, during a week of wet holiday weather.

Constantia was a "Keepsake" girl.

I suppose it must be, as it is with snakes. Some like them and some not. I don't. But I will never deny (not being, like Elsie, a girl) that Constantia was good looking. If (and the Lord have mercy on your soul!) you really liked that sort of thing, Constantia was just the sort of thing you would like.

CHAPTER XIV

BROWN PAINT—VARNISHED!

We had a merry afternoon and laughed—eh, how we laughed! I heard all about the girls, how they had just been at school, and how Constantia had just come home, full up of all the perfections, and deportment, and the 'ologies, and how many men wanted to marry her—were dying to, in fact! That might be all right. It was Harriet who told me—though that does not make it any the more likely to be true (I am sorry to say). For I can see that that young woman was trying to take me in all the time.

"But for the parson, we would have a dance!" whispered Harriet; "but as he will sit there and tell Stancy about her 'azure' eyes till all's blue, you and I can go for a walk instead—shall we?"

I didn't want to, you may imagine. The difficulty was how to say No. Indeed, Harriet never asked me. She had put on a smart little summer hat, and we were out on the moor quicker than I can write it.

"Mind you," she said, laying her hand confidingly (as I then thought) on my arm, "don't you ever dare to tell Stancy that her eyes are like to the vault of heaven, or like forget-me-nots wet with dew, or like turquoises, or the very colour of her sky-blue silk scarf. For, first of all, it's not true, and it is wrong to tell lies. More than that, she will tell *me*. And I like—well" (she added this bit softly, taking a long look at me) "never mind what I like. Perhaps it's as well that you shouldn't know."

Then she kicked away a pebble with the toe of one tiny boot and appeared to be embarrassed. I think, now, that she knew she had a pretty foot.

Anyway I began to be conscious she was a nice girl, and to be sorry for her—a way men have. Men are such wise things, and not vain at all.

Don't think I forgot. I was always just going to tell her about Elsie, when she darted off into something else. She was constantly doing that—a most ill-regulated and disconcerting girl. I knew she would certainly have been interested in Elsie. The two had so much in common.

We were going through some straggling trees on the edge of Brom Common, when Harriet stopped and turned her eyes on me, as if she would have drowned me in them. I didn't know before that they were so big and dark and shiny—especially in dusky places. Harriet Caw knew, however.

"What colour are my eyes," she demanded. "Quick, now, don't cheat!"

"I don't know!" I said truthfully. "I never noticed."

Then she got mad. You see, I had no experience and didn't know enough to make a shot at it. For girls always notice eyes—or think they do. And when they go to see a man condemned in court for extra special murder, they sigh and say, "What very nice eyes he has—who would have thought it?"

And if he had been tried by a jury of girls, he would have got off every time—because of these same nice eyes. That is why the justice of a country is conducted by men. One reason, at least.

"Well, then, look!" she cried, making them the size of billiard balls right under my nose. It was, I own, rather nice, but trying. I had a feeling that Elsie would not have liked it, really.

So I said, "Come out where a fellow can see them then!" And made as if to go out on the moor. But Harriet Caw didn't care about the moor, being a town girl, as I suppose.

"No, here—tell me now!" she said.

So as I had to say something, I told her they were the colour of brown paint.

That was true. They were, but she was quite mad, and gave my arm a fling. This surprised me, and I said—

"Why, I thought that you were the kind of girl who never cared to be told about her eyes, and stuff of that kind. You said just now about Miss Constantia's ——"

"Never mind about M—iss Con-stan-ti-a's," she said, making the word as long as she could—she was mad now and patting the short, stiff heather with her little bronze boot; "attend to me, if you please. And so you think my eyes are the colour of brown paint; is that the best you can do?"

I thought a while, and she kept glaring up at me till I felt like a hen with its beak to a chalk line—I forget the word—something you are when you go on a platform and do silly things the man tells you.

So, hoping she would stop, I said at last, "Well, perhaps they are more shiny, like brown paint—varnished."

But this didn't please her either. Indeed, it was difficult to please Harriet Caw at all. She said that I was twice as stupid as a cow, and asked where I had lived all my life.

"In Breckonside," I said, but I added that I had often been with my father at East Dene. And once I had crossed the ferry all by myself and spent Easter Monday at Thoisby itself.

"Humph," she said, wrinkling up her nose with great contempt. "I suppose that you have never even heard of London."

I told her "Yes, of course." And that I could tell her the number of its inhabitants.

But this she didn't seem to think clever, or, indeed, to care about at all.

She only said, "Are all country boys as stupid as you are?"

To be called a boy like that made me angry, and I ran after her, determined to pay her out. I was going to show her that country boys could just be as sharp as there was any need for.

But quick as I was, this city girl was quicker, and she slipped across the road almost at the very place where we had found the last traces of poor Harry Foster. She dived among the underbrush by the stile, and I lost sight of her altogether.

But the next moment I heard a cry. You had better believe I wasted no time till I got there. I ran, opening a good, stout clasp knife that father had given me —or, if not "given" exactly, had seen me with, and not taken away from me. It comes to the same thing.

Well, just a little away across a green glade, all pine needles and sun dapplings, stood Mad Jeremy, and he had Harriet Caw by the arm. I went at him as fast as I could—which was a silly thing to do, for, of course, with his strength he could have done me up in two ticks of a clock. Only, as mostly happens when one does fine things, it was all over before I thought.

"Just a little way across a green glade--stood Mad Jeremy--he had Harriett Caw by the hand."

"Just a little way across a green glade—stood Mad Jeremy—he had Harriett Caw by the hand."

But when Mad Jeremy saw me, or, perhaps, before (I do not want to take credit for anything that isn't my due), he let go of Harriet Caw, saying just "She isn't the pretty one! What is she doing here?" And with a skip and a jump he was gone. That is, so far as I could see.

Then Harriet swooned away in my arms, toppling over like a ladder slipping off the side of a house. At least, I suppose that is what they call it. But at that time I had had no experience of swoons. For Elsie never went on like that. At all events, Harriet Caw clutched me about the neck, her fingers working as if they would claw off my collar, and she laughing and crying both at once. Funny it was, but though it made a fellow squirm—not altogether so horrid as you might think. But I did not know what to do. I tried hard to think whether it was the palms of her hands or the backs of her ears that you ought to rub, or whether I should lay her down or stand her up against a tree. I knew there was something. Then I got in a funk lest, after all, it should be the soles of her feet.

But Mad Jeremy had not altogether gone away. He had been watching, and now popped his head and shiny ringlets round a tree trunk, which brought me to myself.

"Ah—ha!" he cried, "I'll tell the pretty one about these goings on!"

And, quick as a flash, that brought Harriet Caw to herself, also. It did better than splashing water or rubbing hands. The moment before she had been all rigid like a lump of wood in my arms. But as soon as the words were out of Mad Jeremy's mouth, she was standing before me, her eyes flashing lightning, and her elbows drawn a little in to her sides.

Mad? Well, rather. She was hopping, just.

"So *I'm* not the pretty one," she said—whispered it, rather, with a husky sound, like frying bacon in her voice. "Oh, I see—that's why my eyes are like brown paint—varnished! Well, who's the pretty one? Answer me that!"

"I think he must mean Elsie!" I said, telling the truth just as briefly as I could.

"Elsie—oh, indeed! Elsie is the pretty one, is she, Master Joe?"

"Yes," I said, "she is!"

I was going on to tell her how much she would like Elsie, and how Elsie would love her, when suddenly Harriet Caw turned and marched off. I was going to follow her—indeed, I had to. For I wasn't going to be left in that gloomy glade with only the great tits and Mad Jeremy hiding among the trees.

But Harriet Caw turned round, and called out, "Go to Elsie, I don't want you! I dare you to speak to me! I will kill you, if you touch me!"

I told Harriet quite reasonably that I would not touch her for mints of money, and that all I wanted was just to find Mr. Ablethorpe, and pick up the parcel I had left at her grandfather's before going home.

It must have looked funny enough if any one had seen us. Well, Mad Jeremy did. For we could hear peal upon peal of wicked, sneering laughter pursue us, as we went in single file across the road, over the stile, and across the moor.

At the stile over the highroad I came up closer to Harriet, owing to a slight hesitation on her part, and the switch she gave her skirts to escape the contagion of my touch, was something to see. I had always thought I was something of a favourite wherever I went. So I took the worse with such treatment.

However, I put it down to Harriet Caw's having been brought up in London. My father always told me to watch out for London folk—you never could tell what they would be up to. Certainly not with Harriet.

CHAPTER XV

THE MYSTERY OF MYSTERIES—A GIRL!

Mr. Ablethorpe appeared to have had a much better time of it with Miss Constantia than I had had with her sister—perhaps, because she was younger by

some minutes, and was quite conscious of being pretty, so didn't need to be told. Yet, when you come to think of it, I had done a heap more for Harriet Caw, than the Hayfork Minister for her sister. Had I not rushed to defend her from no less a foe than Mad Jeremy? And there were precious few in the two parishes of Breckonside and Breckonton who would have done the like. So she need not have run upstairs when she got home, pushing her step-grandmother aside and saying: "Out of the way, Susan Fergusson!" Neither had she any need to slam the door of her room, for it was her twin sister's as well as hers, at any rate.

And though I did not like Constantia so well to start with, I must say that her conduct was a great contrast to that of her sister Harriet. I could not help remarking it. She came quite peaceably to the door with Mr. Ablethorpe. Then she went back and found his hat for him, which he had forgotten. And she stood smiling and waving adieux under the bunches of purple creepers about the porch —like—well, I declare, like the picture of "Good-bye, Sweetheart, Good-bye!" in the "Keepsake" book.

And then, thinking it over, I took it all back and preferred in my heart the slam of Harriet's door. There was more meaning to it.

But Mr. Ablethorpe did not appear to notice. He thought that he had sown good seed on very promising soil.

"She seemed quite in favour of the Eastward position," he said thoughtfully, "and she understands our argument in favour of the 'Missale Romanum' and with regard to irregularly ordained clergy. The rest may follow in time."

And as for me, I hoped to goodness it would.

After that the Hayfork was very thoughtful all the way to the crossroads, where we separated, he to return to his lodging in Over Breckonton and I to go back to father's. Well, not just directly, of course. I had to look in at Nance Edgar's cottage at the Bridge End. It was my duty. Elsie was there, sitting reading by the window. She had been doing German or something with the schoolmaster's sister, and, for a wonder, was quite pleased to see me. She mostly wasn't, if I interrupted her when she was "studying." "Studying" with Elsie consisted in neither talking yourself, nor letting any other body talk.

The first thing that struck me was how much prettier Elsie was to look at than Harriet Caw, and, of course, than her sister. I told her so, thinking that she would

be pleased. But instead, she faced about at once and laid down her book.

"Who is Harriet Caw?" she asked in a kind of icebergy voice, quite differently pitched from her usual.

Then I began, pleased as a kitten with a wool ball, to tell her all about it—how Mr. Ablethorpe had come and asked me off for the day from my father, how we had gone and helped at the haymaking. Then I made out a long yarn about finding the little package of rings which Mr. Ablethorpe had taken so carefully away with him.

"But they were more yours than his!" cried Elsie suddenly; "you should have brought them here to me. Then we would have found out what they were, and if they had anything to do with the—with Harry Foster. We were the first who found out anything, and now you go off with Mr. Ablethorpe——"

"Yes, Elsie," I said, a little taken aback by her tone, "but he seemed to know all about where to look, and he wouldn't tell me anything, though I asked."

"No, of course not," said Elsie sharply; "there will be a reward, you may depend. Then he will get it instead of you!"

I cried out against this, saying that she was not fair to Mr. Ablethorpe. But at the bottom of my heart I was not a bit sorry. The Hayfork Minister had such a curly head, and people made such a fuss about him—especially the women—that I wasn't a bit sorry to find that Elsie was not of their mind.

This gave me some assurance to go on.

"Well, and what did you do after that?" she said. And I was all on fire to tell her about the two granddaughters of Caleb Fergusson, who came all the way from London—how we had tea with them, how Mr. Ablethorpe stayed and talked with the one who thought no end of herself—that is to say, with Constantia, while I was compelled to go and keep the other one, Harriet, from getting into mischief.

At the very first word Elsie sat up straight in her chair. Then, even though I said nothing (it was no use entering into details) about Harriet Caw's taking my arm, Elsie pinched her lips and turned up her nose.

"You would like her awfully!" I said. "She's as nice as can be."

"Oh!" was all that Elsie said, and she reached for the knitting which lay within reach.

"Very likely!" she added as she adjusted the stitches, some of which had slipped off, owing to my having sat down on it when I first came in.

"Yes," I continued, in a kind of quick, fluttering voice—I could hear so much myself—"she comes from London, but she does not put on any airs. *And she does not like me at all!*"

"Ah," said Elsie, "and pray how did you find that out?"

So I told her all about Harriet running away because I was so stupid, and her meeting with Mad Jeremy. I said as little about my going at him with an open knife as I could. For, after all, that was a foolish thing to do. But I told Elsie about Harriet Caw fainting, and as much as I could remember about Harriet running home and slamming herself in her room.

And all the time the atmosphere in that room was getting more and more chilly, while Elsie herself would have frozen a whole shipful of beef and mutton right through the tropics.

"Well," I said when I had finished my tale, "she may have got a temper, but she is a nice girl and you will like her. We shall go and see her to-morrow—I told her about you, Elsie."

She flashed a look at me—like striking a vesta at night, it was.

"And pray, what did you tell her about me?"

"I told her that you were pretty—so did Mad Jeremy. And I told her, besides, that you would be sure to take to one another. Now, will you go and see her to-morrow?"

Slowly Elsie gathered up all that belonged to her in Nance Edgar's little sitting-room—her books, her work, and a hat that had been thrown carelessly on a chair.

"No," she said, the words clicking against one another like lumps of ice in a tumbler, "no, I will not go and call upon Miss Harriet Caw, from London. But there is nothing to prevent your going, Mr. Joseph Yarrow!"

And she in her turn swept out and slammed the door.

I sat there in Nance Edgar's winking firelight looking at my fingers one by one, and not sure of the count.

If any one will please tell me what a girl will say or do in any given circumstances—well, I'll be obliged to him, that's all. I don't believe any fellow was ever so abused and browbeat in one day by girls before. And all for nothing. That is the funny part of it. For what had I done? Answer me that, if you please. Nothing—just nothing!

CHAPTER XVI

MR. MUSTARD'S FIRST ASSISTANT

Yes, I was surprised. But there were several other and greater surprises waiting me. I got one the very next day.

I met Dan McConchie on his way home from school, at the dinner hour. He was kicking his bag before him in the way that was popular at our school, where all self-respecting boys brought their books in a strap. Girls had green baize bags and always swung them like pendulums as they talked. But boys, if they had to have bags, used them as footballs. This was what Dan was doing now.

He said, "Halloo, Joe Yarrow, your girl's gone and been made a teacher. You had better come back. Old Mustard is as sweet to her as sugar candy. She is teaching the babies in the little classroom—'A b—ab! B a—baa!'"

He imitated the singsong of the lowest forms.

Now I put no faith in Dan or any other McConchie. But I clumped him hard

and sound for presuming to talk about Elsie at all or call her "my girl."

Then I met little Kit Seymour, a girl from the south, who had reddish hair, all crimpy, and spoke soft, soft English as if she were breathing what she said at you. She lisped a little, too, was good-looking (though I did not care for that), and did not tell lies—had not been long enough in Breckonside to learn, I expect.

At any rate she told me in other words what I had just clouted Dan for. Early the morning before, the school had been astonished to find Mr. Mustard giving Elsie a lesson—when they came to spend a half hour in the playground at marbles and steal-the-bonnets. Their wonder grew greater when, as the bell rang, Elsie was found installed in the little schoolroom, which hitherto had been used chiefly for punishments and doing copybook writing. She was given the infant classes, and had been there all day, so I was told, with Mr. Mustard popping in and out giving her instructions, and smiling like a fusty old hawk that has caught a goldfinch which he fears some one will take away from him.

Of course I did not care a button for Mr. Mustard. But he had always been the Enemy of Youth so far as we were concerned. And it gave me a queer feeling, I can tell you, to think of Elsie—my Elsie—teaching alongside that snuffy old badger. He was neither snuffy nor yet very old, but that is the way I felt toward him. Elsie, too—at least she used to. But I could bet it was all the doing of that hook-nosed sister of his—Betty Martin Mustard, we called her, though her name was only Elizabeth, and not Martin at all.

Little Kit Seymour kept on lingering. She was smiling mischievously, too, which she had no business to do. And she wouldn't have done it long if she had been a boy. It got sort of irritating after a while, though I wasn't donkey enough to let her see it. I knew better.

I just said that I hoped she, Elsie, would like school-teaching, and that my father had always said that was what she should go in for. But Kit went on swinging her green baize bag, like I've seen them do the incense pot in Mr. Ablethorpe's church up at Breckonton. Father would have skinned me alive if he knew I had gone there. He was a Churchman, was father, but death on incense pots, confessions, and all apostolic thingummies, such as Mr. Ablethorpe was just nuts on. He had even stopped going to church at home because our old vicar had said that the Anglican Church was a church catholic. I bet he didn't mean any harm. He was a first-rate old fellow. But my father waited behind and told

him out loud that the Church of England is a Protestant church, and "whoever says it isn't is a liar!"

That caused a coolness, of course. Yet I believe they both meant the same thing. For our vicar wasn't one of Mr. Ablethorpe's sort, but just wanted to let people alone, and was content if people left him alone. But all things about churches made our Breckonside folk easily mad—being, as I said before, actually on the border-line, or at least very near to it.

Little Kit Seymour, with her lisp and soft south country English, was a smart girl. I knew very well she was seeing how I would take the news about Elsie. However, she did not get much change out of me.

"You aren't coming back to school again?" she said next, looking at the toe of her boot.

"Oh, I don't know that," I told her; "old Mustard is well up in mathematics and mensuration——"

"What's mensuration?" She said "men*th*uration," and curiously enough it sounded rather nice. But if a boy had done it everybody would have laughed. Some things are all in favour of girls—others again not. Girls can't go into the army or the navy. Most boys can't, either. But they think they can for a year or two, and that does just as well. They can talk big about it till the fit goes off.

Well, I got rid of Kit Seymour. She went on to school, and as she parted from me she said: "Well, I thuppose we shall be theeing you down there by and by!"

She meant at the school—because Elsie was there. But I had something else in my mind. I was keen to find out whether Elsie had gone there because of our quarrel about Harriet Caw. The fault, of course, in any other girl, would have been Elsie's. For she would not listen to any justification—not even to the truth. But I never blamed Elsie. I only thought she had been led into it by old Betty Martin—Mr. Mustard's sister—who is so ugly that it gives you a gumboil only to look at her.

Now the school of Breckonside—Mr. Mustard's, that is—lies right up against the woods on a sloping piece of land, from which the grass has long been worn off by generations of children playing. There is another little yard with some grass at the back. That is where the girls play, and across it with its gable to the

big schoolhouse is the little class-room where Elsie was teaching.

It was right bang in the woods. So I knew very well I could lie hidden along the branch of a tree and look in at the window.

Mean, you say! Not a scrap. Elsie and I had always been such friends, like brother and sister, that surely I had a right to look after her a bit. Of course, if she had known she would have let out at me—scolded I mean. But all the same she would have found it quite natural.

So I went and got hold of a ripping good place in a kind of sunk fence. Here I found, not a beech, but the trunk of an old willow that had bent itself down into the dry ditch as if feeling for the water. It was just the shape, too, and when I lay down on my face it fitted me better than my bed. There was even a rising bit at the bank for me to hook my feet round. You never saw anything so well arranged. The hazel bushes hid me from above, too, and unless you fairly stepped on me there was nothing to be seen. I had only to put aside some leafy shoots to rake the whole three windows of the little infant school.

Mean? I tell you not a bit. Why, I was really the only protector Elsie had got, and though she was mad with me just at that moment, it made no difference. Besides I had got an idea—I did not get them often, and so hung on the tighter to those I did find. And this one had really been forced upon me. It was that somehow Elsie was the key to all the mysteries, and that through her would come the solution of everything we had been trying to find out. Also—though this I would not for the life of me have mentioned to Elsie herself—that some peril hung imminent over her, and of this I should soon have proof if I wanted any.

Now it is curious how different both things and people look when you are watching them—as it were unbeknown. It is something like looking through between your legs at a landscape. You see the colours brighter, naturally, and as for the people—none of them do anything unless as if with some horrid secret purpose. When Mr. Mustard wiped his brow with a spotted handkerchief, or knocked a fly off the end of his nose, I was lost in wonderment what he meant by it. When he called Elsie to come down for her own private lessons in the big school-house, I watched carefully to see that he had not a weapon concealed under his rusty coat tails. I suppose policemen and detectives get used to this sort of thing, but certainly I never did.

Then I had always thought that we all started for school together. We seemed to. But Mr. Mustard's scholars certainly didn't—and I suppose schools all over the world are the same. Nobody came alone. If they started from home by themselves, they yelled and signalled till they were joined by somebody else. Only a few groups arrived by the road, generally hand-in-hand if they were girls, and the boys with their arms about each other's waists. Most, however, ducked through hedges, clambered over stone dykes, crossed ditches by planks, and so finally got to school over broken-down pieces of wire fencing, or by edging themselves between the gate post and the wall. I remember now that I had generally done the same thing myself. But I never knew it till that day I lay on the old willow, watching Mr. Mustard's school gathering for morning lessons.

Seen from a distance Mr. Mustard was a youngish-looking man, getting bald, however, except about his ears. He wore a perfect delta of wrinkles at the corner of each eye. He was teaching Elsie about half an hour, and during this time, his sister looked in twice from the master's cottage, just to see how things were going. I lay still and waited. From the big school-house there came the sound of a hymn sung all together, with Elsie leading. I could distinguish her voice quite well. And then Mr. Mustard said a prayer. It was always the same prayer, and had been written by some bishop or other for the purpose. Then Elsie came out followed by all the infant class, most of them clinging to her skirts, the rest straggling behind, and pausing to pick up stray toddlers of three or four who had fallen on their faces. In Breckonside they send babies like that to school to be out of the way.

At first I did not get much out of my cramped position on the willow trunk. True, Elsie did turn and look twice toward the tall black paling of my father's storehouse yard. But even that I could not be too sure of, for the next moment Elsie had opened the door of the little class-room and passed within with all her tribe scuffling after her.

Then I could hear her begin with another hymn, very simple. Then she set the elder to learn the mysteries of "two and two make four," while she combined a little drill with the teaching of the alphabet to the most youthful of her flock behind a green rep curtain. After that came the turn of the slates, and at the first rasp Elsie, long unaccustomed to that music at close range, put her fingers to her ears. But when she had set the children to their task of drawing lopsided squares, drunken triangles, and wobbly circles, she left the infant class to drone on in the heat of the morning. She arranged the windows, pulling them down to their

utmost limit, and springing up on the sill she cleverly tacked bits of white netting over the open spaces. Elsie knew that there is nothing so demoralizing to the average infant class as a visiting wasp of active habits.

The drone of the infant department was behind her. I could see a soft perspiration bedewing the tender skins. Hair clung moist and clammy about bent necks. One or two slumbered openly, their brows on their slates, only to awake when Mr. Mustard came smiling in, satisfied with everything, and particularly commending the wasp protectors. Strange that in twenty years he had never thought of such a thing! He would get his sister to make some immediately.

No need of that! Elsie could tear the required size from her roll in a moment. Would he have them now? No, he would wait till the interval, and then she and Mr. Mustard would put them up together. There was no use troubling Elizabeth. She had her own domestic duties to attend to. Of course, she, that is Elsie, would partake with them of their simple and frugal midday meal? It would be more convenient for all parties—better than going all the way back to the cottage at the Bridge End. Besides, Miss Edgar would doubtless be absent, and no dinner would be ready. Yes (concluded Mr. Mustard), on all accounts it would be much preferable to dine together. He had talked it over with his sister the night before.

I could see her hesitate. But the arrangement was really so much more convenient—indeed obvious, that Elsie, after provising that she would have to arrange terms with Miss Elizabeth, ended by accepting.

I began to hate Mr. Mustard.

What could he be after? It could not be love—fancy that red-nosed, blear-eyed, baldish old badger with the twitchy eyebrows in love! I laughed on my branch. But whatever it was his sister was in it. Yes, Betty Martin was a confederate—yet her brother's marriage would (conceiving for a moment such a thing to be possible) put her out of a place.

It was altogether beyond me. Only as I say, I did not love Mr. Mustard any the better for all this, and if I could have pinked him cheerfully with my catapult, without the risk of hitting Elsie, he would have got something particularly stinging for himself.

CHAPTER XVII

DREAR-NIGHTED DECEMBER

Then happened that event which in an hour, as it were, made a man out of a rather foolish boy. The postman comes twice to our doors during the day with letters—once for those from the neighbourhood of Breckonside, once for the mails that come in from London and all the countries of the world. Not that there were many of these, save now and then one or two for my father, about hams and flour. I used to annex the stamps, of course—generally from the United States they were, but once in a while from France.

One dullish December morning, in the early part of the month, my father got a letter which seemed to cause him some annoyance. He did not usually refer to his correspondence. But I was standing near him—for after all, on account of certain business reasons, I had not yet gone to Edinburgh—and I heard him mutter, "I suppose I had better go to Longtown Tryst, or I may never see my money. Still, it is a nuisance. I wish old——"

Here he broke off suddenly, and turning round ordered our man Bob—Bob Kingsman, to saddle the mare. Then he called out to mother to put up something for him, for he had to ride to Longtown, and might be away all day.

"But, father——" she began.

He waved his hand impatiently.

"It is a money payment," he said, "long outstanding, and if I do not get the man to-day at Longtown Tryst I may say good-bye to my chance of it."

He scarcely stayed to get the breakfast my mother had prepared. He did not answer when she pressed upon him this or that as "an extry." However, along with sundry sandwiches, she slid a small "neat" flask into the side pocket of his riding-coat—"in case" as she said. For this was no habit of my father's.

After that he called me into the yard to receive instructions as to various details about the sending out of the vans, and he gave Bob Kingsman "what for,"

because he had been so long saddling Dapple.

I can see him now as he rode away. Though a heavy man he rode well, and in fact never looked so well as when on horseback. I can remember, too, that my mother was at an upper window, my bedroom, in fact, whither she had gone to "put things in some sort of order."

My father waved his hand to her, with a more gracious gesture than I had ever before seen him use. I answered with my cap. For my mother, as I think, was so taken aback that she withdrew into the house, with something of the instinctive shyness of a girl who peeps at her sweetheart from behind the curtain.

Perhaps it was as well. She kept the little love token to herself. It was hers, to get out of it what dreary comfort she could, in the terror and suspense of the days that followed.

* * * * *

Longtown, to the Tryst or Fair of which my father set out, was about fourteen miles over the moors—quite, indeed, on the other side of the Cheviots. It had thriven because it formed a convenient meeting place for Scotch drovers and cattle rearers with the buyers from the big Midland towns, and even from London. Little more than a village in itself, it contained large auction marts for lamb sales, horse markets, and the general traffic of an agricultural district. The country folk went there of a Wednesday, which was its market day. My father's road lay plainly enough marked across the Common, then by Brom Moor and the Drovers' Slap, a pass through the high, green Cheviots, with a little brook running over slaty stones at the bottom—ice-crusted now at the edges, and the water creeping like a slow black snake between the snow-dusted banks.

We waited up long for my father that night, mother and I. Bob had gone down to the village—to do some shopping, he said. But I could easily have told in what shop to find him—the one in which they don't, as a general rule, do up the goods with string and brown paper.

Then in the slow night, I with a book and she with her stocking, my mother and I sat and waited. It would have been nothing very unusual if father had not returned at all that night. He sometimes did this, when business kept him at East Dene or Thorsby. On such occasions his orders were that we should lock up at eleven and go quietly to bed. Mother mostly let the maid, Grace Rigley, go home

to her father's house at the other end of the village. Indeed, we were always glad when she did, for it let us have the house to ourselves, a pleasure which people who keep servants all the time never know.

We gave father till twelve that night—why, I do not know—except that the hill road was an unusual one for him to travel. And what with the sloughs and quags, the peat-faces and green, shaking bogs, it was not at all a canny country after dark.

I had to keep mother up, too.

"Why did he wave his hand to me this mornin', Joe?" she said, more than once; "he didn't use to do that!"

"Oh, he just saw you at the window, mother," I answered her, "and perhaps he thought you were a bit 'touched' at his not fancying his breakfast."

"No, Joe," she cried quite sharply; "me 'touched'—with him—never! He knew better."

"Touched" was, of course, our local word for offended.

Then would mother knit a while, and run again to the door to listen.

"I thought I heard him!" she said. "I am nearly sure."

And there came a kind of white joy upon her face, curious in such a naturally rosy woman with cheeks like apples. But it was only some of the van horses moving restlessly or scraping their bedding in the stables.

Now our house with its big, bricked yard, and all the different out-buildings —stores, coal-sheds, salt-pens, granaries, oil-cake house and cellars, occupied quite a big quadrangle. At the corner was Bob McKinstrey's room, through which was the only entrance excepting by the big gate. Bob had two doors, one opening out on a narrow lane, called Stye Alley, where poor people had kept pigs before my father and the local authority had made them clear off.

On the other side, Bob's room looked into the yard, so that he could see at night that all was right. He could also enter the stable by a little side door, of which he alone had the key—that is, of course, excepting my father's master key,

which he always carried about with him.

Now I had locked the big double gate myself—the one by which the lorries and vans went and came. I had pushed home the bars. I had even gone round to see that Bob had closed his door behind him. The lock was a self-acting one, but Bob was apt to be careless.

I knew that my father, when he came, would let himself in by the big yard gate, opening the right-hand half of it to bring in Dapple.

Well, at twelve o'clock mother and I went to bed—I to sleep, but with half my clothes on me, in case father wanted anything when he should come. For if he did he made no allowances. Everybody had to be on the jump to get it.

I don't think, however, that mother slept much. Afterwards I heard that she had never put out her light. It was, I think, about four o'clock and the moon was setting when I heard a light shower of stones and sand tinkle on my window.

I made sure that it was father, though what he wanted with me I could not imagine. For he always took a pass key with him, and the extra bolts of the house door were never shut when he was out anywhere on business. He never liked any one to interfere with his comings and goings, you see. So much so that we none of us durst so much as ask him when he got back in the morning, for fear of having our heads snapped off.

It was, however, Bob Kingsman who was below.

"Come down, Joe!" he whispered, "an' dinna let the mistress hear ye!"

I was at his side, with boots over my stockinged feet, almost before I could get myself awake.

"Is it father come home?" I asked sleepily.

Bob said nothing, but led me round to the stables. And there, nosing the lock of the inner door, saddled and bridled, stood Dapple, waiting to be let into her own stall.

"Pass your hand over her," said Bob.

The mare was warm, the perspiration and the flecks of foam still upon her. Bob held up his lantern. The bridle was fastened to a plaited thong of her mane.

And the plait was the same peculiar one which my father had remarked in the whip lash in the mail cart, the morning of the loss of poor Harry Foster!

* * * * *

By a sort of instinct Bob opened the stable door, and, just as if nothing had happened, the mare moved to her place. He was going to take off the saddle and undo the reins, but I stopped him. There was a great fear at my heart, for which after all there did not seem to be any very definite cause.

Father might have gone up to his room without awaking anybody. The great door of the yard was locked. Some one, therefore, must have unlocked it, let in Dapple, and relocked it. Who but my father could have done this? At worst he had met with some accident, and was even then dressing a wound or reposing himself.

That is what we said, the one to the other. But I am quite sure that neither of us believed it, even as the words were leaving our mouths.

Then we heard something that made us both jump—the voice of my mother. She was speaking down from her window. I could see the white frill of her cap.

"Father," she called out in a voice in which she never spoke to me. "Is that you?"

Then in quite another tone, "Who has left the stable door open?"

"Me, mistress—and Joe!" said Bob.

"Then there is something wrong! I am coming down."

And the next moment we could hear her, for she had never undressed, descending the stairway.

"What shall we do—quick—what shall we say?"

Bob Kingsman was never very quick at invention.

"Tell her 'an accident,'" I whispered, "we are going to look for him—say nothing about the yard door having been opened and shut again."

For even then I felt that the key of the mystery lay there.

My mother took it more quietly than we had hoped. She did not cry out, but to this day I mind the tremulous light of the candle which she carried in one shaking hand and sheltered with the other. It went quavering from her breast to her face, and then down again till it mixed with the steady shine of the stable lantern in Bob's hand.

She went into the stable and looked Dapple over carefully, without, however, attempting to touch anything about the mare's trappings.

"There will hae been an accident," she faltered, her tongue almost refusing its office, "your faither must have been thrown! We will all go and seek for him. We will waken the village."

"But you are not fit, mother. Bide here quiet in the house—let others seek—you are never fit."

"Who has my right?" she said, with a suppressed fierceness, very strange in one so kindly. "I will go out and seek for my man! No one shall hinder me!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE HUNTERS OF MEN

In the village of Breckonside on that December morning was to be seen a sight the like of which I never looked upon. Doors were open all up and down the street. Every window was a yellow square of light. Frighted, white-faced women looked round curtains. Children in their scanty nightgowns clung on to stair rails, and tried to look out of the open front door without taking their feet off the first-floor landing.

The men of the village mustered about the police office—not because of any help poor old Constable Codling could be to them, but because the very place gave a kind of legality to their proposed doings.

For this time there was no doubt in the minds of any at Breckonside. Harry Foster was a comparatively poor man, even taking into consideration the banknotes which he carried in the mail bags. But my father, Joseph Yarrow, was the richest and most powerful man in all the district—ay, as far down as East Dene itself.

More than that, he had ridden to Longtown to take payment of a long outstanding debt. Bob Kingsman had heard him say so—so, for the matter of that, had I myself. It would certainly be a large sum for him to mention it twice, reticent as he was on all such matters.

The road to Longtown, or back from Longtown—for it was doubtless there that he would be trapped—led over Brom Common, by the edge of Sparhawk Wood, and so on through the Slack into Scotland. On all the long road, there was only one suspected house—Deep Moat Grange. Only one man whose wealth could not be accounted for penny by penny—Mr. Stennis, the Golden Farmer. Only one nest of mysterious and dangerous folk—Mad Jeremy and his sisters. All the rest were shepherds and their little white shielings.

The conclusion was clear—at least to the minds of the Breckonsiders—in, at, or about Deep Moat Grange, Joseph Yarrow, senior, was to be found—and, what was even more to the point, Joseph Yarrow's money.

The conclusion was, they would go in a body to Deep Moat Grange. Our registrar, Waldron, who was great on the instinct of animals, tried to get Dapple to retrace her steps. She was led out into the yard, and instantly retraced them into the stable.

At the Bridge End there was a halt. The heads of our Breckonsiders were no ways strong. Besides they were dazed with the sudden alarm.

The memory of poor Harry, the strange tales they had heard for the last ten years of vanished drovers, travellers seen on the moss and then vanishing in some hollow, like the shadow of a cloud, to be seen no more, weighed heavy upon them.

Then some fool cried out that Hobby Stennis had been often seen of late with his son Robin's daughter—meaning Elsie—and who knew?

Now, no one can ever tell what will seem reasonable to a crowd of such rustics as those about us. And, indeed, if it had not been for my mother—who strode out, and, even in her grief, raged upon them—asserting that Elsie was a good girl and should not be meddled with, I do believe that Nance Edgar's house would have been routed out from garret to hallan, to seek for the captors or assassins of my father.

The sound of many feet, the hoarse murmur of voices in angry discussion, and perhaps, also, the reflected light of many lanterns awoke both Nance Edgar and Elsie. But it was Elsie who was first down. "What is it?" she asked, standing in the doorway with a plaid about her shoulders, and her feet thrust into Nance Edgar's big, wooden-soled, winter clogs. "What has brought you out?"

I told her that my father had not returned from Longtown, but that some one had brought Dapple home, unlocked the door of the yard, and let in the mare—then relocked it and gone his way. I had quite forgotten—shame be to me—that of all this my mother had yet been told nothing. She stumbled where she stood a little before them all. A kind of hoarse cry escaped her lips, and it was into Elsie's arms that she fell. Perhaps it was as well. For in the rough and tumble of that dark, wintry campaign there was no place for women.

In a while Nance Edgar came out also, and she and Elsie soon got my poor mother into a comfortable bed. I had a word or two with Elsie. She would fain have come, making no doubt but that it was in the neighbourhood of that accursed house of the Moat Grange that my father, if, indeed, he were dead, had come by his end.

But I reminded her, first, that she was Hobby Stennis's own granddaughter. Also, she was a teacher in the local school, and, accordingly, leaving all else to one side, that she and I must not run the hills and woods as we had been in the habit of doing ever since she had come from Mrs. Comline's as a little toddling maid. Last of all, my mother would stay behind more contentedly if so be Elsie were with her.

Now it was a black frost, clean and durable. There had, of course, been considerable traffic over the moor road during the days of the Tryst at Longtown.

So the feeble light of our lanterns in the winter morning could reveal nothing as to the means by which Dapple had reached home, nor yet who had brought her. Indeed, we were all more than a little dazed. It seemed such a terrible, unthinkable event, the loss of my father, that no one after him could feel secure. He had been the strongest among us, and if he had fallen to the knife of the secret criminal the only question in Breckonside was, Who was to be the next to go?

Mingled with all this, there was a curious deference toward me, wholly new in my experience. The villagers called me "Mister Joseph," instead of "Joe," as had been their wont. They consulted me as to the steps to be taken—without, however, any very great idea of acting upon what I had to advise. Indeed, that morning, there did not seem to be but the one thing to do—that was, to go as quickly as possible to Deep Moat Grange, and lay hands upon the whole uncanny crew Mr. Stennis had gathered about him there.

It was the earliest grey of the December morning—which is to say, little better than night—when we descended the slopes of Brom Common, crossed the road, and entered into the woods which surrounded Deep Moat Grange. Not without considerable difficulty could I induce the searchers to extinguish their lanterns. And there were more than one of these hunters of men who would have been glad of any excuse to turn back now—-men, too, who had been the bravest of the brave when the familiar sights and sounds of the village street compassed them about.

Several of the searchers kept looking over their shoulders and examining the branches of the trees curiously, as if afraid that Mad Jeremy might suddenly descend upon their shoulders from these tossing arms netted so blackly between them and the sky.

The dead leaves scuffed and crisped under foot. Sometimes a roosting bird, disturbed in its slumbers, or an early-questing, wild creature scurried away into the underbrush. It was an eerie journey, and it was with a breath of relief that I found myself stopped at the Moat, with the water sleeping beneath, black and icebound for want of a current. The drawbridge was up, and at first it seemed that we had come to the end of our tether. But a little testing and scrambling showed me that the Moat was covered with ice strong enough to support us all, going over carefully and one by one.

Presently we stood on the edge of the wide, green lawn, now hard and dark beneath our feet, the blades of grass stiff with frost and breaking under our tread like tiny icicles. Between us and the dusky shadow of the house, set against the waking gloom of the eastern sky, there were only the black mounds of Miss Orrin's garden, where the Lent lilies had waved so bravely in those spring days when first Elsie and I had looked upon Deep Moat Grange.

There were about twenty of us, variously armed. I had a pistol and a Scottish dirk. There were two or three rifles, about a dozen shotguns, many old swords, and even a pitchfork or two in lieu of better. If the courage of the men had been as good as their armament, we might have assaulted a fortress by way of a forlorn hope. But concerning this courage I had my doubts. For Breckonside was like most other villages. The men were good enough, but valued their own skins a great deal more than anybody else's—even that of their natural chief, my father.

Still I did not doubt but that they would do their best. For one thing they dared not turn back. They had to stick to the pack, and, after all, two was the extent of the number of foes they would have to face—one of whom was old. But then the other was that terrifying legend of the village and all the country round, Mad Jeremy himself.

Still numbers give, if not strength, at least confidence. Indeed, the men moved so closely together, that I was in constant fear of some weapon of war going off and giving warning to our foes within the dark house.

What we needed was a leader. And after I had guided them across the ice of the Moat, somehow I slipped into that position myself. I was at least the person most concerned. I never before knew that I loved my father—not particularly, that is. And, perhaps, after all it was only blood-kinship that did it. At any rate, I felt a new sensation steal upon me—a steady, cold determination to be revenged on any one who had harmed him—to find out all about it and bring the miscreant to justice—even to kill him if I could. Yes, there is no use denying it. I knew the verse, "Vengeance is Mine—I will repay!" Which is very true, but is an impossible thing to say at a time like that. No doubt in the long run He will, and does, but it seems too long to wait.

There was not a light to be seen anywhere about the house of the Moat. The crisp wind of earliest dawn made a dry sough among the evergreens of the

shrubbery. The tall chimney clusters were black against the sky, and beneath them and about the overgrown porch the ivy leaves clattered bonely like fairy castanets.

We stood still—close together, but very still.

Then strangely, familiarly, out of the darkness there came to our ears the sound of the sweet singing of a hymn—a hymn, too, that every one knows. I am not going to set down here which one it was. I never could rightly bear to hear it again—much less can I join in singing it. It was spoiled for me, and I would not for the world spoil it for those who may read this history of true, though strange, happenings.

Then, quick as a flash, I thought of the barn where we had seen and heard such wonderful things, Elsie and I. But it was no time for reminiscence. I stepped quietly across the yard and lifted the thick, felted fold of matting. I pushed open the half of the inner door, which perhaps the chill of the night, perhaps the needs of the service, had caused those within to close. Behind me I could hear the people of the village breathe restrainedly, and I smelled the odour of burned horses' hoofs which clothed the blacksmith like a garment. Ebie McClintock was the one man there with a stiff upper lip, and it was a mightily comforting thing to feel him at my back, even though he carried no other weapon than an iron hammer snatched up from the smithy floor as he came away.

The barn was dark, lighted by a couple of tall candles on the altar, and one caught on to the side of a kind of reading desk. I could at first see no more than a huddle of figures clad in black with white kerchiefs bound about their foreheads. The draught from without, caused by the opening of the door and the lifting of the curtain, made the candles flicker, and, indeed, blew out the one at the little desk farthest from us.

It seemed to me, however, that I saw a figure, or, rather, a dim shadow, flit across the heavy hangings, and disappear in the darkness behind. I could not have sworn it, though such was my impression; for at that moment the villagers, bearing on my shoulder, crowding on tiptoe to look, broke like water over an overfull dam. The other half of the door fell back with a clang, and they entered confusedly, tearing down the curtain in their haste. A shot went off accidentally —the very thing I had been expecting all the time from men, who, though

warned, would persist in carrying their guns at full cock. No harm, however, was done, save that a bevy of bats, disturbed in their winter's repose, dashed wildly for the door, striking their faces before swooping out into the night.

Then the kneeling women rose—the three mad sisters, and one who stepped in front of them, their elder and protector, Aphra Orrin.

It may seem strange, yet in a moment there came upon me a sense of shame. All was so decent and in order, as for some private Divine service in an oratory. A Bible was open at the lesson for the day, a "marker," with a gold cross hanging between the leaves. The altar nicely laid with a white cloth, and against the black pall, which hid the end of the barn, hung a great gilt crucifix.

"What seek ye here?" said Miss Orrin, standing up very tall, and speaking with a certain chill and surprising dignity which overawed many of my followers.

"I seek my father!" I answered, since nobody else could. "He has been lost, and it is here that we have come to look for him."

And though the villagers murmured, "Ay—ay, rightly said, Master Joseph!" I could not but feel at that moment that my reasoning was but weak. If I had had to speak with a man it would have been different.

"This," said Miss Orrin, "is the house of Mr. Stennis, and to him you shall answer. Meantime, I am in charge, and shall defend to the last——"

But a score of voices interrupted her. "Where is your brother? Where is Mad Jeremy? Where is Mr. Stennis?"

"I know not where my brother may be," she answered. "In his bed, most likely. You are at liberty to go and look. But as for my master, to whom you shall answer, he is in the City of Edinburgh in connection with some law business. If you seek him there I warrant he will be easy enough found."

But I remembered the flitting shadow I had seen, and crying out, "Search the house, boys! I will take the blame!" I launched myself behind the black hangings which fell behind me like the curtain in a theatre. A door opened to my hand, and I fell down a flight of steps, the shrill shrieks of the mad women behind me resounding keen and batlike to my ears.

CHAPTER XIX

I HOOK MY FISH

I had not fallen far. As is the wont of boys and cats, I was on my feet again in a moment. Something like a tall Lochaber axe—with the hook but without the axe part—had fallen on me, and the steel fetched me a sound clip over the bridge of the nose. Did you ever get a proper clout there when you were least expecting it? Well, if you have, you know how angry it makes you. I wanted somebody's blood. Hardly that, perhaps, for I had been decently brought up.

But the thought of my mother, of my father's disappearance, and the stupefying clink on my nose, all taken together, made me wild to be at somebody. Oh, it is easy to say "How wicked—yet so young!" and so on; but just try it yourself.

Anyway, this is how it happened to me. I was up again, and tearing like mad down the passage, quicker than a wink. I did not care, at that moment, whether it was Jeremy Orrin or Mr. Stennis himself. One of the two I knew it must be. But the iron hook on its six-foot pole gave me confidence. I could feel the point of it sharp even in the darkness. I found out afterwards it was used to pull down the hanging lamps which the mad women and Miss Aphra—who was only half mad—used in their mystic ceremonies. I expect they were trying to raise the devil. Which was quite a work of supererogation—I think that is the word, but Elsie knows—considering that their own brother, Mad Jeremy, was on foot—and healthy, thank'ee kindly!

Well, I grabbed my hook and made after my shadowy man who had darted from behind the big reading desk. I knew some mystic palaver or other had been going on, but what that mummery had to do with the death or disappearance of my father I did not care—only just streaked it down the passage. It was dark as pitch, of course, but firm underfoot, and of a uniform height. The walls had been painted recently, I should say, for I felt the bits of plaster come away in my hand as I put it out, and all along the courses of the stones felt ridgy.

Then all of a sudden it dipped down, and the going got wet and soppy.

"Under the moat!" said I to myself, thinking myself no end clever to have hit on it. "We will be going up presently," I added to myself.

Just so it happened. And then Joseph Yarrow thought himself the cleverest fellow in the world; though, come to think of it now, it was really a chance word of Elsie's that set me on the track.

Anyway, there was somebody before me, for I heard a door open, then shut, and, as it seemed, a kind of fumbling as if with a key which wouldn't act.

I was at the door in a trice—indeed, I rather tumbled upon it. For there were two or three steps leading up, pretty sloppy and slippery with green stuff, and the smell of dank earth all about. Also, it got cold, while it had been quite warm below. So I knew we were getting near the surface where the black frost was.

Plung! I darted my long staff with the hook at the end of it between the door and the doorpost. Luckily it caught on the steel part, so the man behind could not get the key to turn. Way there! I used my staff as a lever. The door gave. And in the chill dawn I found myself in a little sham ruin, covered with ivy, quite near the place where Mr. Stennis got off his pony and came upon us the very first day Elsie and I had ever gone to Deep Moat Grange.

There was nobody there. My gentleman had failed to lock the door, but had managed to shoot an outside bolt which my long hook lever had torn away like so much brown paper. I climbed through a gap in the ruin—either a bit of an old cottage, such as shepherds live in, or, more probably, a thing built on purpose to shield the head of the secret passage. I had never thought of secret passages in connection with the Grange. But, of course—come to think of it—the people there would not have respected themselves if they had not at least one. They saw to it first thing—after the little coffins. "Necessities first, luxuries after," as my poor mother used to say when she confiscated my Saturday's penny for the Sunday's church collection.

But in the growing light of the morning—dawn is the proper word, though smelling of poetry—I saw the man who had led me such a chase running through the wood in the direction of Brom Common. Now, I knew that piece. Had not Elsie and I come there, crawling on our stomachs—yes, lifting our four feet one at a time, counting the front ones, and not daring to move hardly! I was sure the

fellow would have to cross the road, and I knew where. He would not do it right in front of Mr. Bailiff Ball's house; he would have to turn away to the right, about the place where poor Harry Foster was done to death. Because, you see, he would have to cross Brom Water by the bridge, and he couldn't expect to have secret passages everywhere handy. So I made right for that place. It was risky, I own; but then I was in the mood for risks.

I could see him running—or rather gliding—a big portfolio thing under his arm, from tree to tree. And it came to me with a sudden certainty that this man knew the fate of my father, and that he was carrying off the booty under his armpits. Then somehow I got very angry all at once, and vowed I would put the steel hook into him or burst. I stretched across for the stile where he would have to cross the big march-dyke that bordered the Deep Moat property. He had not arrived, though I could hear him coming—in a precious hurry, too, and crashing like a steer through the underbrush. I crouched behind a bush of laurel—for we were in the pheasant shrubbery behind Bailiff Ball's—and waited with my hook at the "Ready."

He passed me, running—a tall, gliding shadow, with something familiar in the back of it. I did not see him clearly, for he was all crouched up because of the low branches of the evergreens and the leather case he carried under his arm. He was breathing heavily. So was I, but I would have died before I would have let myself make so much noise about it.

He looked about him for the stile. Evidently he knew the way well enough. I thought I recognized, as he bent, momentarily lower, the oily glitter of black ringlets which distinguished Mad Jeremy. But though I knew there would be a tussle, I determined that I would not let him off. Besides, we were pretty near old Ball's at any rate, and I meant to call for help like a steam whistle—that is, if it should prove to be Mad Jeremy, or even Mr. Stennis.

Whoever he might be, not finding the stile, he began to climb the high dyke mighty actively—nearly six foot, I should say, was the height of that march-dyke—and he had just his leg over when I hooked my steel into his collar and pulled him back. He fell unhandily, several of the stones following him, and the leather portfolio going all abroad. He came down on his face with a whop like a bag of wet salt.

As I turned the fellow over, I was full as I could hold of everything stuck-up

—as arrogant as a jack sparrow after his first fight. He had hurt his head rather, hitting it hard as he fell. The dawn had come up clear by that time. I tell you I gasped. I give you a hundred guesses to tell me whose face it was I saw.

It was that of Mr. Ablethorpe, the Hayfork Parson.

* * * * *

Well, I know now how it feels when the world comes suddenly to an end; when all that you had counted upon turns out just nothing; when what you believed true, and would have staked your life upon, is proven all in a minute the falsest of lies.

It was enough to drive any one mad. And indeed I think I could have stuck the steel hook into Mr. Ralph Ablethorpe, as he lay there in his High Church parson's coat with the tails nearly to his feet, his stiff white collar and the big gold cross—real for true gold—swinging as low as his hair watch chain. Yes, I would—but for one thing. The Hayfork Minister lay with his mouth open, his temples bleeding a little where he had hit a piece of stone, and he looked dead—painfully dead. If he had looked a bit alive, I wouldn't have minded sticking the hook into him. Just think of all that chase, and his pretending to hunt the murderers of poor Harry, and sending me up that drain pipe—and all in the interests, as was now proven, of the murderers themselves. It was enough to make a Quaker kick his mother.

There was also, though I had not noticed it at first, one thing more. The portfolio that I had supposed to contain my father's stolen papers and the proofs of the crime—well, there it lay, with the lock broken, and ready for me to find all about the foul treachery of the Hayfork Minister.

I was sure I should trap him now. I tell you I was so mad that I began to think of his being hung. And how glad I would be to see the black flag go up over the jail at Longtown. I meant to go there to see and cry "Hooray!"—I was so mad at his taking us all in. But, at any rate, I had a right to look, if only to search for my father's papers. It was I who had caught him, as it were, in the act.

I argued that it must be something very precious for the Hayfork Minister to keep it all the time by him, even when he was striking out his hardest, and knowing himself closely pursued. He had heard the roar as the people of Breckonside burst the barred door and came tumbling into the Grange barn. And

that was a good deal worse than Mad Jeremy's howls—at least, to hear. Yet he had never let go, nor tried any other way of getting rid of his burden, not even in the sham ruin, where there were bound to be pints of hidie-holes among the ivy. But no; Mr. Ablethorpe held on to his leather case and just shanked it the faster. I believe if it had not been for that and my knowing the country better, I would not have nabbed him as I did. It must, therefore, as I made sure, be something worth having, when he was so set on getting safe off with it as all that.

So I took the case and cautiously opened the leather top. It folded over like a square cap. I found no papers! "Well, I'm blowed!"—yes, I said that! Mother said I might, so as to keep me from worse expressions. Father didn't care so much, so that I was a straight boy and told no lies—except when "jollying" somebody—making fun of them, that is—or just getting them to believe something because they were green.

Anyway, I opened the parson's case and saw no papers. It was lined with a kind of purple velvet—no end swell—and had a gold cross worked inside, like girls do things so as to waste their time. And inside a crystal globe there were a lot of round, wafer-looking things that looked good to eat, and a little silver dish beneath them—all figured over in raised work. Then, in a little compartment all by itself, there was a kind of vase or jug, closed with a stopper—all of silver. Everything smelled good. I was just going to try the little wafery things, when all of a sudden the Hayfork Parson sat up, looking all dazed and nohow. He put his hand to his brow.

So I thought "Now for the revelation!" But he only said—

"Joseph, put that down this instant—you have not been confirmed! And at any rate the Communion in both kinds is the privilege of the ordained clergy!"

Of course, I thought he had simply gone moony with the whack he had got when I pulled him down from the dyke, as the Hielant Donalds did the mailed knights at the Red Harlaw, as I had read in the history book.

But in this I was mistaken.

Mr. Ablethorpe got a bit better when he had assured himself that I had not touched the contents of his leather case. He even tried to snib it again, but the catch had been broken in the fall, and the best he could do was to fasten it up with a bit of twine I lent him out of my pocket.

It is a strange thing about grown-ups who set up for knowing everything that they never carry things that are really useful in their pockets; only watches and money, which people try to steal. Now, every boy has twine and knives, and fish-hooks and marbles, and a catapult, and yet nobody ever thinks of stopping him with a levelled pistol on the King's highway, saying, "Your pockets or your life!" They would need to have regular Pickford vans to carry off the plunder, anyway, if they cleaned out very many boys. Why, I should think it a shame if I had less than sixty things in my pockets, all different, and all of the kind that you never knew when you were going to need them. And me going on for eighteen, too, and not a real schoolboy any longer, but a man!

Then, after a while, I began to explain to Mr. Ablethorpe all about everything. He just sat open-mouthed as I told him about father and about the mare coming into our yard through a locked door. I was watching him. He turned a bit paler, but his face was not the face of a guilty man.

"Of course, I see now, Joe," he said, "it looked bad. And I don't wonder the mob acted as they did, seeing me leave the barn so hurriedly."

Now, though I did not say so, I thought that pretty good, just about as good as a dozen glass marbles for a halfpenny. "Leave the barn hurriedly!" says he. My respectable Aunt Sally! Why, he simply scooted like the wind! What is it? He "stood not on the order of his going, but—went?" I bet he did! There wasn't anybody in Mr. Mustard's school—no, nor yet in Breckonside, who could have caught the Hayfork Parson but me. He had legs like a whacking pair of compasses, and went along like the wild ass that sniffeth up the wind.

"Yes," he repeated, tying a white handkerchief about the size of a tablecloth round his brow—I kept mum about what had given him the headache; pretended that I had brought out the hook to fish with—"yes, Joe, I did leave the barn in a hurry. But it was for the sake of those poor, foolish women, for whose souls none cares but myself. I know well that in going there at all I am taking my life in my hands. But the eldest, Miss Aphra Orrin, shows a little more stability than the others. And it was borne in upon me as a duty that I should try and make them put away their mad vanities, no better than stocks and stones, by substituting a real worship in a real chapel. I found out by chance that the barn of Deep Moat Grange had been an oratory in the days of the ancient Cistercian Abbey, which had been built on that site about 1460. It was, therefore, in my opinion, duly and properly consecrated. True, I have not obtained the authorization of my bishop,

and for that, Joseph, you may blame me."

I told him that it was all right as far as I was concerned. I did not think of doing so. His dread secret, if that were all, was quite safe with me.

"I thank you, Joseph," he said, with the solemn air he always had when engaged in making me a good Churchman. "I admit that the action is, on the face of it, irregular. But then the saving of these poor souls, Joseph! Consider! None to give them a thought but me! And I have already induced them to substitute a crucifix for their foolish gauds, which had only a meaning in their own deranged brains, Joseph. And this very night, after confession such as the poor things could make, I had determined to administer the sacrament of the Holy Communion to them. I was in the act of doing so when the noise outside, and the crowd breaking in the doors, caused me to retire, in the belief that my presence and the act in which I was engaged might be misunderstood by an incensed rabble. You agree that I was right, Joseph? Yes? Then—I own it—I am much relieved in my mind—still more to find that all the elements are safe. It would have been terrible—a disastrous loss—if any part of them had been injured. Even now, Joseph, when I came a little to myself, it seemed to me that when I awoke I found you—you, Joseph, the son of a Churchman, who ought to have known better, in the act——"

"No, Mr. Ablethorpe," said I; "but something was necessary to arouse you, and it seemed to me that nothing else would have the desired effect."

"Quite right, Joseph! You judged well," he said, nodding his head. "And the pursuers? Were you able to turn them off the track? I heard them pursuing."

I reassured him. So far as the pursuers went, he had nothing to fear. Mr. Ablethorpe said that in that case he would go home and place the monstrance—I think he called it, but it doesn't seem the right word, does it?—in a place of safety. But as I had no time to lose, I would not let him go without telling me if he had heard anything of my father at the house of Deep Moat Grange.

"Joseph," he answered solemnly, "it is well enough known to you that all I heard there passed into my knowledge under the sacred seal of the confessional, and that I am debarred from repeating a word, either yea or nay."

"But I want to know about my father!" I cried. "You shall not go without! He may have been murdered! And suspicion points to that house where you were

found, in which, according to your telling, you received confessions from those who may have been guilty!"

"Joseph," he answered me, with an accent extremely pitiful, "indeed I cannot tell you! I am debarred!"

"Debarred or no," I cried, "you must tell me if you have heard anything about my father, or I will break your head with this iron hook!"

He could have taken me up in one hand and shaken me, but it was not with the weapons of an earthly warfare that he was fighting this present battle.

"If so, I must e'en bow to the blast," he said. "I am aware that my actions not being strictly in accordance with canon law, and kept a secret from my bishop, I am a legitimate object of your suspicion."

"Never mind that, Mr. Ablethorpe," I said. "Only tell me as a friend. Remember how I helped you all I could before. If you know anything of my father. I must hear of it, and you must tell me."

He shook his head.

"Indeed, you cannot understand, Joseph," he repeated mournfully. "It is not to be expected that you should. I have not the authority to tell you. It is a sacred thing with me."

With the grasp of one hand I caught hold of the leathern case, and out came the thing he called the monstrance. It had a kind of glass top, which I had lifted up to get at the wafers.

"If you don't tell me," I shouted, "I'll send the whole flying into the Brom Water."

"That would be deadly sin—the sin of sacrilege, Joseph," he answered, trying to get the case from me; but I was too active and too near the wall. "Hold, Joseph —oh, my monstrance—my cibory!"

He was evidently in a great strait with his conscience. Curious what times some people have with their consciences! What a blessing mine never bothered me! I wonder what it feels like? Perhaps like when you have eaten a whole

bushel of unripe gooseberries and wish you hadn't. Something like that, I wager!

At any rate, he felt bad, and I was sorry for him.

So I didn't throw the monstrous thingborium away, because he thought so much about it. I kept a tight hold of it, though, and said—

"Well, then, tell me if you know anything about my father!"

Mr. Ablethorpe sat down with his head between his hands, and groaned.

"Perfectly legitimate—perfectly legitimate—from your point of view," he said. "What am I to do? Seal of the confessional! I can't do it, yet I must satisfy Joseph."

Then he hit upon something.

"You know where the Rev. Cecil de la Poer lives," says he. "He is my spiritual director."

I knew him. The Reverend Cecil was another of the ultra-High Churchers, who lived about three miles off, and was a gentleman's private chaplain. He was, if possible, ten times more set on thingboriums *et cetera* than our Mr. Ablethorpe.

"Well," said the Hayfork, "I will write a private confession of all I know about the matter to my spiritual director. I will intrust you with the letter to deliver it to Mr. De la Poer. And if you open it, the sin will be on your head."

"That's all right," said I, cheerfully.

And he wrote something, and sealed, or, rather licked it, in an envelope which he had used for carrying his cards in. It was on one of these that he had written his confession. He went off home in a great hurry to put the thingborium into his safe, and I opened the letter to Mr. De la Poer behind the trunk of the first big tree.

All it said was just—

DEAR DE LA POER,—I have to communicate to you, under the seal of the confessional, that I have learned nothing whatever concerning Mr. Yarrow, of Breckonside village, at the house of Deep Moat Grange or elsewhere.

Yours truly, R. ABLETHORPE.

So once more I had drawn blank.

CHAPTER XX

CONCERNING ELSIE

Now, I liked Mr. Ablethorpe, but after he had wrestled like that with his conscience, just to tell me that he knew nothing about the matter—well, I could have gone back and felled him. Why, his old conscience couldn't have made more fuss if he had known all about the murder—the hiding of the body—of a score of bodies, indeed. But then, with consciences, a fellow like me can't tell. It's like love, or sea-sickness, or toothache. If a fellow has never had them, he's no judge of the sufferings of those who have.

And that's what I always say to people when I hear of some new caper of the Hayfork Parson, or Rev. De la Poer, or any of that lot. "It's conscience," I say. "It takes them like that. It's uncommon, I grant, in Breckonside, but they've got it. So take a back seat, boys, and wait till the flurry's over!"

I am not going to go into detail of the search for my father, because what with the search for Harry Foster, and my father, and all that is yet to come, the book would just be all about folk trying to find out the mystery of the house on the farther side of the Deep Moat, and coming back, as they say in Breckonside, with their finger in their mouth.

Briefly, then, everybody searched and searched, but all to no purpose. Mad Jeremy was proved to have been miles away, and Mr. Stennis safe in Edinburgh, dining with his lawyer. He came home as full of rage as he could stick, and he threatened to bring actions for "effraction" and breaking open of lock-fast places, trespass, damage to property, and I don't know what all. But none of these things

came to anything.

He threatened, but did not perform. And as for me, in those days I had enough to do with my mother, who had fallen into a frail state of both mind and body—she who had been so robust. And if it had not been for Elsie, who took care of her, coming to our house to do it, and even biding the night, I don't know what would have become of my mother.

You see, she had never believed that anything serious had really happened to my father, or that he was dead. And when any one tried to argue her out of it, she said: "Tell me, then, who it was that let the mare into the yard?"

And we dared not give her the answer that was uppermost in all our minds—that it was the murderer who had done it with my father's master-key.

I did not see much of Elsie, though she was in the same house with me, for I had the business to attend to, just as if my father was there—to take his place, I mean. Because I knew that he would wish it, so that if he came back he would be proud not to be able to put his finger on anything, and say, "This has suffered in your hands, Joe!"

Of course, I had men from Scotland Yard, and others searching for a long time. But they did no good except to prove that my father had left the fair at Longtown in good time, carrying with him (what was very curious) not the money in gold or notes, but a cheque payable to bearer on the bank at Thorsby. Well, that cheque had never been presented. This was fatal to our theory. For if my father had been killed for booty, he could only have had an old silver watch on him, with the guard made of porpoise bootlaces, and perhaps five or six shillings in silver; because he always gave trysts and fairs and markets a bad name, especially those so near the border as Longtown. They gathered, he declared, all the riffraff of two countries, besides all the Molly Malones and cutpurses that ever were born to be hanged.

This was all that could be got out of these wise men from London for the money I spent—my father's money, rather. They never traced him beyond half-way, where, at a lonely inn on the Crewe Moss, he had stopped to drink a cup of coffee and break a bite of bread before going farther.

Oh, I tell you that our big house, with its bricked yard, and all the fine, new outhouses, barns, storages for grain and fodder, was a lonesome place those

days! And how much more lonesome the nights! I tell you that, after the men had gone home, the horses been foddered and bedded down in the stable, and the doors were locked (except the big centre one, which my mother would not allow to be touched), Bob Kingsman and I went about with a permanent crick in each of our necks, got by looking over our shoulders for a thing with a master-key, that could let in horses, and open doors, and leave no tracks behind it on the snow. It lurked in the dark when we turned corners, and many's the time we felt it spring on our shoulders out of the dusk of the rafters.

My, but Bob was scared! Me, too, when it came to pass—as it often did—that mother, in her moanings and wailings, sent me down to the yard gate to look for father. If anybody had spoken too suddenly to me then, I should have dropped. And as for Bob Kingsman, he slept in his little room with shuttered windows on both sides and barricaded doors, besides a perfect armoury of deadly weapons ready to his hand. He nearly shot himself more than once, monkeying with them.

I used to tell him that it was all nonsense. For, at any rate, a ghost wouldn't care for repeating rifles, or even 12-inch guns, let alone his old horse pistols, that would go off but one time in four.

But he only said, "Fudge, Joe! Ghosts don't need master-keys. They use keyholes, as a rule."

To which I answered that they couldn't put Dapple through a keyhole, as she, at least, was not a ghost, but hearty, and taking her oats well. He did not know exactly what to reply to this, but contented himself with saying, with the true Bob Kingsman doggedness—

"Well, if he comes, I will plug him."

"Then," said I, "if so be you do, see that it isn't the master you are loosing off at!"

For somehow it struck me that, after all, my father might have his reasons for keeping out of the way. He told us so little of his affairs, and I was always a great one for mysteries, anyway. If there was none about a thing, I didn't mind making up one. It didn't strain me any!

Yet now, when I come to think of it, these days with Elsie were very happy ones. Not that I got much out of it, but just the happiness of being in the same

house with her. She was seldom out of my mother's room, except when she went downstairs to bring something—such as a soothing drink or a cloth-covered, india-rubber bag with hot water for her feet in the cold weather. Elsie slept in a little child's cot with a folding-down end at the foot of my mother's big bed. It was one of mother's queer ways about this time that she expected my father back all the time, and always had his place made down and his night things laid out every evening.

It was nice, though, to meet Elsie on the stairs. I dare say you have not forgotten how frequently, with an Elsie in the house, or any one like her, young people are apt to meet on the stairs, particularly at the dusky corner where the grandfather's clock is—you remember the place, just where you cannot be seen, either from above or below.

Of course, Elsie was cross with me, and said that she would go back to Nance's if I did not behave—that I ought to be thinking of other things, which was true enough. But, for all that, she did not alter her times of coming and going up and down the stairs, and she knew I had a watch. Ah, well, such days pass all too soon! But they are good while they last. And now, when I lie awake, I like to think it all over, taking every single time by itself. We were very young and very innocent then. We did not know what was the matter with us. As for Elsie, she would have boxed my ears if I had dared to tell her that I was in love with her; and I would have blushed to say the word.

She was my comrade, my friend, especially my sister—which is always a good lead with a nice girl. At least, I have found it so. Girls—the nice ones, I mean—are always longing to be somebody's sister—that is, if they have no brothers of their own. Then they know more about it, and are not nearly so keen. Actual brothers and sisters clout each other and fight like fun; but the kind of brother you can be to a nice girl sends poetry and flowers to his sister, and it is all right.

They drop the brothering after a bit, though. At least, that has been my experience—when, as it were, fraternity has served its purpose. Then I used to crib poems out of Keats and Byron and L.E.L., and change them about a bit to fit the "dear sister" dodge. And it worked first rate. Nobody ever found me out. And they asked no questions, because it was all so dreadful mysterious and romantic, and made their little hearts go pit-a-pat to have such a poetic brother. I was glad they did not ask me what I meant, because I never knew in the least myself.

However, this by the way of it.

It was first class to have Elsie right in the house, and a whole shelf-full of poetry down in the parlour cupboard, which father had taken over as part payment for a bad debt. The debt must have been a pretty bad one indeed for father to do such a thing. I think he meant some day to give them to the village library at Breckonside, but always put it off.

They came in as handy now as a hole in an orchard wall. And Elsie wondered why I had never shown myself quite so clever at school. I could easily have told her the reason, but didn't.

I had not found the shelf of poetry then, which father always kept locked. Besides, I did not want to muss up Elsie's young instincts, which were sprouting beautiful.

This was all very well, but the end of the Christmas holidays was approaching, when Elsie would need to go back to her teaching at Mr. Mustard's. I did not like to think about that. For not only would Elsie have to go back to the little Bridge End house where Nance Edgar lived, but I should have the whole care of my mother, which was no light matter.

And so I would have had; but one day old Mrs. Caleb Fergusson arrived. She had known mother from the time they were little girls together, and my mother called her Susy. And when she had heard all about the uselessness of Grace Rigley, our maid-of-all-work, who, really, said my mother, "was so handless that she dropped everything—worse than a man-body in a house!—and dirty!—and not to be trusted to rise in the morning!—and no washer, bless you! But oh, the trouble o' servant lassies in the country! Certes, it's enough to turn your hair grey! And grey mine would have been but that I ken my poor good-man is coming back, and it would never do for him to find me worn lookin' and aged like!"

And mother tried her best to smile. And I was as sorry as if it had all been my fault, just to see her.

Well, there was nothing but talk of this kind between Mistress Caleb Fergusson from the Common Farm and my mother. And I thought they were settled for hours, as comfortable as two old hens chunnering among the warm dust by a bankside. So, as I got pretty tired of such talk, I sneaked out, and made

a pretence to look at the firm's books—though John Brown, our cashier, knew all about them a thousand times better than I did. From there I stepped over to the packing and despatching department, where I put off the best part of an hour.

For though I can stand the steady ditter-clatter of old folks' tongues for a good while in the dark—when I can sit near Elsie and, if she will let me (as a brother) hold her hand—it takes me all I know to put in ten minutes of it in broad daylight, my poor mother with her eye on me (her only hope and pride!), and telling the Pride every other minute for goodness' sake not to fidget in his seat!

Well, what I am going to tell is almost unbelievable. But when I came in, there in the little room that had been my father's office—which he had placed at the right hand of the entrance door, and as far away from the kitchen as possible, on account of Grace Rigley and her like—sat Elsie.

She was crying, yes, fit to break her heart. She had her hat on, too, and the little bag of things she had fetched over from Nance Edgar's was at her feet. I couldn't think what in the mischief had happened. All was as peaceful as Sunday afternoon when I went out, and now—this!

Well, I went up to Elsie and wanted to take her in my arms to comfort her, the way that brothers—except our kind—never dream of doing. But she rose and pushed me off, sobbing harder all the time, and the tears simply rolling down. I never knew before that a girl had such a water supply behind her eyes. Elsie had just fair cisterns full. She didn't cry often, that's a fact; but when she did—well, Brom Water rose, and they put it in the *Border Advertiser* along with the extraordinary duck's egg and Major Finn's big gooseberry.

But though I can make fun now, you take my word for it, it was no fun then.

"Elsie, Elsie," I said, "tell me what is the matter?"

But she only sobbed the more, and searched deep into her pocket for a handkerchief to wipe her eyes. But all in vain. I suppose she had packed her own. I offered her mine, but as I had used it some time for a penwiper, for easing up the lids of tar barrels, for putting under my knee when setting rat traps, and getting game out afterwards, perhaps it was as well she did not accept.

But I put it to you, if she need have thrown it on the office carpet and stamped on it. But I was of a forgiving nature. I only said, "Dear sister, tell me—

do tell me—all about it?"

And I tried to remember some poetry; but that was jolly difficult without the book. Besides, you can't remember the changes you have made to suit the brother and sister business, and it won't run smooth a bit.

However, Elsie saved me trouble by saying: "None of that, if you please, Mr. Joseph Yarrow! Here are your poems. They may come in handy for the young ladies who are coming to look after your mother. I have heard all about it—Miss Harriet Caw and Miss Constantia. You can be their brother as much as ever you like, and use all the poems over again for all I care!"

And with that she threw the "poems" right in my face, and was out of the door before I could shut my mouth, which was fairly gasping with astonishment —like a fish's just out of the water. And so would yours to have all that happen when you have only been out of doors putting off time till Elsie would come down to the kitchen to get mother's beef-tea from Grace Rigley at ten-past eleven!

But there was no brother-and-sistering in the corner of the stairway that day, waiting for grandfather's clock to strike twenty-four. I simply stood and gaped. For I had not, on my honour, the least idea what it was all about. I knew, of course, that when girls or women folk get things into their heads, it is better to let them get better of themselves. But this was quite beyond me. I gave it up. Now, can you get the hang of it without being told?

I did not go after Elsie. Because—first I knew it was better to let her settle a little. More than that, I could not go racing after her all down the village street; and, lastly, I heard my mother calling. Not that I would have minded that so much, except for the two first reasons. I knew she had Mrs. Caleb Fergusson with her. But, as it was, I went up to see.

The two old ladies were sitting as cosily as possible. It was my mother who spoke.

"Susan and I have just been talking," she said, "and as Elsie will have to go back to the school to her teaching, I see nothing for it but that Meysie Caw's daughters should come here in her place. It is a big house this, and a lonely one. And forbye, I think Elsie is far from well. For I called her in and explained everything to her, and out she went without answering a word or even saying

how pleased she would be to ken that I was well taken care of."

"More than that," said Mistress Caleb; "she has just gone down the street with a bundle as fast as if she had wings. I am doubting that there must be something lichtsome about Elsie Stennis. She may tak' after her minnie that ran off wi' a sodjer man. Eh, the lilt o' the bagpipes and the tuck o' the drum, but they rin i' the blood! There's me mysel', I canna see a regiment gang by, route marchin' out o' Newcastle, but I look at my auld man and think how Caleb wad hae lookit in a red coat!"

Then, because I was not going to have Elsie miscalled, even by my mother, I explained how that Elsie had been compelled to go back to Mr. Mustard's, and how rather than grieve her with a formal parting, she had chosen to go off alone.

"I think, mother," I said—hypocritically, I own it—"that Elsie was feared that you would be for offering something for her work."

"And, indeed," said my mother, "what for not? I had as muckle in my mind. Who deserves it better, after all that she has done for me?"

This was a better spirit, but it was necessary that I should hold mother's manifestation of affection well in leash also, or she was quite capable of putting on her bonnet and going off to the Bridge End—where she would have heard another story from Elsie.

"Elsie's young and shy, mother," I said, to put her off; "but she has a real affection for you. And if she thought you expected her to take siller for her work here—it would hurt her sore. She did it for love."

"I doubt it not," said Mistress Caleb, a little dry like—what we call "cut" in our part of the country—"and so will Meysie Caw's bairns do the like. They will do all that Elsie Stennis did, and as ye say, Mr. Joseph, all for love—whilk is a silly word to use. They are brave workers, both of them; and it will be more fitting to have two young lassies in a house than one."

"And what for that?" I said, bristling up at once.

"Oh," said Mrs. Caleb, "they will be able to do more work!"

I knew very well that this was not what she meant, but I was obliged to be

content; for Susan Fergusson of the Common Farm was far more subtle in her talk than any laddie of eighteen.

"And now," she went on, "I will be takin' my road. Master Joe here will convoy me a bit. The twa lassies will be over early i' the morning. You can tell that great lazy nowt, Bob Kingsman, to come for their bits o' traps wi' a cairt in the afternoon."

I walked with her out of the town, and all the way Susan Fergusson entertained me with an account of the many good qualities of Meysie's bairns. And I could see very well that, once installed, she did not mean that they should quit our big and comfortable house in a hurry. And the thought of Elsie nearly drove me out of my mind, to think what she would say and do when she heard of it.

Not that I could say I disliked the girls in any way—at least, not Harriet Caw. No man can really in his heart dislike a girl like Harriet.

And that was the most dangerous symptom of all—just what the Hayfork Parson would have called the natural, double-dealing, deceitful heart of man.

CHAPTER XXI

A JACKDAW'S TAIL FEATHER

One of the first mornings after the coming of the Caw girls—just as we were all sitting late over our breakfast, having waited for Constantia (Harriet was always on wing with the lark)—Grace Rigley came up the back stairs, shuffling her feet and rubbing her nose with her apron for manners, and told my mother that there was a gamekeeper man who was very anxious to see her down in the kitchen.

"Go, Joseph!" said my mother. "See what he wants. I cannot be fashed with such things at such a time."

She had been listening to Harriet's lively lisp and mimicry of Constantia's many aspirants. But that did not matter. I went down, and there, sitting on the edge of a chair—he had evidently just sat down—was Peter Kemp, the gamekeeper at Rushworth Court, where my father had been so long building greenhouses and doing other contracting jobs.

"Hello, Peter Kemp!" I said. "What brings you here so early in the morning?"

The man seemed a little bit scared; but whether because of his errand, or because I had come in at an inopportune time, or just that he felt a little awkward, I cannot say.

"Why, this, Master Joe!" he said, holding out something that looked like a rook's feather, but smaller and with a thicker quick.

The bottom of the quill had been cut away very deftly, and plugged with something white—bread crumbled between the fingers, I think. The plug had evidently been removed before, and as I looked curiously at it the gamekeeper said—

"I did that, Master Joe. You see, I had never seen the like before."

Out of the hollow quill I drew a spiral of paper, like what people used to light pipes with—spills, they call them—only quite little, for such pipes as fairies might smoke. And there, written in my father's hand, in a sort of reddish-grey ink, were the words—

"To whoever finds this.—Please to inform Mrs. Yarrow, Breckonside, that her husband has been assaulted, carried off and confined, to compel him to sign papers. Otherwise not unkindly——"

It broke off there, as if something had occurred to bring the writing to a close.

"How did you get this, Peter?" I asked of the Rushworth gamekeeper.

"I will tell you, Joe." (It was marvellous with what suddenness people resumed the "Joe," after calling me "Mister"—or "Master," at least.) "I got 'un off the tail of a jackdaw when I was thinnin' out them rooks up at our old ellums by the hall. Jackdaws flock with them sometimes, you know, Joe."

"But that's no jackdaw's feather," I said; for, indeed, it was much bigger.

Peter Kemp scratched his head.

"No, Joe, it ain't," he said; "and that made me wonder myself. It's a rook's wing feather; but, true as truth, it was sticking out of the daw behind, like the tail of a comet. Perhaps it was that which made me pepper him. It sort of drew the eye, like."

"Well," I told Peter, "that's a message from my father. He's hid somewhere—kept hidden, that is—against his will."

"So I was thinkin'," said Peter Kemp uneasily.

"Have you any idea where?"

"Why, no, Joe," he answered slowly. "You see, the daw was with the rooks scratchin' about in a plowed field near the ellums, and it might have come from anywhere. There's no sayin'. But there's one thing, Joe, them jackdaws is all for old castles and church steeples and such-like. If your father wrote that and tied it to the jackdaw's tail—as is likely—he will be in some o' them places—up a steeple of a church, most like; nobody goes there. Thank 'ee, no, Joe. I'd do more than that for Mr. Yarrow, if only I knew how. But I'll keep a bright look-out for daws with extra tail feathers. If any come along, Peter Kemp'll spend a cartridge or two on them that old Sir Eddard 'll never miss."

I hardly knew how to break the tidings to my mother, or whether to tell her Peter's news at all or not. But, luckily, she was interested in some tale that Harriet was telling. She was laughing, too, which somehow grated on me. I can't tell why, for I now had good reason to know that my father was alive and apparently, in no immediate danger.

Well, I slipped out, and went through the fields into the woods behind Mr. Mustard's school. I knew that Elsie would soon be coming, and if only she were minded to help, she had the levellest head of anybody; and I would rather take her advice than that of any minister in the place—especially after hooking down the Hayfork Parson like a smoked ham off the wall, a thing which lessens your respect for the clergy, if indulged in.

Well, I saw her coming, and I stood right in the way, just beyond the turn,

well out of sight of old Mustard, for I knew he would be all fixed and ready to give Elsie her morning lesson. But the funny thing was that she didn't seem to see me at all, and would have passed by, reading out of a book, like a train that doesn't stop at a station. But I stood right slam in front, and taking the book —"snatching it rudely," she said afterwards—I held out the little unrolled scrap which Peter the gamekeeper had fetched in his jackdaw's quill. I had the quill, too, in my jacket pocket, in case she should want to see that.

"There," I said, "be all the 'outs' with me you like afterwards—I can't help girls' tempers—but if you want to help save my father, you read that."

And I believe, just because I took her sharp like that without whining to be forgiven and twaddle of that kind, her hand closed on the paper, and she read it.

"Where did you get this?" she asked just as I had done myself from Peter Kemp. So I told her all about it—everything there was to tell, and smartly, too. For I knew she was very late; we should have old Mustard's weasely muzzle snowking down the lane after us. This was no grandfather's clock, puss-in-the-corner game, this.

So I put off no time, and Elsie never remembered about wading into me about the Caw girls, but just wrinkled her brow and thought like a good one. She was death on thinking, Elsie; I never met her match. I was a fool to her; and in spite of what father says, I am not generally taken for one, either.

At last it came—the wisdom over which Elsie had knit her brows.

"If I were you, I would have another turn at that drain—the one you told me about going up with Mr. Ablethorpe," she said; "and likewise take a look at the ruin near which we saw Mr. Stennis get down from his horse."

I told Elsie that I had no stomach for going alone. The oily curls and big knife of Mad Jeremy had weaned me from the love of adventure.

"I will go, if you will, Elsie," I said, thinking this to be impossible.

For one instant her eyes flashed, and I felt sure she was going to say: "Take your caws and crows and rooks, and get them to go with you!"

However, whether it was that she caught the imploring look in my eyes, or

from some secret relenting within herself, I do not know; but she suddenly put out her hand, clasped mine for a moment, and said—"I will come on Saturday. There!"

She was gone, and not a whit too soon; for I had hardly got back behind the hedge among the trees when old Mustard poked his bent shoulders and red, baldish head round the corner, looking for her. But he saw nothing; for Elsie was coming along, already deep in her book. He waited for her, smiling like a hyena, and they went up to the school together.

Saturday was the day after to-morrow, and when I thought of Elsie's promise, and the hope of finding my father without any other person in the world to help us, I snapped my finger and thumb like a pistol shot, and cried as loud as I could —

"That for old Mustard! Wait till Saturday!"

All the same, I thought it best for the moment to say nothing at all about the matter to my mother. Indeed, I looked out for Peter Kemp on my way up the village and swore him to secrecy. He said that nobody knew about it but Tommy Bottle, who was now dog-boy and cartridge-filler at Rushworth Court. The gamekeeper said that he was all right. And he was. For Tommy Bottle knew me, and also that I would flay him alive if he told anything I wanted him not to.

I was, if one may say so in the circumstances, jubilant. I don't know that I had loved my father more than just average. He never gave me much chance, you see. But I liked to think of him so strong and ready. And, above all, I thought with pride of his coming back, and finding that I had kept everything in good order, with the help, of course, of John Brown, our good cashier, in the office, and Bob Kingsman in the yard.

But after all, between Thursday and Saturday there is always Friday. And all sorts of superstitious people call that an unlucky day. Now, I never could see any difference myself. A day on which I lost money through a hole in my pocket, or got a cut finger, or got caught at the cupboard, or had a headache, was "an unlucky day, whether it happened to be Monday or Friday. And Sunday was Sunday, and the worst of all, mostly; for if mother caught me in a secluded crib reading what she called a "novelle," she marched me straight up to my father, who whaled me proper—not that he cared himself, but just to satisfy mother's

conscience and for disturbing him in his after-dinner nap.

But, at all events, there was this Friday, which proved to be unlucky or not—just as you look at it. At any rate, it was with that day that there began the solving of the real mystery of Deep Moat Grange, which had puzzled Breckonside in general, and me in particular, for so long.

Somehow I made sure that Elsie would be looking out for me at the same corner of the road on Friday morning, just where I had met her the day before. At any rate, I did not doubt but that she would have it in her head. And I was such a fool that it pleased me, like a cat stroked on the back, to think that Elsie was thinking about me.

It was all right having Harriet and Constantia in the house, though. And not at all like what Elsie had feared. They were really very good to mother. And Harriet being always merry, and Constantia all the time wanting things done for her, it was good for mother, and took her mind more off her trouble.

Besides, you can't really keep on being angry with a pair of pretty girls about a house. They brighten things wonderfully. The very sight of them does, and you can't help it. And though both of them together were not worth an Elsie, nor half so pretty, yet they laughed more, and being town girls, of course they had any amount of nice dresses, pretty blouses, belts for the waist, and lace for their necks; while Elsie had just a white turn-over collar like a boy, and a broad brown leather belt for her blue serge dress. I gave her that belt, and she always wore blue serge, because she said that, with good brushing, she could make a not Sunday dress look almost like a Sunday one.

Well, as I say, of course all the Caws that ever were could never be like Elsie. But still it is a wonder and a marvel to me to think how much I liked having them in the house. Harriet was as merry as a grig whatever that may be; they don't live in our parts—and pretty, too, with a piquant expression that was never twice the same. She always looked as if she were going to cheek you. And that interested you, because, not being a boy, it put you in a fret to know how she was going to set about it this time. If she had been a boy, she would have got pounded—sound and frequent.

And then Constantia! She was more "keepsake" girl than ever, and slopped about all over our plain furniture like the "window-sill" girl, and the "Romney"

girl, and the "chin-on-elbows" girl—that was Cinderella. But Constantia was always dressed to the nines—no holes in her dress, and not a very big one even where her waist came through. Oh, she was a Miss Flop from Floptown if you like! But lovely, I tell you! How everybody stared, as if they had never seen a girl with curls and big eyes that looked as if they were going to cry! They called them "dewy"—dewy, indeed! She kept an onion in her handkerchief on purpose. Once it fell out, and rolled right under the sofa. I nailed it, and in a minute had "dewy" eyes, too—right before her nose. There were gentlemen calling, too—your lawyer fellows with cuffs and dickeys! She said I was a horrid beast, but Harriet was quite jolly about it. She never "dewied" any, but kept laughing all the time. And if it had not been for thinking about Elsie and my father, she would have got a fellow to like her in time. She was the right sort. But the funny thing was, that of the two Elsie rather took to Constantia. She never could abide Harriet. Now, I was quite different.

Now, I know all this about girls' likes and dislikes is as tangled as can be. I asked Mr. Ablethorpe about it once. And he let on that he understood all about it; but when I asked him to explain, he said that he was bound by the "professional secret."

Which was all right, as a way of getting out of it. But as for understanding about girls, and what they like and don't, that was more than a bit of a stretcher, if one may say such a thing of a parson.

Well, on Friday morning, as I was coming down from my room, ready to go out and meet Elsie, just at the corner where stood the clock—which, as the books say, has been previously referred to in these memoirs—I came on Harriet rigged out in the smartest little dusting dress—the kind of thing that costs three shillings to buy and three pounds to make. She had her sleeves rolled up, because her arms were dimply, and she was sweeping crumbs into a dustpan. There had not been a crumb in that spot to my knowledge for ten years, but that made no matter. She was just tatteringly pretty—yes, and smart. I like that sort of girl, nearly as much as I dislike a loll-about, siesta-with-ten-cushions-and-a-spaniel girl—I mean Constantia.

Well, up jumps Harriet from her knees—quite taken aback she was—and makes believe to roll down her sleeves; but with a dustpan and a crumb-brush, of course you can't. And so she said—

"Do them for me."

And what was a fellow to do? He can't say "No," and look a fool—feel one, too! So I up and did it—rolled the sleeves both down, slow movement, and slid in the buttons careful—at least, I thought so. But not, as it seemed, careful enough for Harriet. For in getting the second button at the wrist through the buttonhole I took up a bit of the skin, and then, if you please, there was a hullabaloo. You never did see! I expected mother or Constantia every minute. Harriet pretended that it hurt, and that I had done it on purpose. Silly! If I had wanted to do anything to her on purpose, it wouldn't have been a footy little thing like that. Oh, no! I'd have given her something to remember me by. But it was all the same to Harriet, and, if you will believe me, she would not be satisfied till I had "kissed it better."

Just think what an ass I looked! I didn't want a bit to do it—indeed, I was as mad as blitz. But, to get rid of her, I did at last. And it was not so bad, only she bent down and kissed me, too, whispering that it was all right now. And just then Constantia popped her head over the banisters and said:

"Ah-ha, you two! Very pretty, indeed!"

And I had a face on me like fire as I went down the two flights of stairs in three hops.

How I stamped and raged when I got outside! To be kissed by a girl—well, that's nothing to cry about, if nobody sees and you had not your mind filled with another girl, especially the former. But to get caught, and by that Constantia! I believed she had been watching from the beginning, the nasty, floppy, hang-her-out-on-a-clothes-line "keep-saker" that she was!

Worse than all, she made me miss Elsie that Friday morning, for I saw her boot tracks in the snow as soon as I got to our corner. I had fixed india-rubber heels on her boots, so I knew. She said that that sort kept her drier, but I knew very well that it was to make her taller than Harriet Caw, whom she hated.

If she had only known why I was late! But, after all, what is the use of giving pain to others unnecessarily? It was contrary to my nature and against my principles. So I resolved that I would not tell Elsie about my buttoning Harriet's sleeve, or, indeed, anything. My great aim in life had always been Elsie's peace of mind. Besides, I don't think she would have taken my explanation in good

part. There are some things that Elsie doesn't seen fitted to understand.

CHAPTER XXII

ELSIE'S DIARY

(*Written in her French Exercise Book by Miss Elsie Stennis.*)

I left home on Friday morning at about the usual time—perhaps five minutes sooner. It was a fine morning—wintry, bright, just enough snow underfoot to crisp the road, and enough tingle in the air to make the buds of the willows glitter with rime.

I was reading as I walked. I always do on my way to school, having learned when quite a girl. It gets over the road. Besides, if you don't want particularly to see any one—that is a reason.

Not that I was expecting to see anybody—least of all Joe Yarrow. He had his "Caws"—let him be content. That was what I was saying to myself. But just at the corner where there is a square inset—or outset—in which they crack stones with a hammer to mend the bad places, I slackened a little. There was such an interesting piece in the French grammar—all about the rules for the conversational use of "en" and "y"—that I went a bit slower, just to make it out. The sense was difficult to follow, you know.

Besides, I heard a noise like the sound of footsteps behind me. I knew that it could only be that donkey Joe, broke loose from his rookery; so, of course, I did not turn round, nor make the least sign. Why should I, indeed? I am not Harriet Caw.

But I heard a voice, which I knew in a minute was not Joe's, calling out—

"Miss Stennis! Miss Stennis!"

That made me turn, as, of course, it would any one, just to see who it could

be.

And it was Miss Orrin—the elder one they call Aphra. You never saw such a change in any woman. She looked like a minister's widow, or some one of good family, living quietly and dressed in mourning. She had a black dress—fine silk, it was, quite real—of an old fashion, certainly, but no more so than you see at hydropathics and other places to which old solitary ladies come for the purpose of talking over their infirmities with one another. I was once at the Clifton one with mother—oh, so long ago, before leaving Wood Green! But I seem to remember these times better than things more recent. I really can't help telling about it, though I am wasting my paper, I know. I used to think there was nothing funnier in the world than to see two very deaf old ladies, neither taking the trouble to listen to the other, lecturing away to each other—only agreeing with the nods of each other's head. One would be talking about the Primrose League at her native Pudley-in-the-Hole, and the other—the learned one—about the internal state of South Nigeria, as illustrated by the fact that her grandson had not seen an ordained clergyman for four years!

"Think what his spiritual condition must be by this time, my dear! Such things ought not to be allowed in a Christian country, under the flag of England!"

"No, indeed," agreed the other, who had not heard a word. "Of course, it was all the doing of that Gladstone. Even one of the lecturers who came to speak to us, he was all for work among the lower classes. As if we could admit the like of them into our League—people who have strikes, wear red ties, and read Socialist papers! Really, dear, it was expecting too much, though he was an archbishop's son!"

"Yes; and my grandson wrote home for books to read—to be sent out by a friend, an officer on a river gunboat—I think his name was Judson. His life has been written by somebody whose books I don't consider at all suitable for James. And so I went down to the Curates' Aid and got a list of everything likely to be of service to one who for four years had been devoid of all means of grace. But I fear they never reached my poor James. For when he came home, and I asked him about them, he did not seem ever to have read any of them. But I dare say it was that Judson's fault. With these naval officer men you never can tell. I dare say the sailors divided them up among themselves on the voyage out!"

"Exactly. What we wanted, was, of course, to keep our League select. No one

very swell, but well connected, and all most careful about appearances——"

"And my grandson in Nigeria brought home a lot of crocodiles and a rare postage stamp, or a rare crocodile and a lot of postage stamps—I am not sure which. Anyway, I would not have it. I said he could not keep both in my house. He must give either to the Zoo. But I don't know——"

And so on. It was fun, and now I like to remember it, though it does fill up the pages of my note-book even when I am writing very small. Still, it is always something to do.

Well, Miss Orrin was dressed just like these ancient hydropathickers. Only, she was as alert as a fox and as demure as a mouse, in spite of being in a kind of mourning, with a big jet crucifix on a thick jet chain. That was the only thing about her that was not as sober and serious as a fifty-year-old tombstone. She had such a lot of jet ornaments about her, all cut into symbolic shapes, that she moved with a clitter-clatter, just like a little dog walking on a chain with fal-de-rals on its collar.

But, withal, she had such a grave air that I never once thought of laughing. Miss Aphra was not a person to laugh at in the gayest of times.

"Miss Stennis," she said, "I know you have not been well received at the house of your nearest relative. I am acquainted with all the long-continued ill-usage so unjustly dealt out to your mother and yourself. Long have I tried my best to bring your grandfather to a better frame of mind. But he is a dour old man—indurated, impervious to good influence. But what I was unable to do all these years, the near approach of death has brought about. When the angel Israfel passes upon his wings of darkness, then the heart hears and is afraid!"

At these last words she showed a countenance as it were transfigured. It was the first glimpse of her former madness that I observed about the woman.

"But what do you wish me to do?" I asked, knowing well that she would not seek me without a purpose.

"Your grandfather, Mr. Howard Stennis, is dying," she said solemnly. "He has had a stroke, and may pass away at any moment. Two doctors from Longtown and East Dene have come all the way to visit him. They give no hope. But he gets no rest, crying out constantly that he cannot die without seeing you. And

you must come instantly. I am here to beseech you. Behold in me the spirit of a father pleading for a daughter's forgiveness."

She seized me by the arm. In a sudden access of terror, I wrenched myself free, and instantly Miss Orrin began to sob. She sank on her knees before me.

"I know I have no right to ask," she said. "You have been shamefully treated, and have no need to forgive. But as you hope for pardon yourself, hasten and come to your grandfather, that he may hear you pardon him before he dies. If not, the sin of his uneasy spirit will be upon your head! Besides"—her voice dropped to a whisper—"there is something that he wishes to confess to you concerning your mother. It is on his conscience. He cannot die without telling you. Come—come! By the forgiveness you hope for yourself, or for those dear to you, I bid you come!"

I lifted her up, and obeying a sudden impulse, I turned with her down the lane which led from the corner where she had surprised me, away from the school-house. I cannot tell you how I came to do it. I had expected—why, I know not—some one else to meet me there. Well, I suppose I may say—Joe Yarrow. And the thought that he was philandering his time away with those Caws made me ready for almost anything.

Besides, I had been to Moat Grange House before. I knew that Mr. Ablethorpe went there regularly, and that he had services with the poor mad folk. So I was not nearly so afraid of Aphra Orrin as I had been.

It was bright and clear still, though the morning was overcasting a little, as we passed through the meadows. There is a private road most of the way till you enter the woods of Deep Moat. The people of the Moat Grange, therefore, never had any need to cross Brom Common or go the way that we had always taken—Joe and I—on our expeditions and researches.

All the way Miss Orrin talked incessantly of my grandfather, of how that he had been like a saviour to her poor sisters and herself, receiving them when they would have been shut up in an asylum, and of a certainty would have died there. She spoke also of his kindness to herself.

"They call him the Golden Farmer," she said. "And of a truth that is what he has been to us, for his heart is of pure gold."

I ventured to suggest that the folk of the countryside held a very different opinion of Mr. Stennis. But I could not have made a more unfortunate remark. In a moment the fire of madness flashed up from her eyes. The colour fled her lips. Her fingers twitched as if drawn by wires. She was again the mad woman I had seen leading the procession of the little coffins. "The folk of the countryside!" she screamed. "Ranging bears, wild beasts of the field! Oh, I could tear them to pieces! Gangs of evil beasts, slow bellies, coming here roaring and mouthing, trampling my lily beds, uprooting everything, laying waste the labour of years. Oh, I would slay them with my hands—yes, root out and destroy, even as Sodom and as Gomorrah!"

And suddenly lifting up her hands with the action of a prophetess inspired, she chanted—

O daughter of Babylon,
  Near to destruction,
Bless'd shall he be that thee rewards
  As thou to us hast done.

Yea, happy, surely, shall he be,
  Thy tender little ones,
Who shall lay hold upon, and them
  Shall dash against the stones.

I trembled, as well I might, at the fury I had unwittingly kindled.

We were now in the woods, the main travelled road far behind us, a complexity of paths and rabbit tracks all about, and before us a green walk, dark and clammy, upon which the snow had hardly yet laid hold. On one side rose up the wall of an ancient orchard, which they said had been planted and built about by the monks of old. On the other was the moat, still frozen, only divided from us by an evergreen fence, untrimmed, thick, and high, probably contemporary with the orchard.

Suddenly, at the entrance to this green tunnel, Aphra Orrin turned and grasped me by both wrists. Her face, as it glowered down at me, had become as the face of a fiend seen fresh from the place of the Nether Hate.

"Jeremy, Jeremy!" she cried. And at the sound of her voice it came to me that of a certainty I had fallen into a trap. This was not the road to the House of Deep Moat. I ought to have known better. I had been drawn hither solely to be murdered. I tried to scream, but could not. As in a dream, when one is chased by terrible things out of the Unknown, speech left me. I felt my knees weaken. And, indeed, had I been as strong as ever I was in my life, of what use would my strength have been? For there, at the entrance of the green tunnel, stood Mad Jeremy, smiling and licking his lips.

Meantime Aphra Orrin held me, shaking me to and fro as a terrier might a rat. She was as strong as most men—stronger, indeed, with the madness that was in her.

"Slay the daughter of Babylon! Slay her! Slay, and spare not!" she cried.

And while I stood thus, trembling violently, with that dreadful woman gripping my wrists so that she hurt them, Jeremy came leisurely up with his hands in his pockets—sauntering is the word that will best express it. He bent down and looked at me. For he was very tall. And I looked up at him with, I dare say, wide and terrified eyes. How indeed, could they be otherwise?

"Where is your knife?" cried Aphra Orrin. "Quick! Make an end—do as with the others! This is the last seed of iniquity. She will take from us our riches—all that should be ours—hard earned, suffered for, all that lies under the green turf—all you have won, Jeremy, and I have paid for twice over with weary nights of penance. That old man would steal it from us, from us who gained it for him, to give it all to this pretty china doll he calls his granddaughter!"

Had it been the will of Aphra Orrin at that moment, the opportunity would have been wanting for me to fill this copybook with these notes, to pass the weary time. For she loosened one hand, and snatched at the knife in Mad Jeremy's belt—the same we had once seen in his teeth when he swam the Deep Moat to get at Joe and me.

But happily, or so it appeared at the time, Mad Jeremy was in another humour. He thrust his sister off, and, as it seemed, with the lightest jerk of one hand he took me out of her clutches.

"Na, na," he said; "this dainty queen is far ower bonnie for a man like me to be puttin' the knife into as if she were a yearling grice. The knife for the lads that

winna pay the ransom, if ye like. But a bonnie lass, and the heiress to a' the riches at the Grange—auld Hobby's hoards—I tell ye, her and me will do fine, Aphra! Let her be, Sis, or you and me will quarrel. Ay, ay, and maybe ye will find oot what the blade o' my gully knife is for. We will see if ye hae ony bluid o' your ain in your veins, Sis—you that's sae fond o' seein' the colour o' ither folks'!"

"Never—never! You lie, Jeremy!" cried Aphra. "I know nothing about that. I swear I am ignorant. As to Elsie Stennis, I did but jest. At any rate, she must not see her grandfather. He is in a foolish mood, and might take us from house and manor, roof and shelter, house and bedding—ay, all that by right belongs to us. Besides"—here she moved up closer to her brother—"she knows too much. She might prove a telltale, and then you, Jeremy, would be hanged—hanged by the neck till you were dead!"

She repeated the words with a space between each, sinking her voice till it ended in a hoarse whisper.

"Na, na!" cried Jeremy. "I but helpit the puir craiturs oot o' their misery. They cried na long. And then they wad be that pleased to hae nae mair trouble, but juist to lie doon agang the lily beds and forget a' the cares o' the warl'!"

"Hush, hush, Jeremy!" cried Aphra. "Think what you are saying, brother. But bethink yourself, brother dear, you must make an end now. The girl has heard too much, and that from your own lips."

Mad Jeremy ran his fingers through his long, glossy ringlets with something like a smirk.

"Na, na," he said, "I can better that! She shall bide in the cove behind the muckle oven, where three times a week Jeremy bakes the bread. She will be fine and warm there. Nothing to do but set her soles against the waa', and in a trice she will be as comfortable as a ha'penny breakfast roll. No like yin I could name—ha, ha!—freezin' in the——"

But this time Aphra fairly sprang upon him, putting her hand over his mouth to stop his speech.

"Oh, that I should be troubled with fools that know not their own folly," she cried—"I, that have given more than my life, almost my soul, for these poor

things, my sisters and my brother, yet who will not be guided by me!"

Mad Jeremy laughed cunningly, or rather, perhaps, emitted a cackling sound.

"Be guided by you, Aphra?" he said. "No, and I don't think! Jeremy may be mad, but he kens a trick worth two of that. He will keep this little ladybird safe—oh, very safe, till the wedding dress is ready! Heiress if you like, sister. But then Jeremy will be the heir. And a bonnie, bonnie bride he will hae into the bargain. Come your ways, hinny—come your ways!"

He spoke to me with a curious, caressing voice, bowing low like a dancing master, with his broad bonnet in his hand, and making all sorts of ludicrous gestures to prove that I would be safe with him.

I did not know what to do. From the woman I had nothing to expect but a knife at my throat, and yet to accompany Mad Jeremy! That I could not do.

Suddenly I screamed aloud at the top of my voice, hoping that some one would hear me and come to my assistance. But Mad Jeremy only put his arm about me and covered my mouth with one great hairy paw.

"Gently then, lass—nane o' that, noo! It wanna do," he said, not angrily at all, but rather like one soothing an infant; "ye see there's nae workers in the fields thae winter days. And if there were hail armies, they wad kep wide o' the Deep Moat Wood, for they hae seen Jeremy gang in there a gye wheen times—ech, aye!"

And picking me up in his arms as easily as a babe, Mad Jeremy carried me into an ivy-covered ruin, and after that all was a labyrinth of passages and tunnels till I found myself in the place where I wrote these notes.

CHAPTER XXIII

WITHIN THE MONKS' OVEN

The chamber into which Jeremy led me was small, but it had evidently been used for a sleeping-room before. A couch was placed in the corner. There were chairs and even a table. But I saw at the first glance that the window, placed high in the vaulted roof, was unglazed, but barred.

"It is not precisely a palace, so to speak," said Jeremy, shaking his long snaky curls, and smiling his unctuous thin-lipped smile; "but in comparison wi' some—mercy me, but ye should be content. Ye will be braw and warm here. This was never aught but a cosy corner—see, bonnie lass! There's the auld monks' wark—the oven where they baked their pies!"

And taking my hand in his great one he slapped the wall which ended my prison vault, cutting it, as it were, into two parts. It was, in fact, quite as warm as the fingers could bear, and most of the time since has kept an equal temperature—though, if anything, a little stifling on baking days.

"Here ye shall bide," said Jeremy, standing dark and lithe in the doorway; "I myself shall be your keeper, but think not but that Jeremy Orrin kens bravely how to behave himself to a leddy. Ye will wait here, sacred as St. Theresa, till the wedding gown is prepared and the table spread. But Jeremy will feed his ladybird with his own hand three times a day—nor shall his sister Aphra put so much as a pot stick in the cooking, for fear of mistakes! She's a fine lass, Aphra, when ye ken her, but little to trust to when she has a spite against ye. Stick you by Jeremy, leddy, and he will stick by you!"

After he was gone, and the silence had re-established itself, listening intently, I caught the sound of water flowing somewhere near, and lifting up a little square of wood let into the stone floor in the angle behind the couch, I saw black water creeping sullenly along underneath my dungeon—probably the outlet of the Moat Pond on its way to join the Brom Water. And I could not keep thinking of the fate of those "others," who had not the doubtful but yet puissant protection of Jeremy. The trapdoor was certainly large enough to take a man, and the water, creeping ice-free down to the Moat Pond, would tell no tales. As it was I tore one or two little notes sent me by Joe into the smallest pieces, and watched them float away—that I might in no way connect him with the miseries into which my foolish confidence had brought me.

I was altogether alone. On the table Jeremy had put a candle with matches. When he brought my evening meal of porridge, cooked in the monks' bakery by

himself, he asked if I wanted anything to read.

"I canna aye gie ye my company," he said. "What wi' the maister bein' no well, I hae great stress o' business—but can ye read?"

I told him that I could, and awaited with some curiosity the books which Mad Jeremy would bring me. His choice was better than I could have expected. It comprised *Driver's Complete Farriery*, *The Heather Lintie*, (poems), a book of sermons with the title *In Hoc Signo*—or something like that—*Markham's Complete Housewife*, *Cavendish on Whist*, and two huge volumes of *Pinkerton's Voyages*.

"I wad hae brocht ye a Bible, too, but Aphra micht hae noticed," he said. "There's mair nor a packet o' candles in the press, forbye a half loaf if ye are hungrysome i' the nicht-time. It's little likely that ye will ken how to play the fiddle?"

I told him I had no such skill, at which he sighed.

"I was dootin' that," he said. "If ye had I could hae played the seconds to ye fine! But Jeremy can play for twa when the fit is on him. Ye never heard Jeremy. He has a fiddle that is a real—Jeremy forgets the name—but it's real something awesome grand. And that's a deal mair than maist braw folk can say o' their fiddles. For they are maistly made i' the Gressmarket o' Edinbory! There's a melodeon, though, wi' silver keys, that's better still. But Hobby winna gie Jeremy the siller to buy it. It's in Lithgow's window at Langtoon, and some day it will be Jeremy's ain. Maybe afore ye think. Then he will come and play ye the bonnie music. Ye can dance, Elsie? Eh, that's weel. Jeremy canna dance, but he can play the bonnie music to dance till, and it's the finest sicht in the world to see a feat young lass footing it dentily to 'The Wind that Shakes the Barley' or 'Tullochgorum.'"

After Jeremy was gone, I went over many things in my mind. Whatever part my grandfather Stennis had taken in the disappearances of Harry Foster, Riddick of Langbarns, Lang Hutchins the drover, and Joe Yarrow's father, obviously he had nothing to do with this. Therefore, I could only hope and pray that he was alike innocent of the others.

Not that the justice, or injustice, of the country would in any case hold him guiltless. He it was who had brought this wild crew about the lonely and

formidable House of the Grange. Because of them the Deep Moat glimmered through a mist of fear, and the sullen expanse of the Moat Pond had its waters, like once on a time the Nile, turned by the evening sun into blood.

Still, I should be glad, even in my own heart, to be able to think better of my mother's father, even if no one agreed with me.

Having seen the disturbances which followed the disappearances of Harry Foster and Mr. Yarrow, I pleased myself with the thought that soon my prison house would be broken open, and this foul brood of birds of prey compelled to flee for their lives. But I had not forgotten that it was the return of Harry's blood-stained mail cart which had awakened suspicion, and in the case of Joe's father, the coming back of the mare by way of the locked door of the yard. But a girl with half a dozen books under her arm, on her way to teach a few infants in a school, would be in a very different position. Joe and Nance Edgar would ask questions, doubtless. But I had quarrelled with the one, and never really been open or companionable with the other. So it might be said (was indeed said) that I had taken French leave of Breckonside in a fit of temper, and had gone off to meet friends, or to teach in a school for which I had long been applying. Indeed, the postman had brought me an official blue paper that morning, by virtue of which I was informed of my registration as a regular certificated teacher under the Act of 1871.

As a matter of fact, there was even a greater upheaval after my departure, but owing to doubts, and to the want of outward and visible signs to provoke it, the outburst seemed longer in coming. I considered myself, indeed as girls often do, much more friendless than I really was.

Then began in my oven prison a period of great silence and regularity. In writing the tale, I am following the entries in my diary day by day, and shall endeavour to make a story out of them as best I can. There is really little to tell, romantic as the circumstances were. As Mad Jeremy had truly said, the place was warm enough. The absence of the light of day was what I felt the most—also the lack of all sound, either of human voice or any living creature. Each alternate weekday I could hear Jeremy raking his fire to its proper heat before thrusting in the pans containing his batch of bread. Thrice every day he would come to bring me something to eat. But never did he offer me the least violence all the time I remained in the vaulted chamber.

Perhaps the moon was in good season. Perhaps the fool had regained a little sanity in the mere act of going contrary to his sister. At any rate his madness showed itself chiefly in his bringing every sort of musical instrument to my prison house. Upon these he played with considerable skill, but with a strange, weird, irresponsible irony running through even the most familiar tunes—something, as one might say, like "God save the King" played by the host's own piper, when George the Fourth made his state entrance into his own palace.

It must have been a strange sight to see us, seated of an evening in a little semicircle, Jeremy with the three younger of his sisters—but always without Aphra, or Euphrasia, as I found her real name to be. And these occasions were by no means unwelcome. For, mad as the women were, there was about them something of the village "innocent," lit with a certain flame of religious enthusiasm. They were very different from that tall, stern figure of granite—their elder sister. Honorine, who had had some training in dressmaking, was always at work with futile industry, confectioning some garment which, when finished, was more like the dress of a Christmas guiser or carnival clown than a respectable garment for everyday use. Her sisters, Camilla and Sidonia, sat looking listlessly at nothing, or engaging in purposeless infantile controversies with one another. Jeremy at one end of the circle sat strumming fitfully upon his latest instrument, violin or Jew's harp, his half-savage music breaking in upon Honorine's ceaseless chatter without prelude or apology. But these interruptions did not in the least put out his sister. She was proud of some remnants of a former short-lived beauty, and loved to recount and magnify the ancient flames she had kindled when "head of a department," dictating the fashions to the good ladies of Thorsby at Hood and Truslove's long extinct but once celebrated emporium in the High Street there.

It did not occur to me till afterwards that I ought to have been frightened—thus sequestered from the world, and my life hardly worth five minutes' purchase, if I should chance to incur the anger of one of those mad creatures. But at the time I sat with my French grammar on my knees, thinking chiefly how funny it was to see the five of us all seated with the soles of our feet turned to a blank wall. This we did for the warmth of the dividing wall. And indeed it was never cold—for before my side had time to cool, Jeremy was firing up his oven again for the next batch of bread to feed the Deep Moat Grangers and their guests.

That these could be dangerous thieves and murderers, in spite of the gossip I

had heard, never crossed my mind. They were to me, as I think to Mr. Ablethorpe, just so many poor things who had lost their senses. I noticed, however, that all except Jeremy were accustomed to hush their voices when they spoke of their terrible sister Aphra. And little by little I was able to draw from Honorine (who, above all things, loved to talk) the sad history of their wanderings. I will not attempt to reproduce in detail all her babblings. Indeed, she never quite finished a sentence. Nor did she ever continue where she left off. But, so far as I understood her relation, controlled as it was continually by the denials of Sidonia and Camilla, and punctuated by the scornful strains of Mad Jeremy, the story of the Orrin family amounted to this—

Their father had been a teacher in a large Lanarkshire village; but some money having come into his hands by the death of a distant relative, he went to Lancashire and there started a mill. He left a fortune to his children, valued at some £40,000. But what had been quickly gained proved just as easy to lose.

At his death Aphra kept on the spinning mill, and for a time made a brave face to adverse fortune. But a combination among bigger employers froze her out. The mill failed, and with it was engulfed the wealth of her sisters and the portion of her one brother. Hitherto Jeremy had behaved more humanly than any of the others, learning the business of the mill, with the hope that some day he might be able to conduct one of his own. But the sudden failure of all his hopes overthrew an ill-balanced brain. He grew wild and untamable in his habits, only appearing at home at rare intervals, and then only to claim more and more money from his sister.

The others, Honorine, Camilla and Sidonia, mentioned the name of their eldest sister with a kind of awe, but Jeremy never without a sneer or a taunt—except only in her presence, and when taxed with digging in the garden, a habit for which, Honorine whispered, Aphra was accustomed to punish him severely.

After their failure in Wigham, the passage of the Orrin family southward through England is marked only by some vague reminiscences of Honorine. She would begin a sentence "When we were at Bristol" and end it with "This happened after Aphra had brought us to Leeds." Nevertheless the nodded confirmations of the other two sisters, silently listening as they twisted their fingers, together with the "humphs" and denials of Jeremy, let me understand the truth with sufficient clearness.

If Aphra had been alone, unsaddled with her flock of mad folk, whom she treated like grown-up children, yet loved with more than sisterly devotion, she would have had no difficulty in providing for herself.

At Bristol, for instance, she had established herself with what remained of their small capital in a ready-made shoe shop in a well-frequented street, while Honorine and Sidonia interpreted the latest London fashions to the dwellers in Clifton. But the latter branch failed because Honorine refused to serve those customers who, on entering the shop, would not consent to bow the knee and worship the statue of the Virgin, which they kept in a wall niche surrounded with ever-burning candles. This did not at all suit the ideas of the Cliftonians, and soon the two sisters were back hanging on as before to the skirts of Aphra. As for Jeremy, he wandered about the docks, finding mysterious means of filling his pockets, but always sharing the proceeds.

But his strength waxed so great, his temper so uncertain, that practically he was allowed to go his way. From this time forward not even Aphra was able to control him. More than once he had threatened her life with his clasp knife. Still she did not insist upon his leaving the house. As the head of the family, she was responsible for all. Jeremy was a prodigal son, but still a son—indeed, the only son of the house. Her father had confided him to Aphra, and she would be faithful to her trust.

It was about this time that the family became touched with that mystic spirit which Mr. Ablethorpe had thought to utilize in leading them to better things. But the attempt was vain from the first.

Even at Bristol an attempt to walk in procession upon the street with white banners and mystic emblems awoke so much mingled hostility and mirth that the police were fain to interfere. And an assault made by Honorine upon a visiting bishop of Low Church tendencies, who dared to preach in a Geneva gown, led to the closing of the boot shop and their migration once more to the north.

Everywhere they went Honorine was the bane of custodians of High Anglican and Catholic churches. She insisted upon spending the whole day in such buildings, kneeling for hours together before the sacred pictures, especially those representing favourite saints, making her stations of the cross several times a day, and representing to the distressed church officers (who wanted their dinners) that it was no time to think of earthly nourishment here below—because

at any moment their brains might be sucked up by a steam engine even as hers had been. She continued, therefore, in spite of gowned Anglican church officers, magnificent Catholic "Suisses," and arrogant parish beadles, to do penance for sins which she had never committed.

"There are enough misdeeds in the family, though, to keep you at penance all your life," grunted Jeremy with a grin, as Honorine finished her confession. "You did quite right, Honor; I always said that you had more sense than Aphra!"

"Aphra is wise," said her sister, "but she does not know that, owing to my prolonged studies in the Book of Nature, I am enabled to cure toothache."

From the date of their leaving Bristol the family had gone where the determined Aphra had led them. Their longest time of refuge was in the service of a German widow named Funkel, who lived in a villa near Surbiton. Devout as Mr. Ablethorpe, this good woman had taken an idea of bringing the Orrins to more settled ways.

Aphra was to be cook and housekeeper, Honorine sewing maid, Camilla waited at table, and Sidonia became laundress. It was a hospitable and kindly arrangement. But the operations of Jeremy, who had charge of the small garden, brought all the dogs of the neighbourhood there to scratch, while within doors the entire service of the household would be interrupted by discussions as to what the exact meaning of a pinch of salt spilled on the right side of the salt cellar, or a tug of war between the younger sisters to decide who was to clean the knives.

As all had foreseen but herself, Madame Funkel had to call in the police before she could get rid of her troop of domestics. It ended in their retreat, after certain threats on Aphra's part—threats which, but for the opportune vanishing of Jeremy, might not have ended pleasantly for their ex-mistress.

Aphra returned to her diminished shoe shop, this time set up in a suburb of Leeds, and Jeremy was next heard of as the companion of Mr. Hobby Stennis in the little wayside cottage where he lived before moving into the larger and more retired Deep Moat Grange.

Honorine asked Jeremy more than once how he came to be acquainted with Mr. Stennis. But his only reply was that "there were certain things which it was good for women to know, but how he first came to meet Mr. Stennis was not one

of them."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE BREAKING DAM

(*The Narrative continued by Joe Yarrow.*)

I have given this part of Elsie's diary in full, as she wrote it out, both because she was so far from the truth as to what was happening above ground, and because her style of writing is so literary—far before mine, with words that I should have to look out in the dictionary.

Why, of course, there was no end of a rumpage. The whole country rose. It is the third time that tells. You never saw anything like it. Farmers and their men flocked in from the field, and took shot guns and hay forks, or tied scythes to poles, making ugly enough weapons. The village of Breckonside emptied itself. It chanced that a little boy, Frankie Leslie, on his way to school, had seen "eour teacha," as he called Elsie, in the company of a tall woman in black going through the pastures towards the woods of the Deep Moat.

That was enough. That was evidence at last. There was to be no pausing this time. The place was to be ransacked, if not sacked. And what would have happened to the poor mad sisters if it had not been for the presence of mind of Mr. Ablethorpe, it is better not surmising. I don't believe that the idea of compelling witches by torture to release their victims is extinct—at least, not in such a place as Breckonside. That mob of angry men and furious women which flocked out towards the house of the Golden Farmer would have taken to the red-hot knitting needle and the flat-irons as naturally as their ancestors two hundred years ago on Witches' Hill, a little beyond the Bridge End. They would have burned, too, only that they were afraid of the police—I don't mean old Codling, but the real police, who would come up from East Dene and Longtown.

I had seen the first surprise about the empty mail gig which had been escaladed by the murderers of poor Harry Foster. I had seen the midnight levy when my father's mare came home without him. But far beyond either was the sight of that silent flood of people, at the noon of a winter's day, when in the ordinary course of things they would have been sitting down to dinner: breaking barriers, throwing down gates, and spreading over the fields in the direction of Deep Moat Grange! It fairly took the breath from me.

Once I had even been a leader at that sort of thing. I had found the traces of

the crime that had been committed in the case of poor Harry. I had been my father's son on the second occasion. People had deferred to me. Even Ebie the blacksmith, with his fore-hammer over his shoulder, had asked my advice. But now I was nobody. No one was anybody. A force which no one could control had been set in motion. I understood better what is that Democracy of which they speak. It is the setting in motion of destructive forces, always most dangerous when most silent.

The idea in the hearts of all was that this must end. There was no saying whose turn might come next. So the rush was made in the direction of that sinister house in the depths of the woods, surrounded by its moat, and looking out upon the gloomy pond, dark grey under the shadow of the pines.

But those of Breckonside who had imagined that there was nothing but processioning and incensing about Mr. Ablethorpe had their opinions considerably altered that day. Mr. De la Poer was with him. They had been—I forget the word—confessing or cross-examining each other. Oh, no, spiritually directing each other—that is the correct phrase. And when the roar of the village rising *en masse* against its formidable neighbours of the Grange came to their ears, they had just got the job done for the month, and were sitting down to a good cup of tea, which Miss Ablethorpe, the Hayfork's sister, had brewed for them.

Immediately divining the cause, Mr. Ablethorpe dashed across the fields, leaving Mr. De la Poer to act as a drag to the armed villagers. It was evident that he had been successful in his mission; for when the mob poured over the drawbridge, which was hospitably down as if to invite them across, they found at Deep Moat Grange a house empty, swept, and garnished.

In the house they found spotless chambers, which testified to the good housekeeping of Miss Aphra Orrin—full pantries, well-filled larders, the milk standing to cream on the stone slabs of the dairy, butter in lordly dishes on great squares of Parton slate, the quietest, the most innocent house in all the parish of Breckonside.

Nor did they find anything suspicious in all the chambers of the house, though they went everywhere—into Mr. Stennis's workroom, which had the windows tightly barred, but which, when thrown open, revealed nothing but a spare wooden settle in a corner, and on a wonderful hand loom a half-worked

pattern, such as only Hobby could weave, with crowns of flowers, roses and lilies, and on a scroll the words: "To Elsie Stennis, on her marriage. The gift of her affectionate grandfather."

But the rest was wanting. I stood and wondered as the tide ebbed away to other rooms—first to whom Elsie Stennis was to be married, and whether the inscription on that half-woven wedding present had anything to do with her disappearance in company with the granite-faced woman as reported by Frankie Leslie on his way through the meadows.

I even went so far as to suspect Mr. Ablethorpe. He had always been fond of Elsie. He had always protected her enemies, those whose interest it was to deprive her of her heritage. Perhaps his very pretence of celibacy was only a cover for a deeper design of getting hold of the riches of the Golden Farmer!

But all the turmoil, and the thundering blows of the fore-hammer wielded by Ebie McClintoch discovered nothing—not one of the mad sisters, not their leader and protectress, Miss Orrin, not Mad Jeremy himself. And, of course, no one expected to see anything of Mr. Stennis. He would be far away, as usual, with an alibi obviously provided on purpose.

Most of all, the silence of the place was disquieting. The door of the barn was open. Within, all trace of the ridiculous gauds of a former time had disappeared. It had been restored carefully, with knowledge and discretion, to its first use as a chapel. A crucifix hung above the communion table. The twin sets of commandments, written in gold on blue, were against the wall on either side. The Bible, on the little lectern, behind a gilt eagle no bigger than a sparrow, was open at the lesson for the day. The Breckonside people, though in their Presbyterian hearts condemning such signs and symbols, paused open-mouthed, taken with a kind of awe, and as Mr. De la Poer dropped on one knee to make his altar reverence, all filed out bareheaded and a little ashamed of themselves.

None thought of going farther. Though I knew very well that behind the hanging of dull purple at the lectern was the door by which Mr. Ablethorpe had saved his strange parishioners, and so cheated the hasty angers of Breckonside.

Nor did I tell them of it. Somehow I was no longer a leader. And deep in my heart I felt sure that if Elsie were indeed there, Mr. Ablethorpe would give his life rather than that any harm should come to her. Besides Elsie and I had been

so many times in danger of our lives, in that very place even, that I knew somehow she would come back to me unhurt. At any rate, the actual prison house where she was hidden was far beyond our ken. None of us thought of searching on the other side of the moat, where was the underground oven of the Cistercians, in which Elsie (as she has already told) was interned.

Perhaps I did wrong in not revealing the secret of the passage. But then if there had been bloodshed—and our folk were quite in the mood for it—the death or ill-usage of these poor innocents (I do not speak of Miss Orrin or Mad Jeremy) would have been on my head. On the whole, I am still convinced that I acted wisely. And I am sure also that Mr. Ablethorpe did so. For he had, there was no doubt, hurried the sisters Honorine, Camilla, and Sidonia, with their eldest sister Miss Orrin, from the chapel where he had known he would be sure to find them at that hour, by the passage along which I had chased him, and had finally hidden them safely in the range of underground buildings that had been the store and treasure-houses of the monks in the days of the border moss-troopers. For then each good wife of a peel tower sent her husband to "borrow" from the holy clerks of the Moated Abbey as often as the larder and money bag were empty. And her way was a woman's way. She served him at dinner time with only this—a clean spur upon an empty plate, which being interpreted meant, "If thou would'st eat, good man of mine, rise and ride."

They lived in dangerous territory, these good monks, and it is small wonder if after their departure the moated island kept its repute. The very wealth of "hidie-holes" conduced to deeds that feared the light.

Mad Jeremy in his outcast days had sheltered there. He had explored them, and that knowledge had been abundantly utilized since the purchase of the Grange by Mr. Stennis. The whole situation was most favourable for his traffic, and even now when its good repute was blown upon, the Cistercian abbots' "hidie-hole" still showed itself capable of keeping its secrets.

Our Breckonsiders were proverbially slow of belief, but they could not get over the facts. There before us was the house of Deep Moat, all open to the eye, silent like a church on week days, prepared as for visitors from floor to roof tree. And nothing to be found, neither there, nor in the numerous out-buildings of which Mr. Bailiff Ball, a man of approven probity, had the charge.

There was nothing for it therefore but to go home. Or rather the villagers had

almost arrived at that decision when Miss Orrin, escorted by Mr. Ablethorpe, walked suddenly into the midst of the crowd of armed country folk.

Her appearance caused an angry roar, pikes and scythes were raised against her. But the presence of a clergyman, the dignity of even an alien cloth, made them turn away a little shamefacedly. Mr. Ablethorpe put up his hand to command silence.

"My friends," he said, "I have lived among you long enough to know that you will offer no indignity to a woman. Miss Orrin is here of her own wish to explain to you all that may be necessary. She does not, of course, make herself responsible for the words or actions of all other members of her family, but so far as she is concerned she is ready to explain."

"Where is Elsie Stennis? Murderess! Burn the witch! The she-devil!" These cries, among others, broke from the crowd, and Miss Orrin was well advised not to attempt any long parley.

"Come with me," she said, "and I will satisfy you! But go gently. For the master of this house is very ill and the doctor is with him even now."

Whereupon she opened with a key a door in the weaving chamber of Mr. Stennis, a door which I had taken for that of a large iron safe, and conveyed us into a smaller chamber, with a barred window looking across the moat. Here Mr. Stennis lay on a bed, very pale and haggard, and with him, his hand upon the sick man's wrist, was Dr. Hector of Longtown, a man whom every one knew and respected—all the more so because of a brusque manner and an authoritative speech that caused people to place great confidence in his judgments.

He looked up astonished and rose to his feet, evidently very angry.

"Hello," he said, "what's this? What right have you to come masquerading here with your pitchforks and hedging tools? Out of this, or I'll put my lancet into some of you! I'll wager that I will let more blood in five minutes than you with your entrenching tools in a week—ay, and take it from the right spot, too!"

He followed the defeated Breckonsiders to the door, made a gesture as if to hasten a few laggards with the toe of his boot, and remarked aloud to Miss Orrin: "I thought you had more sense than to encourage this sort of thing!"

"Me encourage it!" cried Miss Orrin, indignantly facing him—"you are under a great mistake, sir!"

"Well, out of this, anyway, all of you," said Dr. Hector. "I will not have it. If my patient's repose is broken into again, tell them I am armed—I will take my horsewhip to the pack of them!"

And curiously enough the crowd of justicers melted more quickly merely with the shame of looking a good man in the face, and before his horsewhip of righteous indignation, than it would have done before Mad Jeremy, armed to the teeth.

"I went this morning to the school where Miss Elsie Stennis teaches," said Miss Orrin, "and I gave her a message that her grandfather was ill and wishful to see her. Dr. Hector is a witness that such was Mr. Stennis's urgent desire. I merely executed it, and all that I know further is that Miss Stennis has not yet complied with that request."

"Our Frankie saw teacher with you on the meadow pasture at nine this morning," interrupted a gaunt woman with the bent shoulders of the outdoor worker and a look of poverty on her face.

"Then your Frankie lied!" retorted Miss Orrin sharply.

And after this direct challenge it needed both Mr. Ablethorpe and Mr. De la Poer to restore order. But the fury of Frankie's mother contrasted so ill with Miss Orrin's glacial calm, that it seemed possible enough that "Frankie" had indeed invented the little circumstance to add to his importance, after hearing of the loss and disappearance of "teacher."

"Moreover," said Miss Orrin, "since Mr. Stennis is too ill to have his bedchamber and house invaded in this way, in future Dr. Hector will arrange for special protection from the police at Longtown. And after this warning let any one cross the moat at their peril."

There was no more to be done. Aphra Orrin had beaten us completely. The baffled tide ebbed back the way it came, and Deep Moat Grange was left alone once more with the secrets it had been successful in guarding in the teeth of a whole countryside in arms and aroused to a high pitch of curiosity.

The two clergymen waited behind, but the sick man would have nothing to do with them, declaring his intention, if he must, of dying as a good Presbyterian. He was the most intractable of invalids, even threatening to break a bottle over Dr. Hector's head if, as he proposed, he should venture to bring with him from Longtown a minister of his own denomination.

"Hobby Stennis is none so ill as that," he said stoutly, "if only I had my will in a safe place, and had seen the little lass, who is all my kith and kin, I would ask no more from doctor or minister in this world."

"I will take charge of the will myself if no better may be," said Dr. Hector. And so, none saying him nay, he rode back to Longtown with the holograph in his breast pocket, jesting with two farmers riding that way as he went. Had he only known, a few sheets of a folio account book covered with close writing in the hand of Mr. Stennis was considerably more dangerous to carry about with him than the latest discovered high explosive!

It was with considerable astonishment that on the evening of his next visit to Deep Moat Grange, about midway between the edge of the woods and the lonely alehouse where my father had alighted, Dr. Hector was suddenly aware of a noose of rope which circled about his neck with a whiz. The next moment he was dragged from his horse. He lay unconscious for an hour on the road, and then coming to himself turned and walked back to Longtown, very stiff and very angry, but conscious of no other loss than that of several copies of prescriptions which he kept in his breast pocket.

"What they can want with these, I don't know," said the vindictive doctor. "I only hope they will take them all together. There was a triple dose of strychnine in one which I wrote for Garmory's dog!"

Now Miss Orrin was a clever woman, and she grasped at once the immense moral value of having the support of Mr. Ablethorpe and his friend and spiritual director Mr. De la Poer. It was quite evident that for the sisters the situation at Deep Moat Grange would no longer be tenable. Mr. Stennis might die any day. The Longtown doctor gave little hope of ultimate recovery. The will had been removed out of Aphra's reach. True, she might possibly induce the old man to make another, disinheriting his granddaughter. If Elsie died in her prison, doubtless sooner or later all would be found out. There were other things also.

It came as the happiest of solutions, therefore, to the strenuous head of the Orrin family, when, a few days after, Mr. Ablethorpe proposed to charge himself with the care of the three "innocents"—Honorine, Camilla, and Sidonia. He knew of a convent, the good sisters of which gave up their lives to the care of women mentally afflicted. Aphra refused point blank any such assistance for herself, even temporarily. But for her sisters she rejoiced openly, and was indeed, after her fashion, really grateful to the two young clergymen who had taken up the cause of the witless and the friendless.

"I know why you do this," she said, "it is that you may clear the board of those who have neither art nor part in the evil. Then you will strike the more surely. I do not blame you, Mr. Ablethorpe, But for me, I will not go with my sisters, who have done nothing—known nothing. If the guilty are to suffer—and if the guilty are indeed my brother and my master—then I will stand in the dock by their side. No one shall ever say that Aphra Orrin went back on a friend, or refused her full share of responsibility. All the same, Mr. Ablethorpe—and you, Mr. De la Poer—I am grateful from my heart for what you are doing for my poor sisters. For me, I am neither mad nor irresponsible—only as the more notable sinner, in the greater need of your ghostly counsels!"

CHAPTER XXV

A LETTER FROM JOSEPH YARROW, SENIOR, TO HIS SON JOSEPH YARROW, JUNIOR

Dear Joe—Yours of the 10th received and contents noted. You ask me to tell you in writing what happened when, like a fool, I allowed myself to be caught and imprisoned by the other fools at Deep Moat Grange, at that time the property of the late Mr. H. Stennis.

Nothing can be more generally useless than the practice of going back on old transactions, the gain of which has long gone to your banker, or the loss been written off. But as, on this occasion, you represent to me that a few notanda from me might aid your book to sell, I comply with your desire. Your proposition,

kindly but speculative, that I should receive ten per cent. (10%) of the proceeds, is one to which I cannot accede. The venture is your own, and though I reply as a father, I desire to rest absolutely disinterested in the business. I have made my success in life, such as it is, by never touching anything of a doubtful or gambling nature. And I am creditably informed the publication of books of thrilling adventure such as you propose undoubtedly falls under the latter category.

But the facts, nevertheless, are at your service. All that I ask of you is that you should allow them to remain facts. I once lifted a page of your MS., which had been blown from your desk, and I grieve to say that it contained such twaddle about love, together with other intangible and inappreciable articles, that I came very near to discharging you on the spot. But I remembered the solid qualities and aptitudes you had shown (I give you so much credit, but I trust you do not strike me for a rise on the strength of it) on the occasion of my late disappearance.

Well, on Monday, the sixth of December, at 8.59 I received a letter bearing the Edinburgh postmark, stating that a certain Mr. Stephen Cairney, who has owed me over three hundred pounds for a number of years (£329, to be exact) would be selling a large parcel of cattle at Longtown Tryst. The writer of the note was Mr. H. Stennis, of Deep Moat Grange, and he informed me that he had successfully adopted a similar course at Falkirk some years ago. He had been able to give his lawyer due notice, and had "riested" the money in the hands of the auctioneer.

Now there is no reason why Hobby Stennis should go out of his way to put money into my pocket. On the contrary! If it had been the other way about I should have seen him farther first before I meddled. Still, the sum was a considerable one, and Mr. Dealer Stephen Cairney certainly a slippery customer, whom I might never be able to make anything off of again. It was just possible that old Hobby, as spiteful an old ruffian as lived, whether as poor weaver or as Golden Farmer, had his knife into Cairney for some old quarrel which most likely Cairney had himself forgotten.

At any rate, there was nothing against my riding to Longtown to see. Nothing against my trying, at least, to come by my own. Still it was with an angry and unsettled mind, but a firm determination not to be cheated if I could help it, that I rode off to Longtown on Dapple, the good and trusty mare I had bought as a

bargain from the heirs and assigns of Mr. Henry Foster, sometime deceased.

My wife was most difficult as to my riding alone, but if a man is to take account of the whim-whams of his women-folk, he will have time for little else. So I gave Joseph and Kingsman sufficient directions and elaborate instructions to pass them over till my return, and so parted.

There is nothing to note on the journey to Longtown. I fell into converse with several farmers and made arrangements with one to take his young pigs at valuation—which I judged a good affair to me, his valuator being largely indebted to me in the line of bone manures and feeding stuffs.

But beyond that nothing, and even that affair was quite in the course of business, though it has not yet matured.

For, perhaps owing to the unsettled state of the country, the pigs have been anxious-minded and run to legs, utterly refusing to put on flesh, which, as I understand it, is the first duty of pig. I came somewhere across a book by Thomas Carlyle in which he stated this somewhat strongly. I was much struck by the strength and precision of the argumentation, and wished that at all times he had thought fit to write with similar clearness. There is no doubt that the man had the ability. I have read worse newspaper articles.

I found my man without great difficulty, and duly "riested" or arrested the moneys due to me, in the hands of Mr. Lightbody the auctioneer, taking the said Mr. Lightbody's cheque on a Thorsby bank—both as more portable, and also to give that sound and well-considered man time to settle with the buyers of the Cairney cattle—lots A, B, and C, on which I had first charge.

Now, I am not a man ever to halt at markets, or to drink in public places—more, that is, than to clinch a bargain, as an honest man ought, neither with stinting nor with offensive liberality. I even made it up with Cairney, though at first, of course, he was neither to hold nor to bind. He threatened to bring me up "before the fifteen" for damage to his credit. But I pointed out that nothing hurts a man's credit so much as the habit of not paying his debts. Whereupon he calmed a little, and said he, "I'll wager that it was old Hobby who put you on to this!" To which, naturally, I made no reply, letting him think just what he would.

At three o'clock I had Dapple saddled. For it being the winter season, I judged that late enough to be travelling over so wild a country. But having done

harm to no one, and carrying no sums of money, I saw no reason for fear.

At the half-way little hedge inn, for once in my life I lighted down and called for a bowl of soup, but could only get coffee, and that without milk—which proves the improvidence of these people. For Crewe Moss would easily have pastured a hundred cows, though it would most likely happen that an odd one might get laired in the soft places now and then. But not to have so much as a drop of milk and on Crewe Moss! Lamentable! So I told the people what I thought of them, mounted Dapple, and came my ways.

I had gone, perhaps, three miles, and was skirting the woods adjoining the property of Mr. Stennis, when, as I passed under some high trees a noose dropped about my neck. The mare passed on, and I was left dangling as neatly as if the hangman had done it. Happily for me the cord had descended lower than my neck on one side, and I was caught under the left armpit. But there I swung and turned all the same, shouting manfully for help. I could observe as I wheeled about, for all the world like a scarecrow in a bean field, some one in the act of catching Dapple and tying her to a tree.

Then the man—a long-limbed, ugly-mugged fellow, with corkscrew curls exactly like the old maids when I was young—came back, and, letting me down, wrapped me carefully in a coil of rope till I could move neither hand nor foot. I know him now to be Mad Jeremy, for long chief agent in the doubtful affairs of Mr. Hobby Stennis.

Now I am a fair weight, for my inches, though not to call a heavy man. But this gipsy-looking fellow took me on his back as easily as if I had been a bag of shavings for kindling. If he had taken to honest courses, that same Jeremy Orrin—for so I am informed he is called—I would gladly have given him a thirty-shilling-a-week job in the warehouse. Nothing would have come unhandily to him.

Well, he carried me by various passages, the rough stone and lime of which scratched my face, knees, and knocking elbows, to a commodious rounded chamber. It was floored, walled, and roofed with wood. But I could make out, by sounding, the stone arching, and behind that again the solid earth. It was, as I now know, the cellar or ice house of the monks which they had built for themselves on the verge of the Moat to cool their wine in torrid summers.

Hither the woman, Aphra Orrin, accompanied her brother, my captor. They searched me thoroughly, as though I were a postman with registered letters and other valuables, but, as was my habit, they found upon my person no store of valuables—fairs and trysts being no fit places to make parade of one's gear.

Among some almanacs, jottings of bargains, and other things, these two came on the cheque for three hundred pounds on the bank of Thorsby, at which Mr. Lightbody, the auctioneer, did his business—as they said, for the purpose of giving him a day extra—which, indeed, an honest man might very well do, paying out on many occasions before he had received the price from the buyer.

At the sight of that they were much bewildered, and did not, as I judge, know what to do. Finally, after having taken away the cheque and considered upon it, or perhaps taken the advice of a third person, they brought it back to me, and offered me my life in exchange for my signature upon the back of that piece of paper.

But to this I would not agree. I regarded the position all round, and saw clearly that as soon as I had signed, it would be as good as signing my death warrant. So I judged it best to put them off with half promises, and partial encouragements. As, "that I could not bring myself to rob my family of so great a sum," or "that the bank would expect me to present the cheque in person." Both of which were mere vanities—for, of course, the cheque was made out to me personally and would be paid over my signature, which was as well known to the cashiers of the Thorsby bank as that of the manager himself.

So, being countered in this, the man with the curls was for putting his knife into me instanter, but the tall woman took him apart, and I could hear her pounding the table with her fist, persuading him. With three hundred pounds, so she argued, they could all get out of the country, supposing that Mr. Stennis's money was not available. I was, I learned from her words, their anchor to windward. They had expected I should bring back the money in gold or notes. Therefore, as I had not done so, I should be kept in the ice house and coaxed till I signed the cheque. Then they could close all the doors—no need of stronger measures—and leave me tied on the floor of the ice house. Who, at least for long, would be any the wiser?

I had time for many things, there, in that chilly abode. They chained my ankles to rings let into the wall, the bolts of which appeared through the lining of

planks. I was given a mattress to lie upon, and occasionally Mad Jeremy threw me a loaf of bread, as one does to a dog.

Most of all, I was afraid that my faculties should rust, or even that I should go mad, so by steady application I learned the multiplication table up to twenty-four-times, making each as familiar to me as ten times ten. This would prove of great use to me afterwards in my business, and those who do have transactions with me wonder at my quickness while I laugh at their simplicity.

Then I took up one by one all the concerns of every man I knew, and set myself problems as against myself. As thus: Yarrow, of Breckonside, will be coming to me shortly for two hundred loads of fodder for the company's horses. He has the contract down at Clifton—the tramway company—and get the fodder he must. And how shall I mix the stuff so that it will be passed when it comes to be taken off his hands?

I thought all this out, putting myself in the other's place, and no one can imagine—who has not tried it—how excellent a lesson in affairs it proved. After that drill in the old ice house, where at times I was well-nigh frozen, I seemed to see inside every man's skull with whom I was making a bargain. It was not only a great advantage, but in a sort of way it was poetry also. I don't expect Joseph to understand this any more than I understand his maunderings about love and girls. Not but what I am fond of my wife. She brought me a good round sum, as every woman ought, which I have used with care and caused to breed handsomely. But if I were to tell Mary that I loved her, I think she would go at once and order my tombstone. At least, she would call in a doctor!

Still, with all my invention, the time hung heavy. Each day the Orrin woman came bringing Lightbody's cheque, with new arguments why I should sign it. I put her off, though sometimes not without difficulty. I think she must have been partly cracked, in spite of her apparently business-like habits, for it puzzled me how they would have got the money, even over my signature, taking into consideration my sudden disappearance and the to-do there would be about it. But I took care to say nothing about that. Mr. Lightbody's cheque and the hope that they had of my signing it, and so enabling them to get the money, was my best safeguard.

But one day Miss Orrin, apparently after long cogitation, made another proposal. If I would write to my bankers telling them that I had gone abroad on

an affair of great moment, and asking them to pay to the bearer a thousand pounds on my behalf, Miss Orrin would pledge her word to leave me with ten days' provisions in the vault, and at the end of that time to send to the authorities a message stating where I was to be found.

This, she said, was their ultimatum. The alternative unexpressed, but evident, was Master Jeremy's knife. However, I did not agree. The business had too speculative an air, and there was a decided lack of guarantee. For there was nothing to prevent those kind friends from cutting my throat after they had pocketed the cash, supposing that my banker was fool enough to pay it without going to the police. I suppose, however, that Jeremy would have stayed here by me, and if the police had been called in, or his sister had not returned, there would have been no more of me.

I told them plainly, and as a business man, that they would only be running their heads into a trap if I wrote any such order, but that the cheque was negotiable anywhere. It could pass through any number of hands even from the Continent. This little bit of information, I believe, preserved my life. For the very next day I caught one of the jackdaws that came to seek shelter about my dungeon, entering through a crack high in the arched roof. I wrote the message —already reproduced—on paper stuffed in a rook's quill which I picked up off the floor, and fastening the long feather to the jackdaw's tail with whitey-brown thread unwound from a button, I let the bird flutter away.

Now I come to a circumstance that I have something of delicacy about. Bairns' plays are not suitable for men of ripe years, you say. I agree, but when sometimes one has children, and especially an only son upon whom the care and guidance of a large business will some day devolve, there are certain kinds of plays that cannot be hastily condemned even by the wisest.

It was the year when the fever, now called typhoid, but then simply the "Fivvor," made ravages in Breckonside. No one knew what brought it, and none knew why it went away. But during its stay, both myself and my son Joseph were attacked by it among the first. My wife, Mrs. Yarrow, had her hands full with the two of us. Neither was very ill, but the time of convalescence was long; and had it been any other doctor than Dr. Hector who attended me, I would have been out a dozen times a day.

But—and I like him for it, for I have the faculty myself—Dr. Hector has a

way with him that makes people think twice before disobeying him. Joe was in his room, I in mine, and there was between us a thick partition, such as are to be found in old houses, of double oak, with an air space between.

Now my brain being by nature busy, and to amuse the boy most of all, I concocted a simple code of sound signals which Joe and I called our "Morse." We would often amuse ourselves the day by the length, by rapping our messages the one to the other. It went like this. I made a little tablet for Joe, and kept one by me till we had both learned the inscription by ear, as it were.

	1	2	3	4	5
1	A	B	C	D	E
2	F	G	H	I	K
3	L	M	N	O	P
4	Q	R	S	T	U
5	V	W	X	Y	Z

It consisted of the alphabet arranged in five lines, and numbered above, and at the side. Then the intersection of the number of knocks, two series with a pause between, beginning with the horizontal top figures gave the letter. It was simplicity itself when once learned.

Joe picked it up quickly, and we rapped out messages to each other as soon as we were awake. For instance, three knocks, then after a pause two more, gave the letter H.

This was the first of our morning's greetings, "Heeps better." Joe did not spell well at that time, but for the correction of his orthography it needed the schoolmaster's cane, and not a newly invented Morse sound code. So I let him spell as he liked. It lightened our days very much. And I will admit, ever after that, Joseph and I understood each other better.

Now it will hardly be believed, but I am willing to let my commercial honour stand for the truth of what I am about to say, which with those who have done business with me will be sufficient. One morning I awoke early, before the slate-blue crack, with a star wandering across it, which was the jackdaw's front door,

had changed to the grey of a winter's morning. I lay on my comfortless straw couch, wondering why it was that my prison was not colder. It could not be that it was so far underground as to be warm like the bottom of a mine, by its own distance from the earth's surface. There were the exits and the entrances of the jackdaws to witness against that.

Still, though cold enough at times, the fact remained that the temperature of my prison never descended to the freezing point. Indeed, it had probably been chosen as a winter home by the birds on that account. Once or twice I had seen a flake of snow fluttering down, but these melted before they could be discerned on the oaken floor of the curious circular cellar in which I lay.

I was, as I say, pondering over these things, about home, too, and what Joseph would be doing. I almost blush to write, but I began automatically knocking out a sentence in our old "Morse" code which had amused us during the fever year.

"Is any one there?" I spelled the words out.

And I actually sat upright with wonder when I heard come through the thick oak of the partition, first five distinct knocks, then, after a pause, one.

"I heard first five distinct knocks then after a pause--one."
"I heard first five distinct knocks then after a pause—one."

It was the letter E! But, then, only Joe and I knew of it! My heart sank. I thought in swift, lightning flashes. Had my son been captured also? But the person at the other side of the wall went on spelling, one knock, pause, three knocks.

It was the letter L!

And so with the quiet regularity of an expert, the sentence came back to me.

"Elsie here—Who are you?"

I felt much inclined, of course, to ask who Elsie might be, but I made my answer—fearing a trap—by the mere spelling out of my name and address, "Joseph Yarrow, Breckonside."

Then there was tapped out hurried, imperfectly, in a manner denoting undue and even foolish emotion—"Dearest Joe. I thank you for trying to help me. Your Elsie."

There was evidently some mistake. No one had a right to answer me thus—least of all an Elsie—my wife's name being Mary, and she as little likely to address me as "Dearest Joe," as to call me the Grand Mogul! In fact, it was nothing less than a prodigious liberty—whoever Elsie might be.

But a thought flashed across my mind. The young dog! At it already! If I had my hand on his collar, I would teach him to be anybody's "Dearest Joe!" "Dearest Joe" indeed! I would "Dearest Joe" him!

But after all the situation had made me smile, and I knew that there was but one Elsie in Breckonside—Elsie Stennis—and as good a girl as ever stepped! Too good for Joe, if only she had her rights—what with the old rascal's property, not that I minded much about that—and a temper which would make Master Joe toe the line. He had need of that—I never!

Now I do not say that I thought all that then. I desire to be exact in the smallest details. I merely smiled, perhaps a little grimly, and rapped out the correction—"Joseph Yarrow, Senior."

I knew that would surprise her. For I must have had the reputation of being in my grave for many days before the wretched crew at Deep Moat Grange got hold of her.

Then very falteringly was rapped out the further question: "Are you really Joe's father?"

I replied that I had been given to believe so, but that Joe's apparent conduct might well give rise to doubts.

The answer came back at once:

"You don't mean that, Mr. Yarrow!"

Which, I will own, fairly conquered me—almost made me laugh, and though an old man, I felt quite warm about the heart. Now, when I came to think of it, I had always liked to see Elsie Stennis tripping about the village streets. One

picture I was foolish enough to remember—a dingy November day after it had been raining, and Elsie going to school to her teaching. She was crossing the little dirty place in front of Ebie McClintock's forge, and she stooped to pick up her skirts, giving them a little shake, and then hopped across with her nose in the air—pert and pretty as a robin redbreast.

No fool like an old fool. I am speaking to you—Mr. Joseph Yarrow, Senior.

CHAPTER XXVI

COMRADES IN CAPTIVITY

After that we had much intercourse. There was, indeed, little else to do, though now I know that the periods when I could get no answer were those in which the three sisters still in hiding were in the habit of visiting Elsie in company generally with Mad Jeremy. Little by little, however, Miss Stennis—well, after being addressed as "Dearest Joe" I suppose I may as well say "Elsie"—told me all about her position—the manner of her capture, and the liberty, comparative though it was, which she enjoyed. I made up my mind at once that if I were to escape at all, it must be through her chamber.

It was about this time that the truth as to the manner in which I was attached to the wall flashed upon me. I could see it all now, and wondered how I had not understood it before. I have already explained that the rings to which my ankles were attached ended in round rods or bolts that passed through the wall. But the bolts turned easily with every movement of my body, instead of being (as one would have expected) firmed into the thickness of the wall. Now it was all clear as an invoice. The bolts passed right through into the chamber occupied by Elsie, and were there attached either to other similar rings or held in place by a crossbar of some sort.

I used the code—my foolish thought for Joe, now so useful—to ask the girl if she could see anything at the place upon which I knocked with my feet. She replied that it was impossible, because in that place there was a deep cupboard of which she had not got the key. Now, I know the locks of cupboard doors. I sell

them. And the fact is that most of them are worthless as fastenings, except perhaps a few like the one in Miss Elsie's room, which had been planned by the monks some hundred years ago.

But even so, the lock would almost certainly have had to be renewed—probably quite recently—in view of the use to which the underground passages and cellars were to be put. I therefore "knocked" a message through to Elsie to secrete a stout knife. She had it already. I might have expected as much of her. Then I told her how to slide the blade of the knife with its back downward into the crack of the door. The supple bend of the knife blade, taking the shape of the bolt, would in all probability after a little trial cause it to slide back easily.

After a little Elsie succeeded. The bolt, as I expected, was a biased one, not square on the face, and hardly caught into the bolt hole at all. It had come from my own shop, and I knew its capabilities. They make them by the hundred gross, all as like as peas, and just sufficiently strong to keep out the cat. But mostly, if people think a place is locked, it *is* locked—especially women.

I could hardly wait the reply, after Elsie had been into the deep cupboard. It was all I could hope for. The bolts came through into the cupboard about three feet from the floor, which showed that my chamber was higher than hers; they were caught by iron linch-pins in the same way that an axle of a red farm cart is fastened on to the outside of the hub.

"Could Elsie knock them out, did she think?"

Elsie thought she could, but she would need something heavy—like a bar of iron. She had it—the handle of the broken rake that had been used in the oven furnace. So the first thing after supper and the departure of her visitors, Elsie knocked out the pins. I drew out the bolts on my side, and was free to move about—with, it is true, the rings and bolts jangling about my ankles. Still, in part I was free, and my heart rose within me.

First of all I managed with the cord of my hat to tie up the bolts so that I could move noiselessly about, being careful for the time being not to go far from my couch. For of course it was necessary for me, at the first alarm, to undo the cords and thrust the bolts through the holes, so that no change might be apparent to my jailers. Still, the thing comforted me. For not only was I able to take some exercise, but to attend to the proper ordering of my chamber, which had hitherto

been carried out in the most perfunctory manner by Jeremy, and also at very uncertain intervals.

But what chiefly occupied my mind was the thought that, according to Elsie the oven was of easy access from her room, and doubtless would have been visited frequently by whoever had the charge of the baking.

I could therefore, with Elsie's iron bar, if no better turned up, make a good fight for both our liberties. The situation was getting altogether too ridiculous for a man of business habits, shut up within a few miles of his own horses, lorries, his grocery, ironmongery, and other supplying and contracting establishments.

How I was ever to face Bob Kingsman I did not know. I wondered if all this time he were taking his orders from "Dearest Joe." Joe indeed! I lacked confidence in my son as a man of business—as it turned out, without reason. He might even have brought me to the verge of bankruptcy. There were, I was informed, two young ladies from London dwelling in my house, of whom—especially one of them—Elsie reported to me by code a very poor account. They seemed completely to have gotten the mastery over my poor wife, who was, as it appeared, prostrated with grief—a thing I should not have anticipated. On every account it seemed about time that I should come to life again.

The question was merely one of detail. How?

Of course, I did not hide from myself that as the days went by, marked, for me, only by the lighting and darkening of my jackdaw's entrance above, many things would certainly be happening outside. For one thing, I was a prominent ratepayer, and the cleaning and lighting taxes, as well as the school and road rates for the parishes of Breckonside and Over Breckonton, would be coming due. If for nothing else, they would be sure to hunt me up to pay them. For, as I had appealed against them all—on principle—Joe would not be able to settle them without me. He would have done it if he could, having no "fight" in him—that boy taking after his mother—but my lawyer would see him further first, being a minor. I could trust Mr. C. P. Richards—he would not pay a farthing till he had an order under my hand or a proof of my decease. Yes. They would seek for me. No doubt of that.

And Elsie? Of course she was not a ratepayer; but—well, if, as was likely, they had seen her shake out her skirts to trip across a muddy road they would be

just as great fools as myself.

And they were greater—every man of them. I know Breckonside.

Well, now, to join on our doings in the cellar (as it were) to those up aloft in the front hall, it was about this time that our meals began to wax irregular. The Breckonside mob, ill led, and incapable of knowing exactly what it wanted, had come and gone, defeated by the cunning of Miss Aphra—very clever woman, Miss Aphra—and the cheerful, innocent brutality of Dr. Hector.

There was still talk about us, no doubt, but desultory—some semblance of action, too. In fine, little real work was being done, when our provisions began to get scarce down below in the old stone storehouses of the monks.

Indeed, so far as I was concerned, I should have starved if Elsie Stennis, who was still occasionally remembered, had not pushed through the bolt holes long strips of the home-made loaves with which Mad Jeremy supplied her. As for water, she had a spoon tied to the end of the iron rod; and I took it as a babe does pap. It was, I am free to say, most kindly done. For at no time had she too much for herself, and though I do not make too much of a thing like that, neither, on the other hand, do I forget it. After a long, sleepless night of thought, I resolved that the very next evening I should borrow the iron rod from Elsie, which had formerly been used as a rake shaft of the bakery furnace.

Elsie passed it to me through the communicating hole. But there was a hooked handle at the end which prevented it coming all the way till Elsie in her dark cupboard had made a hole sufficiently large to push it through; while I, with Elsie's knife, cut out a piece of the wooden lining of my cell so that it could again be fitted in to avoid suspicion. Then I had a thoroughly strong bar of iron in my possession, with which, considerably elated, I began to make a way through into Elsie's room. But it was slow work. The knife had first to be serrated on the back to form a kind of rough saw. I did this with a sort of projecting tooth or claw of the rake handle, where it had been broken off. And I own that the work was not without a certain charm of its own. In my youth I remember—to my shame—to have carried the life of a certain Count of Monte Cristo—whose name I have not met with elsewhere, but with whom I should much have liked to have had business relations—under my waistcoat to school. He appears to have been, like us, a prisoner. And his account of how he pierced thick walls was not wholly without interest. I wished I had kept the notes I made

in my pocket-book reporting his manner of procedure. It was from him, for instance, that I got the idea of the rook's feather, while the jackdaws, chunnering to themselves up above and occasionally descending to peck, did the rest.

Ultimately I was enabled to cut through the wooden lining of my cell, only to find the wall behind of solid masonry, but with the lime hopefully crumbly round the little holes by which the bars passed into Elsie's cupboard.

All this took some time, and I required the help of Miss Stennis at every step. I fear some nights the young lady did not get much sleep, for every particle of debris—stone, lime, sawdust—had to be conveyed through the narrow holes made for the leg bolts, then taken up in the palms of her hands and conveyed to the little trapdoor behind her bed beneath which was the flowing water. It was not much of an operation on my side—rough work, ill done—and had any man in my employ tried to pass off such workmanship on me, I should have showed him round the yard with the point of my boot—ay, and out at the front gate, too!

Still, it was done, which was the main thing. And after I had bethought me to widen the two bolt holes by making them one—all, that is, except the pieces of wood which hid the tunnel on either side—the work went on much faster. You see, I was always in fear of Mad Jeremy or somebody coming to search. But, as a matter of fact, nobody looked near me, and on Elsie's side she was protected by the dark cupboard. Still, it was better to leave nothing to chance, and to treat Mad Jeremy, with his wild eyes and insane freaks, as if he had been the most suspicious of jailers.

But any one who gives the matter a thought will see in what a humiliating position I was placed, utterly forgotten, as it seemed, even by those who had taken possession of my cheque in order to compel me to sign it. Was it possible, I asked myself, that they had found some one to forge my signature, negotiated it at a distance, and fled with the proceeds? Of Mad Jeremy I still had news. For at intervals he supplied Miss Stennis with food, sometimes days old, for it was but seldom that he baked now; and though the weather was milder without, both Elsie's cell and mine became much less comfortable, though not, so far as I could observe, damp.

It was evidently a period of great excitement with the lunatic who had constituted himself our caretaker. Putting my ear to the excavation, I could hear him whistling and singing while he was in the chamber behind the oven talking

to Elsie. Once I heard him. playing upon some instrument, which sounded like the bagpipes, but was in reality his precious fiddle. And I will say that I lay and gripped my nails into my hands in impotent anger to think that there was, according to my most accurate measurements, at least a foot of stone and lime, laid with burned shell and sand as only the old monks knew how, all to pick out piecemeal with the point of my weapon before I could be of the slightest use to the young lady in the case of an attack.

Once it was evident that Jeremy had been listening at the door. He opened upon me suddenly and demanded what was that knocking he had heard? I answered that I was trying to attract attention to the fact that I had been several days without either food or water. He looked at me suspiciously, and said—

"It sounded more like somebody beating a tune!"

I turned over immediately, and, with my knuckles as far away as possible from the boards I had been so long patiently sawing out, I tattooed the measure of "The Wind that Shakes the Barley," the identical tune the madman had been playing in Elsie's chamber.

"Oh!" he cried, "can you fiddle?"

"No," said I, "but I have a good ear, and I used to be able to foot it in my day!"

"So," he said, "then you shall have a bite and a sup for that. I had thought you were only an old penny-worth-o'-snuff money-grabber!"

And along with the provisions he fetched in his fiddle, and played me nearly out of my reason, for two mortal hours. Like nothing human it was, and I, all the time with my toes pressed to my ill-fitting sawed panel, fearful, that it would fall outward and reveal the work on which I had been engaged. I declare I would rather have supped with Elsie out of the spoon tied to the oven rake.

CHAPTER XXVII

HARRIET CAW ON CLERICAL CELIBACY

(*Narrative continued by Joe Yarrow, Junior*)

I have put my father's writing, just as it came from his hand, into this place. It will give a better idea of the uncertain condition of those two, sequestrated underground, than any mere description. I will now go on to tell how things were going at Breckonside.

Our house in the village had a name. It was called "The Mount," but for the most part of people it was "Yarrow's." Just "Yarrow's." The house had, of course, a different entrance from the shop, and the retail shop again was quite distinct from the wholesale business. For most of the small dealers in the villages between Breckonside and Longtown, besides many even toward the bigger towns of East Dene and Thorsby, were dependent on my father for their supplies. You see, he had his finger upon the state of everybody's purse, and could give longer credit, and in a more human way, than the great firms who depended upon their yearly turnover, and must have their money every three months.

Still, on the whole, I know no man who was more generally respected than my father. He was essentially a business man, but he mixed much kindness therewith. To find him had been my continual desire. Along with Peter Kemp and Davie Elshiner, both apt at the search of the woods, I had explored every ruin within a distance of five miles of Breckonside. We discovered nothing. No second jackdaw, trailing an extra tail feather, came within reach of Peter's gun. Indeed, my father was otherwise employed than in bird catching. Events were hastening fast along in that underground tunnel which had been discovered and utilized by Mad Jeremy Orrin and his master, Hobby Stennis.

About this time Mr. Ablethorpe came pretty often to see us. He liked, I think, to explain his views to Constantia Caw, who languished up at him with eyes each the size of a pigeon's egg. He even fetched Mr. De la Poer to help in the task of proving to the two girls that there was only one apostolic succession, and that they—Mr. Ralph Ablethorpe and Cecil De la Poer—had it.

Mr. De la Poer was a tall, slim, lantern-jawed young man, with a dense mass of straight black hair, which gave him the look of a popular actor of the new Shakespearean Society, university extension sort. But for all that he had strong views, Mr. Cecil De la Poer, in matters connected with his profession. Not an

ounce of hypocrisy about him any more than the Hayfork. For instance, he confided to Miss Harriet Caw, who up to that moment had listened to him with considerable sympathy, real or assumed, that he was firmly resolved never to marry.

Whereupon the young woman got up in the most sprightly, stage milkmaidish manner, caught her gown on both sides, swept him the approved courtesy and sang—

> "'Nobody axed you, sir,' she said, 'sir,' she said,
> 'sir,' she said;
> 'Nobody axed you, sir,' she said."

Then she went to her sister, and pretending to weep, took Constantia by the hand, saying, "Come away, Stancy—it is all over. They won't marry us—they have taken a vow not to!"

"I wish," said Constantia, looking severely at her sister, "that you would not be so ridiculous. I was quite interested in what Mr. Ablethorpe was telling me about—about the council of—council of—whatever—it—was!"

Harriet had got hold of a handkerchief by this time, and was sobbing most desolately into it. She had deftly taken it out of Mr. De la Peer's tail pocket, where a bit of it generally showed.

"He says it is against the true faith," she said, pointing out the culprit, who stood in an entirely correct attitude, though entirely conscious that he was looking a fool. His hair fell about his brow in dense masses, and he looked tragic.

"And I never asked him," continued Harriet; "I would scorn such an action. I dare you to say that I did!"

The unhappy Mr. De la Poer was mute, as indeed he might well be, before such treatment of his person and theories.

"And, O Constantia, it's all because we are two simple little London girls," she said, "that they have been playing with our young affections!"

Harriet heaved a sigh, and then swiftly turned on the culprit.

"And how about Peter's wife's mother, lying sick of a fever?" she cried triumphantly. "I suppose that you don't set up to be any better than him? And if he had a wife's mother, surely he had a wife, too? Come on, Stancy, you see he has not a word to say. I have a mother, too, and if she were here, she would not permit her daughter to be thus insulted. She would have his eyes out with her knitting needles—the crochet ones with the hooks on the top!"

"I shall not do any such thing, Harriet," said her sister calmly. "I think you are very absurd. Please don't mind her, Mr. De la Poer. Sit down, and help Mr. Ablethorpe to explain about the Council of Trent, while Harriet gets Grace Rigley waked up to the idea that she is to bring in tea for four."

But Mr. De la Poer had had enough. He had never been so treated in his life before, and somehow, even Mr. Ablethorpe's exposition of the Council of Trent was not quite the same thing with Mr. De la Poer sitting sulking there with his palms pressed between his knees and his eyes noting the pattern on the carpet.

So the two young men went out, and it was not till he was on his bicycle, and mounting the hill toward Over Breckonton, that Mr. De la Poer began to find excuses for that inexcusable girl. After all, brought up as she had been in a Presbyterian household, without any training, even in the catechism, what could one expect, he thought.

Well, as he entered his lonely lodgings, to find the fire out and the smell of the hastily trimmed paraffin lamp turned low on the table, I suppose he thought that it might have done no harm if, after all, he had waited for tea in the comfortable house at "Yarrow's." And as he was pouring the water into a cup of cocoa—which, when tasted, turned out to be lukewarm and tasting of coal oil—maybe Mr. De la Poer began to think that a bright young person in a house to see to things in general would be a decided acquisition—as a sister.

Since, however, owing to the prejudices of society, it would be difficult to propose this arrangement to Miss Harriet Caw and her parents, Mr. De la Poer finished his butterless bread (he was severe with himself in matters of fasting), and arranged a paper shade cut from a church newspaper, so that it fell at the right angle. He then set himself dolefully enough to compose a Sunday's sermon, which, as may be supposed, did not enliven the scanty company of Over

Breckontoners who listened to it on Sunday.

After he was gone, Mr. Ablethorpe came round to the office to see me. Our office was at the right of the shop, as it were, connecting the wholesale and the retail departments, having a window looking into each. My father was great on keeping his whole establishment under his own eye.

Now, I had charge of the shop books during the temporary absence of Mr. Brown, who did not, indeed, concern himself much with anything so petty as the retail department. But I felt very grand indeed. You see, I had never given up hope of seeing my father walk in with his sharp, decided tread, and ask to see the ledger. Then he would find everything posted, and that would be my triumph.

"I have come to see you, Joseph," said Mr. Ablethorpe; "I have something to say to you which I have been pondering over for a long time."

I began to wonder if he had changed his mind about marrying, and was actually going to ask me for Constantia's hand. This made me feel more "Head of the House" than ever.

But it was something quite different, and Mr. Ablethorpe brought me down to earth again with a whop, as if I had fallen from the store rafters.

"I have been able to arrange about the three poor creatures, Honorine, Camilla, and Sidonia Orrin. They will be in safety with the Good Sisters of the Weak-minded at Thorsby. There is, therefore, no longer any object in withholding from you my confidence. I am morally certain that carrier Harry Foster has been foully murdered, and his body concealed. Further, my dear, dear boy, I fear that I cannot now give you much hope of a different fate for your father——"

"There I differ from you," said I stoutly.

"I am glad to hear it," he said quietly; "but I should like to know the reason of your confidence."

"Because of the message; because my father is so strong and brave; and because—because I am certain he is not dead! And then Elsie!"

He lifted his hand as if to pray me not to go into that question. At this I fired

up.

"I have heard many things," he began; "a man in my position does!"

"Never anything against Elsie!" I was heated, and shouted.

"Certainly not! Though of another communion she has always——"

"Well, then, say no more"—I stamped my foot—"she has suffered the same fate as my father. That accursed house has something to do with it. As yet I do not know what. But something! She has not gone away from Breckonside without letting her friends know. I will not listen to that from you or any other man, Mr. Ablethorpe!"

"You will not have to listen to it," said he gently, clapping me meanwhile on the far shoulder. "You are a good fellow, Joe, and I am proud to count myself among your friends. You have a sort of sneaking liking for the Old Hayfork, haven't you, Joe?"

That was the way he spoke. A fellow one couldn't be waxy with long. I told him Yes. And I think he knew how much I liked him by what it cost me to get it out.

"Yes, Joe, we do very well," he went on, "and I dare say you have not forgotten the time I sent you up the drain pipe, and the little rings you found?"

The matter had never wholly slipped my memory, though, of course, the losing of my father and Elsie one after the other—mystery piled on mystery, as it were—had made me think less often about it.

I told him so.

"Well," said he, "I know more about it now, though—as you say—not yet all. It is necessary to wait a little before I have all the strings in my hands. This, however, I will tell you. The little rings you found were those of the mail bags which were stolen out of Harry Foster's cart! They had been half fused in a furnace and afterwards hidden in the place where you found them."

"But—but——" I faltered. "Do you think that—that Harry Foster was there too—up there where I went—in the tunnel which led from the Backwater?"

He shook his head.

"No," he said, "the rings had passed through some sort of a furnace. So almost certainly would poor Harry."

He paused for a moment, but I knew full well what he was thinking—it was about my father.

"But why not hand the whole over to the police, if you know all that about the people at Deep Moat Grange?"

He laid his hand on mine and patted it.

"I learned long ago not to confound the innocent with the guilty," he said. "Besides, it is only now that even I begin to see little more clearly. And the police did little enough when they were here. I suppose you would have me deliver the rings to old Codling, and see him crawl up the tunnel as you did?"

I saw that it was no use to contradict Mr. Ablethorpe for the present. He had still the detective fever upon him, and his manoeuvring had been for the purpose of getting the poor "naturals" out of harm's way, when he should be ready to denounce the guilty.

"By the way," he said, "do you know that for the moment I am at a standstill? Old Hobby Stennis has gone off on one of his journeys. And till he comes back I can do nothing. Your friend of the snaky curls is in sole possession of the Grange. Miss Orrin has disappeared. It must be a sweet spot! Hello, what's that?"

And through the window of the retail shop, now bright with the extra lighting of Saturday night, we saw Mad Jeremy. He was bending over several melodeons which Tom Hunt, our first shopman, had handed down to him, picking up one with a knowing air, trying the keys and stops, his ringlets falling about his ears, a cunning smile on his lips, and his little, quick, suspicious eyes darting this way and that to see whether or not he was observed.

At last his choice fell on a most gorgeous instrument, one that had just come in. He asked the price, chaffed a a while for the form, and then, drawing out a fat, well-filled pocket-book, slapped down in payment a Clydesdale bank-note for a hundred pounds!

CHAPTER XXVIII

SATURDAY, THE TENTH OF FEBRUARY

This was on the evening of Saturday, the tenth of February, a day never to be forgotten by me and by many more. I will try to place here in order the events which happened both at Deep Moat Grange and at Breckonside during the succeeding forty-eight hours. Of course, there is some part that can only be guessed at, and part is known solely by the maunderings of a criminal maniac. But still, I think, I have now got the whole pretty straight—as straight as it will ever be known on this side time. At any rate, it is my account or none. For no one else can know what I know.

As Mr. Ablethorpe had informed me, he was at a standstill in his researches. And the reason was that Mr. Hobby Stennis, the "Golden Farmer," as he was called, had departed on one of his frequent journeys.

So much was true. The master of Deep Moat Grange had indeed been absent for three days. But he had returned that same Saturday morning about ten o'clock. He had been disgusted to find the house empty. Probably, also, he was in a very bad temper owing to the failure of some combination or other he had counted upon. He found nothing prepared for his reception. Miss Orrin and her sisters were gone, and Mad Jeremy in one of his maddest and most freakish humours.

Now, of all times for arriving from a journey the noon is the worst. In the evening one dines. Later, one may have supper. Later still, one sleeps. In the morning everybody is astonished, and says: "How brisk and early you are to-day!" This pleases you, and you step about the place and come in sharp-set for breakfast. But in the forenoon it is a long time till lunch or dinner. Every one is busy. The clothes in which you have attempted to sleep feel as if filled with fine sand. You want to kick somebody, and if there is nobody whom you can reasonably kick, you feel worse.

Well, this is how Hobby felt. He wanted breakfast, and Mad Jeremy informed

him that there was no bread. If he wanted any he could act as baker and bake a batch for himself.

"Go and get me something to eat, you rascal!" cried Mr. Stennis threateningly. And as he raised his riding-whip, Jeremy cowered. But it was with his body only. His eyes kept on those of his master, and they were those of a beast that has not been conquered—or, if vanquished, not subdued.

With impish spitefulness he set about gathering together all the orts and scraps of his own various disorganized meals, and brought them in, piled on a plate, to his master. Hobby Stennis was in no mood for amusement. He had his riding-whip still in his hand. He raised it, and, as one would strike a hound, he lashed Jeremy across the face. The madman did not flinch—he only stood, with a certain semblance of meekness, shutting his eyes as the blows descended, as a dog might. Once, twice, thrice, the whip cut across cheek and brow and jaw. Jeremy put up his fingers to feel the weals which rose red and angry. But he said nothing. Only his eyes followed his master as he went out.

"He raised his riding whip, and, as one would strike a hound he lashed Jeremy across the face."

"He raised his riding whip, and, as one would strike a hound he lashed Jeremy across the face."

Mr. Stennis, still furiously angry, threw plate and contents out of the window. They fell in the muddy, ill-cared-for yard. The plate shivered, and Jeremy, after whimpering a little like a punished child, went outside also, got on his knees, and patiently gathered them together again, swinging his head with the pitiable and impotent vengeance of a child. Only Mad Jeremy was very far indeed from being a child.

Muttering to himself, Mr. Stennis strode away across the drawbridge, which still bore the footmarks of the mob which, in the time of his illness, had crossed and recrossed it. Part of the balustrade had been kicked away, and hung by a tough twisted oak splinter, yawning over the Moat to the swirl of the wet February wind.

He walked forward, never hesitating a moment, his switch still in his hand, cutting at the brownish last year's brackens which, having doubled over halfway up the stem, now trailed their broad leaves in the bleak, black February sop.

Straight for Mr. Ball's the master of the Grange took his way. He followed the narrow path which, skirting the Backwater, crosses a field, and then drops over the high March dike into the road quite close to the cottage of Mr. Bailiff Ball. It was almost dinner-time, and with a word Mr. Stennis explained the situation. Mrs. Ball swept all the too genial horde of children into the kitchen, and set herself to serve a meal to the owner of the Grange and his bailiff.

The first plateful of Scots broth, with its stieve sustenance of peas, broad beans, and carrots, together with curly greens and vegetables almost without number, put some heart into Mr. Stennis—though his anger against Jeremy for the insult offered to him in his own house did not in the least cool.

"I always like broth that a man can eat conveniently with knife and fork," said Mr. Ball, striving to be agreeable. "Let me give you another plateful, sir."

But Mr. Stennis declined. The thought of Jeremy and his plate of orts returned to his mind and he choked anew with anger.

"I will teach him!" he said aloud, frowning and pursing his mouth.

Mr. Ball was far too wise a man to ask a question. He kept his place, worked the out-farms, deserved the confidence of his master, and convinced all the world that he had nothing to do with the ill-doings of the garrison at the "Big Hoose" by carefully guarding his speech. As a matter of fact, he made it his business to know nothing except in which field to sow turnips, and the probable price he would get for the wintering sheep that ate them out of the furrows.

Never was a man better provided with deaf and blind sides than Mr. Bailiff Ball. And, being a man with a family, he had need of them at Deep Moat Grange.

So he did not inquire who it was that Mr. Hobby Stennis meant to teach, nor yet what was the nature of the proposed lesson. If knowledge is power, carefully cultivated ignorance sometimes does not lack a certain power also.

Mr. Stennis ate of the boiled mutton which followed, and of the boiled cabbage withal—of potatoes, mealy and white, such as became the bailiff of several large unlet farms, and a man whose accounts had never been called in question by so much as a farthing.

Mr. Stennis ate of pancakes with jam rolled inside, and of pancakes on which the butter fairly danced upon the saffron and russet surfaces, so hot were they from the pan. He drank pure water. He refused to smoke, which Mr. Ball did every day and all day long. Mr. Stennis was an example—a man without vices.

Then these two, master and man—though by no means "like master, like man"—strolled about the fields discussing what was to be done with this parcel of bullocks, or what line of crops would do best on the Nether Laggan Hill, or the Broomy Knowe. Mr. Bailiff Ball wished heartily that his master would be gone. But he was not in a position to tell him so. At last, after two o'clock, Mr. Stennis suddenly, and without any preliminaries, bade him "good-day" and so betook himself through the misty willow copses along the Backwater, on which the haze of spring was greening already, towards the house of Deep Moat Grange.

* * * * *

It was not the least of Elsie's troubles to keep herself "nice" in the back half

of the monks' oven, near the bakehouse. Soap she had—a whole bar of it. And with the water which she dipped up from the trap-door behind her bed, she washed her single turn-over collar again and again—as well as her handkerchiefs and other "white things"—drying them rapidly and well in front of the dividing wall of the oven.

Starch, however, was beyond her, and ironing also. Still she was clean, which to Elsie Stennis was very near indeed to being godly. Jeremy had been idle for several days, but it chanced that that very Saturday morning he had set the furnace a-going, and had begun to prepare a batch of bread. Notwithstanding, he had been strangely unsettled. He had looked in several times on Elsie, even bringing in a little washing soda for her laundry work, but had departed always without saying anything of his intentions. Never on any occasion had he mentioned her fellow-prisoner, my father. And he, on his part, had strictly forbidden Elsie to say anything of their converse one with another. Not that Elsie would have done that in any case. She had too much the instinct of playing the game.

Usually when Jeremy came in, he would bring with him a Jew's-harp, and, curling himself up in one corner of the settle, he would extract tunes from that limited instrument with a strange weird combination of voice and twang of the metallic tongue.

Or with a mandolin, of which he had somehow become possessed, he would lean against the table, stretch his long legs, shake back his snaky curls, swinging his body to and fro, and improvise such music as never has been heard on earth before.

But ever and anon, between bursts of strange melody—for there was a certain attraction in every sound he produced—he would return to the subject of the new cargo of melodeons which had just been received at Yarrow's, down in the village. He would have one he declared, whatever old Hobby might say, the skinflint—who would not let poor Jeremy have a single goldpiece of all he had won for him by his own strong hands.

He would let him see, however, when he came back, who was master. And if he would not, then he, Jeremy Orrin, knew somebody—perhaps not so far away—who would give him not only one, but many melodeons, for one smell of the fresh air.

Elsie had the presence of mind not to appear to understand that he meant my father. It was, evidently, one of Jeremy's worst days. And Elsie wished that she had been able to get her knife back from my father, who had borrowed it the night before for a special piece of filing. The work was approaching completion, but just at the last moment he had come upon a bar of iron, buried, for what purpose he could not imagine, in the thickness of the wall. It ran diagonally, and would need to be cut in two places before there was any chance of the passage being finished between their prison chambers.

But the bar once cut, and the passage clear, my father, who, as part of his business, was learned in locks, did not anticipate from Elsie's description any serious trouble. The iron door and patent safety lock of his own prison house, recently arranged for by Mr. Stennis—he remembered the transaction—was, of course, beyond him. But if all was as he had been given to expect, the fastenings of Elsie's door—which communicated with the oven corridor—were of quite another type, and need not detain him long.

It was a little after eleven of the day, as Elsie judged by the light, when Jeremy came back after a somewhat prolonged absence. He brought her a piece of made bread—by which he meant bread bought from one of the vans that passed along the highway, but none of which came up to the Moat Grange.

"Hae," he said, smiling curiously, "there's for you! I hae nae time to be baking to-day. The maister's hame. Guid luck, an' lang life to him!"

He was speaking very curiously, laughing all the time—not offering threats and complaints as he had been doing before.

"And see!" he cried out, suddenly. "He has brought Jeremy a present wi' his ain hand—ay, wi' his ain hand he gied it him!"

And, lifting his finger, he drew it along three red weals on his brow and cheek, one after the other, ending at the corner of the jaw beneath the ear, from which a drop of blood trickled. And he laughed—all the time he laughed.

"A bonnie present," he repeated, "think ye not so, bonnie birdie? Ye never gat the like, and him your ain grandfather. Ah, but he's kind to Jeremy! And Jeremy will never forget it. Na—Jeremy followed him, like pussy cat after a plate of cream, to the March dyke, to the very door o' Bailiff Ball's house. Jeremy wadna let ony ill befall his maister this day. If a *wulf,* or a lion, or a bear had leaped

upon Hobby Stennis, Jeremy wad hae strangled them like this—*chirt*—wi' his hands, as easy as ony thing. Ay, he wad that! For the kind kind present he fetched his faithfu' servant, naebody shall lay a hand on Hobby Stennis this day—except, maybe, Jeremy himsel'—ay, maybe, juist Jeremy himsel'. Ow, ay, but a' in the way o' kindness! the same as Hobby himsel'!"

And with that he picked up his Jew's-harp and breathed a fierce anger and scorn into the familiar words that was positively shocking to listen to—

> Be it ever so humble,
> There's no place like ho-o-o-me.

And he stopped to laugh between the lines. Elsie says that it fairly turned her cold to hear him. Though at that time she had, as she remembers, no fear for herself—which, when you come to think of it, was a very curious circumstance indeed. But then her turn was yet to come.

In Jeremy's absence, Elsie tried to tell my father all about it. But the coming and going of the madman that day were so uncertain, and his moods so dangerous, that she could not get matters half explained; nor yet any advice from my father, except not to cross the maniac, save in the last extremity. He offered to pass her back the knife, but Elsie, hearing that one end of the bar was already severed, and the other well through, refused, like the little brick she was, to take it.

Now, this part which follows can only be known imperfectly, because it concerns what happened when Hobby Stennis went back to his own house of the Moat Grange. There were two other sources of information—Jeremy's wild talk afterwards to Elsie, and certain signs and marks not easy of interpretation, which, however, tend to confirm in most points the madman's version.

After Mad Jeremy had come back from watching his master carefully into the house of the bailiff, he visited Elsie, and spoke the words, little reassuring, which I have already written down.

Then going up to the great parlour, out of which opened Mr. Stennis's weaving-room, he lit a lire of wood, which burned with much cheerful blaze. In front of this he sat down, with his fiddle in his hand. He had only drawn the bow

across it, and began to tune up when his master walked in.

Possibly the noise irritated Hobby Stennis's none too steady nerves. Possibly, also, he was nettled at Jeremy's insistent request for the loan of a couple of sovereigns in order to go down and "price" the new cargo of melodeons received at Yarrow's, in the village. They had been ordered by my father before his disappearance, to satisfy a temporary local musical fever, and had only just arrived.

How exactly the thing happened is not known, but, at any rate, it is certain that Mr. Stennis refused to give Jeremy a farthing for any such purpose, and at the first sullen retort of the madman, turned fiercely upon him, wrenched from his hands the violin on which he had been fitfully playing and threw it on the fire. As the light dry wood caught and the varnish crackled, Mr. Stennis strode off, fuming, to his weaving-room to calm himself with a turn at the famous hand-loom. He sat down before it, and as the shuttle began to pass back and forth, his passion fell away in proportion as the fascination of the perfect handicraft gained on him.

But Jeremy stood gazing fixedly at the burning fiddle till the last clear flame died out, and in the great fireplace only a double couch of red ashes preserved the shape of a violin.

But, meantime, in the weaving-room the shuttle said *click-clack* in the great silence which seemed to have fallen all of a sudden upon Deep Moat Grange. In the red light, Jeremy stood erect, gazing entranced at the shape of his beloved instrument outlined on the hearth, and following one by one with his forefinger the ridged weals, from his cheek to his forehead and back again. And all about the twilight fell suddenly dim.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE CALLING OF ELSIE

Now, upon this very night of Saturday, the tenth of February, the same upon

which Mr. Ablethorpe had come to see me, Elsie had lighted her candle early. Jeremy had been generous in the matter of lighting, though more than once he had proved himself forgetful of food. As the easiest manner of providing in quantity, he had brought up from Miss Orrin's store-room a complete box of candles, which he had opened for her in a summary manner with the back of his knife and the toe of his boot.

Elsie was therefore able to follow the somnolent progress of the adventures of the late Nicholas, M.D., a gentleman whose travels had led him to the Island of Trinidad. In the interests of the "Huttonian Theory" he had visited its famous pitch lake, on which he had found cattle grazing peacefully, as on an English meadow. She had just reached the following passage, and was nodding over it, the lines running together in the most curious manner, and her head sinking forward occasionally, only to be caught up with a sharp jerk, and the passage begun again with renewed determination.

"No scene can be more magnificent than that presented on a near approach to the north-western coast of Trinidad. The sea is not only changed from a light green to a deep brown colour, but has in an extraordinary degree that rippling, confused, and whirling motion which arises from the violence of contending currents, and which prevail here in so remarkable a manner, particularly at those seasons when the Orinoco is swollen with periodical rains, and vessels are frequently some days or weeks in stemming them, or perhaps are irresistibly borne before them far out of their destined track."

This was not clear to Elsie, but she had read the passage so often that the very whirling of these Orinocan currents, confused and rippling as they were, reacted subtly on her brain. She was just dropping over when a second and yet more soothing paragraph caught her eyes. (There is nothing like a volume of old travels for putting one to sleep—no extra charge for the prescription.)

"The dark verdure of lofty mountains, covered with impenetrable woods to the very summits, whence in the most humid of climates torrents impetuously rush through deep ravines to the sea"—this, carefully followed, beats sheep jumping over a stile all to fits—"between rugged mountains of brown micaceous schist"—sch—isssst—final recovery—"on whose cavernous sides the eddying surf dashes with fury. From the wonderful discoloration and turbidity of the water, Columbus sagaciously concluded that a very large river was near, and consequently—consequent-ly—a great continent!"

But to this continent Elsie never attained. She had succumbed to the sagacity of Columbus, and in a moment more her forehead rested peacefully upon the work of Mr. Nicholas, M.D., that renowned traveller.

Let a man or a woman learn this passage by heart, so that asleep or awake he can recall it even when he forgets his own name, and it will not be labour lost. He will live long in the land. His sleep shall be sweet, swift, and easy. Like Elsie he will never reach the haven of Columbus—

> "Not poppy nor mandragora,
> Nor all the drowsie syrrups of the world
> Shall ever medicine him to that sweete sleepe"

like to the prose which Mr. Nicholas, M.D., wrote as he approached the island of Trinidad.

Elsie slept. Time passed. My father filed and sawed in his recess, muttering to himself, his head nearly through into the dark cupboard; but one ear cast ever backward for the first grate of Mad Jeremy's key in the lock of his door.

Before him he could see the thin line of light which was the crack of the cupboard door. Beyond that sat Elsie with her head on her book, her mind a thousand leagues away.

But between my father and the sleeping girl there was that bar of iron, the upper part of which, by reason of some twist, was giving far more difficulty than the under.

So it came about that, without daring to make himself heard, my father was a witness of the final scene in the oven chamber behind the monks' bakehouse. He had a bar of iron against his shoulder and a file knife in his right hand, but for all that he was helpless to render any assistance till he should have cut through the thick diagonal of metal, and so made a way for himself into the dark cupboard.

All at once, my father, lying prone on his breast and sawing at the obstruction as best he could, with his arms in a most uncomfortable position for working—being higher than his head—became aware of an additional light in the room which he could before see only dimly illuminated by Elsie's candle.

A man had opened the outer fastenings. His dark shadow crossed the crack of

light which was the edge of the cupboard door ajar. There was also a flash of a brighter light for a moment in my father's eyes, which was the swinging of the lantern the man carried. He laid his hand on the young girl's shoulder, and with a cry which went to Joseph Yarrow's heart, Elsie came back from the Orinoco, to find Mad Jeremy looking down upon her.

"Sleepin'?" he chuckled, "and over her book, the bonnie bairn! She's a teacher, a lassie dominie—they tell me. But Jeremy will learn her something this nicht that is better than a' the wisdom written in the buiks. Be never feared, lass.

"Ye are the heiress.
And I am the heir."

"But come ye wi' me, lassie, and this nicht we will drink o' the white wine and the red, till the bottom faa's oot o' the stoup. I promised it to you that, when I gat the melodeon, I wad play ye the mony grand tunes—and ye wad dance—dance, Elsie, dance, my bonnie, like a star through the meadow-mist or a dewdrap on a bit rose-leaf when the west winds swing the tree!"

All this time Elsie, gazing amazed at the man, rested silent in an awful consternation. She had never seen Mad Jeremy like this. His curly hair now hung straight and black. Perspiration stood in beads on his brow. He breathed quick and heavy, with a curious rattle in the throat. Slowly Elsie rose to her feet. She stood between my father and his view of the apartment, as it were, cutting it off. He bit his hand to keep him from doing or saying anything, knowing himself to be impotent, and that the best he could do was just to wait. Otherwise, Mad Jeremy would simply have come round and despatched him first. For never (says my father) did murder so plainly look out of a man's eyes as that night in the oven chamber.

Mad Jeremy took Elsie by the wrist.

"Come, lassie," he cried, with a lightsome skip of the foot—for, indeed, the man could not keep still a moment—"come awa'! The gray goose is gone, and the fox—the fox, the auld bauld cunnin' fox—is off to his den-O—den-O—den-O!"

And, with a turn of his lantern, he threw the candle Elsie had left burning

upon the floor, trampled it out fiercely, and then, with one hand still on Elsie's wrist and the lantern swinging in the other, strode out, shouting his version of the refrain: "And the fox—the fox—the auld, yauld, bauld fox, is off to his den-O!"

But my father had been listening keenly for the click of the key in the lock. He had not heard it. The way to freedom, to help Elsie, lay open if only—ah, if only that bar would give way. And once more, in a kind of fury, he precipitated himself upon the stubborn, twisted iron.

Once outside, the freshness of the air fell upon Elsie like a blow in the face. So long confined below in her cell built of the hard whinstone of the country outcrops, she had forgotten the grip and sweetness of the wind which comes over the Cheviots—fresh and sweet even though it bring with it the snell sting of snow-filled "hopes" and the long dyke backs ridged with lingering white of last year's storms.

But there a yet greater astonishment awaited her. Jeremy's grip did not loosen upon her wrist. He led her toward the half-ruined drawbridge. It was within a few steps of the sham, ivy-grown ruin where they had emerged.

Before her eyes the house of Deep Moat Grange, all along its first floor, blazed with the light of a great feast. Beneath and above all was dark. But the great drawing-room, the weaving-room, and Mr. Stennis' bedroom seemed all filled with light.

Jeremy, who seemed to have eyes which saw in the dark, led her easily across the hall, up the staircase, in the completest darkness. Then at the top he suddenly threw the folding doors open, and with a certain formal parade of manners, announced: "Miss Elsie Stennis, of Deep Moat Grange."

Then laughing heartily at his wit, he entered after her, locking the door and pocketing the key. The large room was still ornamented in the old style, for the furniture within it had been taken over by Mr. Stennis when he bought the property. Miss Orrin had arranged wax candles in all the many-bracketed chandeliers. With some strange idea of the fitness of things, she had ordered these to be made extra large, red, and fluted. Jeremy had lighted all these, and the wide saloon, with its central carpet and waxed borders, was as light as day.

On the table, just undone from its wrappings, lay a tinselled and silver melodeon of the latest type. It was the same that Mr. Ablethorpe and I had seen Mad Jeremy buy that evening in our retail shop, and offer in payment the hundred-pound note.

Jeremy leaped upon the instrument, in three light, silent strides, like some graceful, dangerous animal. He swung it over his head with something like a cheer, and at once swept into a tide of melody. Elsie looked all about her. Nothing had been moved, save that on one of the sofas was the mark of muddy boots—-Jeremy's for certain. For it was to that place he betook himself now. All the rest of the chamber bore the mark of Miss Orrin's careful hand, and her worst enemy did not deny that she was an excellent housekeeper.

"Where is my grandfather?" cried Elsie, in a pause of the stormy music. Jeremy answered her by a simple cock of the thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the door of the weaving-room.

"He went ben there a while syne to work a stent at your wedding quilt, my bonnie lamb!

"Oh, I shall be the bridegroom.
And ye shall be the bride!"

With a sudden lift of hope, Elsie listened for the well-known "caa" of her grandfather's shuttle. What if only he were there! What if all the evil were quite untrue—the message that the hateful woman had brought on her way to school—was he not her own blood, the father of her mother? Surely he would save her! She moved toward the door with the instinct to call for help strong within her.

But instantly Mad Jeremy, who had been reclining carelessly on the sofa, motioned her away.

"Come nearer me," he commanded—"there, on the carpet by the fire, where Jeremy can see ye. Ah, it's a grand thing to bring hame a bonnie lass to her ain hoose—her hoose and mine!—

"I'se be the laird o't,
And she'll be the leddy;

She'll be the minnie o't,
And I'se be the daddy!"

Elsie made a dash for the windows, as if to leap out upon the lawn, but the movements of the maniac were far faster. In the wink of an eyelid he had laid aside his melodeon and caught her again by the wrist.

"Na, na," he said, "the like o' that will never, never do! There's nae sense in that ava'! See!"

And leading her to the window he showed her the bars which her grandfather had caused to be put up to guard his treasures. It was as difficult to get out of Deep Moat Grange as to get in. That was what it amounted to, and Elsie recognized it clearly and immediately.

"My grandfather!" she moaned, half crying with pain and disappointment. "Where is he—I want to speak to my grandfather!"

Jeremy made a mysterious sign to command silence, pointed again over his shoulder at the door of the weaving-room, and answered—

"He ben there. But Hobby was in nae guid temper the last time I spak' wi' him. It is better to let him come to a while. He aye does that at the weavin', when he is nettled at onything!"

"But I do not hear the shuttle," objected Elsie. "How am I to know he is there—that you are speaking the truth?"

"Oh, he will hae broken a thread—maybe the silver cord—ye ken he was rinnin' ane through and through, to gar the 'Elsie Stennis' stand oot bonnie on the web! Ech, ay, the silver cord, the gowden bowl, the almond blossom—Hobby could weave them a'—terrible grand at the weavin' is Hobby. But he's an auld man! Maybe he will hae rested a wee. He has but yae candle. Plenty enough, says you, for an auld man. He'll hae fa'en asleep amang the bonnie napery, wi' his head on the beam and his hand that tired it wadna caa the shuttle ony mair!"

Then suddenly the madman took another thought.

"But what am I thinkin' on?" he cried. "The world is not for dune auld dotards, but for young folk—young folk—braw folk—rich folk like you and me, Elsie! See to that!"

He drew out the same large pocket-book that had dazzled the eyes of our shopmen at Yarrow's, and opening it, showed Elsie the rolls and rolls of notes, all of high denominations unseen before in Breckonside.

"There's a fortune there, lassie," he said, "a' made by Jeremy—every penny o't by Jeremy, for you and me, hinny! It bocht the melodeon here, that Hobby wadna gie this puir lad a shilling for. And it will mak' you the bonniest and the brawest wife i' the parish! Hark ye to that, Elsie! There's a fair offer for ye, the like o' that ye never heard! But noo, the nicht is afore us. I will pipe to ye, and ye shall dance. Oh, but though I say it that shouldna—ye are fell bonnie when ye dance!

"Jeremy's heart gangs oot to ye then. If onybody was to look at ye—that much—fegs, Jeremy wad put a knife into him—ay, ay, and the thing wadna be to dae twice! Oh, there's a heap o' braw lads in Breckonside that wadna be the waur o' a bluid lettin'! There's that upsettin' young Joe Yarrow for yin. I saw him the night standin' watchin' me as I was payin' for the melodeon, as if the siller was counterfeit! Certes, if Jeremy likit he could buy up the Yarrows ten times ower, faither and son!"

Then as the madman went off toward the door he lifted his finger with the half-playful air with which one admonishes a child.

"Jeremy can trust ye?" he queried. "Ay, ay, forbye the windows are barred, and the granddad has his door locked—that I ken weel. He aye sleeps best that gate! Bide here like a denty quean—wait for Jeremy. He will bring in the feast, the grand banquet in the cups o' silver an' gowd, the white wine and the reid—the best baker's bread, honey frae the kame, and a' the denty devices o' the King's ain pastry-cook—that were bocht for coined siller in Breckonside! Then, after the feast ye shall dance—dance, Elsie, as danced that other bonnie quean they caaed the dochter o' Herodias. Eh, but she maun hae made thae soldiers of Herod and thae grand wise-like lords yerk and fidge juist to watch her. But, for your dance, Elsie lassie. Gin ye be a wise bairn and dance it bonnie, Jeremy will gie ye, no the half o' his kingdom, but the hale! Ay, Jeremy's kingdom a' complete!"

And again he slapped his pocket into which he had slipped the fat pocket-book.

He was gone. Elsie waited one palpitating minute after he had locked the door. She could hear the sound of his feet descending the stairs. They died away. She listened yet a while longer, lest, with maniac cunning, he should return for the purpose of catching her in the act of disobedience. But the heavy clanging of a door and the screech of the great key in the lock warned her that it must be now or never.

Elsie flew to the door of the weaving-room. She would find Mr. Stennis. She would throw herself upon his mercy. She did not believe—she could not believe that he knew anything of the treatment she had undergone during the past months.

"Grandfather, grandfather!" she whispered hoarsely, knocking on the panel. "Open, it is I—Elsie Stennis! Save me, save me!"

But there was no reply—only silence, and the scurry of a rat behind the wainscot.

She called again, louder than before.

"Grandfather, grandfather! Quick; he will come back! Save me, grandfather!"

But there was utter silence. Even the rat had found a shelter.

Swiftly Elsie stooped. The doors of the old houses of the date of Deep Moat Grange have roomy keyholes. Elsie set her eye to the one which she found empty of a key.

She saw the most part of a bare room—at least, the illuminated square about the room. She saw her grandfather, his head bowed upon his work—his frame still with the stillness of death, and the knife which had done its deadly work lying close by. At his elbow a candle was flickering itself out. Something dripped, and on the floor a darker darkness spread itself slowly out. Even as she looked, the flame rushed upward, like the life of a man which returns not to his nostrils, and all was blank about her.

Elsie would have fainted, but she heard steps on the stair—swift and light—

the footsteps of Jeremy returning, and she knew that she must meet him with the smile upon her lips.

CHAPTER XXX

HOW ELSIE DANCED FOR HER LIFE

The white and gold walls of the drawing-room of Deep Moat Grange, though tarnished by time, and with spots of mould beginning to outline themselves again for want of Aphra Orrin's careful hand, gave back gaily enough the mellow glow of a hundred candles all of wax.

"Dance, Elsie woman!" cried Mad Jeremy, emptying a tumbler at a gulp. "But first drink ye also, lassie. That will bring back your bonnie colour! What has come to ye, bairn? Ye are pale as a bit snaw-drap that sets its head through a wreath at a dyke-back. But red, red, red as ony rose shall ye be, I'se warrant ye! Dance, lassie, dance!"

And with a jingle of bells he struck in the "Reel o' Bogie." Elsie did no more than set her lips to her glass. But she obeyed, for Jeremy was in no mood to be countered. Then, taking up her gown daintily on both sides, as the dance ordains, she danced it alone. And every time as she turned, her eyes caught the door of the weaving-room, and the heart within her became as water for what she had seen through that little black mark of exclamation which was the keyhole.

Yet somehow the situation stirred her, too. There is a vast deal of desperate courage in a woman. A man laughs at this because he is exempt from the fears of mice and minor creeping things. He may as well think, as he often does, the better of himself, on the strength of the beard on his chin. But in the desperate passes of life, woman is apt to lead the forlorn hopes. And why should she not? Her kind have been accustomed to them ever since, in the forlorn coppices outside Eden, one Eve gave birth to her firstborn, and called him—being, like a woman, deceived—"My possession."

And with the blank midnight pressing against the huge windows of the

facade, and the white lights and red candle stems reflected a thousand times in the sullen moat, Elsie danced. The irregular wind moaned about the house, and as the brand-new melodeon whined and crew, flinging a weird rhythm to the tremulous candle flames, something like the fast-running "Broom o' the Cowdenkynwes," "Logan Braes," "Green Grows the Rushes," or "Bonnie Dundee," emerged. Elsie danced to them all. She danced as the fluted candles burned down nearer to their sockets.

And all the while, now with one leg on the table, and swinging his body to the time of the music, or crouched in a corner nursing his melodeon against him as if he were a beast ready for the spring, Jeremy beat the measure with his foot.

Sometimes he would spring up and sing a stave which struck him, in a high, screeching voice—sometimes drain a cup of wine or spirits out of the nearest bottle, stopping in the midst to wave the half-filled glass about his head, and complete his chant. Sometimes it went like this—

"His mother from the window looked,
With all the longing of a mother;
His little sister, weeping walked
The greenwood path to meet her brother.

"They sought him east, they sought him west,
They sought him a' the forest thorough;
They only saw the cloud o' nicht,
They only heard the roar of Yarrow!"

Then, as the night went past, Elsie prayed for the time to go faster. She saw the candles blink and dwindle; she saw the windows stand out more blankly. In her brain there grew up a fear of the dark, after the light should be extinguished, when she should find herself alone with that wild being who had murdered her grandfather. Her hope was in the morning light. If she could only dance till then!

Well it was for her that, as a child, she had danced, as a gnat over a pool, as a butterfly among the flowers of the garden. Light of foot, and ready, she had learned all as by nature. And now, with the candles going out one by one, and the bitterness of death rising like a tide in her heart—barred in, the door locked, utterly forsaken—she had yet to smile and dance—dance and dance—to the lilt

and stress of Mad Jeremy's noisy instrument.

The jangle of bells thrilled her as he struck with a clash as of steel weapons into "Roy's Wife of Aldevaloch," or an irony of fiendish laughter as he shouted the refrain of "Duncan Grey," lifting a hand fleeringly from the German-silver keys, with a glance of terrible import.

"Ha, ha, the wooin' o't!"

It was, indeed, a memorable wooing, but Elsie smiled and danced tirelessly, her young body lithe and swift to the turn, her feet nimble and dainty. The last tune pleased the madman. With a "Hooch" of triumph, he sprang to his feet, marching up and down the room, playing all the time with desperate energy.

"This beats fiddlin'!" he cried. "The Herodias quean was leaden-footed to you, lassie! And noo Jeremy will play ye something o' his ain; and you, wee Elsie, shall dance to the movin' o' the speerit! Wave your airms and smile, Elsie, for I am the laird, and ye are the leddy!"

With one spring, he landed featly on the tall mantelpiece, where, mopping and mowing, swinging his instrument now high over his head, and now lower than his knees, Mad Jeremy seemed more like the sculptured gargoyle of some devil come alive than anything of human stock or human mothering.

The fire was black out, but on the hearth the shape of the burned violin lay in a black heap like a dead, dangerous beast. For the head and neck had twisted themselves back as if in agony, the black pegs looking as if they could sting. They seemed to watch the door of the weaving room into which their destroyer had gone. And certainly they had not been unavenged. For their sake, the madman's knife had bitten deep and keen. There was little need now for the head to twist itself as the tightening strings had pulled it, as the fire had left it. All was wiped out. And, as if in recognition of the fact, its master stirred the black ashes with his toe before he struck into a wild saturnalia of sound, to which Elsie danced like a Bacchante, with the last remnants of her girl's strength.

It was still far from the dawn, which is a laggard in February throughout Scotland. The red candles began to go out one by one. Fear surged tumultuous in Elsie's heart—as, indeed, well it might—to find herself thus shut up with the murderer of her grandfather, whose dead body she knew lay behind the nearest door, and the red candles going out one by one.

There remained only the huge centre one, a special purchase of Aphra's. And still the madman grimaced, crossing and uncrossing his legs on the high mantel-piece. Still he swung his instrument—still he called on Elsie to dance. But now the girl was utterly fatigued. Without a sign of giving way, something seemed to crack somewhere—in her head, perhaps, or about her heart. She sank unconscious on the floor in a heap.

Mad Jeremy halted in the middle of a bar; bent forward to look at the girl to see whether or no she was pretending. Then, leaping down from the mantel-shelf with the same graceful ease as he had mounted, he strode to the last great red candle, fit for a cathedral altar, which Aphra had set in the central candelabra. He took it down, and, after one keen look at the girl, he stepped over her prostrate body, on his way to resume his beloved melodeon, which he had left behind him when he had leaped down.

A smile of infinite cunning wreathed his lips.

"Baith the twa," he muttered, the smile widening to a grin. "She's a bonnie lassie, ay! and if Jeremy had ony thocht o' marryin' she wad be the lass for him. But it's safer no! Baith the twa will be best dead. That will mak' the last of the Stennises gang tegither. She shall have a braw burial. There shall never be sic a Baalfire as Jeremy will licht for her—and weel she is deservin' o't. For she danced blithe and brawly, even unto the breakin' o' the day!"

And he went on tiptoe to the door of the weaving room, unlocked it, and looked in, holding his flambeau high above his head. The light fell on the dead man, bent forward with his face half hidden in the web.

He held his head first to one side and then to the other, as an artist may, with pleasure and self-complaisance, admire a completed masterpiece.

Then he went out. Elsie still lay where she had fallen. The madman glanced once at her.

"It will e'en be the quicker. I will let her lie. She will never wauken. Leave the door open, Jeremy. It will mak' a graund draught. Fare ye weel, bairn! Ye danced bonnie, and kind Jeremy is giein' ye your wages this nicht! The best o' a'—an easy way o' goin'!"

He took the candle in his left hand, and with the melodeon still in his right he

went down to the chamber beneath. Here he filled his pockets with bank-notes in rolls, little sacks of gold, and clinking bags from a great safe which stood wide open—the bundle of keys which had belonged to its dead owner still in the lock. The Golden Farmer was plundered of his store.

Then, flinging all the inflammable stuff, furniture, and hangings in a heap in the centre, he drenched the pile with kerosene from a can he brought from the storehouse, throwing on shavings from his master's workshop, kindling-wood from the kitchen, and, indeed, all combustibles he could lay hands upon.

Bending, he struck a match on the smooth of his corduroy trousers, and in a moment the flame mounted with a roar. Jeremy stood in the doorway chuckling, long enough to make sure that it had taken.

"Ay, ay, a bonnie funeral pyre! That they will hae, baith the twa!" he said. "The last o' the Stennises! A bonnie lass she was—but Jeremy couldna be fashed wi' women folk—na, na, Aphra and her wad never agree."

The draught drew upward through the silent house. It increased to a wind, sucking toward the flames. He could hear the crackling. With a return of his mad humour he began to dance.

He waved his melodeon, making the bells leap and jangle. And in the pale gleam of the still half-smothered flames he flickered down the stairs in the direction of the hall of Deep Moat Grange.

Mad Jeremy had made an end of the House of Stennis.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE HERO PLAYS SECOND FIDDLE

Now, while Elsie was dancing the hours away in desperate danger of her life and to the peril of her reason, Mr. Ablethorpe and I had not been idle. That is, so far as was within our power to act or our knowledge to foresee. He had allowed

me to judge of the state of the rings which had been passed through the furnace. I was still uncertain of their portent till he produced an oval plaque with the mark V.R. upon it. It was of brass, and had doubtless formed part of the single leathern sack which Harry Foster kept open so as to take on to Bewick anything which might be committed to his care *en route*.

There could be no doubt. We had found the murderer of Harry Foster—that is, we had only to find who made the bread at Deep Moat Grange in order to be sure of him. It was, indeed, a known thing that, save on a rare occasion, the Moat Grange people made their own bread—but whether in the shape of griddle-cakes, soda scones, or properly baked oven loaves, no one knew. But Mr. Ablethorpe and I were sure there would be no more difficulty. More than that we meant to find out—the clew was the first one which had really promised well, and we meant to follow it. That very night we got ready to go, even though Mr. Ablethorpe ought now to have been at home, preparing for his Sunday services, instead of doing detective business across country on the strength of a few calcined rings and a brass plate.

* * * * *

It was about this time that my father, with torn and bleeding hands, was working desperately at the bar of iron. His knife was worn to a stump, but the open door of Elsie's cell tempted him with a terrible sense of the unknown which was passing outside. Besides, he could not tell at what moment Jeremy might return, and, shutting the door, shut off at the same time his hopes of escape and of helping Elsie, whom he saw already in the grasp of the midnight assassin.

Now if I were writing this to show what a hero I was, I should, of course, have put my own part in the forefront. But as I was at the time little better than a boy who does what he can, and it really was my father who helped Elsie the most—and had done for some time—I am not going to take away the credit from him. Mine is the proper sort of father, that a fellow can be proud of. I think I would have done all that he did if I had been there and had his chances. But then I wasn't, and I hadn't. So Mr. Ablethorpe and I had just come along as best we might—almost, but not quite, the day after the fair.

It was just before daybreak when my father worked his way through the bar, and the fragments fell outward—stonework, plaster, cut iron—all into the little cupboard. Of course, he had been working by the sense of touch for hours. Many

a time he had drawn the rough home-made file raspingly across his wrist and hands. His face was stained with dungeon mud, his hair uncropped and matted, his beard tangled, and, as my mother said afterwards—

"If Mad Jeremy was a waur-looking creature than you, Joseph Yarrow, I am none surprised that he frighted ye a' oot o' your leggings and knee-breeks!"

When my father came out through the chamber which had so long been Elsie's he groped about to find the entrance, his heart thumping—so he owned to me—against his ribs lest the way should have been shut by the madman, and he no better off than he had been before—nay, infinitely worse, for the handiwork of the night would be sure to be discovered. He had worked in the dark—furiously—without thought of covering up his traces. But he had brought with him the iron bar which had been his means of direct communication with Elsie from cell to cell.

It was cold weather, and the first drive of February wind as he stood up in the ivy-covered ruin was, as my father expressed it, "like a dash of water in the face to a man." The next instant he was through the crumbling walls, startling the bats and sparrows with a shower of debris, and lo! there before him he saw the house of Deep Moat Grange—in a blaze!

Now comes out the deep and abiding loyalty of the man who had a name for little else than driving a bargain hardly and keeping it to the death. Perhaps, though, he looked upon it as that. Elsie had supported him, fed him, given him drink, furnished him with tools, and so now, though most men would have gone straight back to Breckonside to seek for assistance, Joseph Yarrow—of whom I am proud to call myself the son—struck right across the bridge and tore across the lawn among the lily clumps straight for the front door of the burning house.

The staircase and hall were already filled with a stifling reek, but my father could hear above him the crackling and dull roar of the flames, hungry—like many wild beasts.

It was not dark, for the chamber door above was open, and the light of the conflagration was reflected through. But plump in the middle of the staircase my father encountered a man. It was Mad Jeremy going out serenely enough, carrying the candle in one hand, and his precious melodeon in the other. He saw my father. My father saw him. With one intent to fight and slay they rushed at

each other—Jeremy's wild screech mingling with my father's roar as of a charging bull.

Neither got home. My father's iron bar would doubtless have broken the madman's skull, but that, with his usual agility, he leaped to the side. Jeremy smashed the heavy candle over my father's head, and fled upstairs, not because he was afraid for himself, but in order to protect the melodeon from the blow he saw coming.

"Ye shall na get it," he shouted. "It's nane o' yours. I paid good money for it ower the counter o' your ain shop!"

And he fled upward through the flames, which seemed to wrap him round without doing any harm. They seemed his element.

* * * * *

As I say, Mr. Ablethorpe and I came just too late. We had seen from afar the burning house—at least, we had seen the "skarrow" in the sky—the Grange itself lying (as all the world knows) at the very bottom of Deep Moat Hollow, with the pond on one side and the woods all about.

But once on our way, we had made haste, as indeed had many another. However, we started earlier than the others, though my father, living as it were next door, was far before any of us. Indeed, had it not been for him—— Well, I will go on with my tale.

We rushed across the drawbridge, which, just as he had done, we found down. We followed him across the lily plots. Right in the middle Mr. Ablethorpe came a cropper. I was on the look-out. It was not the first time that I had played at hide-and-seek there in difficult circumstances, though never with the windows above crackling and the flames licking the ivy and dry Virginia creeper off the walls, and the smoke so thick that the landscape was almost blotted out by it.

I arrived, a little in front of the Hayfork Parson, on the threshold of the door of Deep Moat Grange. And that is why I was the first to welcome a pair of Lazaruses risen from the dead—one, a girl, apparently truly dead, held in the arms of the wildest and most savage man I had ever beheld, upon whose shoulder her head reclined, and in whose menacing right hand was a rough bar of iron, pointed like a chisel.

I think he did not see well. Or, coming out of all that strangeness of the night, and the smoor and choking swirl of the smoke, he did not know his own son. At any rate, he rushed at me with Elsie still in his arms and the iron bar uplifted.

But Mr. Ablethorpe interposed from the flank, and catching him about the waist, disarmed him.

"Mr. Yarrow!" he cried, "this is Joseph, your own son!"

My father blinked at me a moment, vaguely. Then, quite suddenly, he thrust Elsie into my arms.

"There," he said, "take her. Be good to her. She calls you her 'Dearest Joe.' You will never deserve half your luck—you will never know it. But as sure as my name is Joseph Yarrow, I will take it upon me to see that you behave yourself decently well to that girl."

He was pretty much of a brick—father. At least, though he was only a grocer, I don't know anybody else's father I would change him for. And Elsie says so, too. I think, however—between ourselves—that he's just a bit gone on Elsie himself, and thinks I'm not half good enough for her.

Well, I'm not! I don't deny the fact; and as for Elsie—she encourages us both in the belief.

CHAPTER XXXII

"THERE'S NAE LUCK ABOOT THE HOOSE"

There's a bit more to tell about this part, though you might not expect it. It always makes me shiver to think of. But I could not help it. Nobody could—and anyway, the thing has got to be told. It is about Mad Jeremy, and what befell him when he fled upward through the smoke and flame, clambering by the balusters, my father says, more like a monkey than any human man.

And, by the way, I am not sure that he really was a man—except that a wild beast would not have been so clever, and the devil ever so much cleverer! Or, at least, he has the credit of being.

Did you ever see the burning of a great house—not in a city, I mean, but far in the country? Well, I have. There is not much to see till one is close by. A few pale, shivering flames, like the fires that boil the tea at a summer picnic—volumes of smoke rising over the parapet, mostly pale, and the sun serene above the scurry of helpless men, running this way and that, like ants when you thrust your stick into an ant hill to see what will happen. Hither and thither they go—all busy, all doing nothing. For one thing, water is lacking. The local fire brigade is always just about to arrive. If, by any chance, it does come, a boy with a garden squirt would do more good.

Well, it was like that on the morning of the eleventh of February. When the day did come at last, there was nothing mean about it—considered as an early spring morning in Scotland. It was of the colour of pale straw, with a glint low down like newly thatched houses before the winter's storm has had a turn at them.

Meanwhile, underneath, and looking so petty and foolish, was the crackling of the timbers, the falling in of the tiles, the smoke puffing and mounting like great strings of onions linked together, blue and stifling from the burning wood, white and steamy as the faggots slid outward into the moat, or fell with a crash into the pond.

All about swarmed a crowd of eager and curious folk. My father, as soon as he was recognized, and before he could condescend to tell his tale, had taken command, all soiled and bleeding as he was. I believe now that most there considered that he had rescued Elsie from the wild tribe after a desperate struggle, in which all the others had been annihilated. And it is characteristic of Breckonside, of the position my father held there, and especially of public sentiment with regard to the folk of the Moat, that no one for a moment dreamed that in so doing he had exceeded his legal right.

There was not much attempt at saving the building. Elsie had come a little to herself. At first she could say little, save that "her grandfather was dead—Mad Jeremy had killed him," which information did not greatly interest the people, save in so far as it detracted from my father's glory in having made a "clean

sweep!"

Mr. Ball, whom everybody respected—in spite of the service in which he lived—caused a horse to be put between the shafts, and Elsie was conveyed home to Nance Edgar's by Mr. Ball himself. My father wanted her to go on to "the Mount." But Elsie no sooner heard the word mentioned, than, recovering from her swoon, she declared that "she would never set foot there—so long as —— No, indeed, that she would not!"

"So long as what, my girl?" my father asked, gently.

You really can't imagine how gentle my father was with her. It took me by surprise, as I did not, of course, yet know anything about the events which had drawn them together in the deep places underground.

"Because—because—just because!" she answered. "Besides, it is not fitting at present!"

"I understand—perhaps you are right," sighed my father, somewhat disappointed.

For all that, he did not understand a little bit. It was because of Harriet and Constantia Caw—especially Harriet. It is an eternal wonder how women misunderstand each other—the best, the kindest, and especially the prettiest of them.

I would gladly have gone with her, but, of course, that would have been too marked. Besides, I dared not face my mother without my father. There was a little fountain made of the mouths of lions on the terrace, which spouted out thin streams of water into a large oyster shell—the kind they call *pecten*, I think, only the round part as big as a horseshoe. And once Elsie was away with Mr. Bailiff Ball, I got father to wash his face and hands there, which were black and terrible with matted hair and hardened blood. So that my mother, for all her outcries, did not really see him at his worst, or anything like it.

The fire mounted always, but somehow in the light of day it did not seem real. The faces of all the folk as we returned from the water, were directed to the tower which was called Hobby's Folly. The gabled, crow-stepped mansion of the Moat had nothing very ancient about it—that is, to the common view. You had to know the older secrets of the monks for that. But at the angle overlooking the

pond, Mr. Stennis had caused to be built a square tower in the old Robert the Bruce donjon fashion, each chamber opening out of the other. These communicated by ladders, which could be drawn up and all access prevented. At least that was the tale which the masons who were at the building brought back to Breckonside. The tower was square on the top and had low battlements, save at one corner where there was a kind of pepper-pot cupola in which—so they said—Hobby Stennis used to sit and count his gold.

At first I could not make out what it was that the folk were craning their necks upward to look at. Evidently it was on the far side, that nearest the small lake, and, of course, invisible from the court out of which my father and I were coming.

But we followed the movement of the people, and there on the utmost pinnacle of the battlements, that outer corner which was higher than the rest and shaped like a miniature dome, his long legs twined about the broken stalk of the weathercock, and his melodeon in his hands, sat Mad Jeremy! Of the gilt weathercock itself nothing remained save the butt. With a single clutch of his great hairy hand, Jeremy had rooted the uneasy fowl out of its socket and hurled it far before him into the pond.

Up till now the flames had hardly reached the tower, and it seemed at least a possible thing that the maniac might be saved. But none of the Breckonsiders were keen about it. Only Mr. Ablethorpe and my father were willing to make any attempt to save him. Indeed, I was absolutely with the majority on this occasion, and could not, for my part, imagine a better solution than that which seemed to be imminent.

Nevertheless, the two tried to get into the tower from behind, but found all a seething mass of flames, which had swept across the whole main body of the building as if to swallow up Hobby's Folly for a last *bonne bouche*. There was no arguing with such a spate of fire. There remained, however, a little low door, reported to be of iron, but which, being near to the water and exposed to the fury of damp westerly winds and the moist fogs off the pond, had probably rusted half away.

"The two tried to get into the Tower from behind, but found all a seething mass of flames."

"The two tried to get into the Tower from behind, but found all a seething mass of flames."

"Come, let us do our duty," said Mr. Ablethorpe; "here is a human life! Let us save it!"

But nobody but Mr. Yarrow, senior, followed him. I was with the majority on this point, as I have said before, and so stayed where I was. Besides, Mad Jeremy was so curious to see and hear. He laughed and sang, his shrill voice carrying well through the crackle of the rafters and the snap and spit of the smaller shredded fragments of flame. As soon as he caught sight of Mr. Ablethorpe and my father he began to hurl down the copings of the battlements upon their heads. So that in the end they had to desist from the attempt, though they had nobly done their best.

And all the while he sang. It was the trampling measure of "There's nae luck" that the madman had chosen for his swan song. Never had been seen or heard such a thing. As he finished each verse he would rise and dance, balancing himself on the utmost point of the cupola, his melodeon swaying in his hand and his voice declaring ironically that—

"There's nae luck aboot the hoose,
  There's nae luck ava,
There's little pleasure i' the hoose,
  When oor guidman's awa'!"

Then he would laugh, and call out to the people beneath that the luck had come back.

"The guidman o' the Grange is safe!" he would cry. "He is at his loom, but never more will he weave, I ken. Jeremy has seen to that. And what for that, quo' ye? Juist to learn him that when Jeremy asks for his ain, he is no to be denied as if he were a beggar wantin' alms!"

Then he took a new tack, and launched into "The Toom Pooch"—which is to say, the "empty pocket"—a very popular ditty in the Scots language, and

especially about Breckonside:

"An empty purse is slichtit sair,
  Gang ye to market, kirk, or fair,
Ye'll no be muckle thocht o' there,
  Gin ye gang wi' a toom pooch!"

He finished with a shout of derision.

"Ye puir feckless lot!" he shouted down to the crowd beneath. "I ken you and Breckonside. Here's charity for ye! Catch a haud!" And he showered the contents of a pocket-book down upon their heads.

"Here are notes o' ten pound, and notes o' twenty, and notes o' a hundred! What man o' ye ever saw the like? Only Jeremy, Jeremy and his maister. They wan them a', playin' at a wee bit game wi' rich lonely folk. Jeremy was fine company to them. And whiles it ended in a bit jab wi' the knife in the ribs, and whiles in a tug o' the hemp aboot a lad's neck, if he wasna unco clever. But it was never Jeremy's neck, nor was the knife ever in Hobby's back till Jeremy—but that's tellin'! Oh, Hobby's a'richt. I saw him sitting screedin' awa' at his windin' sheet, and thinkin' the time no lang."

He rose and danced, singing as he danced—

"There's nae luck aboot the hoose,
  There's nae luck ava——"

The flames shot up like the cracking of a mighty whip. The madman felt the sting, and with a wild yell he launched himself over the parapet into the muddy sludge at the bottom of Deep Moat pond. He must have gone in head foremost, for he never rose. Only the melodeon, with the water trickling in drops off its bell chime in silver gilt, and the glittering tinsel of its keys, rose slowly to the surface among a few air bubbles and floated there among a little brownish mud.

CHAPTER XXXIII

CONFESSION

The ruins of Deep Moat Grange were black and cold—almost level with the ground, also. For the folk had pulled the house almost stone from stone, partly in anger, partly in their search for hidden treasure. Elsie was home again in the white cottage at the Bridge End, and my father was attending to his business quietly, as if nothing had happened.

The authorities, of course, had made a great search among the subterranean passages of the monks' storehouses, without, however, discovering more than Elsie and my father could have told them. Mr. Ablethorpe was still silent. So, being bound by my promise to him, I judged it best to hold my peace also.

But in spite of all this, or perhaps because of it, the country continued in a ferment. The deaths of Mad Jeremy and Mr. Stennis, instead of quieting public clamour, made the mystery still more mysterious. The weird sisters remained at liberty, and the wildest reports flew about. None would venture out of doors after dark. Children were told impossible tales of Spring-heeled Jacks in petticoats, who (much less judicious than the usual bogie—"Black Man," "Hornie Nick," the lord of the utter and middle darkness), confounded the innocent with the guilty, and made off with good children as readily as with children the most advanced in depravity.

Of course, knowing what I knew, I had none of these fears. I understood why Mr. Ablethorpe had arranged for the carrying off of Honorine, Camilla, and Sidonia. They were, I knew, housed with the "Little Sisters of the Weak-Minded." But to me, as to others, Aphra remained the stumbling-block.

But even this was soon to be removed.

On March the sixteenth, one month and five days after the burning of the house of Deep Moat Grange, the sheriff's court of Bordershire was held in the courthouse at Longtown. My father and I, with many people from Breckonside, were there, and practically all Bewick to a man. For great interest was felt in a case of night-poaching in which these two firm friends, Davie Elshiner and Peter

Kemp, officially had repeatedly given each other the lie.

"There is rank perjury somewhere," commented the sheriff, "but as I cannot bring it home to any particular person, I must discharge the accused."

A certain subdued hush of various movement ran along the benches, as the listeners got ready to go. Sheriff Graham Duffus, a red-faced, jolly man, was conferring in hushed tones with the fiscal or public prosecutor, when two tall young men in irreproachable clerical attire pushed their way up the central passage, kept clear for witnesses by a couple of burly policemen at either end. A woman walked between them. She was tall, veiled, angular, and bore herself singularly erect, even with an air of pride.

The murmur of the people changed to an awe-stricken hush, as the woman lifted her veil.

It was Aphra Orrin, and she stood there between Mr. De la Poer and Mr. Ablethorpe!

"My lord," said Mr. Ablethorpe, in a clear and dominating voice, "I and my friend, Mr. De la Poer, are ordained clergymen of the Church of Scotland, Episcopal. We are not aware of the formula with which we ought to approach you, seated as a judge in a court of justice. But we are here because we know of no way more direct to carry out the wishes of this poor woman, whose conscience has been touched, and who by full confession, by condemnation, and by the suffering of punishment, desires to make what amends she can for the dreadful iniquities in which, for many years, she has been involved."

In a moment all present knew that it was a matter of the mysteries of Deep Moat Grange.

"Who is this woman?" asked Sheriff Graham Duffus, the jovial air suddenly stricken from his face. The fiscal had subsided into the depths of an official armchair. He reclined in it, apparently seated upon his shoulder blades, and with half-shut eyes watched proceedings from under the twitching penthouse of his brows.

"Her name is Aphra or Euphrasia Orrin," said Mr. Ablethorpe, "and she comes to make full confession before men, of what she has already confessed to me concerning the murders in which she has been implicated at Deep Moat

Grange."

"And why," said the sheriff, "did not you yourself immediately inform the justice of your country?"

Mr. Ablethorpe turned upon Sheriff Duffus with a pitying look.

"I was bound," he said simply, "by the secret of the confessional!"

"In Scotland," said the sheriff severely, "we do not acknowledge any such obligation. But no matter for that, if now, even though discreditably late, you have by your influence brought this woman to make public confession!"

"I take my friend by my side to witness—I take Euphrasia Orrin—I take Him who hears all confessions which come from the heart, to witness that never have I put the least pressure on this poor woman's conscience! What she is now doing is by her own desire!"

The sheriff shrugged his shoulders, and the ghost of a smile flickered among the crafty wrinkles about the corner of the fiscal's mouth. His work was being done for him.

"You refuse the crumb of credit I was willing to allow you," said the sheriff. "Well, I put no limit to what any man's conscience may prescribe to itself, when once it begins to set up rules for its own guidance. Let us get to business. What has the woman to say?"

The woman had much to say. It was the early afternoon of mid-March when Aphra began to speak, and long before she had finished the court-keeper and his temporary assistant were lighting the dim gas jets arranged at wide distances along the wall.

Her crape veil thrown back over a bonnet showing a face, as it were, carven in grey granite, Aphra Orrin stood before her country's justice fingering a brown rosary. Every time she paused, even for a second, one could hear the click of the beads mechanically dropped from nervous fingers. Strong men's ears sang. It was as if the terrible things her lips were relating had been some history of old, long-punished crimes, the record of which she was recalling as a warning. Yet within what of soul she had, doubtless the woman was at her prayers.

Not once did she manifest the least emotion or contrition, still less fear. And she made her recital in the calmest manner, with some occasional rhapsodical language certainly, but with none of the madness which I should have expected.

She stood up, most like some formal, old-fashioned schoolmistress reciting a piece of prose learned by heart, without animation and without interest. The dry click of the beads alone marked the emphasis. The young Anglican priests towered one on either side, and the quivering silence of the crowded courthouse alone evidenced the terrible nature of the disclosures.

CHAPTER XXXIV

JEREMY ORRIN, BREADWINNER

"I had a younger brother, dear to me far above my life" (this was Aphra Orrin's beginning). "He was the youngest of all—left to me in guard by a father who feared in him the wild blood of my mother. For my father had married a gipsy girl whose beauty had taken him at a village merrymaking. In the Upper Ward they do not understand that kind of *mésalliance* in a schoolmaster. And so, for my mother's sake, he had to leave his schoolhouse, after fighting the battle against odds for many years.

"He died rich in his new occupation of cotton spinner, but he knew that the blood of my mother ran in all of us. Once, in a great snowstorm when the schoolhouse was cut off from all other houses—it was in the days soon after Jeremy (the youngest of us all) was born, my father awakened to find my mother leaning over him, the wood axe in her hand, murder in her eye. He had only time to roll beneath the bed, and seize her by the feet, pulling her down and so mastering her. He had to keep his mad wife, my mother, six days in the schoolhouse, with only himself for guard, till she could be taken to the asylum, where she died.

"After this shock my father soon followed her to the grave, and I was left with three poor girls on my hands, who could do nothing for themselves in the world—hardly even what I told them—and with Jeremy my brother. If it had not

been for Jeremy, I might have managed better. But he spoiled it all. He was wild from his youth. The least opposition would arouse him to ungovernable fury. He would, like my mother, take up a knife, an axe, or whatever was at hand, and strike with incredible swiftness and strength.

"After we had lost our money—after *I* had lost it, that is—my own and my family's—it became my duty to provide for them more than ever. I had lost it, because richer people had revenged on me and on these four helpless ones my poor father's too rapid success. So I had no right to be squeamish as to means of vengeance on the rich.

"But while we were in the midst of some sad dreamy days at Bristol, Jeremy began to bring home money, for which he either would or could give no account. Nevertheless, I could not be sure which of the two it was. He was so wayward that if I ventured to ask for an explanation that would be a sufficient reason for his refusing it.

"I began, however, to notice that within a day or two after Jeremy's flush periods, there was always a hue and cry in the papers—a sailor robbed and his body found floating in the dock, a 'long course' captain knocked on the head, and the ship's money missing. Now Jeremy could never be kept away from the docks. Jeremy had plenty of money. Jeremy only laughed when I asked him how he earned so much without a trade.

"'I can play the fiddle!' he would answer, jeering at me.

"Yet, because there was no other money, and I could not let my sisters (who at least had done no wrong) suffer, I used what he brought. For neither, I was sure (and the thought comforted me), had Jeremy done wrong, *because the mad can do no crime*. The worst the law can do, is only to shut them up. And in the meantime the money was most convenient."

Here she paused, and a sort of groan ran all round the courthouse, as the meaning and scope of the woman's revelation began to dawn upon the packed audience. Aphra Orrin, being in her senses, had employed the madman, her brother, to murder right and left that the wants of her brood might be met!

There arose a hoarse mingled shout: "Tear her to pieces!" before which, however, Aphra never blanched. But the sheriff was on his feet in a moment. The fiscal commanded silence, ordering the court officer to apprehend all who

disobeyed. For the wise lawyer could see well ahead, and knew that as yet they were only at the beginning of mysteries.

When silence was restored Euphrasia Orrin continued without losing a moment, neither amazed nor alarmed at the manifestation.

"At Bristol I perceived that all this would certainly end in an unpleasant discovery—yes, unpleasant" (she repeated the word as if in response to the threatening murmurs!). "I was not responsible for my poor brother, but I thought it would be well to remove him to a place where there were no docks and fewer temptations. I bethought myself of Leeds. We went there, but somehow Jeremy never took to Leeds. He wandered off by himself to London, associating with horse-coupers and gipsies by the way. Suddenly he disappeared. I heard no more of him till at our famine-bare garret a letter arrived containing a hundred pounds in Bank of England notes—and an address." Miss Orrin put her hand into a trim little reticule which was attached to her waist, and drew out a single sheet of paper, on which was written in a sprawling hand: "*H. Stennis, Pattern Designer and Weaver, Burnside Cottage, Breckonside, Bordershire, N.B.*"

At this moment I noticed that Mr. Ablethorpe had for the first time left the side of the speaker—though Mr. De la Poer continued to stand on attention, his shoulder almost touching the dark veil which fell away to one side of Aphra's face, and threw into relief her determined chin. Mr. Ablethorpe was speaking to my father. My astonishment was still greater when I saw my father rise quietly and leave the courthouse. With a crook of his finger he summoned Rob Kingsman, and, without either of them paying the least attention to me, both left the room. Then I was certain that my father did not wish to attract attention by calling me away. Perhaps, also, he wanted first-hand evidence of what happened after he was gone. Anyway, he did not put himself at all out of the way at the thought of leaving me in the lurch at Longtown with the night falling. It was, of course, different from what it had been before the burning of Deep Moat Grange. People began to go the roads freely again.

Once more Mr. Ablethorpe took up his position. The sheriff had stopped taking notes, so absorbed was he in what he heard. As for the fiscal, he had never attempted to take any. He was enjoying the situation. This confession in open court was a thing unknown in his experience, and he was chiefly afraid lest the sheriff, little accustomed to this sort of thing, and probably anxious to get home for dinner, should cut short the sederunt.

"At this point," said Mr. Ablethorpe, who in a way assumed the position of counsel for his strange penitent. "I would put into your lordship's hands papers of some importance. They came from Dr. Hector, some of them, and some out of the safe in the cellar of the Grange."

The sheriff was not in the best of humours.

"I consider all this most irregular," he growled—"a court of justice is not a scene in a theatre!"

But Fiscal McMath, who was infinitely the stronger man of the two in character and conduct, turned upon him with a kind of snarl.

"Don't sink the ship for the extra happorth of tar, skipper," he said, in a low voice (which, however, sitting near, I could just catch), "give them rope—give them rope! We have been a long time at the job without hanging them!"

At this the sheriff was silent, only motioning Mr. Ablethorpe to give the papers to Mr. McMath.

Our fiscal, next to my father the best-known man in the county, was a greyish, grave man with twinkling eyes, mutton-chop side whiskers, a little, sly, tip-titled nose, with a dry bloom on the top of it, as if he liked his spirits neat. He never smiled, yet he was always smiling. His mouth, when about his duties, would be grave as that of Rhadamanthus, while within an inch of it a wrinkle twitched merrily away. His eyes could reprove a too light-hearted witness, or frown down an improperly jovial defendant, all the while that a mischief-loving sprite, hovering within, held his sides at the unseasonable jesting.

On this occasion, however, it was gravely enough that Mr. McMath adjusted his gold-rimmed spectacles and proceeded to read.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE WITNESSING OF MISER HOBBY

"*The Witnessing and last statement of Me, Howard Stennis, sometime weaver to my trade, afterwards laird of the lands of 'Deep Moat Grange,' near Breckonside —to which is added my last Will in my own handwriting*.

"I, HOWARD STENNIS, being of sound mind, and desiring that after my death nothing should be left uncertain, have decided to put on record all that has occurred. This I do, not in the least to exculpate myself, because what I have done, I have done calmly and with intention aforethought.

"This paper is for the sole use of the heir whom I shall choose.

"If it be his will not to accept a fortune accumulated under these conditions or in the way I made mine, I have joined to this a paper with the names of those to whose heirs reparation can be made. But it is my present intention to seek rather some strong man, at war with other men—a hater of his kind, as I have good reason to be—who will continue my work after I am gone. So that in time, if the life of our instrument, Jeremy Orrin, be spared, one of the greatest fortunes of the age may be built up.

"From my youth I was called Miser Hobby. And that most unjustly. Because I wrought day and night that I might leave my one daughter Bell in a position of a lady. But she chose to throw my lifetime's work in my face. She left me without a word for a penniless boy in a uniform. My heart had been black and bitter before, but there had always been a bright spot upon it. That was Bell. Afterward it became black altogether, for I cast Bell out of my heart and sight like an untimely birth. I worked harder, yet for all that I wearied of the work. To be rich suddenly, to have all in my power, and to deny to Bell and her tramping rascal of a redcoat a sup of broth, a bite of bread—that alone I counted sweet. It would come to me some day, I knew.

"I looked about for a weapon—for the hand to strike. This I found in Jeremy Orrin. It was at the Tryst of Longtown, whither I had gone to deliver a web. There I saw a limber youth, very dark, turning somersaults on a scrap of carpet. He spread out his hands and walked on them. There was hair on the palms. The thumb was as long as the fingers, and he raised himself upon them as on steel springs. I saw him take a byre 'grape'—or fork of three thick prongs—and bend the three into one by the mere strength of one hand.

"Then that set me thinking of other things that these fingers might be taught

to do. So, in a little inn, I made the tumbler's acquaintance, and I could see that at first he eyed me curiously. I could read such looks. I knew the wickedness that was in his heart. He meant to murder me on my way home!

"But first I gave him to drink as much as he would. Suddenly I turned my pockets inside out and let him feel the linings of my coat—there in that lighted room, to prove that he would not be twopence halfpenny the richer by the transaction. Then, leaning forward as if jesting, I made a proposition. By himself, I said, such a man could do but little. He was but a tracked beast without a den. See what it had brought him to, tumbling on a carpet for a living, and hungry withal! I would give him safety, a position, the high road between two market towns, neither of them yet reached by the railway, running before our very door.

"Finally, on the doorstep of the Red Lion, holding unstably by either lintel, a warning to all sober men like myself, I pointed out Riddick of Langbarns, who, as I knew, had that day sold his two-year-old horses to the tune of eight hundred pounds!

"Jeremy Orrin and I left the lighted town behind us. I am well aware even then that I put my life in his hands—how terrible was my danger I did not know. For the young man's wayward madness was as yet hidden from me, as from all the world except his elder sister. At the Windy Slap, a narrow wind-swept gully, and a wild enough scene at the best of times, I came out suddenly, and speaking to Riddick, who was on horseback, asked him civilly if he would need any sheets or tablecloths that year. For that I was making out my winter's orders. He knew me at once, and bade me get out of his sight for an arrant self-seeking miser that would keep a shivering man from a good glass of toddy at his own fireside!

"Then I lowered my prices till he checked his horse beside a bank (for I had been walking by his side), and while he strove to calculate cost and rebate in his drink-dozened brain, Jeremy quietly leaped up from behind, and clasped about his neck the broad-palmed, long-fingered, hairy hands that had crushed the byre trident. Riddick of Langbarns never spake word. We buried him decently in the kirkyard—in a grave that had that day been filled, laying him on the coffin of a better man than himself—even that of Ephraim Rae, elder in the Hardgate Cameronian Kirk. Face down we laid him—his nose to the name plate—and so filled in and replaced the sods. It was very secure—an idea of my own. No disturbance of the earth, or none that mattered. For who would ever seek for a

lost man in the grave, where, that same day, another had been laid with all due funeral observances? It would be sacrilege. Afterwards, when we used this method, I always tried to be present at both interments. In fact, I got a name for my reverence and exactitude at burials. Also it gave me some useful thoughts upon the transitory nature of all things. Besides, I liked to watch the mourners' daylit faces and then think of Jeremy's twelve hours later, seen perhaps by the light of a late-rising, cloudy, out-worn moon!

"Good fortune such as this (the timely burial of Elder Rae, that is) we could not always depend upon. But as far as possible, of course, we arranged our business transactions so that they fell due on the day of a funeral, either at Over Breckonton or Breckonside. Bewick was of no use to us—the graveyard there having the fatal fault of being placed under the windows of the manse, and the minister being a bachelor, who never cared whether he went to bed at all or not, keeping his light burning till three of the morning. Such men have no right to be ministers. Still, for the time being, the other two parishes served us very well.

"I saw, however, that a change was becoming necessary, indeed imperative. Also, thanks to a certain drover of the name of Lang Hutchins, I had the money. It was most providential (I shall always so regard it) that at this very time the place and policies of Deep Moat Grange came into the market.

"Lang Hutchins was a pure windfall—a catch of Jeremy's. I had nothing to do with that. One night Jeremy walked into the weaving-room with a great leathern pocket-book.

"'Where did you get that?' I asked. I was, I remember, at the loom, and the pattern being an interesting one, the time had passed without my regarding its flight. It was, as a matter of fact, past one of the morning.

"'Lang Hutchins, the Bewick drover, gied it to me,' said Jeremy Orrin, 'and as there were nae funerals in Breckonside, and that minister man at Bewick willna put his candle oot, I had e'en to make Lang Hutchins up a bonnie bed in the gairden at the Grange o' the Moat!'

"I rose instantly to my feet. This was indeed terrible. I had a vision (which I have often seen in reality since) of Jeremy scratching the earth with his fingers, and creeping about on the black soil like some unclean beast, leaving marks easy to be read by the first passer-by. We should be discovered. Jeremy would be

tracked, and I saw in appalling perspective two gibbets, and on one the murderer, and on the other his master—the same Miser Hobby who had thought to make a lady of his daughter; now Howard Stennis, Esquire—both raised to the dignity of the hempen cravat.

"For a moment I did not know what to do—yes, even I, to whom plans occur like oaths to a bad, foul-mouthed, swearing man such as Lang Hutchins, one who had defied his Maker the very day his soul, was required of him.

"'Buried in the garden at Deep Moat Grange!' I repeated to myself. 'The place out of habitation, a prey to every poacher, the gardens and orchards overrun by vagrant boys!' Ah—even in that word it had come to me!

"Deep Moat Grange was for sale! But then I had not enough money to buy it, and I could not face the raising of a mortgage—the possible scrutinies! At that moment Jeremy Orrin tossed carelessly at me a long, many-caped overcoat, such as long-distance coachmen used to wear in the days when twice a day the 'Dash' and the 'Flying Express' passed Breckonside, and I was a boy in knee breeches and a blue bonnet. I could feel that the coat was well padded though not heavy. And there in the weaving-room of the little cottage, I drew out of the lining hundreds and hundreds of packets of five-pound notes, all English, and mostly long in use, like those which pass from hand to hand among drovers. I could see that no one of them had recently been in a bank. There would, therefore, be no awkward record of the numbers. Moreover, Lang Hutchins had come north suddenly (so Jeremy told me) after quite a year of running the southern markets.

"It was as safe as could be—all but the garden plot at Deep Moat Grange, where in one particular oblong the earth had been raked with the split and blackened nails of Jeremy's fingers.

"After that, there was no letting that spot out of our sight till I had got the lawyer work finished—I mean that of the vendor's representatives of Deep Moat Grange. I was my own lawyer and factor, that is, so far as the district was concerned. I had a kinsman in Edinburgh who went over all the agreements and so on, for me, just to see that everything was in order.

"All the time I was away Jeremy watched, resolved that if any one manifested overmuch interest in the scratched soil at the bottom of the lawn where the rhododendrons begin, he or she should find a quiet resting-place beside them.

But, barring one slight accident, into the details of which I deem it useless to enter (being but a poor man and not worth in the gross three solvent halfpence) no one looked near the lawn or the old orchard.

"At last Deep Moat Grange was mine. Deep Moat Grange was paid for in untraceable money—I had examined every note. Jeremy and I moved in, and having heard all that he had to say about his sister Aphra, I sent a hundred pounds to her—and our address. Jeremy said that would bring her. We felt—or at least I, who knew the ways and thoughts, the chatterings and clatterings of Breckonside, felt that there was need for a good, careful, managing woman there. From what Jeremy told me, I was certain that Euphrasia Orrin was that woman.

"She was. I could not have chosen better. Yet, for all that, the madman had deceived me in the way that all such have, with a cunning far above that of sane and grave persons, such as myself.

"Euphrasia or Aphra Orrin (as she was called) arrived in a few days. But she brought with her three hare-brained sisters, concerning whom, if their brother had breathed so much as one word, neither Aphra nor any of them should ever have set foot within my door. I should have claimed my granddaughter, at that time cared for by a decent working woman named Edgar—and for whose upkeep I subscribed according to my means. I should have taken her, I say, and trained her up to fulfil my needs. Between us, Jeremy and I could have done it.*

* "I say nothing of the return and death of my daughter Bell. Save that she left the parish and returned burdened with a brat, her coming had no interest for me, though the neighbours made a foolish work about it, going so far as to give me an ill name on account of my treatment of her!"

"But Aphra was a clever woman, and as soon as I saw her, and as soon as she had spoken with Jeremy, I knew for certain that there would be no turning her out. She meant to stay at Deep Moat Grange, and stay she would and did, she and her yelping litter of she-whelps. Of her I only asked one thing, that she should confine their vagaries to the space contained between the pond and the moat. The house had now been put into some repair, the drawbridge restored, and we were safe within our own guards and barriers. As for the country clatter, we took no heed to that. Besides, whenever there was a fair or promising market, it was agreed that (for my character's sake) I should be found with my lawyer in

Edinburgh, or in the company of some other decent, producible people.

"The advantages of the Grange for our business are manifold. Firstly, should this fall into the hands of a successor actuated by a like hatred of humanity and lack of moral prejudice, and supposing him to be served by the same able though irresponsible tools which I have used, I would point out that from either road, that to Bewick to the right or that through the woods to Longwood on the left, there is direct water carriage to the secluded lawn beneath Deep Moat Grange. In case of necessity, supposing that the 'accident' has befallen on the Bewick road, you can load your boat by the bridge near to the darkest part of the wood behind the Bailiff's houses, and then, sculling lightly, you are carried all the way by the current of the Backwater without leaving a trace. If the game has been played on the highway to the right, then there is equally good going across the pond. It is recommended that the boat, being probably heavily burdened, should return by the north side, where I have planted certain rows of weeping willows, which not only afford a grateful shade, but are seemly in the circumstances.

"It was, however, Miss Orrin (a clever woman in her way) who had the best idea as to the final disposition of the frail but compromising relicts of mortality, thus appropriately transported under my weeping willows to their final resting beds. She made perennial flower pots of them, and nowhere could be seen such display of varied beauty as she obtained from cold, useless clay!

"Personally, I have always been opposed to the general uselessness of graveyards and cemeteries. Nothing is better suited to enrich the soil than the material which Jeremy supplied. It is far before phosphates, about which there has been so much talk these last years. So I was greatly content when Miss Orrin —to whom of necessity I had to confide the secret of Jeremy's unfortunate tendencies, in order that she might use her influence to direct it for our mutual advantage—discovered a means at once of security and of utility by planting masses of lilies in heart-shaped plots all about, wherever Jeremy had found it necessary to disturb the soil. I believe that Miss Orrin attached some subtle meaning to the lilies. Indeed had I not prevented her, she would even have made the plots of the shape and size of coffins—which certainly shows a trace of the family failing.

"But this was, of course, impossible. I had, how ever, good reason to be content with our new arrangement. The old, difficult (though perfectly safe) interment in a doubly tenanted grave, with all its annoyances of being on the

spot myself, of scaling walls and keeping Jeremy to his labour, was all done away with. Deep Moat certainly became, as it were, a self-contained factory for spinning the money which is the god of this world. Ah, it was a peaceful and a happy time. Within and without, everything went like clockwork. I began to be respected, too—at a certain distance from home, that is. For I had taken care to engage the simplest and honestest soul in the world for my grieve or bailiff, and when Jeremy and I were not out on our more immediate business, Simon Ball and I frequented markets and bought all that was necessary for the home farm. To be exact, he bought and I paid.

"But the beginning of evil days was at hand. I have always noticed it. Man cannot long be left in peace, even among the most favoured surroundings. Now I was doing no harm to any soul or body in all the surrounding parishes. Instead I did what good I could—spoke fairly and civilly, contributed freely to charities, helped more than one of my impoverished neighbours. But I will not conceal it from my successor (who alone is to read this manuscript) that all my good will was in vain, so far as gaining the affection and respect of the countryside was concerned. Yet for this, personally, I can conceive no reason. Those whom Jeremy took charge of were invariably strangers—men of loud, brawling character, generally semi-drunkards, trampling all laws of a quiet and respectable demeanour under their feet.

"While I myself, giving shelter to these poor creatures, the sisters Orrin—who without me would have been hunted from city to city—I, Howard Stennis, whose only dissipation or distraction was to weave the thronging fancies of flower and fruit into my napery—was no better respected than an outlaw dog. They called me the Golden Farmer, but it was with a sneer. None would willingly linger a moment to speak with me, not so much as one of Bailiff Ball's tow-headed urchins. If one of them met me in a lonesome path, as like as not he would set up a howl and dodge between my legs, running, tumbling, and making the welkin ring, as if I had been some black evil bogie!

"Yet, I am a man who all his life has loved children, and (with a few exceptions) carefully observed the courtesies as between man and man. When I consider how I have been served by friends and neighbours, many of whom I have repeatedly obliged, I am filled with surprise that I have kept the sphere of my operations so remote from my insulters. But then I have always, save perhaps in the case of my daughter Bell, been a forgiving man. Even now I cherish no enmity against those whose machinations have caused me to be

suspected.

"It was about this time, when the first-planted lilies were beginning to sprout for the third season, that Jeremy, nosing, as usual, here and there, discovered the ancient underground rooms across the drawbridge. Immediately I saw the use they would be to us. Having been well brought up myself, I had always regretted the necessity of sending so many, mostly careless and godless men, to their account unwarned and unprepared. Such of them as could be induced to disgorge further sums of money besides those carried on their bodies might at least have some space for reflection and repentance. What I did not foresee was that the Orrins, with their low, mad-folks' cunning, would make use of these nests of chambers and hiding-places for their own ends, and thereby endanger everything which I had so wisely and so laboriously thought out.

"But for all that it was, as I have said, the beginning of the evil days.

"And as usual it was owing to my own carelessness. I have enough common sense to know that, nine times out of ten, men have themselves to thank for the misfortunes which befall them. It is only the born fool who goes from house to house and from friend to friend maundering about ill luck and an unkind Providence. Good luck, at least, is generally only the art of looking a good way ahead.

"I was away in Edinburgh, for the almanac told us that we were approaching the date of the Bewick Wakes. Jeremy was to make the acquaintance of a certain Lammermuir farmer with a well lined pocket-book. The lily bed, under which he was to lie, would just have made out Miss Aphra's pattern neatly—a thing concerning which she was most particular. I will not give his name; if this falls into the hands of a worthy successor he may one day scent the 'shot' out for himself. He speaks broad Lammermuir, wears glasses hooked round his ears, like a college professor, and generally has cut himself while shaving in more than one place. But at any rate he had a respite for the time being.

"For, without my knowledge, and quite apart from all my well-ordered designs, Jeremy in a mad, fierce fit fell suddenly upon the mail carrier betwixt Breckonside and Bewick. Very early in the morning it was done, and the place unsuitable and quite unsafe, being close by the bailiff's cottage. But that was not the worst. The mare belonging to the carrier postman (I knew him well, a decent quiet man, Henry Foster by name) ran wide and wild, made a circuit of the Deep

Moat property and turned up in front of the school-house at Breckonside, the mail gig all blood and leaves, just as the innocent bairns were going in to say their morning's lessons.

"The rest of the business Jeremy had carried through well enough. He had sculled the body of Foster, properly covered with bark and brushwood, and laid it comfortably in the place intended for the Lammermuir farmer. He had taken the mail bags, such as appeared to have anything of value in them, turned them inside out, burned them in his baker's furnace, and hidden away the rings (which he could not melt) in some of his private *caches*.

"Yet when I asked him why he had done the deed at all, he would only reply, 'I saw Harry passing by, just when I had done whetting my knife, and I thought I would try it on him!'"

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE HOUSE OF DEATH

(*The last Testimony of Miser Hobby is continued and concluded*)

"It was in the days after the disappearance of Henry Foster, the mail-post carrier between Bewick and Breckonside, that I became aware of the increasing madness of those whom I had so rashly taken under my roof and protection. The younger sisters, especially Honorine, thought nothing of standing on walls screaming like peacocks, flapping their arms, and declaring that they were winged angels, ready on a signal from on high to fly upward into the blue. At such times Jeremy would take to his fiddle and lock himself in the top rooms of the house, especially affecting the tower chamber overlooking the Moat. He even refused on several occasions to go to work, though the business indicated was safe and remunerative enough. I had often observed with great interest the home coming of young Jamie Caig, of Little Springfield, a great taker of grass parks, a mighty dealer in well-wintered sheep and fat bullocks. On one occasion I

watched him all the way from Longtown with the best part of a thousand pounds in his pockets.

"I remember that he had on a shiny white mackintosh, and I thought he would never leave the town, going into all sorts of foolish and expensive cook shops and toy bazaars to buy trinkets and knick-knacks.

"Then, after all, at the arch of trees on the Pond Road where the way narrows, there was no Jeremy—though I knew that the usual boat was moored within twenty yards—fifteen to be exact. Thus Caig, the younger, and his thousand pounds passed unharmed. In the dull light I could see him put his hand into an open packet of candy and take out a piece to suck it. He went by whistling, mocking at me, as it were—only that he was such a grown-up babe.

"But there was worse to come. At some risk to myself I followed behind. He never even looked over his shoulder, only quickening his pace as he got near to the tumble-down, out-at-elbows steading of Little Springfield which he had leased for himself.

"The inhabitants, one and all, must have been waiting for young Jamie Caig. For before I could turn away a troop of children issued out and rushed at him, taking him by escalade, routed out his pockets, even his wife and sisters taking part, and he all the time laughing. I never saw a more disgusting sight in my life.

"That night I broke in the door of Jeremy's room where he sat playing on the flute, and, with a revolver in one hand to keep him in awe, I thrashed him severely about the neck and shoulders with my cane. His sister said that it was the only way to teach him obedience.

"Indeed, Miss Orrin was a sensible woman, and at this time remained my only stand-by. So long as I supported the mad troop, I could count upon her, even though it perilled her soul. She aided me with her brother also, and from her I learned a thing about Jeremy which, though I am generally brave enough, I will admit disquieted me.

"Jeremy had taken to digging under the lily roots with his finger nails, and when checked for it by his sister, he said that he wanted to see whether Lang Hutchins, Harry Foster, and the others were 'coming up.' He added that there would be a resurrection some day, and he was scratching to see how soon it would happen. He did not want it to come unawares, when he was asleep, for

instance.

"And he made even my well-trained blood run cold by laughing with chuckling pleasure, declaring that 'when they stick their heads through, Jeremy will be on hand to do his wark a' ower again! He will twine a halter round their necks as they are sproutin' and fill their mouths fu' o' clay. Then Jeremy will defy even Aphra to gar them rise again. There's nae word o' twa resurrections, ye ken! So Jeremy will do for them that time!'

"At other seasons, especially after he had been punished for scratching in the soil, he would cry like a child. He generally did this when Aphra whipped him. But in half an hour I would find him again among the lily beds, his hands all bound up in fingerless gloves, but his ear close down against the earth.

"'Wheesht—wheesht!' he would whisper, putting up a linen-wrapped stump to stay me. 'Listen to them knocking—they are knocking to get oot. Jeremy can hear them!'

"And though I raised him with the toe of my boot and made him be off into the house, yet his words shook my nerves so that I had to go into the weaving-chamber, where I was not myself till I had taken a good long spell at the loom.

"After some of the later disappearances, notably that of Harry Foster—for, as he was in some sort a public servant wearing a uniform, the postman's case received attention out of all proportion to its importance—the police would come about us, asking questions and taking down notes and references. There was nothing serious in that, though I was even asked to justify my *alibi* by giving the employ of my time during the day previous to 'the unfortunate occurrence'—unfortunate, indeed, for me and for all concerned—Harry Foster included. As, however, I had both lunched and supped with my old friend and lawyer, Mr. Gillison Kilhilt, and afterwards slept at his house, I could not have been more innocent if I had done the same with the Queen herself, God bless her!

"But it was not the police, rate-supported and by law established (whom I have always encouraged and aided in every possible way, entertaining them, and facilitating their researches and departures), that annoyed me. The little, mean, paltry spying of Breckonside and the neighbourhood was infinitely more difficult to bear.

"For instance, there was a boy—a youth, I suppose I should call him—one Joseph Yarrow, upon whose rich father I had long had my eye. If it had not been that he generally came in the company of my own granddaughter Elsie, his neck would soon enough have been twisted. But as it was, he put us to an enormous amount of trouble. One never knew when he would be spying about, and once, by an unfortunate mistake of my own, I introduced my granddaughter and this intrusive young good-for-nothing into a barn of which our mad people had been making a kind of chapel of Beelzebub.

"There was also a High-Church clergyman—a kind of mission priest, I think he called himself—come north with a friend to convert the Scotch. He took it into his head that, not making great progress with the sane of the neighbourhood, he might perhaps have better luck with Miss Aphra and her private asylum!

"And I must say that he had. The processions and peacock screamings went on, but there was an end of skulls and little coffins and crossbones knocked together like cymbals as they marched. Instead, they had tables with crucifixes, and confessionals, and all sorts of paraphernalia in gold lace and tags. Mr. Ablethorpe (that was the High-Churchman's name) was pleased and proud. Four at once, sane or insane, was an unprecedented increase to his scanty flock. And as for him everything depended upon the proper taking of the sacraments, it was all right. Honorine and the rest would take them, or anything else, twenty times an hour.

"But in addition there was 'confession,' and you may be sure I went carefully into that business with Miss Aphra. However, she reassured me.

"'These poor ones' (so she always named her sisters, Honorine, Camilla, and Sidonia) 'know nothing about it. And as for me, I confess only what will not endanger the shelter of the roof which covers us. Because of that I am willing, for some time longer, to retain unconfessed and unforgiven sin on my soul!'

"This sounded all right to me. But, fool that I was, as usual my confiding nature put me in danger. If I had suspected that some day that same Mr. Ablethorpe, whom I had received and warmed like a snake in my bosom, would carry off not only Honorine and her two mad companions to one of his patent sisterhoods (even Aphra herself fleeing, probably to join them later) leaving me (as I am at present) alone with Jeremy to face the storm—well, I would have nipped in the very bud the propagation of erroneous and Romanist doctrines. I

have always been conscientiously opposed to these in any case!

"It was the increasing waywardness of the entire Orrin family which threatened to be the ruin of all my carefully planned scheme. If only I could have kept them as I first got them—Jeremy docile and comparatively easy of influence even in his hours of wildness, Aphra sage and wise in counsel, with a firm hand over the others, and all that property of Deep Moat Grange so excellently laid out, as if on purpose for our operations!

"But, alas! Folly no more than wisdom will stand still. If only they had been like my web, full of subtle combinations and devices which none could work out in full beauty save myself, yet abiding still and waiting for my hand without the changing of a stitch! The Orrins were no more than my loom wherewith to spin gold—but—they would not bide as they were during my absences, however short.

"The worst of it all was that, having once begun to operate on their own accounts, though most unfortunately and ill advisedly, they would no longer confine themselves to legitimate business. Not only Jeremy, but even Aphra must needs try to realize the most fantastic and impossible combinations, like some poor drudging weaver who should attempt to execute one of my patterns. It was not in them, the hare-brained, mauling crew, and naturally enough they spoiled the web.

"First of all, there was the affair of that young vagabond's father, the rich shopkeeper at Breckonside—rich, that is, not as I am rich, but rich for a little town village anchored down on a dozen miles square of fertile lands between the Bewick marshes and the uplands of Cheviot.

"Now, I had always had it in my head that some day a trifle might be made out of this Joseph Yarrow, senior. But he was a bold, straight-dealing man, who knew that the nearest bank, or a good investment through his lawyer, was the best way of keeping his head whole on his shoulders. He went and came ostentatiously along both our roads, by night or day—it mattered little to him. He had never more than five shillings and a brass watch in his pockets. All his business he did by cheque, and he was not at all ashamed to enter a shop, or even accost a man on the street of a town where he was known, and ask for the loan of five shillings—which was certain to be returned on the morrow, with a pot of home-made jam or some delicacy from the crowded shelves of his shop.

"Most people liked dealing with this man Yarrow. As for me, I never could bear him. He had a scornful eye, not questing, like his son's (whose neck I could twist), but merely sneering—especially when, at distant market towns, he would hear me addressed as 'Laird,' which is my rightful title. At such times he would smile a little smile that bit like vitriol, and turn away. And I knew well enough that he was thinking and saying to himself—'Miser Hobby—Miser Hobby!' Still, had I had the sense to look at the matter in the right light, this should have cheered me—that he only *despised* me, I mean. For if Joseph Yarrow, the cleverest man in all the neighbourhood, was not calling me 'Murderer Hobby,' then I was safe from all the rest. But so curious a thing is man, and so much harder to bear is scorn than the worst accusation of crime, that it was often on my tongue tip to jolt his self-complaisance with a little inkling of the truth.

"All the same, I laid it all up against him—some day I would catch him coming home with a goodly sum. So, after long thought, I arranged that a letter should be sent to warn him that one Steve Cairney, a slippery 'dealer' who had long owed him a large amount, would be at the Longtown Fair to sell horses, and that it was now or never. The thing was true. Nothing, indeed, could be truer. Jeremy was forewarned, and all should have passed off easily and fitly as the drawing on of an old glove. But because that fool Jeremy had seen instruments of music (of which he is inordinately fond) by the score and gross in Yarrow's shop down at Breckonside, he must needs put the man into a cell behind the Monks' Oven, instead of finishing the matter out of hand. Aphra also mixed herself up in the affair, urging Yarrow, who must have had an excellent idea where he was, to sign the cheque they had found on him, as if that made any difference! I know a man in Luxembourg who will give two-thirds value on a cheque drawn on a sound account, and, in addition, provide the signature from any reasonable copy. It is never the first owners who lose with such things. There were plenty of Yarrow's receipted bills about the house, and there need have been no difficulty about that. But unhappily I was from home, and so everything went to pigs and whistles.

"Then it pleased Miss Orrin to take a violent jealousy of my granddaughter, Elsie Stennis, and to sequester her somewhere about the premises, which, of course, brought the storm about our ears in full force. With this folly, worse than any crime, I am glad to record that I had nothing whatever to do. Doubtless the business was carried out by Jeremy under the orders of his sister Aphra. I have at least this to be thankful for, that as long as I retained the full and entire direction of affairs Deep Moat Grange might have been called the vale of peace and

plenty.

"Then came Parson Ablethorpe, who in collusion, most likely, with his missionary associate—De la Poer, I think he calls himself—spirited off the women, Aphra last of all. It was a case of rats leaving a sinking ship. Had it not been for the loss of Miss Aphra, for whose character I had some respect, I should have been glad to see the last of them. But as soon as the influence of his sister was removed, Jeremy became wilder and madder than ever. I could see him on moonlight nights creeping about among the lily clumps, digging here and scraping there, his hands and feet bare and earth-stained. Then, seated tailorwise among the mould, he would play strange music on his violin, and laugh. On dark nights it was not much better. I could not see him, it is true. But I could hear him digging and panting like a wild beast, or laughing to himself, and then stopping suddenly to croon, 'Down Among the Dead Men!'"

* * * * *

"This," said Mr. Fiscal McMath, "is the last entry in what purports to be a narrative or diary." He turned to another leaf left behind in the house and recovered by the searchers.

"Ah," he said, "here is yet another paragraph. It is dated 'February 10, morning," and runs as follows: "'Came home to an empty house. Jeremy madder than ever, playing and laughing about the house—nothing to eat. Dined with Ball at the bailiff's cottage. I did not like the way Jeremy looked at me when I refused him money. But it is he or I for the mastery. In case of anything happening, the lines which follow contain my last will and testament: I die at peace with all men, and I leave everything of which I die possessed to my granddaughter, Elsie Stennis!

"(Signed)
"HOWARD (sometimes called Hobby) STENNIS."

"The wretch! The villain! The robber!" cried Aphra Orrin, for a moment forgetting her role of penitent—"to take from us who earned in order to give all to a stranger!"

"Elsie will never touch a penny of it!" I shouted, but my voice was lost in the

universal howl.

"The woman stands fully committed—take her away!" cried the sheriff.

He had glanced at his watch. It was in fact, long past his dinner hour! As if moved by his hand policemen rapidly displaced the two clergymen, and Aphra disappeared down a flight of stairs to the cells below.

But, curiously enough, the mob had no thought of her. The reading of Hobby Stennis' confession—so ghastly, perverted, cold-blooded, dead to all moral sense, even triumphant, ending with the will which gave everything to Elsie—had so incensed the people that there was a rush when a kind of crack-witted preaching man from Bewick shouted, "Make an end, ye people, make an end! Let none of the viper's brood escape! She is a woman, this Elsie, and will breed the like—murderers and monsters every one! She is a Stennis, and we have had enough of such. To Breckonside! To the Bridge End! Find the heiress, chosen as the fittest to succeed the man-slayers and make an end! Hang her quick to a tree!"

I could now see what my father had meant by leaving the place so hurriedly. Mr. Ablethorpe, who knew, had warned him of what was coming. And that, as there was no other outlet for the passions of the angry mob, Elsie might be in some temporary danger of violence and ill usage, if of nothing worse. Therefore, he had hurried off, taking Rob Kingsman with him. As for me, even while thinking these thoughts, I was swept out of the doorway, and carried along by the throng, my feet scarcely touching the ground. The mob, chiefly rough Bewick miners and labourers, took the road toward the Bridge End of Brecksonside at a trot, bawling "Death and vengeance!" against all of the blood of Stennis.

And there was now but one of that name and race—Elsie!

CHAPTER XXXVII

I AM HEROIC

You may be sure that I kept up with the crowd. It was a disagreeable crowd—Bewick Muir pitmen, and the navvies from the East Dene and Thorsby waterworks—they were making a new pipe-line through the Bewick Beck Valley, and the navvies were interested in poaching—so that was what had brought them so far from home. Only the few Breckonside people who had not left early knew anything bout Elsie.

All that was known to the bulk of those present was that Hobby Stennis had amassed a great fortune by entrapping and making away with drovers, farmers and cattle dealers—that he had rigged out Deep Moat Grange for that purpose, and that in his last will and testament he had expressed a wish that his heirs should continue the business. The sole heir appeared to be a certain Elsie, and her they naturally enough took for a dangerous malefactor.

There must, however, have been a Breckonside traitor among them, for as soon as they reached the town they made straight for the cottage at the Bridge End. The door was burst in, the poor furniture turned topsy-turvy—Elsie's books thrown about. But I knew better than to interfere at this point. There was something much more serious coming.

I knew very well that my father would never let poor Nance Edgar suffer for something that she had not been mixed in at all. When Joseph Yarrow started in to do a thing—I don't mean me—it had to be gone through with, even though it cost some odd halfpence. For my father, keen at a bargain as he was, did not spare his money when once he put his hand deep into his pocket.

So I pegged it down the road and over the bridge, with the hottest of the pack at my heels. Somebody must have told them that Elsie had gone to "the Mount." And if I could find who that person was, I would wring his neck on the High Street of Breckonside—which would be not a bit more than he deserves.

"*Death to the Stennises! Death to the murderers!*"

I could hear the shout right at my heels, turning after turning, till at last I was in the home stretch, and clambering up the steep ascent to the red brick wall within which stood the house that was my home. What was my surprise to find all the iron window shutters, which ever since I could remember had been turned back against the wall (and each caught there with a screw catch) fitted into the window frames!

My father was on the housetop. I could just see him over the railings, for it was darkish in spite of the moon.

"Is that you, Joe?" he called out, leaning forward till I thought he would fall off.

I answered that it was—I and no other.

"Then be off with you round by the stables. All is shut here. One of the two Robs will let you in!"

He meant Rob Kingsman or Rob McKinstrey. So I tell you I tracked it about the house and thumped on the gate. There was not much time, you understand, for the first of the band were already shouting and gesticulating to my father to give up Elsie Stennis. They meant to make an end of all the "murdering lot," and of any who sheltered them! So they said, and by the accent and the taint of whiskey in the air, I could make out that there were a lot of Irish among them. Now the Irish that stay at home are very decent people indeed, as I have good reason to know, but those that come about Breckonside to work at the quarries and waterworks are the devil and all—if Mr. Ablethorpe and the vicar will excuse me the expression.

Well, I knocked and I shouted, but never an answer got I.

At last, at the window of the sleeping-room that was Rob Kingsman's, I saw a white blob which I made out to be the occupant's face.

"Hey, Rob!" I cried; "let me in, Rob. They are after me—at my heels!"

"Reason the mair for you bidin' where ye are," said Rob, whose strong point was certainly not courage, "if they have done ye no harm as yet, just keep quiet and they will do ye none whatever. Ye are no Stennis. The Stennises are a' weel-faured!"

"But I want to help—I want to get in! De'il tak' ye, Rob, let me in!"

I think even the vicar, good Churchman as he is (though not in Mr. Ablethorpe's sense) would have forgiven me the strength of the last expression—considering the provocation, that is. As also the fact that, living so near Scotland, where there are so many "Presbies" about, the very best Churchman is

sometimes seduced into their rough, but picturesque, habit of speech.

"Here, Joe!" said Rob, after a while, taking pity on me. He opened a little wicket—just one pane of his iron-barred window, for my father had had everything about the place strengthened at the first scare about Riddick of Langbarns and the other lost farmers and drovers; "here, lad, tak' haud o' this! There's a barrel that had sugar intil't doon by the weighing machine. Creep into that. And mind—dinna shoot onybody. Use the pistol only in self-defence. There's nae law again' that!"

The next moment I had a revolver in one hand and a pouch of cartridges in the other—yellow bag, waist belt and all! I tell you I felt the citizen of no mean city as I buckled them on. I would not have changed places with the Prince of Wales going to open an Aquarium. For, you see, I had never been allowed to go near the little room where my father kept the firearms for sale, the sporting ammunition, and the other touch-and-go truck, which interested me more than anything in the place. Of course, when father was lost for so long, I could have gone and helped myself. But, though you mayn't think it, I had a sort of pride about that.

I wasn't going to do when he was away what I durstn't do when he was stamping about the yard and stores. So I didn't. But to have a real, *real* revolver given me, with proper cartridges—and me outside and all the others inside—why, it was just the primest thing that ever happened to me in all my life.

When I reached the outer gate (that by which Dapple had entered, Mad Jeremy, no doubt, riding her to the door) Rob McKinstrey shouted that if I looked sharp he would let me in and have the yard door shut again before ever one of the Paddies could get his nose inside.

But I knew better than that—oh, ever so much better.

Not many fellows get a chance to die nobly, like a young hero, in front of his own father's house, in defence of his girl—with not only that girl, her own self, but also his second best—I mean another girl friend (of his mother's) looking out at him from the wall, just like the beautiful Jewess Rebecca, and Rowena the Saxon, and all that lot.

So I charged round, knowing that the eyes of Elsie and the Caw girls were on me. And there in front of the house was a whole mob of Geordies and Paddies,

navvies, and all the general riff-raff, with here and there an angry Bewicker who knew no better—all calling for Elsie to be given up to them. My father was up on a flat part of the roof, and was haranguing them, as if he had been brought up to the business. They were flinging dirt and stones at him, too, and one had clipped him on the side of his head, so that the blood was trickling down his temple, which made me mad to watch. Morning had come by this time, so that was how I could see so well. It comes precious early at Breckonside this time of the year, as you would know if your father started you out as early as mine did. We have lots of winter there, but when the light time does arrive, it comes along early and stays to supper.

Well, you see, ever since my father took so stiffly to Elsie, I had been pretty much gone on the governor. I suppose, even before that, I would not have seen him mishandled without shaking a stick for him. But now, it just made my blood boil, and I am not one of your furious heroes either. I always think well before I let my courage boil over. As you may have noticed from this biography, I do not profess to be one of your fetch-a-howl-and-jump-into-the-ring heroes.

But, as father's spring sale advertisements say, this was an opportunity which might never occur again. (It didn't, as a fact.)

So I got right between the crowd and our varnished front door, over which stood my father with his broken head, still holding forth as to what he would do to every man present. "Twenty years hard" was the least that even the back ranks would get.

There was not a real armed man among them. So, when I stepped up on the stone stoop with the morning sun glinting down my revolver and my warlike eye squinting t'other way along the sights, one hand behind my back as I had seen them do in pictures of duellists in the *Graphic* (when they do half-page pictures to illustrate what father calls "bloodthirsty yarns." I never read the small print, of course, but the pictures are prime for sticking up over a fellow's bed) and the yellow leather belt and open pouch for cartridges—well, I wouldn't have taken the fanciest price for myself at that moment—I really wouldn't. If it had been at Earl's Court, they would have marked me *Hors Concours*, and set me to judge the other exhibits!

Well, of course, these fellows had never seen the funny round black dot a loaded revolver makes when it is pointed square at your right eye and the fellow

behind looks like pulling the trigger. And I tell you they scurried back, fifty yards at least, and some of the less keen even began to sneak off. Pretty soon they all did so. I think they felt that they had been behaving foolishly.

But what they felt was nothing to what *I* did a moment after.

You see, my father didn't know what had been happening down below. He couldn't see, for one thing. The jut of the porch hid my warlike array and bold defence. So he couldn't understand who the—umph—was down there. To make out he came forward and leaned over the stone cornice at the end of the railings, with Elsie on one side of him and Harriet Caw on the other.

I stood up as noble as the boy on the burning deck or Fitz-James, when he said—

> "Come one, come all, this rock shall fly
> From its firm base as soon as I!"

Or, at any rate, something like that. But *my* feet were really on my native doorstep, while as for Fitz-James—my father says that, whether the rock flew or not, he had no title to it that could stand the least sniff of law.

Before my father spoke to me, both Elsie and Harriet Caw thought that I looked "just too heroic." This I heard on good authority, and it pleased me, for that was the exact effect I was trying to produce. Elsie was such a brick as to swear that she thought so even after, and to this day she sticks to it. Girls have some good points.

But it was awful enough at the time.

"Joe," shouted my father, and I could see his face red and threatening above me, with the effort of leaning so far over, "if you do not put up that popgun and come in the house directly, I will come out with a cane and thrash you within an inch of your life!"

He even went on to give particulars, which I think was mean of him in the circumstances. But no fellow can argue with his father—at least, not with one like mine—so I stepped round to the door. My father met me, took the revolver

away from me, and made as if he would box my ears. Last of all, he told me to go into the back kitchen and wash my face—and ears.

I could have forgiven him all but that word.

Then Harriet Caw giggled, and said she would come and see that I did it. But just then the tide turned. For, hearing Harriet say this, Elsie came along, too, and though I was, indeed, pretty grimy with racing and scratching along after these Bewick pit fellows, she took my hands, right under the nose of Harriet Caw, and said, "Joe, I thank you for saving my life!"

Then, loosing one of my hands, she put her palm on my shoulder, and stooped and kissed me on the forehead, ever so stately and noble, like another of those *Graphic* pictures.

But evidently Harriet Caw did not think so, for she only sniffed and, turning on her patent india-rubber heels (which she had bought to imitate Elsie), she went right upstairs.

So it was Elsie who helped me to wash away the smoke of battle. That wasn't so altogether bad. You should have seen her eyes, all you other fellows, when I undid the yellow leather belt from about my war-worn waist, and gave her the pouch of cartridges to put away.

"Are they Dum-Dum?" she said reverently.

And I said they were.

I didn't really know about the cartridges, but at least *I* was—and Elsie liked it very well. The fellows who talk a lot at such times never get on with girls.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

A FIT OF THE SULKS

Jove, wasn't it just ripping to think that at last a chap could go where he liked, and do what he liked—all that horrid lot at the Grange being either dead or with the locksmith's fingers between them and the outside world! Ripping? Rather! It was like a new earth.

All the same, you have no idea what a show place the ruined Grange became. Old Bailiff Ball stayed on and made a pretty penny by showing the people over. Especially the weaving-room, and where old Hobby sat, and the keyhole through which Elsie peeped to see her grandfather as if praying over the loom, with Jeremy's knife hafted between his shoulder blades! I think they would have had a magic lantern next! But finally this was stopped by the police people. For Miss Orrin was still to be tried, and all the money that could be got out of the grounds of Deep Moat Grange was to be given back to the friends and relatives of the people who had been "arranged for." But the mischief was, nobody wanted to buy, and the whole place was in danger of going to rack and ruin.

As for me, I took to wandering about a good deal there. Maybe I was love-sick—though I hope not, for my good name's sake. At least, it was about this time father said that we were far too young for any thought of marriage, but that Elsie could stay on in our house. Then Elsie was not happy, and was all the time wanting to go back to Nance Edgar's and her teaching at Mr. Mustard's—because my mother had got accustomed to the Caw girls, Harriet and Constantia, by this time, and could not bear the thought of parting with them. So Elsie, of course, would not stay, and go she did, as you shall hear.

We could have had some pretty good times, she and I, but for this worry. Father was about as fond of Elsie as I was (owing to the time behind the Monks' Oven). But, of course, he would not go openly against mother—that is, not in the house. It was not to be expected. If it had been anything to do with the shop or business, he would simply have told mother to mind her own affairs. And mother would have done it, too. But with the house it was different.

Well, all this made me pretty melancholy—with no more stand-up in me than a piece of chewed string. I read poetry, too, on the sly—such rot, as I now see—never anything written plain out, but all the words twisted, the grammar all tail foremost, and no sense at all mostly. I don't wonder nowadays people only use it

in church to sing—and even then never think of bringing away their hymn books with them.

So what with the poetry, and the melancholy brought on by the thought of Elsie going back to have that old bristly weasel-faced Mustard breathe down her neck when she was doing sums, I brought myself to a pretty low ebb. Elsie was sorry for me, I think, but said nothing. She had aches of her own under the old blue serge blouse (left side front) when Harriet Caw went past her on our stairs rustling in silk underthings and an impudent little nose in the air as if she smelt a drain.

At any rate I spent a good deal of time in the woods that summer. Woods are most sympathetic places when you are young and just desperately sad, but can't for the life of you tell why. Doctors, I believe, know. But when mother asked old Doc McPhail, he only grinned and said she had better "let the kail-pot simmer a while longer. The broth would be none the worse!"

But my mother could make nothing out of that, nor I either for that matter. Yet through the glass of the office door I actually saw the doctor grin at my father, and my father—yes, he actually winked back! Old brutes, both of them—fifth commandment or no fifth commandment!

"No books—no office!" said old McPhail, "not for a while. Let the colt run till he tires!"

So the colt was, as it were, turned out to grass. The official explanation was that between nineteen and twenty there occurred a dangerous period—twenty-one was a yet more dangerous age. *And I had overgrown my strength!*

I liked that—*I* who could vault the counter twenty-five times back and forth, leaning only on the fingers of one hand!

Something during the long summer days drew me persistently to the Deep Moat Woods. Some magnet of danger past and gone for ever—something, too, of nearness to the little schoolhouse, to which, spite of my father and myself, Elsie had carried her point and returned. I was sulky and jealous about this—much to Elsie's indignation.

"Mr. Mustard—Mr. Mustard!" she said, with her eyes cold and contemptuous; "I can keep Mr. Mustard in his place—ay, or ten of him—you

too, Joseph Yarrow, mopping about the woods like a sick cat! You are not half the man your father is!"

And, indeed, I never set myself up to be.

The day I am telling about was a Saturday. Elsie was to have gone for a walk with me; I expected it. But, instead, she informed me in the morning, when I met her setting out to go to the school-house for an extra lesson, that she had arranged to spend the afternoon with father in his office, going into her grandfather's affairs.

"Mr. Yarrow," she said, "thinks that everything which my grandfather possessed *before* he began to kill people is quite rightly mine. He had weaved hard for that. It would have been my mother's, and it ought to be mine, too. Even a bad man, your father says, ought to be allowed to do a little good after he is dead, if it can be arranged honestly. That is what your father says."

"My father!" I repeated after her bitterly, "it is always my father now."

"And good reason!" cried Elsie, firing up, "he gives the best and wisest advice, and it would tell on you, Master Joe, if you took it a little oftener."

"No wonder mother prefers Harriet Caw!" I muttered. And the next moment I would have given all that I had in possession to have recalled the words, but it is always that way with a tongue which runs too easily.

Turning, Elsie gave me one long look, hurt, indignant, almost anguished. Then she went slowly up the stairs, and in ten minutes her little chest and bundle of wraps were out on the yard pavement. I saw her bargaining with Rob Kingsman to take them across to Nance Edgar's for her. And I think she took a shilling out of her lean purse to give him. I tell you I felt like a hog. I was a hog. I knew it and, shamefaced, betook me to the woods as to a sty.

I had wounded Elsie to the quick, and wronged my father also.... I did not believe that either of them would ever forgive me. For, of course, she would go straight and tell father. I did not feel that I could ever go back. At the wood edge I turned and looked once at the smoke curling up from the chimney of "the Mount" kitchen. It was so hot there was no fire in any of the other rooms. Ah, '*home, sweet, sweet home*'!

Then I peeped at the schoolhouse, and saw Mr. Mustard and Elsie walking slowly up to the front door together. She had had that extra lesson, the nature of which she had not thought fit to tell me. Then she would go—well, no matter where. It was all over between us at any rate.

Did you ever know such a fool? Why, yes—there was yourself, dear reader—that is, if you have been wise. If not, it may not even yet be too late to be foolish.

I wasted the day in the woods. That is, I took out my pocket-book, jerked my fountain pen into some activity, and scribbled verses. I was too proud to go back home. And I knew well that my father had accepted in its fullest sense the doctor's advice, "Let him run!" He would neither send after me himself nor allow anyone else to meddle with my comings and goings.

It was curious and fascinating to linger about the Deep Moat Woods, once so terrible, now become a haunt of the sightseer and the day tripper. But I who had seen so much there, and heard more, who with beating heart had adventured so often into these darkling recesses, could not lose all at once the impression of brooding danger they had given me, ever since that first morning when Elsie and I crossed the road and plunged into them on the day of poor Harry Foster's death.

I suppose it was the moody state of my mind (Elsie unkindly calls it "sulks") which led me to stay on and on till the afternoon became the evening, and the shadows of the trees over the pond became more and more gloomy—mere dark purple with blobs and blotches of fire where the sunset clouds showed between the leaves.

I stood leaning against the trunk of a tree, the branches bending down umbrella fashion all about me. In those days I was a limber young fellow enough, and could have acted model for an illustrated-paper hero quite fairly—Childe Harold, the Master of Ravenswood, or one of those young Douglases to whom they brought in the Black Bull's Head in the Castle of Edinburgh, as a sign that they must die.

Of course, I had no business to be there at that time of night, but my own loneliness and Elsie's desertion made me stay on and on—miserable and cherishing my misery, petting my "sulks," and swearing to myself that I would never, *never* give in—*never* forgive Elsie, *never* return to those who had so ill used and misunderstood me.

Yes, what a fool, if you like! But I wasn't the first and I won't be the last to feel and say just the same things.

Then, quick and chillish, like the breaking of cold sweat on a man, though he doesn't know quite why, there passed over me the thrill which tells a fellow that he is not alone. Yet anything more lonely than the Moat Pond ruins, with what remained of the square hulk of the tower cutting the sky—the same from which Jeremy had hurled himself—could not be imagined.

Nevertheless I did not breathe that night air alone. I was sure of that. The bats swooped and recovered, seeing doubtless the white blur of my face in the dusk of the tree shadows.

Before me I could see the green lawn all trampled that had been Miss Orrin's pride. The lilies were mostly uprooted to allow of the perquisitions of the law. But whether it was something supernatural (in which at the time I was quite in a mood to believe), or merely owing to the moving of a soil so pregnant with the exhalations of the marsh—certain it is that I saw the distinct outline of a man's body, with limbs extended, lie in the same place where each of Miser Hobby's "cases" had been interred. They were marked out with a kind of misty fire, like the phosphorus when a damp match won't strike—not bright like the boiling swirl in a vessel's wake. Each of them kept quite still. There was no movement save, perhaps, that of a star, when you see it through the misty air low on the horizon of the west, and kind of swaying, which after all may only have been in my head.

I don't think I was particularly frightened at first. I had had some chemistry lessons with Mr. Ablethorpe, and we had gone pretty far on—boiling a penny in one kind of acid, and making limestone fizz with another—nitrochloric, or hydrochloric, I think. So I knew enough not to be frightened—at least not very badly. But what I saw next scared me stiff. I don't hide the fact. And so it would have scared you!

There was something on the lawn, dabbling among the shiny glimmer of the uprooted lily plots, crouching and scratching!

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE THING THAT SCRATCHED

Something living it was, and pretty active, too—no mistake about that. A dog? Possibly! But the next moment it stood erect on two feet like a man, and, turning slowly, peered all about. Then as suddenly it dropped down on all fours again and fell to the scraping. I could hear the sound distinctly in that lonesome place, where the water in the pond was too thick and heavy even to ripple, and where only the owl cried regularly once in five minutes.

I could not have spoken if I had tried, and I did not try. My tongue dried up like a piece of old bark, and I knew what the Bible meant when it said that sometimes a fellow's tongue clave to the roof of his mouth. Mine would, if the roof had not been as dry as a chip also.

You ask if I watched the Thing. You may take it for gospel that I could not have turned my head or averted my eyes for all the wealth of the Indies, though that, I understand, is a poor country enough.

Well, I saw the Thing scramble from grave to empty grave, scratch at each furiously, obscuring the dim phosphorescent glimmer. Then, standing erect, it flung up great clawlike hands with a ghoulish gesture of disappointment, moaning lamentably to the stars!

I tell you I dripped. My body trembled so that it shook the tree. So would yours have done, if you had been there—perhaps even a bigger tree.

Then some noise from the opposite side of the Moat, or, perhaps, from beyond the Pond, struck the ear of the Thing. I don't know how a spectre disappears. I never saw but that one, and since then I have lost all interest. But at any rate the Shape passed me at a long wolf's lope, making no noise and going fast. Right under my nose it slipped silently into the black deeps of the Pond. I think it sank underneath, for the next moment I could see no more than a wet head, a round, vague sphere that glistened faintly, turning this way and that, and very ghastly. *The Thing was swimming, and making no noise*.

Then I came to myself with a sudden revulsion. If there were, indeed, anything living on that Island of Deep Moat Grange—yet another of that hideous

crew left free and alive—the sooner the world knew about it the better. I had always thought, and my father had said that the official researches in the catacombs, called after the old Cistercian Monks, had been much too summary.

The moisture came slowly back to my mouth. I was still scared, of course, but I had got over the paralysis that comes with a first surprise. If the Thing could swim, I could run, though not quite so noiselessly, as there was an abundance of brushwood which I had to traverse, while the wave undulated like oil off the creature's back, as from an otter crossing a stream. You never saw anything swim so lightly and yet so fast.

It crossed the Pond obliquely, evidently making for the entrance of the Backwater. I could not follow directly. You see, I was constrained to cross at the drawbridge. But, between ourselves, I burned the path under my feet. I have many times run fast, but never so quickly as then. Talk about second wind—second courage is worth ten of it any day; quite as real, too, though less talked about.

It seemed a dreadful long way round about, and my heart was as much in my mouth now lest I should lose *It*, as it had been before, lest *It* should find me.

But I got there just ahead.

As I expected it had turned down the long, straight cut of the Backwater, and was swimming straight toward me. Now, thought I, I will surely see what the Thing is. But I could only make out—vague, round, and shining, a head that turned this way and that in swimming.

Suddenly the speed was checked. The swimmer, whatever it might be, turned sharply, searched a little, and appeared to hesitate. I took a step and bent forward to listen. A rotten branch cracked sharply under my careless foot. There was a sort of "wallop" like a seal or sea lion turning off a spring-board into a pond. Then came the sharp click of sliding iron. A square of darkness yawned in the canal bank. Something entered, and the door shut with several jerks like machinery in infrequent usage. The Thing had vanished. I was alone with the new terror of the woods of Deep Moat Grange.

Nevertheless I had had a certain lesson some time before. I could not again be altogether deceived. It *was* something human, though in all probability just so much the more dangerous and cruel for that. He, or she, knew the secret of the

iron door which Mr. Ablethorpe had made me enter.

There was, therefore, at least one still left of the devil's brood in their ancient haunts, and the sooner that the world was warned, the better. Or, at least, I would tell my father, and he would get together a few determined men, who would not be afraid to act according to their consciences and the necessities of the case.

As for fear, it had clean gone from me. A kind of singing came into my head instead, but not in my ears, which seemed to act with extraordinary acuteness. After all it was splendid to know what no one else on earth knew. Besides, I would show them all, especially Elsie, what I could do, acting alone. They despised me, laughed at me, yet here was I I had been away all day, without food, without a soul thinking about me or caring for me. Nevertheless I, Joe Yarrow, whom everybody thought an idler, a mere waster of precious time, would spring this news upon the world!

And so I might, but for one thing.

To get away I had to pass the wall of the old orchard and the flagstone on which Mr. Ablethorpe and I had seen Mad Jeremy stamping down with such force. Now, if I had not been such a conceited young man (my father's words), or so taken up with getting the better of Elsie (that young person's own opinion), I would have known that any of the crew who knew the secret of the iron door and the bricked passage would also be sure to know that of the flagstone and the way out by the orchard.

But at any rate it did not occur to me at the time. I thought solely about getting home, arming a band, and coming to watch for the scratcher of the lily beds, the swimmer of the Backwater, the creature which had opened and shut the iron door—no easy task, as we knew, Mr. Ablethorpe and I.

So I skirted the water edge of the old orchard hastily. Some stones had rolled down from the coping, and the walking was difficult. But there was still a good deal of light, as soon as I had turned the corner. For the west was bright with a late golden afterglow. Quite useful it was.

I was just about the middle, just where the gates with their broken blazons had stood, for it had been a swell place once. Also there was a short cut across to the Bewick road. I passed between the damaged stone posts, which, however, still stood upright. As I did so, something sprang at me with the growl of a

hungry tiger. I had hardly time to glance up, and even then I could see no more than a vaguely shining head, and an arm uplifted to strike, with something glittering in it like a crescent moon.

There was no time for defence. There was no time for escape. The Thing, beast, or man—more beast-like now than human—was upon me and bore me down. But even while the danger was in the air, I heard a sound which appeared to me not at all like a shot—more like a spit of fire when a log sparks on the hearth. And in a moment I was prone on my face, bruised and beaten down by the weight. I heard a jangle of steel. I supposed that I was wounded—that this was the end. And with the Thing heavy on the top of me, I fainted away.

CHAPTER XL

WANTED—A PENNY IN THE SLOT

When I came to myself the moon had risen—risen good and high, too—for it showed well above the orchard wall where it was broken, and over the palisades with which Hobby Stennis had mended it with his own hand.

Elsie was seated by me. She had opened up my coat, and undone my waistcoat and shirt at the neck. There was a pleasant coolness, and she was slopping about with a wet handkerchief—not very big, indeed, being one of her own, and better adapted for dabbing dry girls' eyes, than for recovering a man out of a faint.

I sat up.

"How did you come here?" I said.

"How did you?" she answered, very shortly; "lie still!"

"Shan't!"

"Still in the sulks?"

"I say, Elsie, what was *that*?"

"What?"

I was looking all about, you may be sure, and a little way off under the shadow of the great broken-down gates of the orchard, I saw a heap lie darkly, curiously loose and stretched out, a kind of wisp in the form of a man, something like a Guy Fawkes dragged through water instead of fire.

I pointed to it. The head, to my eyes at least, still glowed faintly phosphorescent.

"*That!*" I said briefly.

"That," said Elsie calmly, "is Mad Jeremy!"

I started up on my elbow in great astonishment.

"Then he wasn't dead after all, when he jumped into the water from the top of the tower the morning of the burning?"

"It seems not—it was only a little habit of his," said Elsie calmly, "but he is now! *I* killed him."

"Why?"

"Because he would have killed you, if I had not! He was waiting for you to pass. Only, as it happened, I had been waiting longest. I knew you were in the sulks, and came to find you. Besides—he killed my grandfather."

"But your grandfather——"

"No matter—he *was* my grandfather!"

"And what did you kill him with?" I was sitting up now, quite myself, and intensely curious. Elsie always says that merely wanting to know will restore me quicker than a whole apothecaries' hall.

She affected not to hear.

"You can't do without me after all!" she taunted. "I know."

"Don't you mind having killed him?" I asked. As for me I should have been fairly cut out of my mind if I had done as much.

"Of course I care," she answered; "didn't I tell you he killed my grandfather?"

Then it was that I began to believe that after all there was something in blood. And I resolved, there and then, that when Elsie and I were married I should behave, and give her no cause to take an odd shot at me.

"But what did you do it with?" It was the second time of asking.

"Dum-dum!" said she.

"What!" I cried; "then my father gave you that beautiful long-barrelled Webley he took from me?"

"Well, don't sulk about it—there's no time!" she cried. "Of course he gave it to me—as soon as you had gone out—said I might need it, with all the excitement among the Bewick pit folk. So I had a special pocket made for it, and I have carried it about ever since. This is the first chance I've had, though!"

I looked at her in astonishment. This was the girl who was afraid of mice.

"But don't you mind—*that*?" I pointed over my shoulder at the heap under the archway. The moon was creeping upward towards the zenith, and the light had now illuminated the dark face and wet, snaky curls of that which had been Mad Jeremy. I went nearer to look at him. I wanted to make sure that he was indeed dead.

The bullet had entered a trifle behind one ear, traversed the base of the skull, and come out by the opposite temple. This time there was no mistake—the creature was dead.

Two little crosses of white caught my eye, one over each bullet hole. She saw me bend down to examine them.

"That's the Geneva pattern," she said calmly. "It's plaster from my 'First Aid to the Wounded' case. I always carry it—so convenient. Now let us go back and tell Mr. Yarrow!"

"Before we start," I said, "I think you had better give me that pistol, and after this you stick to your First Aids!"

"If I had stuck to my First Aids," she retorted, "you wouldn't have needed any aids—first, second, or third!"

However, she handed over the revolver, "not (as she said) because she was afraid of it, but because it weighed down her pocket so much it was making her walk lopsided!"

* * * * *

There is ever so much to tell—about how Elsie and I quarrelled and made up—that of course. How Mr. Yarrow, senior, would and Mrs. Yarrow wouldn't. How my mother pestered me about Harriet Caw, and Mr. Mustard pestered Elsie on his own account. Then, there is all about how we were at last rid of the Caw girls, Harriet and Constantia both, and who rid us of them. That is a ripping part. There isn't so much battle, murder, and sudden death in all this, but it's even more interesting, especially the part where Elsie and I decided to take our fate into our own hands. It all came right enough in the end, of course, or I shouldn't be writing like this, looking out on the sheep pasturing on the Cheviot slopes, and listening to the whaups crying.

But for certain private reasons Elsie and I want a little more money this year. She is sewing away like a house on fire, with her feet on the fender by the hearth. So if you want to know about it, just pester some editor man to get us to write it all out for him. And we will do it gladly.

As for me, I am working up quite a good business connection on this side of the border for my father. You see, Elsie couldn't stand the neighbourhood of Breckonside and Deep Moat Grange after what had happened. And, indeed, I don't blame her. Her opinion on mice, black beetles, and the two Caw girls, particularly Harriet, is still unchanged—even though Harriet—but there, I really *can't* go on with the story without another penny in the slot.

It is quite enough to say that Aphra Orrin got imprisonment for life in an asylum for criminal lunatics, that I got Elsie, and that Elsie seems in a fair way to get what will take her thoughts, once and for all, off the gloomy woods and terrible waters which surround the house of Deep Moat Grange.

THE END

Butler and Tanner, The Selwood Printing Works, Frome, and London

States.

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