

## CHOICE LITERATURE.

## ALDERSYDE.

A BORDER STORY OF SEVENTY YEARS AGO BY  
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## CHAPTER IX.—Continued.

On the Monday afternoon, Marjorie Scott came in the coach to Windyknowe in great glee to carry off Miss Nesbit. She was aye full of nonsense and fun, and while Janet went to get on her bonnet, began to tease Tibbie about the Frenchman's attention to her at Scottrigg. Tibbie took the teasing in good part till she heard Janet's foot in the passage, when she held up a warning finger to let Marjorie know the subject must not be mentioned in her presence.

Listening to Marjorie's blithe chatter as they drove to Scottrigg, Janet forgot her worries, and began almost to feel light of heart. Louis Reynaud being gone from Ravelaw, she need have no fear concerning Tibbie. As for Mrs. Riddell, it was not likely that she would come to Windyknowe after the way her first call had been received. So it was a very bright and peaceful-faced Janet Nesbit who thanked Lady Kate for her wondrous welcome, and at the dinner-table she answered Sir Walter's jokes in a mirthful way which no little delighted him. These true friends took Janet Nesbit home to their hearts, and made very much of her in their quiet way—a very new experience for her, having been rather accustomed to take care of others than to be taken care of herself. The days passed pleasantly, and Marjorie declared at the end of the week that their guest looked years younger for the rest and change. She had thought to be home on Saturday afternoon, but was persuaded to remain over Sabbath at Scottrigg. They walked to Yarrow Kirk on Sabbath morning, the road being frozen hard, and very pleasant to the feet. Miss Nesbit beheld Grizel Oliphant sitting in grim state opposite to them, and observed her face grow red when, at the beginning of the discourse, Sir Walter very deliberately composed himself for a nap in the corner.

After the service, Miss Grizzie stalked out of the church in haste, and waited in the churchyard for the party from Scottrigg. Marjorie Scott, aye ready for fun, was so amused by the old lady's appearance that she kept in behind Janet, to hide the ripple of laughter on her face; but Miss Grizzie saw it for all that.

"Weel, Miss Grizzie, hoo's the world usin' ye?" asked Sir Walter heartily.

"Middlin'," answered Miss Grizzie sourly. "I thocht it my duty tae wait here an' reprimand ye, Walter Scott, for sleepin' in the hoose o' God. It's no seemly for a Land, the heid o' a family, an' an elder in the Kirk."

"I thocht I saw ye winkin' i' the kirk yersel' the day, Miss Grizzie," said Sir Walter with a twinkle in his eye.

"That's but ill-timed mirth, Scottrigg," said Miss Grizzie with increased sourness. "Weel, Janet Nesbit, ye look brawly; but I misdoot ye'll no get what godly inclinations ye may have strengthened amang sic mockers as the Scotts o' Scottrigg."

"Canny, ca, canny, Miss Grizzie," laughed Sir Walter.

"I find my abode at Scottrigg very pleasant, Miss Grizzie—sae pleasant, indeed, that I'll be wae tae leave the morn," said Janet.

"The morn! Then I'm thinkin' ye wasna ettlin' tae come tae my humble biggin' afore ye gaed hame?" said Miss Grizzie in a highly-offended voice.

"I didna think ye wantit me tae come, Miss Grizzie," said Janet truthfully.

"Wha said I did? No me, I'm sure. Weel, weel, the day may come when you an' yer saucy sister'll be glad o' auld Grizel Oliphant's shelter."

"Isabel called for you when she was at Scottrigg, Miss Grizzie," said Marjorie Scott.

"Oh, indeed! I'm vexed. I never set een on her."

"You must forget, Miss Grizzie," said Marjorie. "She had tea with you, and told us you were quite well when she came back."

"Then ye telt a lee, the biggest ane she ever telt, for I've no set een on her since Janet Nesbit there put me oot o' Aldersyde nine o'clock at night," said Miss Grizzie triumphantly.

"Come, lassies!" cried Sir Walter. "Miss Grizzie, ye maun comin' tae Scottrigg an' end yer crack; it's ower cauld tae sit a' thrapin' here, on the Sabbath day tae."

Miss Grizzie turned her back on Scottrigg in righteous ire.

"I'll mask tae for you an' Marjorie Scott the morn's afternne, Janet Nesbit," she called out, "an' if ye dinna come an' drink it, it'll be the waur for ye—that's a'."

So Miss Nesbit was in a manner obliged to remain another day at Scottrigg; and on the Monday afternoon, Marjorie and she got themselves ready to go and drink tea with Miss Grizzie. She dwelt in the little cottage, standing in a well-tilled garden, by the side of the beautiful and picturesque road to Yair. There was a stable and coach-house at the back, which Miss Grizzie had caused to be built immediately on her departure from Pitcairn, for the reception of the lean brown mare and the yellow chariot, which had been specially bequeathed to her in her father's will. The furnishings of the house had been mostly removed from Pitcairn also, and were of a handsome and massive description, apt to look cumbersome in the little apartments of the cottage.

On her tea-table there was a goodly array of fine china and silver, which Miss Grizzie regarded with no small amount of affectionate pride, and which, she was wont to say, were a thorn in the flesh of her cousin's flighty wife at Pitcairn, who doubtless expected they would be hers some day, but was much mistaken.

She was dressed in her best that day to receive the young ladies from Scottrigg, and though she made use of no superfluous phrases, they felt that they were made welcome.

Marjorie had much ado to restrain her mirth sometimes; but the time passed pleasantly till six o'clock, when they

were amazed by the arrival of Walter in the coach, to bid them come home immediately, Miss Nesbit's servant having arrived from Windyknowe, desiring to see her mistress.

A terrible dread rushed into the heart of Janet Nesbit, and her fingers trembled so, she could hardly fasten her bonnet strings.

Miss Grizzie who was devoured with curiosity regarding Marget's misadventure, stood by the dressing-table making all sorts of absurd surmises.

"I wadna wunner, nae, if you limmer, Tibbie, has fa'en intae Yarrow, or broken her neck at the stair-fute, Janet Nesbit. It was a great risk leaving her at hame hersel'; I wunner ye had the conscience tae dae it. If onything happens tae her, ye'll hae remorse a' yer days."

Grey, grey grew the face of Janet Nesbit, seeing which Marjorie's ire flew up.

"Miss Grizzie, you frightful old woman, if you don't hold your tongue, I'll make you! Never mind her silly talk Janet. Nothing will have happened to Tibbie, only they would be very anxious about you not returning on Saturday, and Marget would come to see that you were all right."

For the life of her Janet Nesbit could not have spoken a word, neither did she hear Miss Grizzie bidding her good-bye, and stating her intention of coming over to Windyknowe to see what was the matter.

The Scotts having more consideration than Miss Grizzie, did not offer to speak to her during the drive home; and when they reached Scottrigg, she almost flew into the house. The servant who admitted them took her direct to the house-keeper's room, where Marget sat, with her bonnet and shawl on, the picture of impatience.

"Come awa hame, Miss Nesbit," she said, getting up at once.

"What's happened tae Tibbie?"

"Naething yet," returned Marget grimly. "But Mrs. Riddell's brither's back at Ravelaw, an' there's bonnie ongauns at Windyknowe, I can tell ye."

Miss Nesbit sat down upon a chair and covered her face with her hands. Her worst fears were realized, and the danger was thickening round Tibbie's path.

"Tell me first, Marget, an' syne we'll gang awa' hame."

"Weel, Miss Nesbit," began Marget with a curious mixture of grief and sympathy, and indignant shame in her voice, "nae suner were ye awa on the Monday night than ower comes Mrs. Riddell in her coach, an' wants Miss Tibbie awa tae Ravelaw. God forgie me for settin' up tae my betters, but I daured her tae gang, an' set the ledly to the door."

"God bless ye, Marget," said Miss Nesbit fervently.

"The bairn was in an unco rage, but I wasna mindin' for that," continued Marget. "I went about my work singin' neist mornin' thinkin' that was putted an end till, when lo, in the afternne, up comes my ledly again, an' that ill man, her brither, wi' her. An' they cam in, spite o' me; an' Tibbie ordered me tae the kitchen, an' bade me keep my place. They bade a lang time. A' next day Tibbie was up at Ravelaw frae mornin' till night, an' the Frenchman brocht her hame. An' I dinna ken hoo many mair times they hae been thegither, an' me poorless tae help. So I jist cam awa for ye, Miss Nesbit, tae come an' pit a stop tae sic ongauns, which hae been waesome tae me tae see, an' her a Nesbit o' Aldersyde!"

Miss Nesbit rose up, very white, and stern, and sharp-looking.

"I'll get my bag, Marget, an' spier if Sir Walter will gie us his coach. Can onything be happenin' tae Tibbie while we're awa?"

"Na, na; for I gaed down by Aldershope as I walked the day, an' telt Miss Elliot a' about it, an' askit her tae gang up tae Windyknowe till we cam back; an' there she is the noo, for I saw her awa up i' the gig wi' my ain een."

"God bless you, Marget," repeated Miss Nesbit, then she went to seek Lady Scott in her own chamber, and kneeling down by her couch, told the dear motherly woman all her trouble, and begged that they might have a coach as once to take them back to Windyknowe.

"My dear, of course. This is terrible!" said her ladyship in much concern. "I may tell you now, that that day Tibbie went from us, saying she was going to Yair to see Miss Oliphant, she met a strange gentleman and walked with him up past Lochside. Mrs. Gray herself told me she saw them from her window. I said nothing about it to any one, but I make no doubt it was Mrs. Riddell's brother."

"Tibbie has fa'en frae her name as a Nesbit when she stooped tae sic deceit," said Janet almost in a wail. "Oh, Leddy Scott, there are things waur, faur waur than death!"

Before many minutes Miss Nesbit and Marget had quitted the hospitable roof-tree of Scottrigg, and were being whirled as fast as Sir Walter's fleet thorough-breds could carry them over the long miles to Windyknowe.

## CHAPTER X.

"She's owre the Border an' awa."

Instead of looking pleased to see Mary Elliot that mornin', Isabel Nesbit did not even show her the commonest courtesy. A very disagreeable person could Tibbie be when she liked, she possessed the very knack of making those about her uncomfortable. She felt that she was being watched, and resented it; besides she was not easy in her mind at the prospect of seeing Janet.

Mary, feeling instinctively that she was helping her dear absent friend, did not mind Tibbie's sour looks, but sat quite coolly at her sewing in the dining-room, thereby compelling Tibbie to remain in the house. But it was dreary work sitting opposite a sulky face, and listening to the ticking of the clock, and the sighing of the winds in the fire. Nine o'clock struck before the sound of wheels broke on her listening ear. She got up at once, and ran out to open the door, and welcome Janet home.

Very white and haggard looked Miss Nesbit's face in the flickering candle-light, and she did not seem to be able to utter a word, but pressing Mary's hand, hurried

past her to the dining-room. Tibbie looked up quite unconcernedly, but her eyes did not meet her sister's gaze.

"Tibbie!" said Janet.

Never in her life has Isabel Nesbit heard Janet speak in such a voice.

"Well, Marget's got ye hame," she said carelessly.

Then, to her amazement, Janet came over to her in a swift, sudden way, and took her in her arms with that terrible close grip with which she had held her on the night her father died.

"Tibbie, my bairn, I hae come hame tae save ye. Nay, dinna shrink frae me. We are twa orphan lassies, but I'm the elder, an' ye were left in my care," said Janet, and holding up Tibbie's face, she looked at it with passionate yearning eyes. "Tibbie, it's no true," she said hoarsely.

"What? Let me be; ye hurt me," said Tibbie pettishly.

"Whaur's Mary Elliot, wha ye set tae watch me?"

"Bide there, see, till ye tell me," said Miss Nesbit, her manner changing from tender entreaty to stern command. "What is there between you an' that ill man at Ravelaw? It cannot be that ye are gaun tae leave me for him, Tibbie?"

"Marget has been filling your head with nonsense, Janet," said Tibbie defiantly. "Mrs. Riddell called here with her brother once or twice, an' I was up at Ravelaw—that's a'. I had to do something to keep myself living when you were awa'."

"Had I thocht he was still at Ravelaw, I wad never hae gane to Scottrigg," said Miss Nesbit passionately.

"Marget should hae been surer o' her news," said Tibbie maliciously. "He only gaed tae Carlisle an' cam back on Monday mornin'. As ye are the mistress, Janet, I hope ye'll speak sharply tae Marget for her outrageous treatment o' Mrs. Riddell. She actually told her to go awa'."

A wan smile flitted across Janet's face.

"As I wad hae dune, had I been at hame," she said drily. "It was weel Marget was hear tae uphold the respect o' the hoose. Ye are a puir dochter o' Aldersyde, Tibbie."

She could not keep back the half-pitiful, half-scornful remark, she was so sorely driven. But beyond curling her red lip and tossing her head, Tibbie took no notice of it.

Seeing her young sister was only defiant and sullen, Janet went away in search of Mary, whom she found chatting with Marget at the kitchen fire. They went away up-stairs together, and talked long over the matter, and Mary's gentle sympathy did Janet's tired heart good.

"Yer bridal is comin' very near noo, my Mary," said she tenderly. "It's aye a heavy thocht tae ye yet?"

"It's my weid, I think, Janet," said Mary listlessly.

"I've ceased to fret about it. I'll make a good wife to Hugh Nesbit, and try to be a worthy mistress of your dear Aldersyde. Oh, Janet, you'll come and see me often?"

"Surely, Mary."

Then their hands met, in seal of their friendship, and they went down-stairs again to Tibbie's sulky presence.

Early next morning Peter came up with the gig for Mary, and she bade her last good-bye to Windyknowe. Only one week, and the Lily of the Aldershope must go to bloom for Hugh Nesbit in Aldersyde. She had indeed resigned herself to the inevitable, and if she was not a glad-hearted bride, she was at least a passive and uncomplaining one.

Her mother's health was failing every day. As for Doctor Elliot, having the height of his ambition to see his Mary a lady of high degree within his reach, he was to outward semblance a happy man.

Hugh Nesbit was impatient for the day when he could claim his wife. He loved her with all the love of which his selfish heart was capable. But it was not that steady, all-careful tenderness which makes a woman's heart enduringly happy, but a fierce lava tide of passion which would never last a lifetime.

The preparations moved on apace, for Doctor Elliot insisted on Mary getting a marvellous quantity of gear; and she was distracted between milliners and mantlemakers, when she would fain have spent her last days in peace at home.

The Miss Nesbits were asked to the quiet wedding. In Mrs. Elliot's state of health it did not behove them to make a great fuss or grand display; so, excepting the Miss Nesbits, there were no strangers to be at Mary's bridal.

During the week intervening between Mrs. Nesbit's home-coming and the wedding, Janet watched Tibbie night and day. The fear that was in her heart would not give her a moment's peace. Louis Reynaud was still at Ravelaw, but neither he nor his sister ever came near Windyknowe; and as Tibbie was never beyond the garden, surely there was nothing to fear.

On the Saturday before the wedding Miss Nesbit being very busy, she sent Tibbie in Marget's charge down to Aldershope, with a wedding keepsake to Mary, in the shape of a pair of massive silver candle-sticks, which had stood on each end of the mantlepiece in the drawing-room at Aldersyde. They came home to tea at six, Tibbie looking particularly defiant and unconcerned, and Marget worried and anxious. Instinctively Miss Nesbit went into the kitchen after Marget, while Tibbie ran up-stairs.

"I took Miss Tibbie to the door o' the doctor's, as ye bade me, ma'am," said Marget without perforce, "an' syne gaed doon the toon for my errands. I might be about half an hour, I think, an' was comin' slow up, ettlin' tae gie her time for a crack wi' Miss Mary, when tae my horror I sees her staunin' speakin' tae the Frenchman at the heid o' the toon, jist fornet Robbie Harden's door. I jist flew up to her, and grippin' her arm, says, 'Come awa hame.' Syne the Frenchman maks his bows till her, an' gangs awa; an' bonnie gled I was tae see his back, but hoo lang they might be staunin' I dinna ken."

Miss Nesbit sighed, and a sorely troubled look came upon her face. She had been trying to lull her fears to rest during the last few days; but so long as Louis Reynaud remained at Ravelaw, there was abundant cause for apprehension.

"Oh, by the bye, Janet," said Tibbie blithely when they