

The Braes of Yarrow

An Historical Tale of the Sixteenth Century.

Having dismissed the ostler, Gilbert handed the paper to Lindsay.
"Can you guess who is the scriber?" queried he.
"I fancy it is the page Crawford; it may be honest, but it may be merely a bait to enable Barras or Tushielaw to entrap me."
"I believe it to be honest, for it is most probable that Angus would send her ladyship to some sanctuary of this kind."
"We will obey the summons, then, and start at once."
They procured horses, and just as the gloaming deepened into darkness, they turned their backs upon the city.
It was near midnight when they reached Peebles, and they proceeded straight to the Portbrae Hostelry.
Dame Stott slept lightly, and she was soon roused by the loud knocking of the traveller. As for the guidman Jock, he had not yet recovered from the effects of the fright he had got in Edinburgh, and at every unusual sound he flew to a cupboard or the cellar. On the present occasion he took shelter under the bed, praying to all the saints to shield him from his enemies, and confounding Jean Stott for not closing the door after her, as the night air blew rather keenly upon him.
After enduring some sauciness from the dame for making a steer at six an hour, Gilbert asked if any inquiry had been made there for one of his name.
"No, there's been naeboddy speering for Master Gilbert Elliot, and if that's a' you want to ken, you might hae waited till morning, and no come making us think there was a raid on the town."
Much to the indignation of the dame, and against the persuasion of Lindsay, Gilbert resolved to pursue the journey as far as Mount Benger that night. As he was doggedly bent upon this course, in hope of learning something to confirm the truth or falsehood of the information he had received, Lindsay yielded.
Jean Stott slammed the door after them, barred it, and returned to her bed, venting her ill-humour for being disturbed for so small occasion on her shivering husband, who was too thankful for his escape from the persecution of the Douglas to mind the customary persecution of his irascible wife.
The night was clear for the sky was studded with stars, which shed a soft light upon the earth. There was only wind enough to send a gentle whispering sound along the leaves of the forest. It was a night for pleasant roaming, and the two travellers would have enjoyed it to the full, had their business been only a little less serious.
As it was, they moved forward at an easy pace, thinking much, but speaking little. They passed through Traquair, and were approaching Glencaiber, when Gilbert suddenly bent forward on the neck of his horse, as if peering at something which he could only dimly descry ahead of them.
"I could have sworn," he muttered, "that I saw a figure moving on before me—see, there again, and now it has disappeared."
"I observed it; be prepared for whatever may hap, for we are within range of Tushielaw here, and if our pretty bird be caged at Mount Benger, Barras is not far off."
They advanced to the place where they had observed the figure disappear, and there drew rein.
"It was here I lost sight of it," said Gilbert, peering around.
"Exactly, our—hallo!"
The horses reared up in affright, as a gaunt dark form darted out from the thicket and confronted them.
The hands of the riders were on their petronels, when, simultaneously, they ejaculated—
"A woman!"
"By the rood, none other than my friend the witch of Merlin's Cairn," added Lindsay.
"And my friend, Dame Hyslop," said Gilbert, with some respect in his tone.
"Give ye a kindly greeting, gentlemen both," said the woman coldly.
"And we the like to you, dame," said the Captain; "but you have a fashion of coming and going when and where you are least expected, and that would argue ill against you in a trial for witchery."
"I have been to Traquair to procure by night the food I dared not seek by day," she said drily. "I heard you following, and having reason to fear all who carry arms, I hid to let you pass. The voice of Master Elliot let me ken that ye were no foes, and I came from my hiding."
"We are friends, dame," rejoined Gilbert; "and since I am debtor for some kindness, say can we not help you in your strait; what danger threatens you?"
"The same which threatens yourself, master; Tushielaw hunts me like a wolf, for he has pledged himself to his dead foster brother that his death shall be avenged in your blood and mine."
Gilbert's heart felt heavy under the thought that even this poor creature had not escaped the fatality which attended all who aided him.
"Why stay you here, then?" he asked huskily.
"Why ventured you here?"
"It is for the sake of those who are in peril."
"And for the sake of others I stay here. If you would ken more to me with me."
She turned, without waiting an answer, and stalked rapidly on before. They followed.

TO BE CONTINUED.

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It has now been before the Public for a number of years and has gained for itself a World-Wide Reputation.
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