

"My dear fellow, this is about the hundred and fiftieth time I've asked you if you're coming, don't you see we'll be caught in the shower, if you don't hurry?" The only answer my companion made was to draw himself up, and say thoughtfully, "That bridge won't stand long, shouldn't wonder a bit if it were to go to-night; see how the water has risen since this morning." I made some trifling reply, and nothing more was said as we proceeded, Indian file, along the narrow path for some distance, when Raeburn turned aside into another path.

"Why, man," I cried, "where on earth are you going to? don't you know I promised Mrs. Gordon and Mabel, I'd bring you home to dinner to-night?" "Yes, I know, but I hope the ladies will excuse me this time," replied my companion, rather confusedly, "I'm just going up to Mar—to the Urquharts for a little while, I have an engage—I mean—that is——" and here he broke down altogether with a dark crimson flush over his face.

"Oh, my dear fellow, I know," I exclaimed, heartily wringing his hand, "my cousin is the dearest girl in the world, next to Mabel, of course," I continued, laughingly "and I wish you every success."

"I thank you," said Hugh, simply, as he squeezed my hand again, and in the next minute his graceful, powerfully knit figure was lost in the mist which had crept down from the mountains.

"How glad Mab will be to hear this," I thought, as I walked quickly along, "bless her heart, ever since we have been engaged, she has been wishing that affair settled, so they may be as happy as we are."

Presently I arrived at the Doctor's gate, and as I walked up towards the house the front door opened, and Mabel Gordon ran down the steps.

"Dear Charlie," said my betrothed, as I drew her close to my side, and stooped to kiss her rosy lips, "I am so glad you have come, I was very much afraid that dreadful rain would keep you at home."

"Keep me at home, my own darling! don't you know that nothing could keep me at home if I wanted to come here, which I generally do—no, not even if it rained buckets—cats and dogs—pitchforks—there's a gallant speech for you."

"I've no doubt you do generally follow your own sweet will," said Mabel, laughing a little nervously, "but I've been ill and cross all day, dear, and have been imagining all sorts of absurd things about you."

"Ill, dear," I exclaimed, "and here am I, model physician, letting you stand in the damp without——"

"Oh, it's nothing," interrupted Mabel, hastily, "there's the dinner-bell. Your arm, Sir Knight!" The family, consisting of Dr. and Mrs. Gordon, the dearest, kindest people in the world; their five children, including myself, and an old gentleman, an uncle of Mrs. Gordon's, are soon seated around the table. Then no one seems at a loss for conversation, for dinner in this house never could be prim or ceremonious, with such a pleasant face as Mrs. Gordon's beaming at us from the top of the table. Mabel soon recovered her spirits, and laughed and talked more than any one else. After dinner, Mabel and I sang some duets in the drawing room. Then, seeing the troubled look coming back into my betrothed's eyes, I called out hastily, "Uncle Henry, won't you please tell us some of those old legends to-night, it's just the time to sit round a grate fire and listen to stories."

"Just hear the wind," quietly remarked Mabel's brother Harry, a lad about fourteen, "it's a good thing for those who have no home to go to-night."

"No home to go to," ejaculated Nellie, aged eleven, "what do you mean?"

"My dear child," said Harry, patronisingly, "if they're at home already, they haven't any home to go to, have they?"

We laughed a little, but the boy's remark called our attention to the weather, and for a minute or two we were quite still listening to the howling of the wind as it drove the rain and sleet against the windows. With a shiver we took our seats round the bright fire, Nellie on her grand-uncle's knee, looking eagerly up into his face for the promised story. So absorbed were we in the terrible, weird tales of the North, that I remembered nothing, until I heard the pretty ormolu clock on the mantel piece strike ten, when starting to my feet with unfeigned surprise, I exclaimed,

"Ten o'clock, why! I ought to be home by this time."

"My dear boy, you're never thinking of going home such a night as this."

"Indeed, Mrs. Gordon—Dr.—it's quite impossible for me to stay to-night. I half promised Ainslie I'd call in and see his wife, as I went home—Goodnight, mother, goodnight, doctor; why—where's Mabel, oh, never mind, I suppose she is waiting for me in the hall." As I stepped into the hall I caught sight of Mabel's pale-colored dress in the dimly lighted drawing room opposite, where we had been singing after dinner. She was sitting in a low chair, in the great bow-window, with her head on the window-sill, and her hands clasped before her face. I advanced quickly toward her, and kneeling down on the floor beside her chair, caught her passionately in my arms and turning up her sweet face, kissed her red lips again and again. "My own darling, what is it," I said in a low voice, noticing how dark were the rings under her eyes. But instead of replying, she only drew her arms tightly round my neck, and leaning her face against my shoulder, burst into a passion of tears. For a minute or two the storm lasted, then the sobs grew quieter and then stopped altogether.

"Excuse me, Charlie," said Mabel, in a sweet tearful voice, "I am so silly, but, oh, my own dear love," pressing my head upon her bosom, and her lips passionately to mine, as she never had done before, "if you only knew how desolate my life would be without you——"

"But, my pet, what can possibly happen to me going home to-night," I interrupted.

"Nothing, I suppose," replied Mabel sadly, as if silenced but not convinced, "but I shall sit up an hour longer—No, dear, don't say anything—I couldn't go to sleep any way—to see if you'll come back again."

"If I see anything more extraordinary than myself," I said, laughing purposely to raise her spirits, "I'll come; but it's my opinion that I shall not be able to see anything at all," and with these words I closed the hall door and stood outside for a minute, before starting on my journey homewards. The rain had again almost ceased, and the wind was moaning fitfully through the almost leafless boughs, while the moon broke through the heavy masses of cloud at intervals, to shine with pale radiance for a few moments before it became obscured again. After a few minutes' walk along the path, I vaulted a fence, and struck out across the fields. As I pro-

ceeded, thoughts of my past life came floating before my mind—of the time when Mabel Gordon, my cousin Marion, Hugh Raeburn and myself were children, and how we used to play together. Then how we boys went away to school, I coming home for holidays and bringing Hugh with me (for Glenderavon was not his native place) each time shy of the two girls growing up so rapidly. Then how we completed our college course, and afterwards how glad we were to be settled in same place. Then how I fell in love with Mabel, and how Hugh fell in love with Marion, (for though he thought his love was perfectly secret, Mabel and I had known it a long while) and how I was the very happiest and luckiest fellow in the whole world, and when Mabel was my own darling little wife—but my reflections were here suddenly brought to a close, by the appearance of a huge black Newfoundland dog, which bounded over the fence, and running along the path (for I had once more struck into the path) in front of me, disappeared in the darkness.

"Confound that brute, what a start he gave me!" I muttered, a thrill of superstitious terror, and anger at the feeling, running all over me. You will think me a great fool, no doubt, to be afraid of a dog on a dark night, but I am a Highlander, consequently superstitious, and moreover I knew at that moment, and shall always believe that the creature was unreal, uncanny. Here the moon broke from behind the clouds, and revealed to my sight the figure of the dog stretched right across the pathway. He was a perfectly immense creature, without exception the largest dog I ever saw, and though I approached very near to him, he did not take the slightest notice of me, but lay quite motionless, his massive head reposing upon his outstretched paws. Again the same singular tremor came over me—I can hardly describe the feeling—it seemed as though I had come unbidden into the presence of the Supernatural—my brain was scared—I could not think—I did not know what I was doing, and yet the scene is indelibly impressed upon my mind. I do not know how long I stood there staring upon the creature before me—I suppose it was some minutes—then following some blind instinct, I left the path and picked my steps through the mud. As frequently happens in an extraordinary situation, or in extreme danger, the mind takes hold of the most trivial matters, and I remember distinctly thinking, as I walked through the mud, how difficult my boots would be to clean next morning. As I regained the path, I glanced over my shoulder expecting to see the dog in the same position, but to my great wonder, nothing was to be seen, save a pool of water right across the path, with the moon reflected in it. Could it have been a mistake? Was it an optical delusion? I rubbed my eyes, and walked on a few paces, when to my unmitigated terror, I beheld the great black brute in exactly the same position. I hurried past him, recklessly plunging into the mud, and again glancing over my shoulder beheld the vacant path as before. I could now plainly hear the rush of the water, for I was quite near the stream, and as I hurried along, Uncle Henry's last words that evening rushed into my mind: "All these warnings, children, just occur three times, and those who disregard them, almost invariably come to some harm." I suppose I uttered these words aloud, for I have a kind of vague impression upon my mind that I heard the last words, then I perceived the dog's form almost at my feet. I suppose I turned and retraced my steps—I do not know—I do not remember anything more till I found myself at the door of Dr. Gordon's house. I saw that there was a light in the drawing-room, though all the rest of the house was quite dark, and so I knew that it could not be very long since I had left the house. I walked up and down the path two or three times, to recover my usual demeanor, then not wishing to alarm Mabel, I opened the door very softly and went straight to the drawing room; I stopped at the door and stood looking at her. She was sitting in the same chair, her head thrown back, and eyes closed. I thought she was asleep, and so did not stir or make the slightest noise. In about a minute her eyes slowly opened, and encountered mine steadily fixed upon her. For one moment she gazed at me in return, her eyes wide open, her nostrils dilating, then uttering a low cry of horror, she bent forward and covered her face with her hands.

"Mabel, my love, my darling" I exclaimed, throwing my arms around her.

"Charlie, is it you," she cried, lifting a face full of astonishment, mingled with happiness.

"Who should it be, my pet?"

"Why, you know, Charlie, I wasn't asleep, but was just sitting with my eyes closed waiting for you, when I felt as if some force made me open my eyes, and I saw you so still, so motionless, looking so steadily at me, I thought," she continued falteringly, "my presentiment had come true, that you were dead, and the figure was your wraith."

Then I drew my chair close to her own, and told my strange experience, and soon after, making my way to the chamber known by the family as "Charlie's room," fell fast asleep, in spite of the strange events of the evening.

## II.

"Charlie, Charlie, seven o'clock—time to get up," and I became conscious of some one shaking me vigorously by the shoulder.

"Well, what if it is, can't you let a fellow alone for a minute," I remarked sleepily, opening my eyes a very little way, and perceiving Harry, my brother-in-law elect, standing by the bedside.

"For a minute," laughed Harry, "why I've been up and out for a walk an hour ago—and, do you know, old fellow, the bridge is gone."

"You don't say so" I exclaimed, quite awake now.

"Yes, I do—clean gone, every bit of it."

The boy rattled on while I dressed, but I did not take any notice of what he said, for there was a deep feeling of thankfulness rising in my heart, as I thought over the events of the past evening, and of my remarkable preservation—for the night being comparatively calm, the bridge must have been gone before I reached it. At breakfast little was talked about except this calamity, for as the doctor said "every one who wanted to get across, must go about a mile up-stream" where a bridge had recently been built. As I had a good deal of business on this side of the stream, it was about one o'clock before I got home, when on going at once to the surgery, I met my old housekeeper coming down stairs.

"Good morning, Alison. Any one for me? has M. Raeburn been here yet?"

"No, sir, no one for you. M. Raeburn hasn't been here, but several people have been for him, for they say he isn't at home, sir, and no one seems to know where he is. There's Jimmy Ainslie again. His mother sent him before this morning."

"Mr. Raeburn isn't here, Jimmy," I called, over the banisters, "I suppose he will turn up presently."

"Please, sir, it isn't him, it's you, sir, I want to speak to," cried Jimmy, holding out a small silver-topped cane I distinctly remembered having seen in Hugh Raeburn's possession the evening before.

"Where did you get that, Jimmy," I exclaimed, dashing down stairs, three steps at a time.

"Please, sir, me and Johnny Shaw, sir, went down to the bridge just now, sir, and I found this, sir, wedged up between the branches of a little tree close to the bank, sir."

"Good God," exclaimed Alison in a horrified tone can he be drowned."

"And please, sir, Donald was over from Mr. Urquhart's this morning," continued Jimmy, sobbing, "and he said Mr. Raeburn left their house about half-past nine last night."

Hardly waiting to hear the last words, I picked up a hat, and strode out of the house. I questioned every one I met, and went to every possible and impossible place, but nothing was to be heard of Hugh Raeburn. By four o'clock we had searched all over the village, and down the stream, and my heart sank still lower within me as I turned my steps towards my cousin's house. Bad news travel quickly, and of this I became truly convinced, when I opened the drawing-room door and saw Marion sitting on the sofa, staring straight before her. As I entered she half rose, but whenever she saw my face, she sank down again with a low moan. Marion Urquhart was the most beautiful woman I ever beheld. She never had much color, but as I looked at her then, I thought I had never seen a face so white, and with such a look of utter despair, in the splendid dark eyes. Her hair, which was jet black, was pushed back from her broad brow, and fell in half-curly, half-wavy masses almost to her knees. After I entered the room, she took no notice of me, but gazed straight before her, while she wrung her white hands convulsively, and now and then a smothered sob burst from her lips. I could hardly bear to look upon such agony, and yet, what could I do? I walked to the window, and stood looking out. Again the door opened softly, and I turned quickly to see who it was. Mabel stood there. She looked as if she had been crying, poor girl, and when she caught sight of Marion, her lip quivered, but I shook my head, and she, choking down her tears, glided across the room, and kneeling down beside the sofa, drew Marion's head upon her breast.

"Oh, Marion, Marion," cried Mabel, stroking her hair fondly, "try to cry a little, my poor girl."

"I can't," said Marion, slowly "my eyes burn so."

After a moment or two, she sprang from her seat, and pacing backwards and forwards, she cried aloud: "Oh, why did God give him to me? why did he let such boundless love grow up in my heart, and then tear my darling from me?" and casting herself upon the sofa, as if the very mention of her love had softened her heart, she burst into a perfect passion of sobs and tears.

Mabel let her cry for several minutes, caressing her hair softly, while the tears trickled slowly down her own cheeks.

The afternoon waned, the room became dark, and no sound was to be heard save the clock, steadily ticking through the long hours. I tried to persuade Marion several times to take some rest, but it was no use. At last, about two o'clock in the morning, I forced her to take a sleeping draught, for I was afraid if she remained longer without sleep she would go out of her mind. I then sent Mabel to bed, and Marion fell into a restless and troubled sleep (she would not go to her room for fear there might be news) though after a while she became perfectly quiet. About dawn she awoke, and startled me (for I was almost asleep myself in an arm-chair) by saying, "Is he coming home? He is found, isn't he?"

I shook my head sadly, for I was almost sure that the only way in which he would come home now would be on the shoulders of two strong men. "I must have dreamt it," said Marion wearily, closing her eyes again, "I thought they had found him."

Soon after Mabel came in, and then I had to go away to attend to my own work. And so that day and the next, and many others passed, each day deepening the sorrow in the hearts of the people, for the beloved young pastor, who had thus early been snatched from them by death.

I cannot describe the agony which my young cousin suffered, for she kept it all to herself, sitting day after day, with her head upon her hand, gazing out of the window, her sweet face becoming paler and thinner every day. I was quite sure she would die, and this I told my poor old uncle, when he beseeched me with tears flowing down his furrowed cheeks, to tell him the truth. Mabel, bless her heart, did all she could to soften the grief of her dear friend. Thus the weary days, morn, noon and night, passed slowly away.

One evening, about two weeks after that mournful night, I had pulled the curtains, lighted my student's lamp, and was just sitting down for a few minutes before going up to my uncle's, when I heard the front door open, and an uncertain step come along the hall.

"Alison is getting old," I thought to myself, poking the fire, "she will be glad when I get a wife, I daresay." The step meanwhile had come along towards my door, and a hand seemed to be groping for the handle, when I heard a heavy fall. I rushed to the door, and opening it, I perceived the figure of a man lying upon the floor. At a glance I saw that it was Hugh Raeburn. But how changed! His cheeks and eyes were sunken, and he looked as if he had been very ill. His plaid and Highland bounnet were covered with snow and sleet. I hastily took off the wet things, laid him on a sofa, and rang the bell for Alison. It would be utterly impossible to describe the gladness of the faithful old woman, but I cut short her exclamations of joy, and sent her for a glass of wine, while I pulled off the invalid's boots, chafed his hands and feet, and made him as comfortable as possible. The wine soon came, and I forced it by small quantities between his teeth, but it was some time before, with a sigh, he opened his eyes. A faint smile passed over his face, as he looked wonderingly around.

"Oh, Hugh! Hugh! my dear fellow," I exclaimed, actually laying down my face on the sofa pillow, and shedding tears (I was always a soft-hearted booby), "how thankful I am to see you."

He smiled again as if he did not quite understand, then closed his eyes murmuring—

"If I could see——"

"You're not to talk a single word; here, Alison, sit by the sofa, and if he says anything, you just smother him with a pillow; I'm going for Miss Urquhart."