

Our 5-Minute Story

HOW THE McNAB WON HIS WAGER.

JENNIE McTAVISH had bushels of beaux, for she was young, pretty, witty, and an heiress; and, of course, she kept them all in the proper condition of misery and uncertainty, as became a young lady of her pretensions. Pretty girls are much the same the world over, and particularly is this the case in the Highlands—and in all other places.

Angus McTavish was considered the most fortunate man in the little Scottish fishing village. By unremitting industry in catching and curing salmon, he had amassed wealth to the stupendous amount of some £2,000. But not only had kind heaven vouchsafed him great riches, for it had also sent him a much greater treasure in this same eighteen-year-old Jennie, who was about the prettiest girl any of my young lady readers ever saw, except in the glass.

The matter of his daughter's beaux, however, had never given him the slightest concern, for he had not yet thought of considering her otherwise than as a mere child. For years he had been accustomed to see the prints of Jennie's little bare feet in the moist sand, which bordered the river and the Firth of Dornoch at low tide, as he returned from superintending his fishing arrangements, for, be it known, she had unusually small feet, as all heroines are said to have, and, furthermore, she continued to go barefoot, and bareheaded, too, even up to the age of eighteen, as is the custom of young ladies of her station, in that sensible region. But at length it occurred to him that another footprint had latterly accompanied those of his daughter with wonderful constancy; and that, at their point of separation, the great number of little footprints and big footprints, and the numerous turnings and twistings thereof, gave evidence of somewhat reluctant partings. So, to satisfy his curiosity, he followed the large tracks, which led him to the most unwelcome place in all Scotland, the door of Rory McNab's little cottage.

of all the Highland clans,
McNab is the most ferocious,
Except the Macintyres,
McGraws and Macintoshes

This McNab's ferocity, however, was not of the sort to render him an object of terror, indeed, so far was this from being the case, that no young fellow in those parts was a more welcome guest at any merry-making. A better-looking or more jovial-hearted youth, a better singer or more light-footed dancer, was not to be found in the Highlands. In short, wherever pleasure, danger or excitement was to be found, there was sure to be Rory, while wherever money was to be slowly and laboriously, though surely, made, he took the best of fine care that you should look for him in vain.

"Jennie," said her father, sternly, on his return, "whom have you been prancing about on the beach with this afternoon?"

Jennie really could scarcely recollect, there were quite a number of young people on the sands.

"Don't try to put me off in that way, you undutiful, ungrateful child. What man came home with you this afternoon, and has been coming home with you this nobody knows how long?"

Jennie gazed attentively at her toes, wriggled her shoulders petulantly, and, taking a corner of her apron between one thumb and finger, slowly drew the bottom seam between the other thumb and finger, till the opposite corner was reached, when the motion was reversed. This explicit answer not being entirely satisfactory to her father, he indignantly proceeded:

"It's that miserable, good-for-nothing Rory McNab you've

been taking on with, you hussy; and you thought to hide you're scandalous actions from me, did you, you jade?"

The "jade" had been expecting this name to come out; but, as she was a young lady who had a pretty resolute will of her own, she firmly resolved that neither by word or action would she betray the slightest interest in it; in pursuance of which resolve she forthwith started suddenly and turned as red as a beet, which made it clear enough to the meanest capacity that she didn't care a fig for the young gentleman.

"Yes, misguided girl, it's that wretched vagabond, Rory McNab. Lucky is it for you that I discovered it as I have. Now, mind what I say; never in your life do you pass another word with that scape-gallows poacher, or I'll have you shut up where you'll be glad to obey; and, as for him, I'll, I'll, yes, I'll contrive to have him taken by the press-gang, if it costs me £1,000."

Jennie let her apron drop, and clutched her handkerchief. She didn't see how her father could be so prejudiced against poor Rory, who was "such a clever fellow and such a kind fellow, and—and such a handsome fellow—and—and such a dear, good fellow—and—and—hoo—hoo, hoo—oo!"

Mr. Angus McTavish, master mariner, was thunderstruck. Several times he opened his mouth to give vent to his outraged feelings, but he could find no words sufficiently staggering to express anything like what he felt; so, like a sensible man, he gave it up, for the time, as a bad job, and started in search of Rory.

"You think to marry my daughter!" he continued, after having fairly run himself out of wind in calling Rory everything but a good fellow—and only escaping a sound drubbing for the all-sufficient reason that he was Jennie's father; "you, who can't raise a £5 note to save your life! A fine support you'd be for a family! When I give my consent to Jennie's marriage, it will be to some honest, industrious young man like Donald Gunn, or Evan McKay, or——"

"Evan McKay be hanged!" bellowed Rory. If the contemptible little shrimp dares so much as to cast his squint eyes at Jennie, I'll twitch the legs off him as I would from a lobster."

"If he is a shrimp and cock-eyed, he's an honest man, who 'tends to his business, and is able to put £200 of his own honest earnings into the new schooner I'm about to build."

"Look here, McTavish," said Rory, evidently impressed by the last remark, "suppose now that I should be able to come down with £200 of my own honest earnings before your schooner is launched—how would that be, eh?"

"Your earnings?" sneered the old man; "because you have never earned money, you think it is to be picked up like tiny pebbles, do you? When you've earned £200 come to me, and perhaps I'll talk with you."

"It's a bargain," said Rory, vigorously shaking him by the hand, whether he would or not, "it's a bargain; and you'll have to stick to it, too, or I'll carry Jennie off from under your very nose. It's pretty well known about here that McNab don't back down from what he has once said."

This arrangement was thoroughly satisfactory to all concerned. The father was delighted, for he saw how utterly impossible it would prove for his would-be son-in-law to comply with such terms. Rory was overjoyed, for nothing whatever seems impossible to a young man under such conditions; and, as for Jennie—why! she simply knew that Rory could do anything.

But when Rory settled down to business, he soon found that none of the ordinary slow-coach ways of making money would do for him. He studied and planned, fretted and fumed, and almost lived up to the family name for ferocity; but it was all of no use until Jennie made a remark which set him to thinking in a new direction. Next morning, at earliest dawn, and so for days thereafter, his boat was seen steering broad out into the German Ocean, far beyond the utmost fishing grounds; and great was the wonder and speculation as to the object of these foreign voyages. After several weeks of these mysterious daily cruises, Rory all at once reappeared in his