

had not sat long, when a fair maiden, an acquaintance of "mine hostess" entered the hostelry, and began to assist her in the cutting out or fashioning of a crimson kirtle.— Her voice fell upon the ear of Thomas like the "music of sweet sounds." He had never heard a voice before that not only fell softly on his ear, but left a lingering murmur in his heart. She, too, was a young thing of not more than eighteen. If ever hair might be called "gowden" it was hers. It was a light and shining bronze, where the prevalence of the golden hue gave a colour to the whole. Her face was a thing of beauty, over which health spread its roseate hue, yet softly, as though the westling winds had caused the leaves of the blushing rose to kiss her cheeks, and leave their delicate hues and impression behind them. She was of a middle stature, and her figure was such, although arrayed in homely garments, as would have commanded the worship of a connoisseur of grace and symmetry. But beyond all that kindled a flame within the hitherto obdurate heart of Thomas, was the witching influence of her smile. For a full hour he sat with his eyes fixed upon her, save at intervals, when he withdrew them to look into the unwonted agitation of his own breast, and examine the cause.

"Amongst the daughters of women," thought he unto himself; for he had a sprinkling of the language of the age about him; "none have I seen so beautiful. Her cheeks bloom bonnier than the heather on Tollishill, and her bosom seems soft as the new-shorn fleece. Her smile is like a blink o' sunshine, and would make summer to those on whom it fell all the year round."

He also discovered, for the first time, that "Tollishill was a dull place, especially in the winter season." When, therefore, the fair damsel had arrayed the fashion of the kirtle and departed, without once having seemed to observe Thomas, he said unto the good wife of the hostelry—"And wha, now, if it be a fair question, may that bonny lassie be?"

"She is indeed a bonny lassie," answered the landlady, "and a guid lassie too; and I hae nae doubt but, as you are a single man, Maister Hardie, your question is fair enough. Her name is Margaret Lyleston, and she is the only bairn o' a poor infirm widow that came to live here some two or three years syne. They came frae south ower some way, and I am sure they have seen better days.—

We thought at first that the auld woman had been a Catholic, but I suppose that isn't the case, though they certainly are baith o' them strong Episcopawlians, and in no way favourable to the preachers or the word o' the Covenant; but I must say for Maggy, that she is a bonny, sweet-tempered, and obliging lassie—though, poor thing, her mother has brought her up in a wrang way."

Many days had not passed ere Thomas Hardie, arrayed in his Sunday habiliments, paid another visit to Westruther, and he cautiously asked of the gudewife of the hostel many questions concerning Margaret; and although she jeered him, and said that "Maggy would ne'er think o' a grey-haired carle like him," he brooded over the fond fancy, and, although on this visit he saw her net, he returned to Tollishill, thinking of her as his bride. It was a difficult thing for a man of fifty, who had been the companion of solitude from his youth upwards, and who had lived in single blessedness amidst the silence of the hills without feeling the workings of the heart, or being subjected to the influence of its passions—I say, it was indeed difficult for such a one to declare, in the ear of a blooming maiden of eighteen, the tale of his first affections. But an opportunity arrived which enabled him to disembosom the burden that pressed upon his heart.

It has been mentioned that Margaret Lylestone and her mother were poor, and the latter, who had long been laid boun with infirmities, was supported by the industry of her daughter. They had also a cow, which was permitted to graze upon the hills without fee or reward, and with the milk which it produced, and the cheese they manufactured, together with the poor earnings of Margaret, positive want was long kept from them. But the old woman became more and more infirm—the hand of death seemed stretching over her. She required nourishment which Margaret could not procure for her; and that it might be procured—that her mother might live and not die—the fair maiden set the cow to Kelso to be sold, from whence the seller was to bring with him the restorative that her parent required.

Now it so was that Thomas Hardie, the tenant of Tollishill, was in Kelso market when the cow of Widow Lylestone was offered for sale; and, as it possessed the characteristic marks of a good milcher, he inquired to whom it belonged. On being answered, he turned round for a few moments