

HOW HE TOLD HER.

'She'll have to go; ain't no way out of that. She'll have to skip,' said Dave Kinney. He squinted in a cross-eyed manner at a bit of cracker on his tawny, scraggy beard and transferred it carefully to his mouth. There was a wedge of cheese on his left knee.

When the Fence Corners School Board—originally Fennett's Corners, but thus aptly abbreviated—had a meeting it was by general agreement in old Hank's grocery, where crackers and mayhap a herring might relieve its tedium. But to-night there was an alleviating interest.

'About the size of it,' said Silas Saunders. He preferred tobacco and rolled a quid under his tongue. 'This ain't no place for her here. Why, I wouldn't answer for the consequences if she stayed; there ain't no tellin' what might happen nor what cussedness them boys might be up to. Look at Corny Rouke, six foot or three if he's an inch, and chuck full, chuck full. He's always been the one to put the teachers out and their ain't no doubt but what it's his idea this time. Barricadin' the school house right out bold the first day of school; now who but Corny would have thought of that?'

There was something of a contemplative admiration in his tone.

'Goin' to be done, whoever's doin' it,' said Kinney, exploring his cracker bag. 'Goin' to get it at eight o'clock to-morrow mornin' and shut up the door and fasten the windows, and any teacher that gets in will have to get in through the keyhole or a crack; that's what they said.'

He had told it before; he had called a meeting for the purpose of telling it. But it was interesting to dwell upon. There was an impressive silence.

'Well, we'll have to give her notice. You're just the one to do it, Thornton—eh?' Saunders observed to a third member of the board. He was himself uneasy. 'She got along first-rate with the Summer term,' he added. He appeared to feel a vague and impotent regret. 'Needs the money, I should judge.'

'She needn't have made no calculations to teach no Winter term here—not to Fence Corners,' Kinney responded, with some contempt. 'If there hain't been a Winter for five years but what there has been a rumpus, and generally school shut up, why, she needn't have looked for there goin' to be.'

It was unanswerable; but the storekeeper offered a weak suggestion over his motley counter.

'I should think that gang ought to be broke up,' he said.

He expected no rejoinder and got none. The school board's attention was centered upon no such whimsical irrelevancy.

'Reckon you're the one to notify her, Thornton,' said Saunders again.

He wriggled unquietly on his stool. Thornton sat motionless. Whether in fact or by a trick of the ill-burning lamp on the counter, his good-looking face, with its heavy moustache, appeared pale. He sat with his arms crossed on his knees and his eyes on the floor, silent.

'Just so,' said Kinney, with an air of impartial decision; 'you can get it off better than Saunders or me, Thornton. You're a better-lookin' man, anyhow, and you're better rigged up,' he concluded with a polite amiableness.

They made an attempt at a careless dismissal of the subject. Kinney got up and threw his cheese rind into the stove. Thornton passed his hand over his mouth and swallowed hard.

'You can just put it easy,' said Kinney, encouragingly. 'You can just tell her how it is and that it's for her own good and ain't to be put off nor avoided. You can tell her she done first class the Summer term. Why, you can tell her just what you're a mind to,' cried Kinney, magnanimously.

Their colleague rose. He was a tall and powerful young fellow, but there was an odd laxity in his movements now as he went toward the door. He held his hat brim to his lips, too, and turned his face from the light. Hanks stared at him till the door closed.

'I suppose that you've found out that Jim Thornton's about the bashfullest feller in town, hain't you?' he queried.

There was no response.

'And you've probably suspicioned, same as other folks, that he's kind of sweet on that schoolma'am, or would be, if he dared?' pursued the storekeeper.

The school board was silent.

'Well,' he concluded with a grin, half of disgust, half of admiration, 'you couldn't have hired me to be that mean to a yeller dog—not to a yeller dog.'

Thornton made his way up the road, through a warm and lightly falling snow, that whitened and beautified it, dark as it was from the infrequency of buildings and hubbly with the frozen mud. He forgot to put his hat on until he met a man in a wagon, who stared at him. His face and hair were damp with melted flakes. He went slowly, almost creepingly, for there was in his heart a terrible, sinking dread of what

he must do. It was almost more than he could master.

Where was she? Bissel's; he knew she boarded at Bissel's and it was not far. He could see its light through the snow-laden trees. The pain at his heart was all but physical. He winced and kept his hand on his nervous mouth. There was a mist in his eyes which grew into tears. He was not surprised at them nor ashamed of them. He wiped them off mechanically with his rough, strong hand. He did not know whether they were from pity for her or himself. He was not clearly conscious of either, but of a dull happiness, such as he had never known.

He looked down at his clothes with a feeling of shame; they were not his best ones. He had a ready-made suit at home, but these his mother had made. He wished they looked better. The light in Bissel's window cast its long shadow on the whole ground. It waved there, shrinking and lingering; then it pushed on and up to the door.

It was not the custom of Fence Corners to rap; it would have been looked upon as a useless formality. He stepped into Bissel's large, scantily furnished, rag-carpeted best room. He gasped as he stood there. He had vaguely hoped for a little reprieve, but she sat there by the lamp, alone, bending over some work. She rose at his entrance and came forward a little to offer her hand; but he did not see it and dropped it back in awkward haste.

'Won't you take a chair?' she asked. She brought one forward. Thornton sat down. He dropped his hat as he did so and picked it up with a red face. Then he sat still. He would have tried to speak, but he knew he could not; his tongue felt thick and immovable.

'It is snowing, isn't it?' asked the school teacher; she bore the marks of diffidence herself in her timid voice and look.

Thornton nodded; it was all he could do. He stared at her fixedly, almost vacantly. His mind wandered back and strove to anchor itself on something. Once he had spent an evening at Bissel's, on the occasion of a party, and taken her hand in one of the games; once he had overtaken her, in a wagon, on her way to school and given her a lift. That was all. He thought it might have been less hard for him if there had been something more, but that was all morbid self-distrustfulness had allowed him.

The ticking of the clock on the stand in the corner filled the silence. It was a round, nickel clock, and it ticked so loudly as to force itself upon them.

'That's my school clock,' said the teacher. 'I am all ready for to-morrow. There are my books over there with it and the register.'

The school director dropped his miserable eyes to the faded stripe in the carpet at his feet, but he did not see it; his hat shook with the trembling of his hands.

'I've been thinking how many I'd be likely to have,' the teacher went on. 'I had twenty-five this Summer; there's always more in Winter, ain't there?'

He managed to say yes. His eyes were wandering about the room now, his lips parted as if for air. He saw a new pane in the window, clumsily puttied—a break in the cane seat of a chair—a camphor bottle on the melodeon—a small tub filled with astors still in bloom. He continued looking at these.

'They are real late, ain't they?' said the girl. 'They are mine. I potted them nicely, and I guess they'll last the best part of the Winter; I have heard they will if taken care of. Do you want one?'

She put down her work and went and picked one. Then, with a shy laugh, she took her scissors and went back to the table.

'Maybe your mother would like a few; she hasn't got them, has she?' she said.

She made a bunch and tied it with black thread. Thornton watched the slight girl in a cheap and well-worn dress, her dark hair in a girlish braid. This she was, but who should say what he saw? His agony rose, culminated as she turned to him; he clutched his hat till its stiff brim cracked. She was coming toward him with the flowers.

'There, maybe she'd like a few,' she repeated faintly; but he did not hear her. He felt his face aflame like fire, a choking in his throat. He struggled to speak, and did make an inarticulate sound, at which she looked up at him in surprise. He looked down at her pitifully and then fell stumbly on his knees at her feet and buried his face in her skirt, and groping for her hands pulled them down till they pressed his throbbing head and rested there, her happy, wondering tears falling upon them.

'Bashful?' said Dave Kinney to the storekeeper. 'I'd like to know your idea of bashfulness. Why, Jim Thornton walked out of this store that night and up to Bissel's straight as a string, and told that school teacher that owin' to circumstances that he didn't have no control over, she couldn't have the school this Winter, and likely there couldn't nobody else neither, and if it'd be any consideration to her she could have him; told her right up and down and made no bones of it. If Thornton's bashful, why, the fellow to him is what I'd like to see.'—San Francisco Call.

A Shallow Sweetheart.

FART FIRST.

A MYSTERY AND A PARTING.

On a summer evening some three years ago—a Sunday evening—a lad and a lass sat on a boulder near Mushat's Cairn, on Radical Road. Above them loomed the grand old Salisbury Crags. In front and beneath spread the magnificent panoramic view of "Auld Reekie." The sun was shining in the west, and darting its golden rays fiercely upon spire and dome and chimney top.

Ruth Hyslope was tall, well-made, and dark; black, sparkling eyes, that had a mysterious witchery in them; black eyebrows and raven black hair that was coiled in large plaits under her summer hat. Her features were faultless. In a word she was fascinating.

Her companion was a young man of some four or five and twenty summers, fair, fresh-complexioned, with full hazel eyes that could flash with passion or melt with love.

Calmly they sat—to all appearance—and silent, while the bells rang forth their evening hymn.

'Ruth, you will drive me mad!' passionately exclaimed our 'lad,' as he clasped his brow in his right hand, and fixed his burning eyes on the calm and beautiful features of his companion.

'You must have been mad when you deceived me!' was Ruth's cold answer.

'I never deceived you, Ruth; you know it!' he answered hotly. 'I told you the truth! I told you I was a poor student that had to fight my way.'

'Yes, I acknowledge you told me that!' put in Ruth with a scornful curl of the lip.

'But what about your "great expectations" that you spoke so much about? Did you not deceive me in that?'

In a hard voice he made answer—'Ruth, I did not deceive you! Who was to know that my aunt was to die intestate? I do not believe she did! She was kindness itself! She told me over and over again that she had left all her wealth to me. Was that deceiving you? If the will cannot be found—'

'Was it ever there?' answered Ruth sneeringly.

'Ruth—Ruth!' burst forth from between the young man's teeth.

At this moment footsteps were heard approaching; next second in the fast closing shades of the summer evening a Cameron Highlander in full parade attire accompanied by his sweetheart was observed approaching along the narrow path.

Without a look or a word the Cameron and his sweetheart passed along, the former speaking softly in the ear of the latter.

'By your words, Ruth, I think it was the "great expectations" that made you marry me instead of love, as I fondly hoped it was.'

'Well,' she at length responded, 'it seems we may cry quits!'

'Ah!' was all the reply, but what a depth of meaning was in it.

'Had it not been for your deception I could have married a member of the firm,' she recklessly continued.

'Oh, Jack Derrick! You do well to remember me of him,' cried her companion, starting to his feet and bursting into a perfect fury. 'I have stood this too long! I married you in spite of every obstacle, and thought you loved me! If I cannot have your love I shall have your life!'

And with these words he made a fierce and sudden movement towards the girl. For an instant something gleamed in the dull light. A blow was struck, and then a thrilling shriek resounded through the silent air.

Ruth Hyslope, who had remained sitting on the boulder until her infatuated companion struck her, fell prostrate with the force of the blow. Hardly had the echoes of her scream died away in the recesses of the stupendous crags than the sound of hurried feet were heard approaching.

Next instant the Cameron Highlander who had passed but a short time before stood panting by their side.

'Anything wrong; anything amiss?' he cried, as he looked first at one and then the other.

Ruth Hyslope rose slowly to her feet. Her face looked ghastly pale in the dull light. Yet calmly she sorted her attire, and then in a voice that was remarkable for its calmness, she retorted, 'Nothing wrong; thank you. Nothing amiss. A bat or some other night bird flew against my face, and frightened me!'

'Yes, yes,' muttered her companion. 'She is nervous and rather hysterical.'

'Oh; all right. I beg pardon. I thought I might be able to do some good. Good night, miss; good night, sir.'

And with these words the Cameron turned on his heel and left them.

'By jove, Mary,' he exclaimed, when he rejoined his sweetheart, 'there is some trouble with yonder two. And what is more, I recognize the man as an old college chum of mine.'

It was at the little gateway near Davis Dean's cottage.

'And do we part thus, Ruth?'

'Farewell forever!' was the cold answer, as the beauty moved away.

'But will you not forgive me?' he pleaded in agony.

'For trying to murder me—never?' she answered. 'Our union has been no union. It has been a fraud and a deception. Let us end it, and go our several ways. Farewell!'

PART SECOND.

THE STORY OF PRIVATE BLAIKIE.

We are still in this gloomy, cold, old Castle. Not that I dislike it as a barrack, only my own personal reminiscences of 'Auld Reekie' depress me, and weigh heavily on my spirits.

Years ago in Edinburgh I fell into bad company, and lost a good situation, thus blasting my early hopes. That was bad. At the same time, I met with my good angel—my own darling Mary. That was good. But then when I made overtures to my rich old uncle, who owns six or seven publichouses—and whose heir I am—to the effect that if I was bought off, or if he would use his money and push a commission my way, urging the fact that my beautiful Mary would be my sheet anchor for life, and I would never do the same again, his emphatic answer was that as 'I had made my bed so must I lie.' And a very hard lie it was sometimes. Shortly after that I had to go under the scorching sun of Egypt. It wasn't bad fun either as long as I knew that my Mary was waiting for me. The Khedive's medal along with the Queen's, together with a grim-looking cross that enabled me to put V. C. after my name, I thought would melt my old relative's heart. No use.

'I am proud of you, my boy,' quoth he. 'You are a Blaikie every inch of you. Serve out your time. It will do you good.'

Last night I saw Mary. She tells me that uncle has engaged a splendid barmaid. I could hardly believe her, as the hoary-headed rascal had always an abhorrence to having females in the bar.

However, I have been down to his principal shop in Leith Street along with two of my chums, and seen with my own eyes that such was the case.

About two years before I pen this a great and particular chum of mine met his death in a little horseplay in our room. Some female visitor had left her parasol or umbrella in the room, and the boys commenced to toss it from one to the other. An awkward throw was made—by whom I cannot say; it was all in fun—and one of the iron ribs pierced poor Dykeman's brain.

And, now, another year had gone, and it was the anniversary of poor Dykeman's burial. I had another wreath, a more showy and costly one, for it was given by my Mary!

With a sad and thoughtful mien I was leaving God's Acre when, close to where our National Bard erected the stone to the memory of his genial poet friend Ferguson, I beheld a figure crouching on the grass, and evidently convulsed with grief.

He had a costly wreath which his trembling hands were trying to place neatly over the rank green sod, a different tribute than what Mary and I had been able to give to dear old Dykeman. My footsteps aroused him. He rose to his feet, and albeit his face was tear-stained and convulsed with grief, I instantly recognized my old college chum, Lashleigh Hope.

'Like a flash it came on me! The last time I had seen him was under Mushat's Cairn on the Radical Road.'

Our recognition was mutual. There was a solid grasp of the hand, a few hurried words, and then a silence.

'Tom Blaikie!' Lashleigh at last exclaimed, as he pointed to a little plain slab over the little spot where he had laid his wreath. 'Tom Blaikie, there lies my heart—my aspirations—everything that I could have struggled and fought for! She was my own Ruth! I was wrong—I was savage! I was mad!—mad with jealousy! I struck at her, and we parted in anger! Think of that, Tom Blaikie. And now, after two years battling with every danger in the Arctic regions, I come home to find *this*!'

With these words he pointed to a grey slab, on which I read the simple inscription—

RUTH HYSLOPE,

ETAT 22.

From the graveyard to the publichouse may seem to many a singular shift, yet apparently a very common one under more depressing circumstances than ours.

If it was in the back room of a publichouse, we saw not the grimy walls—we felt not the stale odor of beer and tobacco, that generally distinguishes such places—we only saw each other—we looked with loving eyes on the past!

When we were boys!

Dear, oh, dear! How we talked, and how the time ran on!

At last he seemed to be unable to contain himself any longer, and with a burst he exclaimed—

'Tom! Tom! I can stand it no longer! I must make a confidant of some one. Oh, Tom, I believe I murdered that woman!'

'Ruth—Ruth Hyslope!' I gasped as I gazed at him in mingled surprise and horror.

'Yes, Ruth Hyslope or Hope!' he replied with a queer smile, 'for she was my wedded wife. Listen, and I will briefly tell you the history of our foolish union. Ruth was handsome—she was more—she was fascinating! We were introduced at a dancing club. I had at that time got my diploma, and thought that after the years of hard study and toil I might have a little relaxation, and enjoy myself before once more getting into tighter harness. That holiday was our ruin. Ruth's beauty made me her slave. I fancied that the admiration and love was reciprocal. Ah, me! I had informed her of certain great expectations that I looked forward to at our earlier meetings—more as a young fellow will do to bounce when walking out with a showy girl than that he ever expected that together they would share the same lot. Mad love drove me to the step I took! Alas! to my cost I found it was the "expectations" that led Ruth to accede to my wishes. We were quietly married at the registrar's. One week—only one week—of a fool's paradise! And then—the devil came in at the door in shape of an empty purse, and love flew out at the window! She was firm of purpose. She went calmly back to her work, and told me to pursue my studies, and call upon her when I received my "expectations." Oh, Tom! the gall and the bitterness!'

'Ah!' I exclaimed, as another flash of memory came upon me. 'Lash, old boy! I think I can help you now. This occurred two years ago on the Radical Road, eh? She screamed, did she not?'

'How know you that?'

'Do not you remember that a Cameron Highlander came at the cry, and only left when the lady assured him that a bat or night bird had flown against her face and frightened her? I was that Cameron.'

'Hush, Tom!' answered Lashleigh.

'When you look on that photograph—that does her but little justice—you will understand.'

PART THIRD.

TOM BLAIKIE'S STORY CONCLUDED.

I looked at the picture and understood—understood more than what my old college chum dreamt of.

I could remember the showy girl that was with him on the Radical Road at that particular Sunday; but I would not have known her had I met her in my 'porridge,' as the saying is.

But, with this picture in my hand, I, with a thrill that almost made my hair rise on end, understood that I was the means that Fate had decreed to unravel a mystery that otherwise might never have been heard of.

Now, unfortunately—or fortunately as it turned out—I was deputed for guard at the Palace. That kept me fixed for twenty-four hours. I did not mind this, as I thought there was no hurry. But somehow the weight of the secret I had discovered seemed to grow heavier every moment until it almost became unendurable. Oh! what a relief it was to see Mary at the guardroom door.

After our first greetings she exclaimed—'I've been up at the Castle, Tom, looking for you to tell the news! Your uncle is going to be married to night to Miss Smith, his dashing barmaid!'

'What!' I gasped. 'Are you sure of this, Mary?'

'Isn't it fun, Tom?' finished Mary with a ringing laugh. 'You'll have to finish out your time, and keep yourself after—and me, too! But what is wrong, Tom?' she added as she observed my troubled face.

'My answer was to produce the photograph of Ruth Hyslope or Hope.'

'Whose picture is that, Mary?'

'Why! Miss Smith's! Mrs. Blaikie that is to be!' was her answer.

This answer convinced me.

'Mary!' I exclaimed in a hurried yet earnest voice, 'this marriage must be prevented at all hazards. Go to this address in College Street, and tell Lashleigh Hope that you come from me—that as he reverses the name of Ruth Hyslope he must instantly accompany you! Then lead directly and quickly to my uncle's in Leith Street.'

Yes! No sooner had I relieved the guard and taken our turn up on the north post outside the Abbey than, coolly laying my musket against a buttress, I scouted along the North Back and up the Low Calton, and leugh I stood breathless at my uncle's shop-door. I was not a moment too soon. A cab stood at the door, and as I rushed into the bar I met the bridal party face to face.

'Hold, uncle!' I cried; 'this must go no further!'

'What do you mean—you—you—'

'Ruth Hyslope, or rather Ruth Hope, your husband is here!' with all the rough brutality that my excitement had brought to the surface.

A scream—and a fainting woman! A scene better imagined than described! Mary and Lashleigh arrived, and after a short time and some hurried explanation Lashleigh took his wife away in the cab that was to carry her to—. Well, well! To err is human! Money was her idol. She