

had often comforted me in times of trouble. "Siclike nonsense I never heard!" cried my mother, "a callant like you! A besom—a designing madam, nocht else—that's what she is! I wonder to hear ye, Willie?" "Where's, wheest—Mary!"

I could hear my father's voice, grave and sober as ever. Then Willie's vehement rush of words went on till I heard my mother break in again.

"Marriage! Marriage! S'rce, heard ye ever the like? A bairn to speak to me o' mairrying a woman naeboddy kens ocht aboot—a lass in a shop, ye say; aye, I'se warrant a bonny shop——!"

Then there came the sound of a chair pushed vehemently back, the crash of a falling dish. My father's voice deep and terrible so that I trembled, followed. "Sir, sit down on your seat and compose yourself! Do not speak thus to your mother!"

"I will not sit down—I will not compose myself—I will never sit down in this house again—I will marry Lizzie in spite of you all!"

And almost before I could get round to the front yard again Willie had come whirling all disordered out of the kitchen door, shutting it with a clash that shook the house. Then with wild and angry eyes he strode across the straw-littered space, taking no notice of me, but leaping the gate and so down the little loaning and up towards the heather like a man walking in his sleep.

I remember I ran after him, calling him to come back; but he never heeded me till I pulled him by the coat tails. It was away up near the march dyke, and I could hardly speak with running so fast. He stared as if he did not know me.

"Oh, dinna—dinna—come back!" I cried (and I think I wept); "dinna vex my mither!"—and—there's 'rummelt tawties' to the supper!"

But Willie would not stop for all I could say to him.

However he patted me on the head.

"Bide at hame and be Jacob," he said; "they have cast out this Esau."

For he had been well learned in the Bible and once got a prize for catechism at the day school at Whinnylgate. It was Boston's "Fou fold State," so though it was in the house, I never tried to read it.

So saying, he took the hillside like a goat, while I stood open-mouthed, gazing at the lithe figure of him who was my brother as a grew smaller, and finally vanished over the heathery summit of the Rig of Drumquhat.

That night I heard my father and mother talking far into the morning, while I made a pretence of sleeping.

"I will never own him!" said my father, who was now the angry one.

"I'm feared he doensna look strong!" answered my mother in the darkness.

"He shall sup sorrow for the way he spoke to the father that begat him and the mother that bore him!" said my father.

"Dinna say that, guidman!" pled my mother, "it is like corsin' oor ain first born. Think how proud ye were the time he grippit ye by the hand romin' up the loanin' an' caaled ye 'Dadda!'"

After this there was silence for a space, and then it was my mother who spoke.

"N, Alexander, you shallna gang to Edinbra to bring him hame. Gin yin o' us maun gang, let it be me. For ye wad be overly sore on the lad. But oh, the madam—the Jezebel, her that wiled him frae us, wait till I get my tongue on her!"

And this is how my mother carried out her threat, told in her own words.

"Oh, that weary toon——" she said afterwards. "The streets so het and dry, the blawin' stoor, the peetifu' bairns in the gutter, and the puir chapman's joes standin' at the close mouths wi' their shawls about their heads! I wondered what yin o' them had had gotten haud o' my Willie. But at last I cam' to the place where he lodged. It at a time o' the day when I kenned he wad be at his wark. It was a hoose as muckle three kirks a' biggit on the tap o' yin anither, an' my Willie bode in the tapmaist laft."

"It was an auld lame woman wi' a mutch on her head that opened the door. I askit for Willie."

"He's no here," says she; "an' what may ye want wi' him?"

"I'm his mither," says I, and steppit ben. She was gye thravn at the first, but I sune tamed her. She was backward to tell me ocht aboot Willie's onganin's, but none backward to tell me that his 'book' hadna been payit for six weeks, and that she was sore in need o' the siller. So I countit it doon to her shillin' by shillin', penny by penny.

"An' noo' says I, 'tell me a' ye ken o' this madam that has bewitched my bairn, her that's costin' him a' this siller—for doubtless he is wearin' it on the Jezebel—an' breakin' his mither's heart.'"

"Then the landlady's face took on anither cast and colour. She hummed an' hawed a while. Then at last she speaks plain."

"She's nane an ill lass," she says, "deed, she comes o' guid kin, and—she's neither mair nor less than sister's bairn to myself!"

"Wi' that I rises to my feet. 'If she be in this hoose, let me see her. I will speak wi' the woman face to face. Oh, if I could only catch them thegither I wad let her ken what it is to twine a mither and her boy!'"

"The auld lame guidwife opens the door o' a bit clost wi' a bed in it and a chair or two."

"G'ng in there," she says, "an' ye shall hae your desire. In a quarter o' an hour Lisbeth will be comin' hame frae the shop where she serves, and it's mair than likely that your son will be wi' her!"

"And wi' that she sneaks the door wi' a brainge. For I could see she was angry at what I had said aboot her kith an' kin. And I liked her the better for that."

"So there I sat thinkin' on what I wad say to the lass when she cam' in. And aye the mair I thoct the faster the words raise in my mind till I was fair feared I wad never get time to utter a tenth part o' my mind. It needna hae troubled me, had I only kenned."

"Then there was the risp o' a key in the lock, for in thae rickles o' stane an' lime that they rin up noo a days ye can hear a cat sneeze ower a hale 'flat.' I heard footsteps gang by the door o' the closet an' intil the front room. And I grippit the handle, bidin' my time to break oot on them."

"But there was something that held me. A lassie's voice, fleechin' and fleechin' wi' the lad she loves as for life or death. Hoo did I ken that?—Weel, it's nae business o' yours, Alec, hoo I keened it. But yince hear it and ye'll never forget it."

"Willie," it said, "tak' the siller, I dinna need it. Put it back before they miss it—and oh, never, never gang to thae races again!"

"I sat stane cauld, dumb-stricken. It was an awesome thing for a mither to hear. Then Willie answered."

"Lizzie," he said, and I kenned he had been greeting, "Lizzie, I canna tak' the money. I would be a greater hound than I am if I took siller ye hae saved for the house

## Bright Babies.

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and the marriage brawls—and—"

"Oh, Will," she cried, and I kenned fine she was greetin' too, an' grippin' him aboot the neck, 'I dinna want to be married—I dinna want a hoose o' my ain—I dinna want ony weddin' brawls, if only ye will tak' the siller—and—be my ain guid lad and never break your mither's heart—an' mine! Oh, promise me, Willie! Let me hear ye promise me!"

"Aye, she said that—an' me hidin' there ready to speak to her like a tinkler's messan."

"So I opens the door an' gaed in. Willie had the pound notes grippit in his hand, and the lassie was on her knees thankin' God that he had ta'en her hard earned savin's as she asked him, and that he had promised to be a guid boy."

"Mither!" says Willie, and his lips were white.

"And at the word the lassie rises, and I could see her legs tremble aneath her as she cam' nearer to me."

"Dinna be hard on him," she says; 'he has promised——'

"What's that in your hand?" says I, pointing at the siller.

"It's the money I have stolen!" says Willie, wi' a face like a streikit corpse.

"Oh no, no," cries the lass, 'it's his ain—his ain mine!'"

"And if ever there was a lee markit doon in shinin' gold in the book o' the Recordin' Angel it was that yin. She was nae great beauty to look at—a bit slip o' a fair-haired lass, wi' blue e'en an' a ringlet or twa peepin' oot where ye didna expect them. But she looked as bonny then—aye, as bonny as ever your Nance did."

"Gie the pound notes back to the lass!" says I, "and syne you and me will gang doon and speak with your maister that ye hae robbit!"

"And wi' that the lass fell doon at my feet and grippit me, and fleeced on me, and kissed my hands, and let the warm tears rin drap—dap on my fingers."

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