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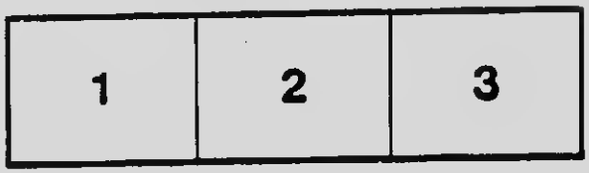

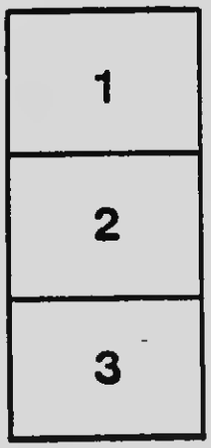

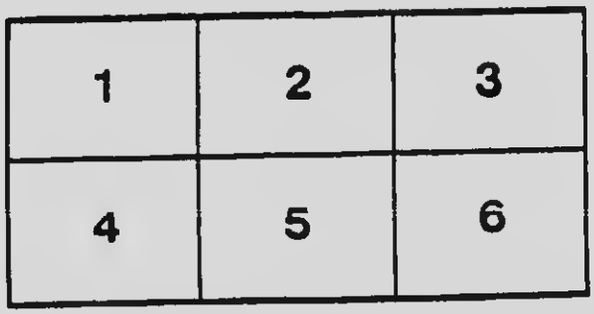

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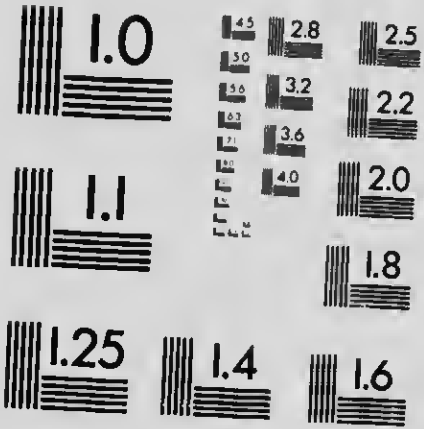

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BY ALFRED OLLIVANT

Author of "Bob, Son of Battle"

TORONTO

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PART I

Danny

CHAPTER I

Laird and Lady

There came a knoek at the Laird's door, very shy.

"Who's there?" he growled.

"It's me, Massa," said a timid voice.

"Come in, Me," said the Laird, grimly, and swung in his chair.

There entered the Laird's lady, who might have been his daughter.

"I'm not disturbing you?" she asked, standing against the door, slim, shy, and with alarmed child's eyes.

"You are," said the Laird.

"O," said the lady, "sh-shall I go?"

"It's done now."

"Awful sorry," said the lady.

The Laird grunted.

"What is it?"

"O, it's nothing," said the lady; and whispered, "Hush! *do* hush!" to a noise of snuffling without.

"Why disturb me then?"

"Because it's—well—*rather* nice," said the lady.

"O, show it in!" said the Laird.

"May I?" said she, with leaping eyes, and opened the door delicately.

"Danny!" she called, bent, and enticed with slim long fingers. "Hss! hss! Danny, wee man!"

Busily through the crack there came a knightly babe in tabard of clouded silver; halted on a lion's skin; and stood there with uplifted head and the shy delightful dignity of one gentleman doubtful of his welcome at the hands of another.

The grey man eyed him with grim unwelcoming stare.

"What is he?" he asked.

"A Dandie, of course," said the lady. "Isn't he a duck?"

"I've seen uglier," allowed the Laird.

"May I then?" asked the lady, with quick, anxious eyes.

"What?"

"Why, keep him?"

"Why should ye?"

"O, didn't I tell you?" said the lady quickly. "He's a present. Andie Campbell sent him. I thought I'd said."

"What's young Campbell want sending you presents?" growled the Laird.

"It wasn't a *present*," said the lady quickly.

"Then why d'ye say it was?"

"I didn't," panted the lady. "I said it wasn't. And don't be such a grump. . . . Not like a present to *call* a present," she added.

"You see," she continued, "I'm bound to have him—sort of."

"If you're bound to have him, sort of," said the Laird, "why ask me?"

"I don't," said the lady; "I only want to know if you mind."

"I do."

"But you won't when you know."

"I will," said the Laird, and returned to his writing.

The lady stood by the door and chewed the end of a baby handkerchief.

"You see," she said, lifting eyes of woe, "if I don't—he's got—to go——" She paused.

The Laird ceased from his writing.

"Where?"

"You know," said the lady, and nodded ominously.

"I guess," said the Laird, and resumed his writing.

"In a bucket," said the lady.

"As good a way as any," said the Laird, writing on.

She looked at the grim back with wounded eyes.

"Don't you care?"

"Not a finger-flip," said the Laird.

"O," said the lady. Mournfully bending, she gathered her grey babe and tucked him away beneath her arm.

"Anything else?" said the Laird and drummed on the table.

"No-o," she murmured, and stood at the door with bowed mouth, wet eyes, and her babe beneath her arm.

"Then shut the door when you go out," said he, and turned to his writing.

The door did not shut.

"It'll be very expensive sending him back all the way to Ardlochet, Massa," said the voice at the door.

"No need to send him back," said the Laird.

A ray of hope shot across her face.

"Ye can get Robin to shoot him," continued the Laird.

The light died out of the girl's face.

"Robin can't shoot," she said resentfully.

"He must try."

"He couldn't hit him."

"He must go on till he does."

"Beast!" said the lady, low; looked dreadfully frightened, and bit home on her handkerchief.

The Laird sat, great of shoulder, grim of back, unmoved, and wrote.

The lady thrust her hand into her belt desperately and plucked forth a letter.

"This is what Andie says, Massa," she said with seared eyes.

The Laird swung round, grim as fate.

"He has written, has he?"

"Not written," panted the lady, roses blowing in cheeks of snow.

"What then?"

"Only scrambled a line."

The Laird sat home in his chair.

"I would wish to see what Mr. Campbell says," said he, and folded great arms.

"I'll read it to you," panted the lady.

"I can read myself," said the Laird.

She marched across the room, all pale, hitching her babe beneath her arm; and offered him the letter.

Grimly he thrust forth his man-paw and took—not the letter but the hand that held it.

"I was only daffing, child," he said, and pulled her down onto the arm of the chair.

"I—I know," she gasped.

"Then why did you——"

"I didn't."

"You were just going to."

"I wasn't," said the lady; "and I don't," and did.

He put his arm about her, grim, tender man; nursing her.

"Why's Master Andie going to bucket him?" he asked when at length she was comforted.

"It's because of his eyes," said the lady, her own still downcast.

"I see nothing amiss with his eyes," said the Laird, looking

"It's only his nonsense."

"Let's hear it," said the Laird. "I'm partial to nonsense."

"He's only a boy."

"Old enough to be your elder brother, miss."

"Boys are different," said the lady. "Boys don't grow old till they're elderly." She unfolded the letter reluctantly. "He says:

" '*My dear Marjory, I—I never saw*——"

"Stop!" said the Laird. "You're skipping."

"This is all that matters," said the lady.

"All or none," said the grim Laird.

The lady, pale as lilies, folded the letter. The strong arm about her fell away.

"Tell Robin," said the grim Laird, "I would speak with him."

A moment she sat on the arm of the chair like a shamed child; then she looked up, and her eyes were as those of that same child, pleading to be let off, and full of rain.

"O Massa!" she begged.

"I mean it," said the ogre Laird.

She sat on the arm of the chair, poor stripling lady, shame-faced as a rain-whipped rose. Then she put the letter in his hand.

"Very well," she gulped.

"Is it amorous?" asked the Laird, not taking it.

"Certainly not," said the lady, choking.

"Is it revilings," asked the ogre Laird, "of me?"

The lady sat dumbly with bowed neck, and plucked threads out of the arm of the chair.

"It's only some rather stupid nonsense," she gasped. "Andie's only silly. He doesn't mean any harm, but——"

"Does he call names?"

The lady drooped upon her stalk in misery of woe.

"He'd not be the first," said the Laird. "Let me hear."

"O *please!*"

"I wait," said the Laird.

"He says," gasped the lady, "O Massa, you *might* not! I can't! I really can't!"

"Try," said the Laird. "He says——"

" '*How is his Dottyship?*' " with a rush and a sob it came at last.

"Indeed," said the grim Laird, "How—is—his—Dottyship? And what might 'His Dottyship' mean?"

"It's sort of slang," said the red-rosy lady. "It means—sort of—I don't know—sort of—you know."

"I don't."

The lady gulped.

"You might try," she said, catching up a sob.

The Laird's arm stole about her not untenderly.

"I jalouse," said the grim Laird.

The lady dabbed her nose. Then she looked up. There was rain in her eyes, rain on her eyelashes, and her mouth a rainbow; and she began to talk in April showers.

"You see, he really did like me quite a lot—at least, he thought he did; though, of course, that's no reason—and he was rather bitter about it—and he doesn't understand—and he was sort of—sort of sorry for one—and he thinks I must be lonely."

"So you're like to be," said the Laird suddenly. "What sort of company are the Woman and Robin and me, with our two hundred years between us, for you and your twenty?"

She put her hands upon his shoulders, and looked at him with quiek eyes, very tender for him.

"I'm not," she cried. "I'm *really* not. I *wish* you'd believe that, Massa. I have a *lovely* time; and you're all so sweet."

"Am I sweet?" asked the ogre Laird. "Is the Woman sweet?" he asked—"Sweet and sixty."

"Deb's a duck," said the lady.

"And Robin?"

"Robin tries," said the lady, and began to gurgle.

The lady sat on the arm of the chair, rain-clouded still; and the Laird looked at her with grim eyes, very tender.

"And so," he said, "Master Andie thought ye needed a playmate, and sent ye the little doag—eh?"

"Partly," said the lady.

"And what about his eyes?"

"That's nothing," said the lady rosily, yet laughing.

"Then let's hear it."

"Would you like to?" said the lady shyly, and unfolded the letter. "It's only fiddle, of course."

"Fiddle away," said the grim Laird.

"Well, he says, '*I never saw such eyes outside the head of an angel and one other, whom I mustn't think of any more. I can't keep the little beggar because of his eyes. They remind me too sadly of the past*' (there never was a past," murmured the lady). " '*I can't give him away except to you for the same reason. So you must either take pity on him or he must go where I sometimes think of going myself*'—Fiddle!" said the lady; and folded the letter.

"Seems to end rather abruptly," said the Laird.

"That's all the letter," said the lady firmly.

"What about the postscript?"

"The postscript doesn't count."

The Laird folded his arms.

"The postscript!" said the Laird.

"No," said the lady, palely; tore the letter into dainty fragments and strewed it on the floor.

"Child!" said the Laird.

"Well!"

"Look this way."

She turned on him two eyes of sunburnt gold, tender, clouded, shy.

Long he looked into them, then into a twin pair set in a sea of pearls, and girdled round by a slender arm; and he said to himself, and dreamily:

"He has discernment then, young Campbell?"

She laid her hand on his shoulder.

"Need he, then, Massa?" she begged—shy, pleading eyes close to his own.

"What?"

"Go to—you know," and nodded.

"It would seem a pity," said the Laird.

"It would be a shame," cried the lady.

"That he shouldn't," continued the Laird, "while he's still innocent."

"He'll never be anything else," said the lady, and bowed over her babe; "will you, my precious?" she said, and kissed him. "And he does love his new mum so, don't 'oo, my own?" and she fell away into tender mother-drivel.

"How old is he?" asked the Laird.

"Only three months."

"Just a match for ye,' said the Laird.

She began to jig upon the arm of the chair.

"I may keep him then?" she cried with leaping eyes. "Yes, Massa! There's a lovely Massa!"

The Laird reflected.

"It'll save me buying ye a ball," he mused.

Radiant she rose—

"O you dear Massa!" she said, and patted his rough head. "Danny say 'ta.' Danny says 'I will love my Massa next in all the world to my mum!' Tousand tas, Massa."

"Get ye gone!" said the Laird, and returned to his writing.

"Come, then, Danny," she cried, and put him down. "Let's leave old Grump! Hss! hss! Danny, wee man!" and away she skipped, alluring him with her skirts; and he not slowly fell upon them and hung like death.

The door shut and opened again.

Two eyes of sunburnt gold with long shy lids peered round the door; and six inches from the floor, such another pair, set in a sea of pearls.

"*Quite* sure you don't mind, Massa?" asked an anxious voice.

"Be off!" said the Laird harshly.

"Andie's a dear boy and that," said the voice shyly; "and of course I like him like anything; but he's not a Massa."

The door shut quickly; the two pairs of eyes were gone; and without was a turmoil of worryings, little laughter, and hushed screams of "Now look here!" and "You'll tear me!" and "O you little horror!"

And this was the postscript:

"How is his Dottyship? I enclose you a cutting from the *Whitehall Gazette* on him—'The Kirk Militant of Hepburn: a Survival.'

"Is it true that you've had to do the Longer Penance for not keeping your kirks? You stand on one leg or something, don't you, and

you can put down the other leg when you like, but only on a red-hot brick or something?

"Is it true his 'souls' fall down on their flat faces when he passes; and if they don't he breaks them on the wheel?

"Is it true that there's one she-hag and one he-hag to run the place, and you do the washing?

"I know it is true that he once killed a man, and wears his skin as a fancy waistcoat.

"Is it true your job is to sew silk spots on to this?

"There's a lot more I want to know, but I'll write again soon. Yours as of old,

"ANDIE."

CHAPTER II

The Knight-Errant

It was a year later.

Marjory stood on the grass before the house—slim wisp of black with swan-neck and hair of russet gold, and looked up steadfastly towards the birch-woods hanging like a grey bloom on the dark bosom of the moor.

All day there had been rain. Now the e ening drooped about her with folded wings; thrilled with the song of birds. The sky was of the pale, shining purity of pearls; and above dark-shouldered Lammer-more a single star shone like a diamond in the forehead of the night.

The rain had passed, but the dews were falling all about her; and still she waited, pure, cold, pale, as the evening; and in her hand a riding-whip.

The door of the house behind her opened. A lean woman, hungry-eyed and very tall, came down the steps of the house and stalked across the gravel to her.

"You are to don this cloak," she said harshly.

"Who says so?" said the lady, not turning.

"Deborah Awe," replied the Woman, gaunt and grim.

"O bother you!" said the lady crossly.

"I carena a boddle for your bothers," said the Woman, and threw the cloak tenderly about the evening shoulders of the other.

Then she turned vindictive eyes to scan the hillside.

"Still bloodying," she said. "No sign of him."

"Then you'd better go in," said the lady.

"While you bide, I will bide. If you will catch your death, so will Deborah Awe," said the Woman.

"Bide then," said the lady, "and don't babble."

Silently they waited, the gaunt time-worn woman and gracious-limbed cold lady side by side.

"Never content but when he's killing," muttered the Woman. "In my time I have known many males, and most of them bloody, but I've never known the like of him for it. Robin's scarce his match."

"We all have our failings," snapped the lady, "and you particularly, Deb."

"And have I been away three times since the Sabbath massacreeing God's creatures!" cried the Woman.

"You would have been," said the other, "if God had made you that way. It's not your fault He didn't."

The Woman stared up at the hillside.

"I am praying God has seen good to take him," said she, and licked her lips. "He is long away."

The other turned on her.

"You want to see him dead?"

"If it's the Lord's will, I will make shift to bear it," said the grim Woman.

"Then you want to see me dead, too!" cried the lady, cold as death.

"He will be the death of you any gate," said the Woman.

"He would die for me!" cried the lady, hot as flame.

"I'd be blythe to see him," said the grim Woman.

"Yes, I know you don't care," said the lady, gulping.

"It is little I care for his likes indeed!" retorted the Woman.

"Then it is little you care for me," said the lady. "And so I'd rather be without you, so you can hook it."

"Keep me!" cried the Woman. "He might be son to you, the gate ye go on."

"So he is."

"With a soul to save!" cried the Woman.

"So he has."

"Who says so?" asked the Woman, turning to her.

"I do."

"Are you his Honour that you should know that?" cried the other.

"His Honour doesn't know everything," retorted the lady.

"His Honour knows that or nothing," said the Woman. "And I will inquire of him."

"Go and inquire?" said the lady. "Good riddance of bad rubbish."

The Woman had turned away, when a little exclamation from the lady interrupted her.

"Here he is!" she cried joyfully.

"Where?" said the Woman, returning.

"Just coming."

"He has been just coming this great while," sneered the Woman.

She looked up the hillside and beheld a little busy shadow bustling through the dimness towards them.

"I do think you are right," she said.

"I'm likely to be," said the lady, "seeing I'm his mother."

Daniel, son of Ivor, Warden of the Marches,

had come to his full-blown beauty now; and he was beautiful as Absalom.

Broad of chest, broad of brow, with coat of tarnished silver, he looked what he was, the warrior and lover in one.

Since Lancelot there had never been such a gallant with fair eyes and ways of chivalry; since Lancelot never such a battle-fighter. He lived indeed for battle, murder, and delight of kisses. To be loved by his lady, and to find a worthy foeman, these were the two passions of the knight in grey. And something of either passion entered into the other. He loved his lady fiercely; and the heathen host —foumart, sweetmart, otter, and tod, and all the lesser outlaws of the wilderness—he cherished like a lover, and waged war upon them everlastingly.

Yet while he smote the heathen, true knight that he was, he succoured the distressed—the tame things of the farm, whose Warden he was, and his lady's one-legged partridge with whom he dealt honourably upon the lawn, for so had she taught him, she of the high soul and aspiring chivalry.

Yet even so, his bloodiness not seldom brought upon him tribulation and stripes. That very forenoon he had slain in battle the one-horned fallow-buck, him his lady called

King Cole because he was such a merry old soul. Now the fight was a fair fight, but the deed was sacrilege; for it was done in the shadow of the house, on the borders of the birch-wood, and his lady had ordained that there should be sanctuary for any wild things of the wilderness.

So, beside the dappled corpse of the fallen king, her collar about her ears, the rain dripping from her hair, she had beaten him; and kindled to great anger had bidden him go home, for she would speak no more with him that day.

So he had gone, trailing miserably through the rain, and she had followed. Nor when she reached home had she found him waiting for her on her bed as was his wont when in disgrace; but going forth to hearken had heard his battle-cry in the mist far away in Lammer-more, and knew then that he was slaying among the heathen in a passion of remorse.

That was hours since. Now the rain was over, and in the hallowed evening he was coming back to her.

Steadfastly down the hill through the heather he ploughed with the earnestness of purpose and swagger of gait peculiar to him; off the hill, on to the lawn, all in a tender hurry to be with his lady once again.

"Come here!" called the lady coldly; but there

was no need to call. He came to her feet, gay and grinning, with eyes of love, frankly unafraid.

She bent to clutch him.

"Hold!" cried the Woman suddenly. "He has a peace-offering for you."

She stooped.

"Keep me!" she screamed. "It's a corp?"

The lady looked.

"He has laid it at your feet!" jeered the Woman. "O the cannie laddie? he bears ye in mind even while he's at his bloodying."

The lady bent and picked up the bloody sop. She looked at it; she looked into her true knight's eyes; and he smiled up at her, there in the fair face of heaven, because he had made his amend; but she was pale.

"This is different," she said. "Follow me." And Danny's soul died out of him, and he followed her.

The tone of her voice struck the Woman's ear.

"Dear sakes, Missie!" she cried aghast. "What's come to ye?"

The lady held up the bloody sop without a word.

"What is it?" asked the Woman.

"It is murder," said Missie, pale-lipped.

"It is no more murder than usual," retorted the Woman.

"It is," said the lady, and added pitifully, "Danny has killed a chicken, and I am taking him to the Laird that he may deal with him."

Pale and miserable she marched on her way, and Danny draggled at her heels.

The Woman followed, flat-footed, grim.

A sound of one running and cursing as he ran came to them.

The Woman turned.

An aged beldam of a man, unbonnetted, with dim ringlets dripping about his face, and weeping eye, was stumbling down the hill towards them.

The Woman turned in sour disgust.

The old man caught up with them.

"Where away, Woman?" he panted.

"To his Honour," said the grim Woman, marching at Missie's heels. "The other murderer has killed once ower often. He has killed that you see in Missie's hand."

"That?" cried the old man in grim scorn. "Think you *that* is all?"

"What," screamed the woman, "is there more?"

"Leuk!" said the grim old man, and thrust forth a horrible hand.

The Woman stopped.

"Murder! It's a massacree!" she screamed. "A massacree of Incense."

"Ye may say that," said the old man. "O it was fine to see!"

"Hear him, Missie!" screamed the Woman. "O the bloody Belial!"

Missie had turned.

"You saw him at it!" she asked, cold as death.

"I did so," said the gleeful old man. "I was in my luck's way."

"And you let him!" with stinging eyes.

"And why for should I hinder him?" cried the old man hotly. "Would ye ha' him forego the gift that has been given him?"

"Gift!" shrilled the Woman. "And what is Danny's gift?—to make families fatherless, and you eggin' him."

"To attend deathbeds," said the other solemnly, "and comfort the dying. A gran' work for a Christian!" said the preacher of the weeping eye. "Death is hard, yet all that lives must come to it. Now a man may die easy or he may die hard; he may die quick, and comfic, or he may linger long. And to make death quick to them that might die long, to make it easy for them that might find it hard, that," said the preacher, "is Danny's gift; and none can say but that he made the most of it."

"There's a pair of ye!" screamed the Woman. "Each bloodier nor t'ither."

"I try to live up to him," said the meek old man.

"Hear him, Missie!" shrilled the Woman. "It was *this* shedder of blood set *that* one on like as not. He should hang too."

"You will come with me," said the lady to the old man, and turned on her way.

"Will I?" said the other, not stirring. "Where to?"

"To his Honour," said the Woman grimly.

"Why for?"

"To help hang Danny," said the grim Woman.

The old man stared and started in pursuit.

"You're no going to deliver him into the Laird's hands, Missie?" he asked aghast.

"I am," said Missie.

"Just for a bit massacree?" cried the old man.

"For murder," said Missie. "It was a promise."

The old man drew a deep breath.

"Then the Lord pity my man, for the Laird will not. He will hang him."

"He will so," said the Woman. "He is sore on murder is His Honour. '*A murder, A Lie, Lechery, Treachery—these are the abominations*,' " she quoted.

"He was not that sore on it," said the

other bitterly, "when he murdered one himself."

Missie marched on.

"I tell you he will hang him, Missie," cried the old man at her heels, "hang him by his neck—so," and acted it, gurgling horribly.

"It would be just," said Missie, pale as lilies.

"It would be just murder!" cried the other. "More by token it is not murder Danny has done."

"Na," said the Woman, "it's a massacree."

"He has killed a chicken," said Missie, not to be cajoled; "and that is murder; and Danny knows it."

She looked at Danny; and he was miserable at her feet, and not for the murder's sake.

"Cheekhen!" cried the old man, with sudden heat. "Cheekhen yourself. She is none of your cheekhens at all."

Missie looked at him.

"What then?" she asked.

"A young pheasant for sure?" cried he.

Missie stopped.

"The rear-mother of that you hold, and of these in my hand, was the grey hen; and she was bringing up half her own and half young pheasants. A-well, as Danny was coming off the hill by way of the wood, the canker'd

old carlin flustered out at him from under a bit bushie, and her brood after her. And so," said the old man, "Danny just took and sent the half of them home," and he rolled his eyes.

"I don't see——" began Missie slowly.

"Ye will if ye'll wait," said the other. "The half he put to rest," he went on, "was the pheasant half."

"And where's the difference?" asked the lady, cold as ice.

"The differ!" scoffed the old man. "Is she daft? Why, in the reek of them. The one reeks gamey, t'other tamey. How would Danny ken they was like, as ye may say, liars, reekin' gamey yet bein' tamey. If they werena gamey they'd no cause to reek gamey. 'All that reeks gamey is fair game,' that is how he talked, did Danny. And if you reeked gamey, Missie," ended the courteous old man, "he'd serve you th' same gate."

Missie looked at the sop in her hand, and saw that it was speckled; she looked at Danny miserable at her feet.

A breath of roses blew upon her cheek.

"Thank you, Robin," she said, and sighed like a relieved child.

"Will I run fetch his Honour?" asked the Woman, eager at her ear.

"No," said Missie. "It's not murder; it's only manslaughter again."

"What will you do then?" asked the Woman.

"I will do my duty," said Missie. "Danny, you old bother, come here?"

He came and lay at her feet, meek knight; nor stirred, while she dealt with him faithfully because she loved him much.

The old man turned away; but the Woman watched with glee.

"It is a fine little mother you make to him, Missie," she said complacently when it was over.

Missie panted; but Danny, gay at heart again, shook himself and sallied furiously at the yellow cat licking thin lips upon the path as she watched greedily.

"Would ye murder my Jael?" screamed the Woman, and caught up her treasure in her arms. "O! is there no bounds to his bloodiness?"

But Danny was back at the feet of his lady, begging with adoring eyes for her whip, that he might bear it home for her.

So they set off for the house: first Danny, whip in mouth and proud at heart; then his lady, pale still, yet laughing as she watched her true knight swaggering before her bearing the trophy of his shame; and last the Woman.

"His Honour will be waiting you in the hall," said the Woman grimly, as they came to the steps; "you and your bloody one."

Missie turned to her with large child's eyes.

"Don't tell on us, Deb?" she begged.

CHAPTER III

That Doag

She flitted through the hall like a frightened shadow, and Danny paddled at her heels.

As she reached the foot of the stairs, a harsh voice stayed her.

One hand on the bannister, she turned.

In the door of the morning-room stood the Laird, great and grim and grey, his short cloak about his shoulder.

"Dinner's in," he said harshly.

"I know," said Missie, hovering on the lowest step. "We won't be a sec, Massa."

"Why be any time?" said the Laird. "I have waited long enough."

Poor Missie looked at the true knight at her feet; then looked across at the Laird with frightened eyes.

"I only just want to wash his mouth, Massa," she said. "He's—it's—it's—not very nice for him—before his dinner."

The Laird looked with thunder-brow.

"So," he said, "he has been bloodying again."

"Only a little tiresome, Massa," said poor Missie with frightened eyes.

"I weary of this bloodiness," said the Laird.

Missie, hovering on the lowermost step, looked across at the grim man with appealing eyes.

"Don't be cross with us Massa," she pleaded. "We can't help it; we're only human," and added, dropping fond eyes to the little man at her feet, "It's the naughty ones we mothers love."

The Laird turned.

"Mind," he said, "I will have no murder. If murder is done, I will deal with it."

"Yes, Massa," said poor Missie, "I've promised."

"Killing is killing," said the Laird, "and murder is murder, and——"

"And Danny knows the difference," said Missie quickly.

"And well for him," said the grim Laird. 'His first murder is his last."

In her room she made him sweet with tender hands, scolding him motherly all the while.

When he was once again himself, sweet-smelling as the dawn and fresh as dew, he led her down the stairs, arming her as it were in to the great hall, grey, tender gentleman in shining silver apparel and with eyes of love.

At dinner he lay at her feet, adoring her.

Once the Laird spoke.

"Child," he said, "you are not eating."

"All gone," said Missie, showing a clean-swept plate.

"So I see," said the Laird; "to that doag under the table."

"Not very wolfy to-night, Massa," said tired Missie.

The Laird looked at her.

"It's that doag!" he said.

Afterwards when he came into the drawing-room she was standing over the fire, shivering, pale, a flush of red in either cheek; and Danny sat beside her with lifted muzzle warming his throat and warrior bosom at the blaze.

"A fire in July!" said the Laird.

"I'm a little sort of shivery, Massa," said she. "Deb lit it without asking me."

He put forth great hands and took hers, and they were hot and dry.

"Child," he said, "you best get to bed."

"I think I will," she said, "if you don't mind, Massa."

"Tired?" he asked.

"No, thanks," she said, smiling at him. "A little all-overish—sort of—that's all, Massa."

"It's that doag!" snarled the Laird, and looked thunder at the grey man at her feet.

Later she rose from her knees in her own

room, and with hushed feet stole across to him who sat, sedate grey figure, nodding drousily before the fire. Bending over him, she took his face between her hands; and he, dreaming dreams of slaughter and the chase, looked up and beheld her above him, arrayed in long, white raiment, as one about to walk the dewy lawns of heaven, with hair like the shadow of the glory to come veiling her.

"Pray God make Danny not quite such a bluggy boy," prayed the mother, and kissed him on the eyelids tenderly.

He rose and stood, his hands in hers, lifting a grey muzzle and shy eyes to adore her reverently.

"Danny try to be a gooder boy," whispered the mother. "Danny not worry mother now. Mother not welly well. Good-night, my blessed."

Then she led him to the door and opened it; and there on the mat he lay and curled himself to watch over his beloved while she slept:

But in the night, guard he never so faithfully, there crept in one across his body whom he could not see; and in the morning there came no long-robed figure, innocent and dear, with hair like a shadow of wrought gold, to peep round the door with sleep-clouded eyes and cry him greeting home from his hunting with Robin in the dawn.

CHAPTER IV

They Steal His Love from Danny

It was now that they set to work to steal his lady from Daniel, son of Ivor. For days the plot had been a-hatching, nor had he been unaware of it.

They tried to entice him from her room with soft words and meat-offerings; they sought to hound him forth with hushed abuse and bullyings; but he lay at the foot of her bed like a sea-grey log and refused to budge.

Then Deborah Awe made effort to carry him away by force: in vain.

"Dirty tyke!" she cried. "He heavies himsel' till I canna lift him."

"Better not try, Deb," urged the faint voice from the bed. "You'll only hurt yourself."

"Eh, but ye heard what the doctor said, dearie?"

"But the doctor's an owl, Deb," said the voice. "What was it he said about your herb-tea? Quack-quack, wasn't it?"

"And one day he will be called to his account for thae words," said the grim Woman, marching

out; and as the door closed, she at the head of the bed with pale face and clouds of aureole hair winked, while he at the foot smote a sounding blow on the bed with his tail.

Later, while she slept, there came the Laird himself, he of the great hands and thunder brow, his enemy whom Danny hated, and bore him away to the birch-woods on the face of the brae, and there lost him in the evening at the time when the wild things of the woods begin to stir for their night huntings. But Danny, who of wont needed no cajoling to go a-hunting, would not be tempted now.

Before ever the Laird was clear of the woods Danny was off the hillside, stealing over dew-grey lawns, quiet as the shadow of coming night, guilty as a haunted soul; had entered the house by way of the open window of the morning-room, crept up to her room, and there lay outside the door, so still that when the Woman entered, Danny, ambushed behind her unknowing skirts, entered too.

There he hid beneath the muslin curtains of the dressing-table, nor stole forth till she was gone. Then, tilting up against the bed, he licked the long fingers that drooped from beneath the coverlet.

They stirred, seeking his brow.

"That you, Danny?" said a sleepy voice, nor seemed at all displeased. So, velvet-footed, he leapt upon the bed and crept along till he came to the pillows with the shadowy pale face upon them, weary with the toil of living, and dark-frilled eyes closed now as though she slept.

With tender teeth he pinched her ear as he was wont to do to show that he was there and loved her; and she shook her head and smiled, nor opened her eyes, but laid thin fingers on his forehead.

So he laid his grey muzzle along the pillows and lay there beside her, watching her with untiring eyes.

Later there sounded along the passage a ponderous hushed tramp as of an elephant marching upon his toes.

"Massa, Danny!" whispered his lady, with dark-frilled eyes still shut. And Danny, with bristling back, waited until the feet were at the door, then stole off the bed and crept beneath it.

But he of the thunder-brow marked a tail like a trail of dew vanishing away, thrust out a brutal hand, and haled him forth, wee Danny with the lion eyes, and holding him prisoner, marched to the door still with hushed elephantine tread.

"O Massa!" pleaded the voice from the bed, awaking.

He of the thunder-brow marched on.

"O need you?" cried the voice, very pitiful.

"Better, Child," said he of the thunder-brow, now at the door.

"O why?" begged the dear voice.

The Laird hovered irresolute and turned.

"Just a day or two, Child," he said, with voice of the coming waterflood.

"I *love* to have him so," pleaded the dear voice, threatening rain.

He stood by the door weighing his prisoner as though in a balance. The grim mouth was bowed like a scimitar, and the stark face granite grey.

"Well, Child," he said, in his voice of the coming water-flood.

"Well, Massa."

"Will I?" said the Laird with throat of iron.

A minute she looked at him with fond eyes; her face uncertain as an April day. Then she surrendered.

"Massa knows," she said, and smiled at him, yet with moving lips. "Bring him here a minie first," she prayed.

He came to her and stood beside the bed, great-shouldered grey, grim man, bending awkwardly that the prisoner beneath his arm might be near to her.

"Just a day or two," he repeated huskily.

She reached forth a hand thin as a flake of snow, and stroked the broad brow of her true knight; and he struggled not, curling his tongue upwards to caress her wrist.

"Just a day or two," said the Laird; nor seemed to know he spoke.

"Just for ever," said the lady, and looked up at him. "You will be good to him, Massa. You won't—you won't—not even if he does bloody sometimes."

She broke down quite and sobbed.

"If you like me at all"—she gasped and lifted a streaming face. "I love him so—he's such a darling—he's so naughty."

The Laird bent and kissed her dumbly.

She wrestled with her sobs, smiling at him through the rain.

"Thank you, Massa," she said, and patted his hand. "'Bye, my Danny," and waved to him. "Try to be a better boy—and not too bleedy. And don't *quite* forget your mum."

Then he was borne away; and she blew him rainy kisses whom she would never see any more this side.

Danny looked back at her with soft cocked ear.

Then he understood; and with a grunt struck for the grey-haired throat of his enemy who had brought this ill upon him.

And because his heart was pure, and he was fighting for love of his lady, he was inspired with strength, and battled like a thousand bulls. But his enemy, with arms of oak, as strong as pitiful, bore him away and handed him over to Robin Crabbe, henchman, to hold him fast until word came.

CHAPTER V

Missie Away

Now Robin was a rude man. Deborah Awe, who had cause to know, affirmed he was the rudest man in all Hepburn, save his Honour. Moreover, he dreamed dreams, drank whisky drams, and was vainglorious above all men; yet for the dreams' sake, and because he had understanding of visions, she forgave him much—his scourging tongue, his weeping eye, and his great thirst.

Now Danny loved him and he loved Danny; for the two did bloodily together on the hill morning and evening at the time of the dews.

But Robin, though he loved Danny much, in those days feared the Laird more. So he made fast his prisoner in the wood-shed and barred the door; and morning and evening he came to him with weeping eye and told him how it went with his lady. But Danny sat in the dimmest corner, a grey shadow with mourning eyes, and would not be comforted.

Then Robin considered that which was most dear to the soul of his captive next to his

lady. And he went forth and waylaid great grey rats; and he cleared a space on the floor of the wood-shed and blocked all ways of escape and loosed them for his prisoner there.

Then Danny trotted forth and slew them sobrely and without glee; and Robin of the tarnished ringlets tarred him on with blasphemy and Old Testament battle-cries. But Danny, his duty done, trotted back to his dim corner there to mourn with reproachful eyes.

Robin retired into the kitchen, and was there assailed by the Woman.

"What is all this rout raging of the heathen that I hear?" she asked fiercely.

"Me at Danny," said Robin, dully, "at the work of the Lord."

"Fine I ken your work of the Lord!" cried the Woman. "You have been killing of God's creatures. O!" she cried, "that is like you man-males! Missie is in the Valley, and all you can do to help is to go rat-killing."

Robin looked up.

"In the Valley?" he whispered. "Is that so?"

The Woman with the weary eyes collapsed.

"She is dwining," she said, brokenly.

Robin was silent for a while.

"Missie must not die," he said at last; "for if she dies then will Danny die too."

"Danny!" cried the Woman, "who cares for Danny now?"

"You do not," said Robin bitterly. "You have no heart at all."

"Heart!" cried the Woman. "Indeed, I have little heart for your vermins, and Dannys, and the like, with Missie drawing nearer God each tick of the clock."

"And when you have killed her quite——" Robin began.

"Kill her, keep me!" cried the Woman passionately. "Me that wrastles with the Laird and yon weary Doctor body and none to help me!—me that am tending her my lane and blythe to do it, dear heart! me that never quits her night nor day! Kill her? whatna more can a body do to cure her? Tell me that, Robin Crabbe—you that have the dreams when you are in liquor—and I will do it."

"Ye could keep away," said the rude man, and dragged back to the wood-shed with weeping eye.

The fourth day of his captivity found Danny full of secret busyness, carried far into the night.

In the morning, unaccountably, he had missed a rat; and, marking the way of its escape, had discovered a hole and rotten board in the side of his prison-house. All day thereafter in the absence of his gaoler, he had wrought

with earthy muzzle, delving hands and spurning feet; and when Robin entered had sat upon the earth-heap to hide it, mourning with reproachful eyes. Nor would he come forth to the slaying, though Robin tempted him with rats, young, unwhiskered, succulent, such as a three-months puppy would kill. Said Robin, "Give him time."

Robin watched him awhile miserably; then he went forth and came to the kitchen to the Woman who sat within, idle for once.

"You have killed my Danny!" he gulped. "I aye tell't ye."

The Woman lifted her face; nor seemed to understand.

"What is that?" she asked, uncomprehending.

"Danny is dead," gulped the old man. "He cares no more to kill and he cares no more to live; and I aye tell't ye."

The Woman flashed forth upon him.

"He has killed my Missie!" she cried. "That should be killing enough for him for one while."

Robin looked at her with startled eyes.

"Is she away?" he whispered.

The flame died out of the Woman's face, and she was grey again.

"Get out your blaeks, man Robin," she said huskily. "The Lord has had his will of her."

Then she began to tell her tale, speaking as one speaks in a dream——

"Then his Honour went—him bein' but a man and unable to bear; and I was left with her. . . . Then she just lay a bit."

Her fingers began picking at her apron listlessly.

"Then she whispered me—and I bent—and it was to will his Honour to me—to mend him, and mind him, and see he changed his feet.

"And I swore to it. . . . Then she just lay a bit."

Her eyes were downcast, her fingers at idle business.

"Then she opened her eyes and whispered me. And she was gettin' far, but I heard—and I was to give her dear love to Danny—'and don't girn at him, Deb,' says she: 'he's all the child to me.' And she looked at me, and she was greeling. And I swore to it. . . . Then she just lay a bit.

"Towards sunset she began to stir, and I do think she would be waiting Danny home from the hunting. 'Don't be cross, Massa,' she says, frightened like. 'We can't help it.' Then she opened her eyes, and saw me and laughed like, and whispered: 'It is I am girning, I think, Deb.' Then she just lay a long bit."

The Woman's throat was haggard, and her face grey as the evening.

"Then she smiled—and she just said—'Good night, Deb. Kiss,' and I kissed her . . . and she was awa. . . . Just, 'Good night, Deb,' she says, 'Kiss,' . . . and I kissed her, and she was awa."

She told it with dry eyes, drearily, picking her apron, and Robin, who for all his rude tongue had the heart of a woman, stood in the door, his back to her, shaken with sobs. Long he stood so, then turned, dim old man, with swimming eyes.

"Danny is dead indeed," he announced, "is dead indeed."

The Woman looked up; and into her dull eyes crept a gleam of joy.

"Has he followed her home?" she said. "Then I am glad. He will be like company to her, and her feeling strange among them foreign angel-bodies."

Her hands fell to her lap once more, and she began again in that dull dream-voice of hers:

"And 'Good-night, Deb,' she says, 'Kiss.' . . . And I kissed her; and she was awa."

Two days later at noon Danny stole out of his prison-house with earthy muzzle, and made for the house and his lady. The hall was strangely dark as he entered it, and there was

an unwonted stir of people, silent-footed as in church. At the foot of the stairs was a drift of fair white flowers, unfamiliar in that gaunt hall as a heap of lilies on a bleak hillside; and dimly seen through the heart of them a shining slab of oak.

Threading his way amid strange legs clothed in black, and still smelling of the tailor's iron, he sped up the stairs to the door of his lady.

It was shut; and he called to her through the crack at the bottom, low and very tenderly as was his way; and waited for the sound of skipping feet, the little laughter, and flash of half-hidden ankles as of old when she came to admit him of mornings, home from his foray with Robin in the dew.

In a passion of expectation he waited, watching the crack; now thrusting at the door with impatient paw, now crying a soft call, now taking a little eager turn down the passage as though to seek help, returning again to snuffle, shiver, and cry to her to come.

She came not; and at last he lay down to wait, crouching close, lest there, in the house of his enemy, he should be seen.

Then a far door opened.

Down the passage came his enemy like an old blind giant tramping in his sleep, and stumbled against the watchman at the door.

He looked down with eyes that did not see.

"Eh?" he said—"Eh?" as one lost in a mist.

"It is Danny, sir," sniffled the Woman at his heels. "Will I take him away?"

The Laird opened the door without a word Danny shot in. With a little glad cry he leaped upon the bed; and then he knew his lady was gone.

Back he came with a fury of onslaught.

Too late.

The door was shut.

CHAPTER VI

His Lady's Slipper

In the dusk of that evening the Laird came in. Great and grey, he stood in the door and looked.

Danny lay at the foot of the white bed—a sea-grey patch with lion-eyes; and clutched covetously beneath his chin a silver slipper.

The Laird's throat stiffened suddenly. He turned and went out in that blind way of his.

At midnight the woman came to him. He was sitting lonely in the hall, a short cloak about his shoulders. His hands were crossed; the stark face was lifted till the throat could be seen, and his eyes were shut.

"He will not taste, sir!" she gasped, tears in her voice.

"I laid the clout for him at the bedside—as Missie would; and I put his platter on it—as she would; and I called him to it and bid him say his blessing—just as she aye did. And he leapt off the bed, and walked round and sniffed it; and then, he just stood, waggin' a bit, and looked at the door and waited."

She gulped.

"He would never touch a morsel till she bid him; and now, she will not be there to bid him any more. And what will I?"

The Laird answered nothing.

"He bided awhile," continued the Woman, wailing; "then he just looks at me and goes back to the bed and cuddles her slipper. And there he lies and looks, and lies and looks, and will not stir for me. And what will I?"

"Let him bide," said the Laird briefly; and he was let bide.

For a night and a day the mourner lay, he and his slipper, and the Woman tended him.

In the morning of the second day Robin came into the kitchen, nor paused there as was his wont, but marched through.

"Where to?" cried the Woman suddenly.

"To my Danny."

The Woman thrust her gaunt self between him and the door.

"What is you want with him?" she asked fierce-eyed.

"I go to comfort him," said Robin.

"There is no need," said the Woman with light lips.

"Who then is minding him?" asked Robin.

"Deborah Awe," said the Woman, hands on hips.

"And by whose bidding?"

"Missie's."

"Missie's!" cried Robin. "It was not Danny Missie willed you too! I leave your Lairds to you to mend and mind," the old man continued hotly. "But this is my Danny."

"Missie was my child to me, and Danny was her child to her," said the Woman doggedly. "And now Missie is away, it is for me to mind him, who was nanny to his minnie."

"But you do not love him!" cried Robin.

"Do I not?" retorted the Woman. "I dirtied a sauce-pan for him the morn. If that is not love, I would know what is!"

Robin sat down by the door miserably; and the Woman went about preparing food for the mourner.

Later she took it to him herself, with fresh water, and laid them on the clout beside the bed. Soft-footed he leaped down, his slipper in his mouth, lapped up his water, wagging gratefully, yet one eye ever on his treasure; then he went back to his post of vigil, hoarded his slipper beneath his chin, and lay there with haggard eyes like a grey monument at the feet of his dead mistress, lying unseen where she had lain of old.

The Woman drew close to the bed and watched him with wrung face.

"He canna greet," she cried, with woeful eyes.

"Could ye greet a wee bittie, my man!" she said—gaunt Woman, very tender, bending over him, "it would ease you fine. Try, then! So," and all in a motherly way, her face streaming with tears, she shewed him how; but Danny lay with tearless eyes and could not greet.

The Woman returned to the kitchen.

"He might not be a male at all!" she said. "He finds no comfort in his food."

Robin, sitting dull-eyed in the door, made no reply.

"I have appealed to his stomach," continued the Woman, "and what more can I, him being male?"

"Is a man's heart in his stomach?" sneered Robin tremulously

"I kenna" said the Woman; "but I never met the man but I could mend his heart-break with a meat-pie."

"Then ye can mend Danny," said Robin shortly.

"I canna!" cried the Woman. "I just canna! I got him a gigot fresh from the flesher, and cut him a slice from it, and he'll have none of it. What more is there I could do?"

"Ye can do no more," said Robin. "Danny will die; and I aye tell't ye."

The Woman looked at him.

"Could you do nothing, Robin?" she implored.

"I could if I would," said Robin.

"And would you not?" cajoled the Woman—"for our wee man."

"*Our* man is it?" sneered Robin tremulously.

"And is he not yours?" cried the Woman.

"He *was* mine," said Robin, swallowing.

"And is," said the Woman; "yours—and mine—and Missie's."

"Missie willed him to you," said Robin. "It is not for me to come between Missie and her will."

"She would will ye too," said the Woman. "Belike he might eat for you."

"Ay," raid Robin, "he loves me."

"He does so, for sure," replied the Woman. "Often's you and he have been taking life together, and that is aye a bond between Christian man-males. Go tell him!" she implored. "He might heed you."

"If he will heed any, he will heed me," said Robin; and went.

Danny lay at the foot of the bed as for these last two days, quite still, with haggard eyes and chin upon his slipper.

Robin sat down on the bed.

"Mannie," he said, and could say no more for the fulness at his throat.

Danny greeted him friendly with faint flicker of ears and slow-moved tail; but he made no move.

Robin edged nearer, and the watchman huddled over his slipper. Robin patted him, and he crouched with leveled ears. Robin laid hand upon the slipper and Danny pinned him by the wrist; nor broke the skin.

The old man loosed the slipper, and Danny loosed his hold; then he licked the wrist where he had pinched it, very tenderly, watching the other with sad eyes.

Robin arose, and went out quickly, down the stairs and through the kitchen.

There the Woman waited him.

"Well?" she asked eagerly.

Robin trotted past without a word.

"Ah! You have mendit him fine!" jeered the Woman, tears in her voice—"you whom he loved."

Those were days of woe for the Woman almost beyond bearing. Upstairs lay Danny with ever-growing eyes; while in the hall the Laird sat out his days with clasped hands and blind eyes.

"Missie willed him to me to mend him, and mind him, and see he changed his feet," she cried in anguish. "And how will I mend him—when he never doffs himself? And how will I

mind him—when he never utters? And how will I change his feet—when he never wets them? Oh!" she wailed in shrill voice of woe, "what with him in the hall, speakin' none nor greetin' none; and Danny in the great room the same; and you in the kitchen dreep—dreep—dreeping all the while—Oh!" she cried, turning on the maudlin heap of woe beside the door, "give over; or go and get drunk!"

"I have not the heart," said dim Robin, sniffling.

That afternoon, as the Laird kept lonely vigil in the hall, he heard a noise of secret sniffling without the door.

"Who is there?" he cried in harsh, leaping voice.

There was silence; then a voice, very small and woeful, replied.

"It is but me, your Honour."

"Then begone!" said the grim Laird.

There was a silence again; then a nose was blown.

"D'you hear me?" cried the Laird.

"I hear ye," replied the sodden voice, "but I dinna heed ye."

The Laird rose.

"And who are you," he asked terribly, "who does not heed me?"

"Robin," replied the voice, hastily.

The Laird flung wide the door.

Upon the stone flags in the mouldy passage kneeled Deborah Awe.

The Laird looked down at her, still upon her knees.

"It seems there's a mistake," he said.

The Woman lifted a wet face to him, and it was wrung with woe.

"I was just putting up a bit prayer for your Honour, she said, clutching great knuckled hands—"was ye objectin'?"

"I was not asked," said the Laird.

"Just that the Lord send you the comfort of tears—you and Danny. O man!" she cried, "there's a hantle o' comfort in tears. If ye could greet a bit, it would ease ye fine."

The Laird looked down at the wet moved face.

"Tears are no ease to men," he said.

"O, but ye should just see Robin!" cried the Woman. "Dreep—dreep—dreep it is all the while. And it eases him fine. And belike if ye——"

"I am not Robin," said the Laird.

"I ken he's not much in the way of a man, is not Robin," said the Woman; "but——"

"As God meant him," said the Laird, "so He made him. And He made me other; so there's no good talking."

"Hear him!" cried the Woman despairingly; "and how will I that Missie bid——"

"Get up!" said the Laird. "Go!"

The Woman did not move.

"May I no pray for Mr. Heriot!" she urged. "Just a bittie—as Missie would. Now she is away, there is none prays for you but yourself. And ye ken that in the village if they pray at your Honour, it'll no be fer ye but against ye."

"You may pray for me," said the Laird, "but you must do it in the kitchen. I cannot have you praying about in the public passages."

"I thought I'd be nearer here," said the Woman, mopping up her tears.

"The kitchen's near enough," said the Laird; and turned.

"Aweel," said the Woman, resigned and rising from her knees; "the Lord's there too, I'se uphold."

The Laird went back to the leathern chair and his blind reverie.

His hands were hardly clasped, his eyes scarce shut, before the door opened afresh, and the Woman stood in it, her face still bleared with tears.

"And there is Danny!" she said.

"What of him?" asked the Laird, opening his eyes.

"He is as is your Honour. The Lord has de-

nied him the gift of tears. God gave woman the heart to sorrow, and tears to ease her of her sorrow; to man He gave no heart and no need of tears; to dogs, and your Honour, He gave the self-same heart to mourn, and forgot to give them the comfort of tears: for it is all one with you and Danny. He speaks none, nor greets none; and he dwines and dwines because of the sorrow which cannot away in water."

"Well?" said the Laird.

"Would Mr. Heriot go to him?" she begged. "I have tried, and Robin has tried; and he will not heed us. He just lies and looks, and lies and looks, and that wae with it to gar ye greet."

"He is strange with me," said the Laird, pondering.

"And he was with me." said the Woman, "but he's not now; nor would he be with your Honour. Ye'd be like a bit o' Missie to him."

"Where is he?" asked the Laird.

"The same where," cried the Woman, gulping. "Missie's bed."

The Laird went.

Danny lay as ever at the foot of the white bed, hoarding his slipper, and with haggard eyes.

The Laird sat down upon the bed, and laid grey hands upon his brow.

"LIKE A CHILD, GREATLY AFRAID"

"Danny," said the Laird, bending low, until his face was just above the other's, "do you not understand? She is gone; she is gone," and repeated it, low and slow, as a father teaching a child its letters. "Mother is gone. She will not come back to us. We will go to her."

But Danny looked up into the widowed face above him, and would not understand.

CHAPTER VII

Danny's Search

Next morning when the Woman came to the mourner he rose wearily, slipper in mouth, and trailed out of the room.

She watched him plodding down the stairs, the slipper tap-tapping from stair to stair as he went; she saw him cross the sombre hall, where no soul of sun ever came now, and enter the morning room.

Within he leaped onto the low tapestried chair Missie had used to sit upon—slender white figure with bowed head, the sun in her hair, and her white-and-golden work upon her knees.

Against a little octagon table he leaned and tilted with long muzzle at the work-basket thereon. It fell; and, full of woman's ware, strewed the floor.

He leaped down and searched amid the wreckage. Her thimble he took between his teeth, pinched delicately, shook, and snuffled into; a ball of wool he held with one firm paw, hopped round it on three legs, and nosed beneath; then into the gutted basket he thrust

his nose, and scratched the bottom of it with diligent fore-paw.

"She is not there, Danny," said the voice of the Laird.

Danny looked up and saw him standing in the door, stark shadow of a man; then he snapped up his slipper, and trailed out into the greenhouse beyond.

Here had been Missie's nursery of old; here she had wandered with fond-tending fingers; and now it seemed that these, her children, drooped palely and without hope for lack of love, for lack of her to love. Among them Danny searched. Round the rim of each flower-pot he sniffed with careful nose. One pale fuschia that she had loved above all because it ailed, and tended even on that last evening, hung now brokenly like a love-sick girl. Round it he searched, eager, intent, his tail still low, yet stirring as with reviving hope; nor would abandon it, as though about it lingered still some far, faint rosy breath of her dear ministry.

"She is no there, Danny," said Robin chokily; and Danny looked at him.

In the morning room the clock chimed twelve. At that of old his lady would arise and fold away her work, neat, demure, old-maidenly; then she would skip, cry to him

joyously, clapping her hands above his head as he pranced beneath; and hand-in-hand, as it were, the two would fare forth gleefully into God's morning, he and she and her book of knightly deeds; up through the knee-high bracken, among the white-stemmed birches, where the wind was always in the leaves like the rustle of women's robes, until they came to that high headland that thrusts a bare shoulder up into Eternity; there to lie amid the tides of heaven, the idea of God about them everywhere, look out over the rough-hewn land to Burnwater, shining like a jewel set at the feet of the hills, and the far sea flashing like sheaves of shaken spears.

So now he went to the door and asked.

Robin opened for him, and watched him canter across the silent lawns and lose himself in the heather beyond.

"Whither now?" asked the Laird at his elbow, harshly.

"To Lammer-more," Robin replied; "to inquire of God where He has lain her."

Twenty minutes later he was back in a bustle. Through the hall he shot and up the stairs at three-legged run, to wait outside the door of his lady in a fury of expectancy.

There the Woman found him, urgent to be admitted.

"She is no there, Danny," she cried, but opened to him.

In he thrust furiously; saw the empty bed, and stood quite still, as one shocked to death; and the hope died out of him as the soul dies out of a man.

Then he threw up his head as if to howl; but no sound came.

So he stood a moment in the centre of the floor, grey muzzle in the air, like a lost soul praying.

Then he turned and trailed out.

All that day and the next he sought her.

In green shaw and lonely strath and all among the birch-woods, where she would walk in the golden evening, he searched. Not a cottage in Hepburn but he entered it; not a rheumatism-ridden beldame, to whom she had ever ministered with sympathy and pudding—pudding in that basket-basin that he once valorously carried and spilled lamentably to the tune of maiden laughter—but he came in upon her, a sudden sea-grey shadow, snuffed her old ankles and was gone, before she had well begun to scream.

No woodland nook, known to these two only, where she would harbour at noon mid hart's

tongue and lady-fern, a wild cherry above her, the noise of bubbling water in her ears; no headland private to him, and her, and the God who walked with them there with trailing skirts in the dew of morning; no secret glade beside the burn, where she would splash a line in June, and, wearied, lie out her length upon the bank with far-flung arms, amid the fox-gloves, nor there be anywise afraid; while he, dripping, alert, and clamorous, did doughtily for his lady's sake and his own delight against the water-rats and heathers of the wilderness--but he searched them through; nay, not a meek-eyed wood-anemone that she had once caressed, but he stayed with lifted paw and anxious eye to inquire of it if his lady had passed that way.

Then he carried his search abroad. In the Forest of Altyre, in those far cleughs, where the red deer lie at noon he sought her. All along the shores of Burn-Water, on Windughope, and the Hill of the Eagle, in grey moss-hag, and far away on the wind-beaten pastures beside the sea, he made his search. He asked the heron in the pool; he asked the wet-eyed cattle at the Ford; he asked the wild goats on the sea-whipped cliffs. Once a herd saw him standing like a grey watchman in the opening day on the high loneliness of Lammer-more, where she would go to watch the morning with

trailing robes of grey sweeping out of the East over the moors. And once beside the lake of the Black Dwarf, amid the desolate hills, one who had no lawful business there saw him, the lonely hunter, passing rapidly by, so rapt in search that, seen himself, he did not see.

On the evening of the second day, the Woman peering forth with weary eyes, beheld him coming down Lammer-more.

"He is homing!" she cried to the heap of misery by the fireside. "He is coming off the hill."

Robin rose and crawled to her side.

"Who's yon at the brae-foot?" asked the dim old man.

"The Laird," said the Woman.

"Biding him?" cried Robin.

"Ay," said the Woman, apron in mouth. "And has been these three hours."

"God help my man!" cried Robin, in an ecstacy of woe, and trotted in again.

The Woman watched on, apron in mouth. She saw the little figure coming off the hill at swift unvarying trot; she saw him who stood at the brae-foot, ominous, grim, cloak-wrapt, waiting as another had used to wait of old with cold cheeks and riding-whip. She heard the Laird call, and drew her breath; but Danny

passed him by, swift, trotting shadow, nor seemed to hear. He crossed the lawn, into the kitchen, passed her too, trotting on haggard, weary, intent; passed Robin, huddled by the fire; down the long mouldy passage, and up the stairs to lie, all travel-stained and ragged as he was, on the mat at Missie's door.

To him, as he lay there, the Woman came, grey with misery. A wash-tub was in her hands, a towel over her arms.

She put the wash-tub down upon the floor and knelt beside him, spreading out her cloth upon the floor, and making arrangements with lean, large-knuckled hands as though to give a child a bath; and behind her Robin leaned against the wall idly swallowing his sobs.

Then the Woman took Danny to do for him as Missie would do when he was home from hunting—bathing his feet, his eyes, plucking the thorns out of his coat, and as she began to wash his mouth dread feet sounded in the passage, and the Laird stood over her.

The Woman kneeled bolt upright. One gnarled hand sought Danny and clutched him to her.

"What's all this rout and wash-tubs, and all?" the Laird asked.

"I am for washing Danny," said the Woman.

"You are for doing everything in the public passages," said the Laird.

"He was lying outside Missie's door," said the Woman. "I'd no the heart to stir him."

"Why does he want washing?" asked the Laird.

"Missie would aye red him up whiles," said the Woman vaguely.

"She would so," said the Laird, "when he was home from bloodying."

"He has not been bloodying!" cried the Woman quickly.

"That he has not!" corroborated Robin. "He has been with me all the while," faithful liar that he was, who had never stirred from before the fire these days past.

"Then why wash his mouth!" asked the Laird.

"It wets the lips," said Robin.

"He may have bloodied a bit in between whiles," said the Woman sullenly. "God made him male."

"He has not bloodied," said the Laird. "I would to God he had!" and he passed on down the passage, tramping.

At his own door he turned.

"Leave his mouth," he said, "and mend his heart: and may be you will red him up to some purpose."

Next day was Sabbath. All the morning Danny searched diligently and alone. At noon the kirk-bells tolling brought him home.

Robin saw him stand before the house as though awaiting Missie as she would come forth on Sabbath afternoons, she and the Laird; when of old the three would go down the drive together to the great iron gates, and there part company, the Laird, tramping kirkwards to garner in his people without remorse; while Danny and his lady, with wicked laughter and joyful feet, crossed the park-dyke; climbed Lammer-more, and there passed a holy hour in that world-oblivious loneliness she loved.

Now Danny stood before the house with lifted face and waited; while the kirk-bell tolled.

The great door opened. On the top of the steps the Laird appeared alone.

Danny looked; then started away, of set miserable purpose.

The Laird swept his short cloak about him, and strode kirkwards.

Robin and the Woman were left together. And as they stood thus silently, there came towards them floating from on high a far note of wailing.

"Dear sake!" cried the Woman, hearkening. "What's yon?"

"It's the sound of a breaking heart," said Robin, choking. "The Lord peety our man this day."

From far away on the height of Lammermore, it came to them, that voice of Lamentation. Over the birch-woods, borne on sorrowful wings it floated, long-drawn and low as Love's swan-song. Down in the village they heard it amid tolling bells; across Burn-Water it traveled, anguished still; by the Ferry lingered, and the boatmen there knew it for Danny mourning his heart away as faithfully as ever did man-lover for his mistress; then it fared forth and lost itself on the comfortless cold bosom of the sea.

The Woman stood with bowed head and prayed.

"The Lord send Missie is not hearing him," she cried, swallowing her sobs. "It would just break her heart!"

"Then there would be two with broken hearts," sniffled Robin. "Maybe that would be like company."

"O!" cried the Woman, "O!" as the sound of wailing grew. "Will you not go to him, Robin!"

"I canna," cried Robin, tender coward that he was. "I could not bear to see him suffer!"

"O you man!" cried the Woman. "I will go my lone," and set forth.

"That you shall never!" said Robin jealously, and set forth only to stop.

"The Laird's gone," he said.

The Woman looked up and saw that it was so.

"The Lord go with him," she said solemnly.

It was an hour before he came back, the grey Laird, striding; and his face was like a frost, and Danny in his arms.

CHAPTER VIII

Lochinvar is at the Door

Late that evening Robin came upon the Laird suddenly; and there was a misty splendour in the old man's eye, that the Laird knew of old.

"Well?" said the Laird briefly.

The old man stood in a puddle with lifted face and half-closed eyes.

"The Lord—in his mercy—has seen good—to take him," he said, in the deliberate voice of one delivering his text.

The Laird stayed from his marching.

"Who?" he asked, with sudden thunder-brow.

"Daniel—son—of—Ivor," said the preacher, "of this parish, bachelor."

"Is he dead?" asked the Laird, suddenly stern-lipped.

"He is, away and away and all," said Robin, and bowed his head upon his breast.

"Away?" shouted the Laird. "Where away?"

"That is not for me to say," replied Robin, and crossed meek hands upon his bosom. "For

some there is a heaven; for others there is a hell; and for the likes o' you and me, earth-worms that we are, there's a between-the-two."

The Laird strode across to him, and laid stern hands upon his shoulders.

"Hear!" he said sternly.

"Where?" said Robin, meek still.

"Is Danny dead?"

"Not that I know," said Robin, with some asperity.

"Has he gone, then?"

"Ay," said Robin testily. "Ay, ay, ay, I am telling you."

"Searching her?"

"Searching 'em out!" said Robin, rolling his eyes.

"Who?" said the Laird.

"The heathen!" said Robin, kindling.

The Laird looked at him, and his hand dropped from the old man's shoulder.

Robin sloshed round in his puddle, stood there, and began to shake with silent giggles.

"Crabbe!" said the Laird.

"What!" sniggered Robin.

"Your back is on me," said the Laird.

"If you walk round this gate," suggested Robin, "it will not be neither."

"And if you turn round," said the Laird, "I shall see your face."

"And I will see yours, my mannie," said Robin; "and I would rayder not."

"Crabbe!" shouted the Laird.

"Ay, billie," shouted Robin.

There was a moment's pause.

"Why are you standing in a puddle?" said the Laird, suddenly.

"Becob," said Robin, meek again, "the Lord gar'd me so to do."

"And I gar you to continue so to do," thundered the Laird, "until the sun has set." And he marched away.

"May I no sit me?" cried Robin, weeping suddenly, and sat him.

The Woman was sitting in the kitchen.

Now as she sat there, her Book upon her lap, her mittened hands upon her Book, her thoughts with Missie far away, a crooning voice, very caressing, came in upon her dreams.

> Little virgin, white as snaw!
> Dainty, daffin', windsome, wee,—
> Lochinvar is at the door,
> Knockin', knockin', loud for thee.

The lady he came a-courting looked not up.

"You are dripping drunk," she said.

Lochinvar leaned against the door-cheek and ogled her out of the night with mildewy eye.

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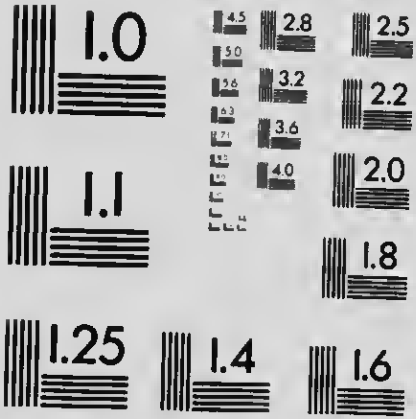

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"Ay," he said, "you have no guts. There is no heart of love in you:

> Will ye be
> Wee wife to me,
> Hummin', bummin',
> Busy-bee?"

"If ye wait for me," said the Woman, shortly, "ye'll want long."

"Ye're not asked yet, chuckie," said Robin. "That was just a song; no an offer."

"And if I was." said the Woman, "ye'd yet want."

"I'd prefer to want," said Robin. "When my first died I found I could do wantin' her better than with her."

The Woman looked at him over her spectacles.

"I see, you are yourself again," she said.

"I am so," said Robin, "and not me only."

"Who else, then?" asked the Woman.

"Daniel, son of Ivor," said Robin; "hero—soldier—saint."

The Woman dropped her hands.

"What's that?" she cried.

"Daniel, son of Ivor, has gone forth to war," cried Robin, kindling.

"Bloodying?" cried the Woman.

"Some call it so," said Robin.

"How d'ye ken he went bloodying and not searching?"

"Woman," said Robin with majesty, "I am that Robin Crabbe that dreams dreams."

"Ay," said the Woman, "and drains drams!"

"And I," said Robin, "say that it is so."

"The Lord send you're saying the truth for once," said the Woman.

"He has put forth like Saul to the slaying; continued the old man, "and he will be away three nights; and then he will return and he will be whole of heart again; and thereafter he will bide and comfort the Laird, as is Missie's bidding."

"Belike it may be so," said the Woman, nodding. "Three days breakin', three days makin' —that's the way of a man's heart."

CHAPTER IX

Danny Does Homage

For three nights Danny was away, as the dreamer had foretold, and none but the stars of the night and the creatures of the wilderness knew the bloody way he went.

In the dawn of the fourth day, while still the clouds hung like a gloom on Lammer-more, Robin found him curled outside the wood-shed.

The grey mud of the moss-hags was on his flanks; between his toes was the sand of the badger-earths of the Forests; and he lay at length, with hollow flanks.

As Robin came to him, tiptoeing across the yard in fever of uncertainty to know if he was whole again, the little knight woke, wagged, yawned hugely, stretching his toes; then came to his old man with grin, fond eyes, and twinkle of ears as of old; and his eyes, though closed with dust of war, were sane and sweet again.

Robin took him in his arms tenderly, and kissed him, and bore off to the kitchen and the Woman.

"I have dreamed a true dream," he announced. "It is even as I tell't ye."

The Woman looked up from her scrubbing, saw the old man in the door, and Danny in his arms.

"O, my bloody wee one!" she cried, and clattered over to him with outstretched arms and mother-murmurings.

"Do not girn at him so," said Robin.

"Girn!" cried the Woman, snatching the prodigal away, "Girn! Will I girn at my man returned to me?"

"*Your* man!" flashed Robin jealously. "It used not to be *your* man one while."

"Maybe no," said she, nursing her baby, "but he will be my wean to me from now; and I will be nanny to him, and it is I will have his heart!"

"In Missie's stead!" sneered Robin. "You will do fine!"

"I will make shift till she has need of him," replied the Woman, rocking on flat feet.

The Woman took her man away, fed him, washed and made him sweet as Missie would of old; and Robin watched her.

When it was over, and the little knight was once again himself, and sweet as the morning, she went to call the Laird.

Danny went before, brisk and busy as ever. Past Missie's door the little man trotted, busy, bustling, paying no heed.

The Woman turned to the old man at her heels.

"You are right," she said bitterly.

"I aye am," said Robin, sourly.

"He is whole of his heart-break!" she cried. "I thought he would have died when Missie went—and now, he just jaunts past her door as though she'd never been. There! he is little better than a man at all!"

The Laird had already risen when the Woman came to his room.

"Is he home?" he asked in his short, harsh way, as she entered.

"Ay," said the Woman indifferently, "and whole of his broken heart—this bein' the sixth day."

"Where is he?"

"Here," said the Woman, and turned.

"Where?"

She looked.

"Dear sakes!" she cried, "he *was* here and is not. O! if he has gone back to Missie's room!" and started hot-foot down the passage, but the Laird stayed her.

"He is coming," he said; and as he said it the tick-tacking of nail-shod feet upon the boards came to their ears.

At the far end of the passage appeared Danny, and in his mouth a lady's riding-whip.

So he came to the Laird's feet, dropped his burthen there, and stood over it, wagging, wide-mouthed, well pleased.

"O Missie!" cried the Woman, her apron to her eyes. "O the wee man!" For just so had he been wont to do for his lady when home from bloody doings in the dawn, coming to wake her and knightly bringing with him the whip with which she was to chastise him.

The Laird picked up the whip.

"Na!" screamed the Woman, and snatched up the threatened knight.

"Never," said Robin, rolling up his cuffs, "but over the last corp of Robin Crabbe."

"Put him down," said the Laird in his curt way.

"Will I?" said the Woman, and looked at Robin.

"It's your affair," said Robin, and withdrew down the passage.

"Put him down," said the Laird.

The Woman obeyed, and with shut eyes began to pray.

The Laird bent till his face was close to that of the grey man at his feet.

"I will lay no finger on you, Danny," said he, "now or ever."

Danny stood at his feet with lifted face and dubious tail; then he raised himself and stood against the Laird's knee and pawed. The Laird took the paw in his own great hand; and Danny looked up into his eyes, and thenceforward was the Laird's liege-man forever.

PART II

The Villain

CHAPTER X

Robin, the Oracle.

Now all his life fear of the Laird had lain like a shadow on his people; aye, before ever he slew the father of Simon Ogg under the stark shoulder of Gaunt Scaur. But in the days of Danny awe of the Laird grew on his people.

Harsh and hard and grey, like an East wind marching, he would stalk through Hepburn with downward eyes, his short cloak swept about him; and the silence lay upon him like a shroud; while ever at his heels cantered his squire in grey.

In the village at that time the pair began to acquire an ill name. The mother of Simon Ogg declared it was no that cannie, this intimate friendship between the two; the more so seeing that it was common knowledge that in Missie's time they had not been that close.

When the gate of the great House clanged and the pair came forth, the grey man stalking grey Squire at heel, the women in their rose-

laden porches retreated within doors and watched fearfully from behind drawn blinds. As the Laird swept by like the Shadow, it seemed a village of the dead, such was the hush, nor was it till he had passed the last house, that any dared come forth to peer secretly at him now halted at the bridge over the burn. There he always stayed, leaning against the parapet, to watch while Danny leapt on the coping, and hunted with diligent nose.

Danny never came to the bridge but he hunted so with questing tail; and the village knew why. For in the old days would not Missie often sit there, while waiting the Laird at business among his people? Had they not seen her time and time again of summer evenings, perched on the coping, swinging slim ankles and, brimming with malicious laughter, drop pebbles on the backs of the fat trout asleep in the deep-eyed pool beneath; while Danny at her side with alert ears would crane his neck and grin hugely at the joke.

It was after he had searched the coping thus and had come to the Laird waiting him at the bridge-head that the village, watching with white eyes, would see the two talking together —Danny with lifted face saying his say, and the Laird with bowed face hearkening.

Andra Gillray, inhabitant of the cottage

nearest the bridge declared indeed, that, though the two communed together thus as the world saw, yet no words passed.

"Nor likely!" cried the mother of Simon, dark, fierce woman with the evil eyes, "seeing the dumbness is on the Laird."

"Is the dumbness on his Honour?" asked Andra.

"Is it not?" said the dark woman. "A banned man is a dumb man."

"And who'd dare ban his Honour?" asked Andra fearfully.

"I ken one who would," said the mother of Simon, darkly flaming; and Andra asked no more, knowing her heart's bitterness.

Young Simon Ogg, he of the flaming head and pale eyes, had a tale that he told quakingly in the ale-house about that time, that seemed to give his mother the lie direct. And his tale was that he, being at the fall of night on Lammer-more——

"What did ye there?" interposed Robin jealously.

"Takin' the air," said young Simon, sullenly.

"Ah," said Robin, "gathering flowers for your father's grave, belike."

"Ay," said young Simon, "him that was killed by the Laird out-bye."

"I mind me," retorted Robin, nodding; "and

your minnie offered thanks next day before the congregation."

Simon retired into sulky silence, and it was a while before they could coax him forth to tell how, being on Lammer-more, he had heard the Laird talk, and more, had *heard Danny reply*.

The village looked at Robin.

That dim old man took his cutty from his mouth, tapped it on the heel of his boot, and made answer deliberately:

"I am no denying it," then arose and went out.

But for that, Simon's tale would have been generally discredited; for Simon, son of his father, and afflicted, was known to be full of nightmare imaginings about the Laird and his familiar.

Two nights later this same Simon appeared in the ale-house in a sweating panic to declare on oath that the *Laird was himself by day and Danny by night*, and that he, Simon, had cause to know that these things were so.

The village listened and mocked.

Later, and at dead of night, they took the tale to Robin.

Now Robin cherished a feud against all the village, and Simon Ogg in particular.

So when the deputation came to the kitchen door, in the hush of secrecy and lanternless, Robin received them coldly.

Himself taking a seat, and ostentatiously omitting to offer them one, he asked their business.

"And queek!" he said. "I who am factor to the Laird these thirty years have little time to clack with a pack of old wives wearing breeks."

"It is this that we would ken," whispered the leader, fearfully. "*Is his Honour whiles himself and whiles Danny?*"

"Ask his Honour," said Robin coldly.

The deputation sniggered at the thought of it.

"Is there none other kens?" asked the leader at length.

"Ay," said Robin, "there is me."

"We kennt if any could tell us it would be you, Mr. Robin," said the leader cunningly. "You that have his Honour's private ear."

"That could I," said Robin, expectorating.

"And ye will?" cajoled the other.

"Never!" said Robin firmly, "while time is; and belike not then."

"Why for not?" asked the leader.

"What!" cried Robin, "would ye ha' me that have been factor to the Laird these forty years——"

"It was thirty a while gone," interrupted a rude youth.

"It was so," said Robin, "ten years back."

"The years fly," said the rude youth.

Robin rose.

"And so'll you," he said, marched to the door, and held it wide.

The deputation took the hint.

Only the leader, an old, large-eyed man, stayed.

"Mr. Robin," he said, when the others were gone and the door was shut, "you ken things."

"What man kens," said Robin, "that I ken; and more," he added, "and more."

The old man left the door and drew closer.

"Whisper!" he said, and bent. "*Is there one soul to the two of them—to Danny and his Honour?*"

The oracle of the dim ringlets wiped his eye.

"Maybe ay," he said; "maybe no," he said; and maybe—*neither.*"

CHAPTER XI

Warrior, Saint, and Searcher-Out

In fact, there were never at any time two Lairds, while there never was the time when there were not several Dannys.

First there was the Squire of the day; a Gentleman-in-waiting, very staid and with demure eyes, who in summer lay beside the Laird on the sunward side of Lammer-more polishing nails of ebony; and in winter stretched before the fire in the hall with hollow heaving flanks, and dreamed. This was that same Danny who on Sabbaths was Keeper of the Door; leading his lord to kirk, and during service lying in the porch, and there, inexorable in resolution as in courtesy, barring entrance to the laggards; to whom woe! when the Laird came forth.

Followed another Danny—the Danny of the Dews, going the round of the Marches with his battle-fellow rude Robin of the Heart of Fire. All among the lady-birches clad with lace of gossamer, on high Lammer-more, through diamond-sprinkled heather and tawny bracken-

beds, he marched as though to pipe music, every dawn, he and Robin, like Jonathan and his armour-bearer, going forth against the Philistines; for the heathen were his inheritance and he made sore war upon them.

Keen as a sword, wary as Ulysses, fiery as Saladin, there was never such a Warden of the Marches to do stern justice on the outlaws of the wilderness. He could be patient as a cat and as still; he could be stealthy as a fox, shadowing his enemies and when the stalking time was past and the time for the onset came the fury of the Lord gat hold of him. He smote upon his enemies like a tempest; he overwhelmed them like an avalanche of stars. The greater the odds the greater the glory, that was the grey knight's creed; there was nothing so great but knight-like he attempted it; nothing so small but he slew it out of courtesy.

Many a time the grey knight returned from some immortal struggle against odds, bloody, ragged, and yet ever with bustle of love and tender eyes as his Woman came clattering to meet him. And while she bandaged him with lean fingers, Robin would sit on the edge of the dresser and tell the Homeric tale.

"In my days," the old man once averred, "I have fought as few have fought since Sampson. But I am second to our man!"

The Woman hearkened sourly.

"He will fight one fight too many yet," she croaked; "and one day he will be overcome."

"My trust is in the Lord," said Robin piously, "and my bit stickie."

The Woman finished her business of love with a kiss, and sent her soldier forth to join the Laird, only the bandage above his eye, and plastering down one ear, giving him a rake-hell air that sat quaintly on his innocence and eyes of love; then she turned to Robin.

"One day," she croaked ominously, "he will go forth to kill, and he will be killed; and he will not return."

"He's little like to if he's dead before he started," said the rude man, and trailed out.

"Ay," screamed the Woman, following him vengefully, "ye may mock and mock! but that day that he comes home a corp ye'll mind the word of Deborah Awe?"

To Deborah Awe, indeed, the bloodiness of her man was long a source of tribulation.

She never tired indeed of making excuse for him: God had made him male, and therefore he could not help himself; Robin led his feet astray; and belike if all went well and Robin was gathered to his fathers, her man would become more Christianified.

To which Robin always retorted (1) that he

did not intend to be gathered to his fathers yet a bit, and (2) that when Danny was past caring to kill he would be past caring to live.

"Onyways," snapped the Woman, "he is not like a man, is not my Danny. He does not murder for the murder's sake and call it sport. He kills by way of duty."

"He kills," said Robin emphatically, "for love and the glory of the Lord."

Danny's indeed seemed the rage of the fanatic. He massacred like some warrior saint of old who slew the bodies of the heathen gleefully to save their souls. There was no crime of blood but he would perpetrate it with a fervour of devotion, a passionate conviction of the highness of his cause, and bear himself thereafter in so tender and devout a way as to lend a halo to his crime.

"There was never the like of him," Robin once averred, in a sweeping wonder of pride. "Battle's his hunger; blood his thirst. It's like the drink to a drunkard—the more he has the more he's for having."

"And but for you who entice him to shedding of innocent blood, he would be as good a Christian as a God-made male may be!" cried the Woman.

"To every man his world's work?" Robin replied. "Some is Warriors; some Saints; and

some is Searchers-Out; and Danny is neither one nor both, but a bit of all three."

"And Robin Crabbe the same!" jeered the Woman. "Warrior, Saint, and Searcher-Out."

"And some," continued Robin, "is just yallerin', squallerin' old yeldrowies, and such is Deborah Awe."

"There is just this difference between you and Danny," screamed the Woman after him. "You are both bloody; but Danny is a gentleman, and you are a pot-swabbing byre-raking son of your mother, who was we all ken what."

Robin in truth was a rude man, but Danny for all his bloodiness had the sweetest courtesy of any knight since Lancelot. No lady but must love him for his manner's sake; and to this frouzy Woman he bore himself as to a Queen. In truth he was the prettiest mannered murderer who ever sped a soul. He expiated his crimes in courtesy; and from the bloodiest doings in the dew came forth from the Woman's hands innocent, gay, demure, tripping across the great hall to greet the Laird and take up his dear duties as Squire of the Day.

The Woman at that time went about in daily fear lest his Honour should catch her man at murder, and never tired of quoting ominously—"'*A Murder, A Lie—these are the abominations*,' and his Honour spares none."

But Robin was in no wise to be frightened, merely replying that Danny never did murder, and that if he did he was far ower cannie to be catch'd.

And in fact what Danny did he did frankly, and all the world was welcome to watch him at it. Stealth and subtlety and creeping deeds were not for the little knight of the fair eyes. He loved light, and to bloody beneath the open eye of heaven.

Once indeed in the early days of their fellowship the Laird caught him red-handed. He had stalked a jack-hare in the birchwoods, and had snapped him in his form, when a voice from heaven thundered at him.

The slayer looked up. Above him, among the birches, towered the Laird. The heavens were on his grey head; the bracken to his knees; he was cloak-wrapt and with thunder-brow.

Simon Ogg, upon his belly in the bracken, there on secret business of his own, peeped forth fearfully, and his face was white as the boll of the birch above him as he heard; but there was no fear in the heart of Danny

Blandly the little knight arose. His booty lolling from his mouth, he staggered to the feet of the Laird, laid it there beslavered in the bracken, and smiled up into the dour face above him.

Simon, quaking, waited to see the dumb Laird smite once and smite no more. He smote not; more terrifying still to fearful Simon, he spoke:

"Mind!" came the inexorable voice. "I will have no murder!"

"Why then did you murder daddie?" muttered Simon to his soul, as the Laird tramped off.

That evening Simon, standing in the ale-house door, watching the Laird and his body-Squire sweeping down the street, turned to Robin and asked him if Danny feared any?

"None," said Robin, "now Missie is away."

"Did he fear her?" asked the youth.

"He feared her word," said the old man, "not her whippie."

The youth of the red eye-rims pondered.

"And does he fear none now?" he asked.

"He fears not the face of man," said Robin.

"Or the face of the Laird," said Simon, and trembled.

CHAPTER XII

Son of His Father and Afflicted

It was because Danny knew no fear of the Arch-fear that about that time Simon Ogg and the people began to be afraid of him.

Simon indeed feared him of old; for in the early days the Warden had met him outbye on the moor, and had words with him; and for weeks thereafter when the grey knight and his lady came through the village, linking along, arm-in-arm as was their way, he of the red eye-rims cowed in naked terror behind the door.

"What gars ye tremble that gate, John Jelly-bag?" cried his dark mother.

"I am afraid," chattered the youth, truthful in spite of himself.

"Because of what?" cried the mother.

"Because of him," whispered the youth, and pointed with the thumb over his shoulder.

The dark woman looked forth.

"Of Danny?" she scoffed. "He is but a dog."

"He is the Devil himself," said Simon with conviction.

To Simon then and thereafter the presence of the Warden was as a perpetual and irritating sore. Simon, though afflicted, was a mighty hunter on the marches of other people, as his father had been before him. That same father, indeed, had come upon his death at the Laird's hand, through his sporting habit; since which time the Laird had forsworn all sport forever: and now for many years the spoiling of the Heriot baronies had been the unofficial perquisite of Simon Ogg, and the like-livered; so, as young Simon once pitiably put it, all was for the best after all.

Then had come Danny; and all had changed. The little knight preserved rigidly in his own favour and Robin's, and there was no more spoiling of the moors within the jurisdiction of the keenest-eyes March Warden north of Solway; and Simon was bitter because of it.

And well he might be. Those were bad and barren times for Simon, his mother mocking him everlastingly because he came home empty-handed from his hunting and stayed day after day huddled over the fire—cuddle-minnie that he was! Was he feared of a bit doggie?—him, the son of Red-handed Simon. A fine son to his father, and that father's blood crying these twenty years for blood again! Ah, if she had not been a woman she would have shown him!

Simon, blinking red eye-rims, muttered that all the world knew it was his minnie's self had gone to the Laird the night before she was a widow, and warned him what her man was up to and where; begging him on her knees, so the tale went, to put out after him and get him put away from her forever.

Thereafter, on that night, words passed between the dark widow and her son, and later, Simon, driven by her houndings, went forth, strove all night, horror at his heels, and in the morning watches achieved a fallow-buck on the borders of the birch-woods.

As he wiped the sweat from his brow, and prepared to truss the legs of his victim, Danny came over the brow above him; saw him kneeling in the braeken, and stormed at him down the hill with merry battle-cry.

Simon rose, roaring, and fled down the braeside; and skilled in the wiles of the hunted, dropped of a sudden, deep in a braeken-bed, and lay there to watch.

Danny did not pursue. He stood upon the body of the dead buck, and head in air, cried for his battle-mate.

Robin came to his cry, saw the kill—that it was a deer; and made halt.

"Whist, mannie!" he said fearfully. "Ye must mind your murders if the Laird's about."

Danny looked up, waggled furiously, and plunged with frank delight to gralloching his dead.

Robin bent, saw the eord tied around the dead deer's foot; and understood.

Then he stood up, turned his back upon Simon in the bracken-bed, and cried up-hill to the heavens.

"Simon Ogg, son of your father and afflicted! hearken. I see you there. And I ken you're near by, my buckie, for I heard Danny call for you. And I heard you hellaballooin' when he was after you. I thank you for your trouble!" cried the old man. "I thank you for this bit venison! we was searching meat. And his Honour, who killed your father for you out-bye, he too will thank you when he hears of it."

He bent, shouldered the deer, and departed down the hill, Danny at his heels.

Simon crawled away upon his belly; and his mother met him in the door of his home and blasted him with scorn.

"A fine son to a murdered father!" she cried, "who nor brings home meat for the pot nor makes good his father's murder."

Next day the Laird came to him still cuddle-ninnying in his cottage and asked him what he had to say for himself.

Simon mumbled that he was born afflicted,

his Honour having killed his father, as his Honour might call to mind.

"Ye were worse afflicted before I killed him," said the grim Laird.

"It's sore being born with no daddie to ye all the same," mumbled Simon.

"It was your gain," said the Laird, "and my loss. It's cost me a crown a week and a cottage ever since."

"I've seen none of it," said simple Simon. "Ye might as lief not have killed him, for all the good it's been to me."

"You was best shut of him, my lad," said the Laird. "I know that who knew him. And anyway, because I killed your father, it's no reason you should kill my deer. However, in consideration of your being Simon Ogg, I'll let you off this last once with a word of warning: Keep your kirks, keep your hands from poaching and stealing, and keep clear of that old hell-hag of a mother of yours—and maybe ye'll make some sort of a misfit of a man yet," and he went forth, grim and dumb, cloak-wrapt, and Danny at his heels.

Simon Ogg that night obeyed the last of the Laird's precepts, and went forth to transgress the second. Now that night Danny, too, had put forth on bloody business; and the two clashed at dead of night

suddenly by the shores of the sea a score of miles from home.

It was the place where the sea comes thrusting into the throat of the hills like the blade of a spear; it was the time when the seals play on the sand-dunes in the moonlight and the dead come forth from the great deeps to feel again the breath of heaven.

What then happened by the lapping of the tide, in the stillness of the moon, the scared seafowl and secret stars can tell. Simon told none; and Danny never spoke of it. But for weeks thereafter, when the Laird swept through the village, his calm-eyed Squire at heel, Simon crept indoors and drew down the blind.

"What's taken you?" cried his mother, dark Woman with the evil eyes, beholding him.

"Whisht!" whispered Simon. "He is passing."

"He who murdered your father!" cried the dark woman, never tired of harping on that string.

"He who nigh murdered his son," said Simon, nibbling; and it was not till the Laird and his Squire were already at their questing on the bridge, that he came forth into the street, and there with lifted hand, under the roof of heaven, his mother's eye upon him and the village looking, swore, by the blood of his murdered father,

in a manner to have done credit to his dark minnie at her best, that one day by moor or moss on land or water, he would get back upon the Laird and the little man in grey.

Robin, passing at the time, heard, but was little moved, merely reporting the matter to the Laird; who, indeed, noticed it so far as to set Simon the Shorter Penance—"for taking an oath," so ran the grim order, "which he will not keep."

"We will see that!" cried Simon, as he came forth next Sabbath into the kirk-yard, pale-eyed and blinking, from being shamed before the congregation.

CHAPTER XIII

The Woman Prophesies

Now for Simon Ogg the bitterest sting of all lay in this: that Danny, the most jealous Warden in the country-side, who fell like the sweep of a sword on all who crossed his borders, was not himself above reproach. As Robin euphemistically phrased it—"Whiles the wee man forgets a march himself," and foraying abroad spoiled sport for Simon and his brethren for a score of miles around.

At these times he dropped the Danny of the Dews; the Gentleman-in-Waiting, the Warden of the Marches, the Keeper of the Door, knew him no more. Now he was Danny the Reiver, a gentleman moss-trooper rollicking forth to harry the land from Lammer-more to the sea.

Often he would be away for days together thus a-raiding; and those would be wae days and dowie for Robin; for not only was the old man widowed of his battle-mate, and left to go his rounds forlornly in the dews, but the anger of the Laird was on him because of the absence of his Body-Squire, while the Woman's tongue

ceased never from prophesying woe and that her man would one day go not to return.

"One day we will all go and we will not return," retorted Robin the dim-eyed moralist. "No man lives but must die. And if Danny dies, as died Saul, and as will die Robin Crabbe, in battle on the field, he dies well."

"You die of battle on the field!" niekered the Woman in high seorn. "You and your dreep-eye! Na," she eried, "na; you will die of brandy and in your bed."

"It's as the Lord wills," said the good old man. "I will not eomplain either way."

Now there were others besides Simon Ogg whose souls were vexed by the red erusades of Daniel, son of Ivor. These were wardens to those men who came up out of the South year by year, like a blight of locusts to trouble the land. And these on a day, led by one who was himself little better than he should be, so Robin averred, seeing that he spoke foreign Freneh and took no snuff, gathered in council at the Ferry Ha' by the Ford of the Weeping Bride and offered blood-money for the body of a eertain soldier-saint in grey.

News of it eame to Robin, and he trotted down to the village, and there gave it forth ominously that he who harmed Danny had the Laird for his foe.

Hepburn was afraid, but the leader of those bloody men, loud-mouthed loud-laughing Saxon of the South, who knew nothing of the Heriot Hand, heard of it and mocked; and the mother of Simon, who was drinking at the Ferry Ha' at the time, returned home to tell her son significantly of the mocking of the huge-limbed Southron, bidding him mark it—"you that took an oath and was shamed for it before the congregation."

Word of this mocking came to Deborah Awe, too, and she was amazed.

"Who is this man who dares defy his Honour?" she cried.

"He is one Joliath by name," said Robin moodily.

"Goliath!" cried the Woman. "A Philistine!"

"Surely," said Robin, "and as uncircumscribed a one as ever I saw."

"Any kin to him o' Gath?" sneered the Woman.

"A-well," said Robin, "it seems he spells his name not justly the same; so he'd be but a far cousin."

Now it was but a week after that gathering of bloody men at the Ferry Ha' that the Reiver went forth a-raiding.

He had been with Robin in the white dawn,

going his rounds busily, bloodily, as was his wont; the old man had bent to tie his shoe, and looking up had found himself alone.

Robin knew of old the vanity of pursuit, yet he climbed feverishly to his watch-tower on Lammer-more, and there under the grey roof of God, the rain-washed moors at his feet, and far Burn-Water dull and dim beneath the bulwark of the hills, clamoured; but no answer came except from a grouse-cock whirring out of the heather half a mile away.

Mindful of that dark meeting at the Ferry Ha', he set his face for home, miserably, but as he drew near habited himself in impudence as in armour; and rollicked into the kitchen with the conquering air of the victorious lady's man.

"And how is my woman the morn?" he cried playfully—"blithe as a laverock and bonnie as a gowan, I'se be sworn. Oh!" he cried, leering at her, "she is my sin that besets me!"

The Woman, scrubbing on her knees, looked up.

"Where is Danny?" she snapped.

"Away somewhither," said Robin, nonchalantly.

"Where away?"

"At the work of the Lord," said Robin, passing on.

The Woman rose from her knees and confronted him.

"I see how 'tis," she cried. "You have lost him again!"

"One of us has," said Robin, pushed by her and passed down the passage into the hall.

The Laird ceased from his lonely pacing as the other entered.

"Well?" he growled.

Robin raised a warning finger.

"Whisht!" he said, and nodded significantly in the direction of the kitchen.

"What?" asked the Laird, thunder-browed.

"The Woman," whispered Robin tactfully.

"What of her, fool?"

"She is wae at heart," said Robin.

"Wae?" thundered the Laird. "Why?"

"Whisht!" hushed Robin. "Danny is away, so she gar'd me tell ye."

"Who gar'd ye tell me?" asked the Laird, glowering.

"Her," said Robin petulantly; "our virgin. "It was little fault of hers," added chivalrous Robin, and turned to go.

"I am not blaming her," said the grim Laird.

Robin turned.

"D'you blame on me?" he asked fiercely.

"No," said the Laird. "Ye're as God made ye, and yer mother spoilt ye. Ye can't help yourself."

"I canna," said Robin. "It's the company I keep," and went out quickly.

To the kitchen he returned, sour at heart.

"What said he?" inquired the Woman.

"It's no matter of yours," snapped Robin.

The Woman was joyful.

"He scolded ye!" she cried. "I am blythe to hear it. One day my Danny will go, and he will not return."

"And that will be a joyful day for you," cried Robin bitterly.

"When my Danny is dead!" cried the Woman.

"When you can say: 'I aye tell't ye,'" said Robin, going forth.

"Ay," cried the Woman, following, "and I aye *have* tell't you, and I will tell you once again: *You will lose him once ower often yet*, Robin Crabbe. I have said it before, and I say it again. *You will lose him once ower often yet.* Mark me," she cried, hanging on his heels. "My word will come to pass. It maybe this very time, or it may not be yet a bit. But mark me! *You will lose him once ower often yet.* And that is my last word to you, Robin Crabbe."

"I would well it were," said the rude man, and trailed away to mope all day, full of uneasiness because of that gathering of dark men at the Ferry Ha'.

CHAPTER XIV

The Watchers on Lammer-more

Those were dark days for Robin. The Laird indeed said little; wrapped in his short cloak, he moped about, grim and grey and inaccessible, as an eagle shorn of his mate. But the Woman said much. Day-and-night-long at that time she might be heard, crying that that day had come of which she had long spoken; till Robin was driven forth from the kitchen to pass miserable days on Lammer-more, hand to his brow, looking forth across the unkempt land towards Burn-Water lying pale and still beneath far Windy-hope and the Forest of Altyre.

Two days passed. A third came, and began to pass away, and still the Reiver had not returned.

On the third evening, at that tender between-time when the day is gone, and the night not yet come, and the gossamers swing across the evening like fairy tresses hung from star to star, there were three watchers on Lammer-more.

The Woman had come out of her kitchen and stood at the foot of the brae, the evening upon

her hungry eyes, scant hair, and gaunt-boned face.

Above her on Fir-Tree Knowe was Robin. Once she called up to him shrilly to ask if he saw a sign of the lost one; but he stood like one deaf, his face to the west, and answered nothing.

"Nor ever will," shrilled the Women, answering her own question. "Once ower often I aye said; and now ye see!"

Topmost of the three, on that high, lonely headland whither Missie and her knight had been wont to go on such holy evenings to exchange secrets with the Lord God walking there, stood the Laird.

Bare-headed, he stood, and black, his back upon the evening star, watching the going down of the day from the topmost pinnacle of the moor.

The moors began to smoke; the mists to steal forth from the cleughs and nether-places of the land; the glory lifted from the face of Burn-Water, lying afar like a dead lily floating in a mere of shadow; while beyond athwart the throat of the hills the sea lay like a barrier of beaten gold.

The hallowed silence fell about him like a raiment; the stars came out; the moon was like a silver sickle upon a field of azure; and there

came stealing across the forlorn dark face a tenderness as though the spirit of the Evening had entered into him.

The iron melted out of his face. He stood beneath the stars, no longer a dark Heriot, but a dreamer of soft dreams, very dear. His feet were in the heather, his face in the seventh heaven; and upon it the ruined splendour of the West like a blindness to transfigure it.

And as he stood so, he began laffing and daffing with lifted face, blind eyes, and tender hands, as one talking to a child; and as he murmured, smiling, he was aware of one stirring in the heather at his feet.

Dreaming still, he looked down and beheld two eyes of love, low at his feet, regarding him. A moment he stood amazed; as one who looks into the eyes of her he has lost and found now after many years.

"Child!" he whispered, in wonder of love—'Child!" and bent with tremulous tentative hands as though to lift her; and there was upon his face a glow that was not altogether of the moon.

Then a wet leaf, as it were, touched his wrist.

He woke.

At his feet was no maidenly white Missie, but a storm-warrior, wet, haggard, ragged with battle and but an hour escaped from instant death,

As the two came off the brae together, one crept forth from the dark and with whimpering cry fell upon his knees, caught up the wanderer in fond arms and kissed him.

As they came to the foot of the brae, the Woman came winging to them in the half-light like Azrael with hungry eyes.

"My man to me!" she cried, and hugged him to her bosom.

Out of the darkness behind came the voice of Robin, nonchalant, swaggering as of old.

"So ye'll be disappointed again, Lucky."

"And no fault of yours," retorted the Woman, rocking on flat feet. "It is well this time," she cried, "but I will be right yet. Once ower often I have said, and once ower often it will prove."

CHAPTER XV

Danny's Tryst

Next day Danny was not himself. The Woman noticed it—and abused Robin; Robin noticed it—and moped; so did the Laird—and scowled.

The little man was troubled, absent—"all the while away," as the Woman phrased it.

Once or twice he put forth on little lonely questings about the old familiar lady-haunted spots by burn and brae; and Robin, troubled greatly, followed and tried to entice him to an enterprise upon a vixen who had a lodgment under Gaunt Scaur. In vain. The Warden, though he greeted his old man friendly, went on his questing way alone, and would not be tempted to his duty.

Robin trailed back to the kitchen.

"He cares no more to kill, he cares no more to live," he said and sat down soddenly. "And I aye tell't ye."

The Woman turned on him, fierce-eyed.

"It is that is troubling him, I do think," she cried. "He has something on his soul—some

bloody murder you and he have been at in the wilderness."

"God send it's nothing on his stomach," said Robin, mindful of the oath of Simon Ogg and the Philistine of Altyre.

Next day Danny was gone again; and the Woman, as was her way, raved at Robin.

In the dawn he was home again.

Robin bore him back to the kitchen, and there the Woman received him with amazement and open arms.

"Back from the bloodying in one day!" she cried. "The Lord's wonders never cease!"

"He has not been bloodying," said Robin, greatly gloomy. "He has not so much as fleshed his teeth. I know not what he has been at. I would to God I did."

"I will tell you," said the Woman grimly, and looked down into the eyes of love of him upon her bosom, "for God made him male, and there is but two things that sort puts out after. If a man has not been after some shed of blood, then has he been after some she-woman. So God made them, and they canna help themselves; and there's no good talkin'."

Robin shook his head.

"Na," said the dim old dotard, "na; he is no vanquisher of women, as I have been, to my shame be it spoken."

"'WHAT IS IT?' PANTED LADY"

Now Danny was back from his night-adventuring, but he was still sick of soul. There had come the old harassed hungry look into his eyes. He now trotted at the Laird's heels with drooping tail; anon he made sudden halt and stood with ears alert, as though hearkening to the far-heard feet of the Well-Beloved: again he would start off of sudden scurrying purpose, following unseen skirts trailing over dewy lawns; and then marched warily with eyes as stars, bright to expect her, ambushed at every corner and behind each bush, to leap forth on him with loud hands and merry eyes just as of old. Even his dreams were troubled. As he lay at the Laird's feet and slept he was not hunting now, but murmuring as though talking to his lady in her chamber.

The Woman fell back on furious abuse of Robin; and Robin fell back upon whiskey.

As he sat that evening seeking familiar comfort in the ale-house, Simon Ogg, drinking in the door, dropped his pewter suddenly.

The potman looked up.

"What's taken the lad?" he cried. "He's all of a daddle. I'm thinking ye'll ha' taken a chill layin' out-bye last night, ma lad," he added.

Robin woke from dim dreams.

"Who was out-bye last night?" he asked.

"Ah!" said the potman. "Ask Looney here."

"Simon Ogg, son of your father," said Robin solemnly, "where was you last night, when ye was where ye'd no call to be?"

"God's sake, man, whisht!" whispered Simon urgently, his cheek cuddled against the door-post, peering round it fearfully into the street.

"What is it ye see?" asked the potman. "Is it a war-lock? that gars ye glower that gate."

Simon nodded furiously.

"Where?" asked the potman, and come to look over Simon's shoulder.

"Just there," said Simon, nibbling his finger-tips and nodding streetwards.

The potman looked. The street was empty save, indeed, for a lonely little warrior figure trotting down it bent on some earnest business.

"It is but Danny," he said.

"His lane?" cried Robin. "Is his Honour none there?" and tumbled to the door to see.

"Not in the flesh," said Simon, chattering.

Robin looked long. He saw the little lonely figure pass through the village; he saw him come to the bridge, and leap to the coping as of old; he saw him at search there with diligent nose; then he came back, busy, hurrying, rapt, the trouble in his eyes.

"He'll be away hunting," said the potman, "else his Honour'd be there."

"Hunting he is," said Robin, nodding, "and not the heathen."

He turned on Simon chattering in the door.

"Where was you last night?" he asked sharply.

"In the Forest," said Simon. "And he was there and he is fey. He is fey."

Half an hour later Robin looked in on the Woman in the kitchen with solemn eye.

"That has been shown me that is troubling our man," he announced. "He has met Missie in the wilderness."

CHAPTER XVI

The Papish Philistine

That night Danny disappeared; so did Simon Ogg.

Robin knew it; so did the Woman.

"It's the second twice in three days!" she screamed. "There was never the like of it before, nor ever now will be again; for why? He has gone not to return. I just tell't ye. And as I said and so it has proved."

So indeed she did say nine hundred and ninety and nine times in three days; and as in the morning of the fourth day she was saying it for the thousandeth time, the Reiver trotted in upon her.

Then it was Robin's turn. From dawn to eve he stirred not from the door of the kitchen, jibing at the Woman for a lying prophetess, a Bald-headed Abomination, and every pet name, fair and foul, a ruthless tongue and rude wit could lay hold of. Not till evening fell did he desist to retire to the village, there fitly to celebrate the Reiver's return and the utter destruction of Deborah Awe.

He had been gone a bare half-hour, when the Woman, returning to the kitchen, was amazed to find him sitting before the fire, his head between his hands.

"Keep me!" she cried. "Back so soon! You are indeed the rapid drinker that walks down the street, gets you blind drunk, and home again all while I see his Honour changes his feet."

"I am not blind drunk," said Robin, chin upon his hands. "I have scarce tasted."

The Woman regarded him.

"Have you dreamed then?" she asked.

"Not to my knowledge," said Robin dully.

"Then what in God's world is it?" she cried. "Danny is home! ye can get fine and fou for a sixpenny! and there's oceans of innocent blood to be shed!—what more d'ye want, you that God made male!"

"It is this," said Robin, and looked her in the eyes; "last night the Forest of Altyre was moved."

"What's that to me if it was?" cried the Woman.

"To-day," continued Robin, "was to have been a great shooting at Altyre. There has been no shooting because of the moving."

"Awell," cried the woman, "am I man that I should mourn because the Lord has seen good

to come between his creatures and their murderers?"

"And the countryside is being raised against the mover," continued Robin dully.

"The mover is the Lord, I say," asserted the Woman. "He is weary of this blood-guiltiness; and has moved the Forest to ward his creatures of the coming up against them of bloody men. Even so He warned David in Keilah of the coming up of Saul."

"And on every brig and naked wall from here to the Ferry Ha'," continued Robin, "they have a reward out against the mover. I have seen it with these eyes."

"They may *re*ward and *re*ward," said the Woman grimly, "and yet if it is as I say——"

"You say lies," said Robin shortly. "It is not on the Lord they are putting it. I would it were."

"On whom then?" asked the woman.

"On Danny," said Robin.

The Woman turned on him darkly.

"This is as I have said!" she cried. "Ten thousand times ten thousand I have tell't you, and you have mocked and cried out on me 'Baldhead!' and the like. And now ye see! Our man is in jeopardy of his life because of you!"

"How will I hinder him?" Robin miser-

ably. "Missie calls him; and he is just away. She trysts him in the wilderness," said the old man; "that has been shown to me in a dream. And if while he is waiting for her—and you'll mind she was never there to the stroke—he bloodies a bit, who shall blame him?"

The Woman pondered.

"Who is it has the Forest this year?" she asked at last.

"Young Johnson," said Robin; "a young fool-Sanenach with a fair wife. It is not for him I fear. He is little better than as God made him. Nor for her. I have seen her in Campbell-town carousing by in chariots and horses, and though she decks out in gaudy duds as it might be the Scarlet Woman, yet she is ower like to Missie to do scathe to any that walks God's earth, let be Danny."

"Who is it then you fear?" asked the Woman.

"Awe," said Robin harshly, "I fear none. But O Woman!"—he threw up dim eyes, and dropped his hand upon his knees—"I am just sore afraid."

"Because of why?" asked the Woman, with scared eyes.

"Because of yon muckle slabber of a foul-mouthed foreigner."

"Goliath!" cried the Woman, wild-eyed.

"Ay," said Robin, biting home on a plug, "and full as uncircumscribed as ever his kin was when he cam' out o' Gath, with helmets on his head and targets on his feet."

"What of him?" asked the Woman.

"He has sworn," said Robin.

"That's little more than the mort o' men do," said the Woman, relieved.

"He cursed Danny by his gods," Robin continued.

"That's no matter," said the Woman. "The gods o' the Philistines are of little account."

"Wait!" said Robin. "He swore—he swore—to crucify him."

"To crucify him!" screamed the Woman, and rammed her apron to her mouth. "My wean!"

"Ay," said Robin, "your wean—my wean—Missie's wean—all our wean!"

The Woman was pale as her apron.

"The papish!" she cried. "The papish Philistine!"

"To crucify him," continued Robin, nodding, "along o' t'other vermin against his kennel-door. Ye man look!" said the old man. "It is truth I am telling you. Andra' Gillray, who has foreign French and tongues, heard him swear it at the Ferry Ha'. Myself," said Robin, "I am a Christian and have no dealings

with barbarious tongues; and I cannot rehearse you the words, but that is the matter of it."

The Woman drew a deep breath as one emerging from icy waters.

"The Anti-Christ!" she said. "The bloody Caiaphas!"

"He is all that, to be sure," said Robin, and spat upon the floor, "and worse. He is an Englisher."

The Woman turned and scurried for the door.

"Where away?" asked Robin sharply.

"To warn his Honour," cried she.

"Let be, Woman," snapped Robin. "What cares his like for his Honour?"

"If not for his Honour, for whom then?" asked the Woman, hand on the door.

"Woman," said Robin solemnly, "if there is any hugger-mugger-muddlin' over this matter it will be like to cost us our man. Is it to yon old billie——"

"Billie!" cried the Woman.

"Bletherin' and blatherin'," said Robin.

"Mind your mouth!" shrilled the Woman.

"That we will turn in our hour of need," said Robin. "Na. This is a matter for a man, or more than a man. This is a matter for such an one as was he who slew the kin of the same Uncircumscribed—a mighty valiant man and a man of war."

"For such an one indeed," cried the Woman. "But where will we find our champion?"

Robin gathered himself and rose.

"Here is your David," said he, and stood before her, dim, aged-bowed, with dripping ringlets; then went out.

CHAPTER XVII

A Man of His Word

It was night; and from the cottage of Simon Ogg proceeded merriness and shrill song.

> Three wee devils in a big black pot,
> Screamin', steamin'!
> And the ole daddy Devil gaily stirrin' of the lot,
> Beamin', streamin'!

The door opened and a face looked in. Within all was blackness save for the light of the peat fire splashing ruddily on dingy walls, and low rafters, hung with onions and fat hams. Pinned to the centre-beam and fluttering in the red light, like a huge anguished butterfly, hung a notice; and before it in the firelight danced Simon Ogg, beating with two wooden spoons a furious rat-a-tan on the sides of a fat ham, and screaming:

> He's a-pokin' and a-strokin' with a poker that is hot,
> Here one, there one!
> Particularly proddin' in a sore selected spot,
> His dear one, the heir one!

"His heir one!" said a voice in the door—"Simon Ogg, son of his father."

Simon leaped round, and saw one in the

door, dim, ringleted and bonneted, against the night and everlasting stars.

"Ye're fine and songful," said Robin.

"Ay," tittered Simon, and searched with blind hands at his back.

"What gars ye pluck for that notish?" asked Robin, eyeing him.

"What notish?"

"The notish hanging from the beam," said Robin, "offering £10 reward for information against you."

"Against me," cried Simon. "What for why?"

"For bein' there," said Robin, nodding.

"Who's been where?" said Simon, nibbling his nails.

"You have," said Robin, "in the Forest."

"What Forest?"

"The forest that was moved."

"Has the Forest been moved then?" asked Simon.

"You should know," said Robin sourly.

"When was it?"

"By night," said Robin.

"What night?"

"The night you was there," said Robin.

"I wasna there," said the youth, fearful, but dogged. "And who tell't you?"

"Ah," said Robin, "I have my dreams."

"Your dreams can put no proof on me," said the youth, watching him with cat's eyes.

"And there is Danny," said Robin.

"Danny!" said the youth, and began to chatter. "Did he see me?"

"Did he not?" said Robin.

"But it was pit-murk!" cried the youth, nibbling furiously.

"Maybe," said Robin. "He sees with his nose."

"And now I mind me," cried Simon, "I was never there to see."

"And now I mind me," said Robin, "he was none there to see ye."

"Indeed, but he was so!" cried the youth.

"Can ye swear to that?"

"Swear to it!" cried the youth. "I just saw him a."

"You saw him!" cried Robin, and transfixed him with accusing finger. "You saw him, you that was not there!"

Simon staggered but recovered.

"It was in a dream I saw him," he mumbled.

"You dream dreams!" cried Robin. "The very trouts in the poddles will be dreamin' dreams next. Na," he cried, "na: you lie lies but you do not dream dreams. . . . And you was in the Forest," and he turned to stump out.

"Where to?" asked Simon, following, pale-eyed.

"To earn £10."

"What for?"

"Informing on you," said Robin.

Simon drew closer.

"See here, Mr. Robin," he whispered, nibbling, "if you will swear to tell none, I in my turn will tell you——"

"What?"

"A thing," said Simon, nibbling and nodding in a very ecstasy of mystery.

"I thank you," cried Robin with high scorn, "but when I would know a thing it is not to you that are afflicted that I would turn: it is to my dreams."

"Concerning Danny," said the youth, and nibbled and nodded.

Robin stayed.

"Tell on," he said with cold indifference. "I will make shift to hear you."

"Ye'll tell none o' my bit jaunt?" insisted Simon.

"Trust me," said Robin, "and see."

"Ye'll none tell Joliff, the Englishman," pursued Simon. "He has his eye towards me. He would clink me if he could."

"Ye're safe with me," said Robin. "I'll none tell Joliath. I could not if I would. I have no

Philistine. Besides that, I would not be seen talking with English in the gate."

Simon drew closer stealthily.

"Whisper!" he said and began. "I did just happen there or thereabouts."

"Where?"

"In the Forest," said Simon, "that night."

"What night?"

"Tuesday night."

"How came you there?"

"Awell," said Simon, "I just woke and found me there."

"Where?"

"On Windy-hope above Burn-Water; it's there where the great fir was that came down in the tochet-storm two years by-past; and as I was layin' out-bye, who should come by but——."

Robin held up his hand.

"I will hear no more," said he shortly.

"Why not?" said Simon, looking at him.

"I have heard plenty enough for my purpose, I thank you," said Robin courteously.

"And what's that?" asked Simon, suspiciously.

"To clink you," said Robin.

"Will ye betray on me?" screamed Simon.

Robin turned on him wrathfully.

"Am I a Judas?" he asked, "that I would break the troth I have plighted. Na, I will

indeed inform on you—how else would I earn the reward? But I do not go to the Bloody Englisher, but to his Honour."

"But the Forest's none of his Honour's?" cried Simon.

"Is not Danny his Honour's?" said Robin sternly. "And are they not putting the moving of the Forest on him? Shall he suffer for your sin?"

"I'd liefer ye tell't the Bloody Englishman than his Honour," whined Simon.

"Na," said Robin firmly. "I have my oath that I may not break. Yet be not dismay'd. It will be the same to you. For I will tell it up to his Honour, who will tell it up to the Fool-Sassenach, and he to Joliath, and Joliath to the police."

"And I will be clink't!" cried Simon.

"You will so," said Robin, "if you are not hang't."

Simon chattered.

"Mr. Robin," he began. "Need ye tell his Honour? It was him k'"ed my daddy in Gaunt Scaur."

"Ay," cried Robin fiercely, "and for all thanks to him for doing that for you, you would kill his Danny—who is more to him than son, and little less than soul."

"I'll ne'er lay a hand to him," whimpered Simon.

"You took an oath," said Robin inexorably.

"It was minnie made me," whined Simon. "O Mr. Robin, is there no way but his Honour must know?"

He stood before the old man, lank, quaking, shabby-kneed, and whimpered.

"There is one way," said Robin at last, "and but one. Go ye to Altyre the morn's morn. Tell the Bloody Englisher it was you and none but you moved the Forest. And it might be well to tell him that to your sure and certain knowledge Danny was not out that night."

"But he was!" cried Simon, "he was there!"

"I've none but your word for that," said Robin, "and you are a liar above all men but your mother."

"Ye've none but my word I was there," said Simon cunningly.

"No man can be lyin' all the time, not even you," said Robin. "Tell him that, just as I have tell't you. And if you add to that by the half of one word, or take from it the less than that, then," said Robin, rolling dim eyes, "may the Laird do by you as he did by your father, or worse, or worse."

"Can he worse than murder me?" screamed Simon.

"What the Laird canna, there is just one that

can, and that," said the old man, "is Robin Crabbe."

Robin stood in the door of the kitchen, and looked in on the Woman.

"I have done four things this night that should stead me well," he announced. "I have saved my Danny—and Missie will be pleased; I have made away with a malefactor out of this parish maybe for aye and may be for six weeks—and his Honour will be pleased; I have made £10 that I have not earned—and I am pleased; and I have taken an oath that I have not kept, nor yet broken it—and the Lord will be pleased."

CHAPTER XVIII

"Where is My Danny?"

It was dawn next day. Simon Ogg stood in the door of his cottage and shivered; and at his heels was his dark mother, whispering.

"Who strikes Danny strikes the Laird," said the dark woman in his ear. "Mind that, you that are son to a murdered father!"

Simon shrugged, shivered, stepped out into the silent street as one plunging into cold waters, and turned West. Once he turned and in the silent street his dark mother stood watching him; so he turned again and took the old drove-road that skirts the foot of Lammermore, surging up to heaven in long, slow sweep, wind-ruffled nor yet awake."

"As he came out on to the cold moors, a tiny figure, black against the dun dawn, espied him, and came plunging down the brae, Danny at his heels.

"Where away at cock-shout?" asked the old man with upraised authoritative hand.

"I go to Altyre," chattered the youth, his eyes on Danny.

"On that business I spoke with you of last night?" asked the old man.

"The same," said Simon.

Robin eyed him critically; then he thrust forth an old hand.

"Simon Ogg," said he, not unfeelingly, "you have more guts to you than has been shown to me. It is ill to sin," continued the preacher of the weeping eye, "but some hold—and I am one—that to sin and then to confess your sin is better than never to have sinned at all. And mind, if they give you the £10 for informing against yourself, it is to me that it belongs, who put you in the way of addling it. But I will not forget my little friend," said Robin tenderly, "and we will share and share alike. You shall have your sixpenny if ever you come forth from clink alive; and I will have that is over. Go, my buckie!" said Robin, tears in his eyes. "Go! and the blessing of St. Colomb be with you!"

Simon, son of Simon, tramped on his way, tittering; while Robin trotted home with heart uplifted.

In the kitchen he sat down and laughed so long and silently, that the Woman, coming in on him, asked him sharply had he been drinking, or had he had the dreams.

"Nor t'ane nor t'ither," said Robin, hugging himself.

The Woman looked at him.

"What is it then?" she asked. "Have you killed Goliath? you that are our champion."

"I have cotched him," said Robin, "if I have not killed him," and told her all.

"And where is Danny now?" asked the gaunt Woman as he made end.

"Here to my heel," said Robin, and looked.

"I see him not," said the Woman, and looked into the old man's eyes.

"He's there all the same," said Robin, turning and ever turning, and ever paling as he turned, "only—I just canna see him. . . . Ho the man! ho the Danny! He'll just be with his Honour," he said, feigning indifference, and yet with shaking lip.

"I will see that," cried the Woman, and scuttled off.

In a moment she was back, clattering furiously along the passage.

"He is not with his Honour nor has been," shė cried vengefully, and flung into the room. "And his Honour would ken where he is."

Robin was already in the door, sneaking forth.

"It is of you I ask it, Robin Crabbe!" cried the Woman, dogging him. "You that are our champion! You that have saved him!"

"If he is not there," said Robin, "it is like he will be some other where."

"He is lost!" cried the gaunt Woman, "lost!" and turning called down the passage.

"Robin Crabbe has lost him again, your Honour."

"Send him here!" came the harsh voice from the hall.

"The Laird would speak with you," said the Woman, turning.

"I canna come," said Robin, hurrying away.

"He must come!" thundered the voice unseen.

"I canna!" cried Robin, raising his voice. "I've my work."

"Ye can let it go," thundered the Laird, "same as usual."

"Na," said Robin, firmly, "a man must work while he has daylight: it is in the Book. Maybe I'll come to-night, maybe I winna."

He sneaked away, and the Woman hung on his heels.

"Then what will I tell his Honour?" she asked, "and him shouting for Danny. God's sake! hear him!"

"Tell him," said Robin shortly, "to go look for him."

"I will tell him this!" cried the Woman: "that Danny is gone; and that Simon Ogg has gone after him, whose father the Laird slew, and who has sworn to slay again; and that you

sent him. And I will tell him of the oath of the Englisher which you have withheld from him."

Robin turned.

"I tell't you of it!" he cried." It was for you to tell his Honour—you that Missie bid mend him and mind him, and see he changed his feet."

"Me!" screamed the Woman. "It was you forbid me flatly. 'How will yon old billie, bletherin', and blatherin', serve us?' ye said. 'Na,' says you, 'I will be your champion,' you says. 'I will go up and fight with this Philistine.'"

"I did it to try ye," said Robin. "I did it by his Honour's word."

"We will see that!" cried the Woman, turned and fled for the house; halted, and turned again, gaunt-eyed, remorseless, prophetess of woe.

"What was it was the oath of the bloody Englisher?" she cried, "word for word, that I may rehearse it to his Honour."

Robin above her on the mound quavered. bowed, and fell suddenly upon his knees.

"To crucify him," he sobbed, his old face in his hands. "To crucify him. O Missie! O my man!"

CHAPTER XIX

On Windy-hope

Twelve miles away across steep scaurs and sudden cleughs, and many a little sodden moss, rises Windy-hope, bulwark between the moors and insetting sea.

Half-way up the hillside stands the stump of an old fir, solitary, moody, desolate, like the deserted throne of some king who has fallen, and in his ruin been deserted by his Court.

Here is that they call the Forest, clothing the hillside in shreds and patches; and here beside the fir-tree throne two stood and talked.

One was a burly man and brown, with a face like the autumn sun, and an Englishman's hogged beard; the other a lank youth with flaming head, pale eyes, and the air of one who is afraid.

Whispering, this one told a tale, his fingers ever at his mouth, his eyes everywhere; while the other huge, frank, open-eyed as heaven, hearkened.

Simon at last made end, and stood looking at the other.

"What think ye?" he said at last.

The Englishman thought a little, spat a little, and replied briefly—

"It's a dom lie—that's what A think."

"Ye said the same about the otter, Mr. Joliff," replied the lank youth eagerly. "Was I wrong that time?"

The Englishman spat gloomily.

"I put ye on to him fair enough," continued Simon, "and however you came to miss him——"

The Englishman turned on him.

"Shut gab o' thee!" he roared.

Simon retreated out of fist-reach. He had touched on a sore, and he knew it.

A fortnight before Simon had fallen alive into the hands of this same loud Englishman, and had only saved himself by swearing to deliver to Joliff in his place the Arch-Spoiler himself; telling a tale of a certain otter lady who had her hold in the wee lochan on the top of the hill with whom, so Simon affirmed, he of the coat of tarnished silver and lover's eyes had a friendly feud to death.

Joliff, loud-tongued, tempestuous, had mocked.

"Yon lil terrier mix it oop wi' her like!" he had jeered. Yet, Simon persisting, he had lain out at night beside the silver-splashing shallows where the waters of the lochan dimple before

falling in laden tresses down the hillside; and there six nights in mist and misery of soft weather had awaited his enemy of the lover's eyes.

As the seventh dawn broke the Englishman had risen and gone home. In his clothes, as he was, he had thrown himself down upon his bed and slept; and at high noon was waked from a dream of fit vengeance executed on Simon by a sudden voice, deep, familiar, challenging, swinging over the Forest from afar.

Joliff had snatched his gun, and hurried down the hill towards the sound; and met by happy chance his Master, out at exercise with old Maida, and the terrier-pack; had put them on to drive the Reiver, while he, himself, running furiously, had arrived at that spot whither of old he knew his enemy, when hard pressed, would come, on his way to taking the water and passing over to his island refuge Sillerholm.

He had not to wait long. On the hillside above him he heard the boom of Maida, as she hit the line, the scream of the terrier-pack in full chase, and his master's cheer, and then had come to him not him he awaited, a calm-eyed cavalier in grey, but a lady flying, with scared eyes—his mistress.

What then had happened Simon never rightly knew. He had asked Joliff, and been answered

first with violent words and then with a violent blow that had knocked the words clean out of his already riddled mind. This much, however, he did know: that it was here in the clearing, where they now stood, that Maida had lost the scent as completely as though the fugitive had been rapt up to heaven.

"And it was here yo' seyn him?" asked the Englishman, moodily.

"It was so," said Simon, nibbling, nodding.

"What night?" asked the Englishman suddenly.

"Tuesday night," said Simon glibly, "Thursday night again——"

The Englishman rounded on him, thundering, and would know by this and that how Simon came in *his* forest on these or any other nights.

Simon tittered, nibbled his nails, looked at the Englishman's feet, and——

"What's yon?" he asked, pointing.

"Where?"

"Just there," said Simon, pointing beside the fir-tree throne—"whitey."

The Englishman bent, picked up a gossamer-rag, soiled but dainty, and folded it with careful fingers.

"Her handkercher," he said shortly.

"Whose?"

"Missus's."

"Missic's?" cried Simon fearfully.

"Ay," said the Englishman, "the Missus's. She's all for this figurin' and picturin' and that'n."

"Would she be at it here?" asked Simon, pointing to the fir-tree throne.

"Betimes," said the Englishman surlily. "She was figurin' here the time——"

"Will yon be her?" whispered Simon, suddenly.

The Englishman turned and looked up the hill.

On the brow of Windy-hope a girl stood against the sky, slender, tall, and with sunset hair.

"Ay," he answered shortly.

Simon looked long.

"Hoo!" he said, sucking in his cheeks, "hoo!" and taking his courage in his hands, "See here, Mr. Joliff! Just lend yon here a bit."

"Her handkercher?" cried the Englishman.

"Ay," said Simon, nibbling, nodding.

"That yo' may snuffle on it!" stormed the other, and came on. "Ma guy! A'll learn thee!"

"Na," said Simon, retreating, "na. I'm none for snufflin' on it. I have my sleeve."

The Englishman halted.

"What's 'ta' want with it then?" he asked, glowering.

"See," said Simon. "So," and showed him.

CHAPTER XX

Simon and the Englishman

Two days later towards dawn Simon stood at the door of the Englishman's lodge.

"Danny will trouble you never more, Mr. Joliff," he said, smirking.

"Hast caught him, then?" asked the other.

"I have so," leered Simon, "and more."

The Englishman hearkened, grim-mouthed.

"Let's see the body, ma lad," said he. "Seein's believin'. Where's the body?" and he thrust his hands deep in his leather breeches.

"Back in the clearing," said Simon, nibbling.

"The carkiss?"

"Ay," said Simon. "Gie me my penny-fee, and I will be away."

"Plenty time enough to talk o' that, ma lad," said the Englishman. "A bid yo' snare him; A never bid yo' kill him. Think A'd trust the killin' of a Christian beast to your heathen hands! Likely!" he cried in scorn, and strode down the hill, Simon, lurcher-like, at his heels.

So they came to the clearing on Windy-hope. There beside the fir-tree throne one sat, en-

meshed; and in his eyes were dreams and in his mouth a handkerchief.

The Englishman turned.

"Yon thy carkiss?" he asked, grimly.

"There's the body," tittered Simon, "and the breath in it, and a'."

Burly, sun-bearded, grim, the Englishman strode across the clearing, released his prisoner and held him at arm's length.

Danny hung quite still; in his eyes were dreams, and in his mouth a handkerchief.

"It's a rum 'un," said the Englishman; "it's a rum 'un," and holding his prisoner at arm's length eyed him.

Here was the villain of half the tragedies of Joliff's later life, who had haunted him these several seasons like a guilty conscience. Now that at last he had his enemy in his hand he could not but admire. Long he had known him bold in peril, daring in plot, flaming in battle; and now in adversity found him strong to endure, and loved him for it as a brave man loves a gallant enemy; yet there came no thought of pity into his heart.

"A've gotten thee at last, ma lad," said he, and shook him, not unkindly; "yo've had your run, and a rare run, too; and now yo' mun pay."

He slanted across Windy-hope.

"Where away?" asked Simon at his heels.

"If yo' follow," said the Englishman, "happen yo'll see," and strode on for the stream that trips and slips and leaps from the wee lochan on the hilltop to the lake below.

Half-way down the hillside it runs through a birch-ambushed ravine. Here it falls in a straight white plume through a throat of rock into a pool—deep, delicious, green-eyed, set in rocks, and screened by birches hanging over it to hide the fairy ladies bathing there from the lewd eyes of the sun.

Here in that lonely hollow, remote from man, silent save for the babble of the stream and cry of a white-breasted water-ouzel beneath, on the rock above the pool, the Englishman stayed.

"What!" cried Simon. "Will ye drown him?"

"Less'n yo' will," said the Englishman, bent over his prisoner and busied himself.

Simon watched, aghast.

Only Danny, sitting on the rock, dreams in his eyes, and in his mouth a handkerchief, seemed unmoved.

The Englishman rose.

In his left hand was a stone, in his right hung Danny; and a rope attached the two.

Simon drew near, wide-eyed.

The Englishman strode to the edge of the rock.

Beneath him lay the pool, cat-like, crouching, with green eyes, awaiting its prey.

"Noo, ma lad!" said the Englishman. "Say thy prayers!" and began to swing him.

"Hi!" protested an urgent voice. "Bide a bit."

The Englishman turned.

"Are you for drowning him, Mr. Joliff?" protested Simon.

"What's that to you?" scowled the Englishman.

"Ye swore to crucify him," said Simon, and sniggered.

The Englishman breathed deep.

"Drowning's none good enough, eh?" he asked.

Simon, with sideways head like a coy child, tittered.

"A-well," he said, "may be crucifyin's the more laffable."

"Happen so," mused the Englishman, measuring the distance between Simon and himself. "Here!" and suddenly held out the prisoner.

Simon slipped back a yard.

"What's it?" he cried.

"Kill him," said the Englishman. "And I'll crucify him."

"Kill him!" shrilled Simon, "and where will be the sport in crucifyin' the dead?"

The Englishman regarded him.

"Art 'feared?" he scoffed.

Simon giggled.

"Minnie bid me not handle him," said he.

"Yo' dursena!" scoffed the Englishman. "A proper mak' o' man, surely!" and turned in scorn.

"See here, Mr. Joliff!" urged Simon at his back.

"If you will crucify him as you swore, I will kill him, after just a bit," coaxingly.

The Englishman turned.

"Is that a bargain?"

Simon nodded.

"Strike hands on that!" said the Englishman, and came to him with huge frank hand stretched forth.

Simon clutched it eagerly.

"Ay," he said, gathering courage, "I will do that for you, Mr. Joliff, and just for love and a'."

"And A'll do that for thee!" said the still Englishman, jerked him into half-arm reach, and smote him like thunder—"Just for love and a'!"

He dropped Danny and fell upon the other like a tempest.

"Call yo' sen an Englishman!" he bellowed. "Ma guy! ma gosh! A'll learn thee!" (blow)

"yo' bloody-minded" (blow) "double-dutch" (blow) "Frenchified" (blow) "Roosian Prooshian" (blow) "made in Gummanee," and felled him.

"Stan' oop!" roared the Englishman. "Stan' oop! A ain't reetly begun on thee yet! Stan' oop, I say!"

"What for?" whined Simon, wriggling on his face.

"That A may fell thee!" roared the Englishman.

"I'd liefer lay," whimpered Simon.

"Get oop!" stormed the other. "Get oop! ma guy! or A'll tread thee," and he began to.

Simon wriggled, rose, and shifty as lightning, slipped out of fist reach.

Then he turned, babbling, blubbering.

"Ye shall hang for this, ye bloody Englisher!" he screamed. "You are not his Honour that you can murder folks when you've the mind!"

"Hod awa' wi' thee!" stormed the Englishman, coming on. "Ma guy! ma gosh! If A lay hand to thee, it'll like to be t' end o' thee!"

"Pay me my penny-fee!" screamed Simon, dancing out of reach, "and I will away and tell his Honour I am murdered quite, and he will hang you; for though whiles he murders bodies himself, he is sore on others that do the like."

The Englishman thrust his hand into a huge pocket, pulled out a penny, spat on it, and slammed it at Simon's face.

"Tak' it!" he roared. "It's the price o' blood. And may it bring thee the luck o' Judas!"

Simon fled, limping down the hillside; and the Englishman, his fury spent, turned quickly, expecting to find his prisoner gone.

The doomed knight had not stirred; and in his eyes were dreams, and in his mouth a handkerchief.

"It's a rum 'un!" said the Englishman, musing above him, then caught him up under his arm and marched off up the hill. "We'll see what Master says!"

CHAPTER XXI

The Doomed Knight

At the foot of an old black fir on Windy-hope above Burn-Water sat a doomed knight in the honied glow of evening.

At his feet was a new-dug grave; and round his neck a halter tied to the stem of the fir.

Across the grave stood Joliff, handling a gun.

The knight sat sedately beside his grave; and was politely bored.

The sun had westered behind dark Windy-hope; and was no more seen. Still he sat, the dreams asleep in his eyes, gazing steadfastly to where, on the brow of the hill, a gap in the Forest made a gate of gold with pillars of dark pine.

Joliff clapped the gun to his shoulder.

Tranquil as the evening sat the little knight, and ever gazed towards that gate of gold with pillars of dark pine as though through those fair portals, out of that western wonderland of stars and pale illimitable lakes of gold, should come to him his Well-Beloved from searching of lost suns.

Joliff dropped his barrel. Then he blew his nose rudely, expectorated, swore; withdrew the cartridge, peered down the barrel, blew down it, expectorated, swore; pulled forth another cartridge, polished the brass end, weighed it, expectorated, swore; and shoved it home.

Then he took another sight.

The doomed knight looked up the muzzle of the gun with grave interest.

Joliff dropped his barrel; drew his fist across his mouth to wipe away an oath; bent his hands on his great thighs, and said in the other's ear and confidentially:

"Dom thy eyes, lad!"

Danny wagged; and his air was that of the fine lady who smiles to show how bored she is.

Joliff snatched up his gun.

"Dooty's dooty!" he said, "and to be done," and kneeled, with blind eyes. "Art theer, lad?" he hoarsed, and pressed the muzzle of the gun against the other's heart.

For answer, Danny yawned.

Joliff clinched his eyelids. "Steady, old lad!" he hoarsed as Danny began to stir. "It's none o' my doin', mind! It's master's!" his finger on the trigger. "'Twon't be long," and fired.

There was a little startled yelp, and not of pain.

"I'd as lief ha' killed a lad!" gulped the great man, and opened his eyes to find before him no grey-and-bloody-dabbled corpse, but at his side, at full stretch of the halter, one who had waited long and beheld at last her he had sought.

Joliff, still on his knees, swung about to see.

Over the brow of the hill, through the gate of gold between pillars of dark pine, there came one on white wings; and the gossamers swung across her path to stay her as she sped.

Out of the pure heart of the West she came, the Well-Beloved from searching of lost suns, and as she came she cried:

"*You beast!*"

Joliff rose from his knees and dusted them.

A lady stood at his side like a lily in flames.

"*You dared!*" she panted.

Joliff touched his cap, stolid, respectful oak of the Forest.

"Orders, 'M," he said, surly and not at all ashamed.

"*Whose orders?*"

"And orders bein' orders, 'M," said the oak,

"Then what of my orders?" passionately.

"Beg pardon, 'M," said the oak, touching his hat, "but Master's orders for men, 'M, Misses's orders for maids."

"Did the Master order this *murder?*" cried the lily in flames. "*Did* he? *did* he?"

"And that bein' so," continued the oak, "and orders being orders——"

"*No, Joliff! It's no good!* You shall tell me. You *shall!* No, I won't! You shall."

"I mun carry of 'em out," continued the oak, unmoved; and loaded his gun. "Will yo' please to step aside, 'M.?"

She did not understand, pale still with passion.

"I were, 'M," said the oak, "and I are, 'M. Will yo' please to step aside, 'M?" and began to circle around her.

Then she understood.

"If yo' please, 'M," said the oak, circling round.

She stood before him pale as a sword, and as dumb.

"By your leave, 'M." He thrust out an arm like an iron bar to thrust her aside.

Like a lily she bowed to the sweep of his arm, bent beneath it, and sprung erect again.

Then she faced him, snow-cold and still; and Danny in her arms.

"And now!" she said.

She stood where she was in the hush and holi-

ness of the falling evening, Danny in her arms, hearkening to the noise of mighty feet tramping through crisp bracken.

Then the noise ceased.

"Beg pardon, 'M," came a far voice.

She half turned.

On the brow of Windy-hope, in the gate of gold between pillars of dark pine, stood the Englishman, big and black and burly, against the perfect West.

"'A was none for it, 'M," he said, touched his hat, and was gone the way of the lost sun.

"O my *dear* Danny!" said the lady, and sat down beside the grave. "May Lady never have to live through that again!" and she panted like a hunted hind.

Then with tender fingers she loosed the cord from his neck, and set him free.

He shook himself and came in upon her with lowered tail and sniffed the hem of her garments.

She watched him, wondering.

"What is it, little man?" she asked at last, kindly.

At the sound of her voice he lifted a grey face, and looked at her with troubled eyes. Long he stood so, at her feet with lifted face and lowered tail, one lost in a love-mystery; and at last knew.

A moment he stood four-square before her; and then with muzzle lifted to the sky cried out his heart because this was not her he sought, his lady dead, come back to him from wanderings in far-and-near eternity, but only one like her as her shade.

"*Hush!*" cried the lady fearfully, "*Hush!*" for a horror that his crying might draw her husband seized her. "Home! Hepburn! Home to your Laird! Murder-man Laird! Keep-His-Kirks Laird!" and she waved to him urgently.

He went, trailing sadly; then looked back at her, standing with large eyes beneath the fir, and invited her to follow.

"Just a wee way then," she said, and followed.

So together the two went through the evening, he bearing himself as one well used to ladies' company in the dew, until they came to the height of Windy-hope.

Here she stopped, the evening wind caressing her fair hair, and stood a moment nibbling a silver pencil; then she wrote.

"No farther, Danny!" she said, and kneeling beside him, her fingers played about his collar. "Now be good! and if you love lady ever so little don't come again!" and framing his face between her hands she kissed him.

CHAPTER XXII

The Return of the Reiver

On the highest point of Lammer-more Robin stood in the opening of the dawn. His bonnet was beside him in the heather, and he prayed aloud and with blind eyes passionately.

Danny had been gone four days. For three of them Robin had endured greatly, and had endured alone.

On the evening of the third news had come to him that Simon Ogg had returned. He had risen and hobbled down to the village to the cottage of Simon. There he had found the youth's mother, dark woman with the evil eyes, who barred the entrance with akimbo arms. Simon was none that well, Simon had the trouble on him sore, Simon could not see him.

The old man, too utterly undone to force an entrance, had quavered home.

Next morning, for the first time for three days, he crept brokenly to the kitchen and looked in.

Within Deborah Awe kneeled by the empty hearth-stone, her great hands clutched together,

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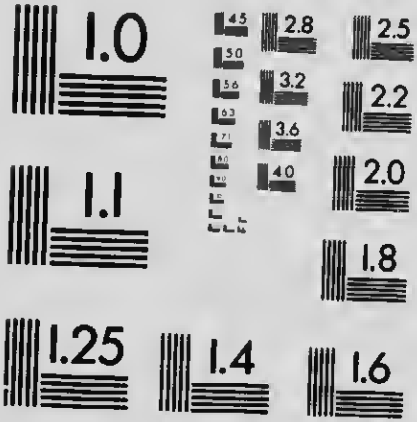

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all knuckle-bones and working fingers; lost in prayer.

She heard his coming and looked round.

"Is he home?" she asked, in dull, passionless voice, nor stirred from her knees.

"I just cam' to see that," gasped Robin.

The Woman closed her eyes, and was back again at prayer; then she raised her face, and asked in that still voice, hushed as in church:

"Was it crucify him?"

The old man had run out at a little dribbling trot to creep up to his high loneliness to be miserable there with God alone; and here in the eyes of the wakening morning he knelt now, unbonneted, dim, and poured out his heart with sobs to the God of the Bereaved.

Anon he rose, walked to the brink of the hill, and peered out over the mist-muffled moors toward Burn-Water, cradled in the hills, and wrapped in mystery of sleep.

There was no sign of him he sought—only hope creeping out of the East over the land like the first faint flush of Love rosying innocence.

He closed his eyes and prayed again, not now to Him who would not hear, but to her who lay forever at the foot of the Throne, prayed that she would turn the ear of God towards him; calling her "Missie!"—"dearie!"—and a thousand tender names of the old time; "You that had the

fondness for your man one while! You that could wheedle his Honour's self to hear you!"

At length for a last time he opened his eyes.

Beneath him still the moorland lay with the patient face of the unheeding dead. Only as he looked a cock-grouse rose with sudden alarum cry; nearer, a raven, slow-winged, and gorged, flapped wearily away; at the foot of the hill a whin-chat leaped into the air; and then it was as though one was walking up the hillside unseen, yet leaving in his wake a trail of wakened creatures.

Robin fell to his knees. His eyes were shut; yet he prayed not.

The heather rustled before him; there was the patter of little feet, and sound of one who pants; then two small hands thrust at his breast, and one was kissing his blind face very tenderly.

Robin lurched forward, as one who swoons.

"Am I dead?" he gasped; opened his eyes, as one first opening his eyes in heaven, who looks about in frightened hope to see if all is well. "Or, Missie! have you heard?" and knew that she had heard.

Robin came to the kitchen, Danny riding on his shoulder.

There kneeled the Woman as he had left her.

"There's no need for any more of that," cried Robin jauntily.

"I am just putting up a prayer to Missie for my man!" said the Woman.

"And I tell you," reiterated Robin, "ye can just hike off your hunkers."

"Eh?" said the Woman, dully, nor moved.

Robin behind her began to snigger.

The Woman, still on knees, heard him, and wrenched round.

"Where is he?" she screamed, saw him perched on Robin's shoulder above her, held there by his fore-paws, scrambled to her feet, tore him from his perch, and was parading the kitchen in paroxysms of sobs and laughter.

"I aye kenn't he would come!" she cried, and kissed and kissed. "I aye tell't his Honour," and laughed and sobbed. "O the cold neb to him!" and rocked and hugged. "And may this be a life-lesson to you dreep-dropping on the dresser, and making believe to nicker while you greet."

She ceased to march.

"I was forgetting! He will not have tasted these three-four days! That is a manny to her wean!" She put him on the high dresser and began to bustle. "But I have held ready a bit venison against his return—for I aye kenn't he would come; I aye kenn't he would come; I aye

tell't the Laird," and she placed a bowl upon the dresser before her prodigal returned.

Then she turned for the door.

"Where to?" asked Robin, obstructing her.

"To tell his Honour."

"Na," said Robin, and clutched her back.

"Because of why?"

"Because I will for you," said Robin, "I [illegible] have found him."

The door opened as they wrestled.

The Woman looked round, and screamed.

In the door the Laird stood like a shrouded corpse, spectre-footed.

Danny, at breakfast on the dresser, looked up, saw, leaped down, and fell upon his master as though to devour him.

The Laird picked him up, packed him beneath his arm, and padded off on naked feet down the groined passage, silent, shrouded, ghostly, Danny a blotch of silver grey against his night-shirt, with tail swishing like a sword.

He was already turning into the hall when the Woman came to herself.

"Where's your stockings?" she screamed, and clattered down the passage in pursuit. "O the infidel! O the face of brass! I'll gar him flout Deborah Awe!" and flung furiously against the hall door, only to find it locked.

She put her eye to the keyhole.

"I spy ye!" she screamed. "Do not fancy you are hidden from Deborah Awe—squattin' there, ne'er a thread to yer foot, nor a shred to your body. O!" she shrilled, "just bide there a bit till I come to ye! I'll gar you trapeze the stone floor barefit! I'll learn you paddle the death-cold stones dressed for buryin'!"

She turned and plunged into Robin standing at her heels.

"His Honour sits within like a blessed idol—naked save for his sark!" she cried. "Just stand to the door and kep' him at it till I come. I'm away after his duds!" and scuttled screaming up the stairs.

Robin put his shoulder to the crazy door, forced it, and entered.

The Laird sat in his winding-sheet in the half-arm chair. A shaft of cold sun fell on his grey head to hoary it. His feet were crossed, his face low, and grey hands framing the face of him who sat upon his knee.

Robin looked long, then turned to go.

"Wait," said the Laird, nor looked up.

Robin shuffled.

"I weary of waiting for the thanks that do not come," Robin replied.

"Thanks!" said the Laird, inquiringly, and looked up.

"Ay," said Robin, "for finding him for you."

"I thank you," said the Laird grimly, "for losing him; and I will thank you," more grimly, "not to lose him again; and lastly I will thank you to read this," and handed him an envelope, "that I have just detached from Danny's collar."

Robin took and fingered it.

"I canna read without my spectacles," he said.

"Or with them," said the Laird. "I forgot. Hand it back. Hark now!" and read harshly:

"'*Mrs. Johnson presents her compliments to Mr. Hepburn, and he must never allow Danny to go hunting again, because you never know what may happen.*'" The Laird looked at Robin and continued:

"It is signed," he said, "'A Friend of Danny who must remain anonymous,' and the address on the envelope is Mrs. Johnson, Allyre. And now," said the Laird, with sudden thunder-brow, "What might be the meaning of that? *What may happen?*"

"Canna say," said Robin shortly; "I have no knowledge of divinations."

"He *can* say, your Honour," panted the Woman on the other side of the door, "if he will. And if he winna, I can for him if you will bid him let me in. Open to me, Man!" she ordered, "I have a word for his Honour's ear, and stockings for his feet."

"Never!" said Robin firmly, his back to the door. "His Honour is not dressed for receiving company."

"Will Mr. Hepburn be pleased to *order* him open!" shrilled the Woman.

"Keep her out, Crabbe!" said the Laird. "And you, Woman!" he called, "just bide where ye are—the right side of the door for hearkening and the wrong for seeing—and hear his tale, and see he tells it true. Now"—to Robin—"tell on!"

"Tell on!" snarled the Woman. "And tell all!"

So Robin, sulky as a beaten boy, must needs tell all: of the meeting of dark men at the Ferry Ha', of the oath of the Bloody Englisher, of Simon Ogg and his going forth, and much else; and the Woman shrilly edited the tale through the keyhole.

"How long has this been forward?" asked the Laird when all was finished—"these plots upon him?"

"Maybe just a year-twa," said Robin, feigning nonchalance.

"And you have not seen good to forewarn me?" said the Laird.

"I thought the Woman would have tell't you," said Robin. "I tell't her."

"O ye Adam!" screamed the accused.

"It was for you to tell me," said the Laird.

"I thought ye knew," said Robin.

"How should I know?"

"Same as I do," said Robin. "Ye might dream it."

"And you think," said the Laird deliberately, "if I had known all this I would have let you lose him so?"

"Me lose him?" cried Robin. "He does lose himself. It is me finds him. Oh!" he cried, in bitterness, "Himself save me from the thanks of man!"

"When each time you lost him," continued the Laird, "you knew it might be the last, and that he might never return to me."

"This is just what I have aye tell't him," shrilled the Woman. "Once ower often, I aye said: and once ower often it has nigh proved: and he would never heed, but jeered and called out in me 'Bald-head!'"

"Is it Mr. Hepburn's will," asked Robin, trembling, "that I be spat upon by this Person through the keyhole?"

"Attend to me!" said the Laird.

"I will attend to your Honour now," said Robin: and turning—"And I will attend to you, Vessel of Hell, later."

"Hear me," said the Laird terribly, and

leaned forward, "there will be no more losing Danny from this day. You understand?"

"And how will I help it?" cried Robin. "When the Voice cries him forth——"

"Voice?" said the Laird. "Whose Voice?"

"Missie's," cried Robin.

"Does Missie cry him out to the bloodying?" jeered the Woman—"She that would aye wait him at the brae-foot with the whippie."

"She cries him forth to tryst her in the wilderness," said Robin, doggedly; "and when she cries him he will go, and how will me that am but mortal, all said, stay him?"

"I leave that to you," said the Laird, grim-lipped. "It's for me to give the orders; it's for you to carry them out."

"DROPPED INTO SULLEN SILENCE AS HE ENTERED"

CHAPTER XXIII

The Shadow of the Dead

Robin pattered off to the village. It was yet early. As he entered the village street the sluggard folk still slept; and a patternly black hen lorded it in the road and eyed him scornfully.

At the cottage of Simon Ogg, where no dour woman now stood on guard, he stopped; passed through the rank garden where the wild thyme grew, pushed open the door and entered the evil-smelling parlour hung with bacon hams, nor knocked.

In a recess in the far wall, on a low-heaped couch of straw, Simon slept guiltily.

Robin's hands smacked down upon the youth's naked shoulders.

He woke with a scream.

"Who is it?" he cried.

"Me," whispered Robin, "factor to him who slew your father."

The youth stared up through the dimness.

"Why for d'you whisper?" he asked, whispering himself.

"Because I am afraid for you," Robin replied.

"What gars you come here?" hoarsed Simon.

"His Honour gar'd me come," whispered Robin.

"Because of what?"

"Because of you know what," said Robin.

"I know nothing," chattered Simon, writhing.

In the room had been no sound but the hiss of whispering; now came the noise of hushed feet, ghostly and slow.

Simon tried to start to his elbow.

"Heark!" he cried.

"What?" said Robin, holding him down.

"Like it might be a dog!" chattered Simon; and peered round the body of the other.

"What's yon?" he hissed, and gazed and gazed, his face ghastly beneath the freckles.

"Where?"

"There!" staring fearfully.

Robin turned, and saw Danny standing in the dim light with eyes like cairn-gorms ablaze.

"I see little," whispered Robin, unmoved.

"I see my fate," said Simon, and fell back like one dead. "I have seen the Shadow of the Dead. I will not live."

Robin bent over him.

"Is Danny dead, then?" he asked.

"Dead these two days," whispered Simon, lying with closed eyes.

"How came it?"

"Over away in the Forest."

"Who slew him?"

"The Bloody Englisher."

"Was you there?"

"I was so. It was me snared him. Himself be good to me!"

He lay with shut eyes, breathing like a dying man.

Robin removed his hands from the other's shoulders.

"Do not leave me, Mr. Robin," whimpered Simon, "I will go mad else. Is he there yet?" and peered round the old man stealthily.

"He is there yet," said Robin, nor whispered now.

"What?" cried Simon, "can you too see him? Are you, too, a wraith?" and clutched his wrists.

"Wraith!" cried Robin. "Far be it from me. Na, I am that Robin Crabbe that is factor to the Laird of Hepburn these forty score years and more. And I have found you in your sin."

Simon lay back, panting like a stranded fish; and at last looked up.

"Is it a dream?" he asked.

"It's no dream," said Robin awefully.

"Thank God for that word!" said Simon, lay back with shut eyes, and laughed and laughed.

"Well for you were it a dream," cried Robin.

"I care na by," cried Simon, and laughed and laughed. "I have not seen the Shadow of the Dead, and I will live."

He opened his eyes suddenly.

Danny was digging busily at a heap of sacking and sawdust in a far corner.

"What gars him snout so yonder?" he cried, rising on his elbow.

"We will see that soon," said Robin.

"There's nothing there," said Simon. "Cry him out of it!"

"If there's nothing there," said Robin, "he will do nothing no hurt."

At that out of the heap of sacking came Danny, backing and pulling sturdily.

Robin went across to him.

"Your nothing is one of my roe-deer," he said, and looked at Simon.

Simon lay back with shut eyes.

"He is no wraith for sure," he said, and laughed his empty laughter. "And I will live: and I will not die."

"You will not die," said Robin, shouldering the deer. "This day to-morrow you will be praying that you could!" and he marched out.

CHAPTER XXIV

"There's No Place Like Home"

That afternoon Robin brought word that his Honour would speak with Simon.

Simon went, quaking.

His mother escorted him to the great gates, and bid him remember he was going to stand in the presence of his father's murderer, and there parted from him.

"Bid your minnie good-bye, lad," said Robin, not unfeelingly. "A man has but a mother once in this world."

"Will I not see her again?" cried Simon aghast.

"That is as his Honour wulls," said Robin with bowed head.

The Woman thrust Simon into the great hall without a word.

There sat the Laird in his cloak, lonely, grim, twining grey fingers, and Danny at his feet.

"Have you anything to say why I shouldn't send you to gaol?" he asked.

Simon sucked his thumb.

"I'd liefer bide with minnie, if your Honour pleases," he said.

"Ye must find a better lie than that, my lad," said the Laird.

Simon fell back on the old argument.

"Your Honour killed my father," he said.

"What if I did?" said the Laird curtly.

Simon bit his thumb and pondered.

"Only," he said, "it was none that neighbourly."

"And beside," said the Laird, "I apologized."

Simon shifted uneasily, seeking further excuse.

"A lad must live," he said, "and I'm far ower wankly to work."

"You're strong enough to steal," said the Laird.

"That's easier done," said Simon.

"So's going to gaol," said the Laird.

Simon pondered.

"There's minnie, too," he said. "There's a feck o' little things I do for her."

"What sort of things?"

"I fetch her whiskey," said Simon. "She will miss that sore."

"Sorer than ever she'll miss you," said the Laird. "I can tell ye that. D'you know, my lad," he added earnestly, "your dear mother has been at me these seventeen years to get me to put you away for her?"

"Same as ye did daddie?" gasped Simon.

"She's not particular," said the Laird, "only so long as you go; and she gets her crown a week and her cottage to herself. And I'm going to oblige her."

Simon knelt down.

"I'd liefer not be murdered," he whimpered, "if it's all the same to Mr. Heriot."

"Get up," said the Laird. "Make believe for once ye're some sort of a man; and listen here. You can take your choice, either you follow in your father's footsteps, to gaol——"

"Why for should I go to gaol?" whined Simon.

"Because you're a danger to the peace," said the Laird.

"Whose peace?" asked Simon.

"Mine," said the Laird. "Or, I will get you admission to a Home of Rest, I know, for such as you. And if you'll be advised by me, you'll take the Home."

Simon looked at him.

"What's a Home?" he asked suspiciously.

"Home is Sweet Home," said the Laird. "And there's no place like it—that's all I can tell ye."

"How long will I bide there?" asked Simon cunningly.

"Till you're better," said the Laird.

Simon shook his head.

"I'll bide with minnie, if it please yer Honour," said he knowingly.

"You'll take your choice," said the Laird briefly; "gaol or Home."

Simon burst into tears.

"I'll take Home," he said. "Though it's not much of a Home when you wear a chain all the time."

Robin, who had been listening at the door, trotted off to the kitchen, sat down there and bowed with laughter.

"The Laird's the cannie laddie!" he cried, and wiped the tears of merriment away. "He has put Simon Ogg away fine. We need fear no more for our man."

"Where?" asked the Woman.

"In a Home," gasped Robin, and wiped his eyes.

"What kind of a Home?" cried the Woman.

"A Home," gasped Robin, "for Lost Imbesillies!"

So Simon left Hepburn and retired to a place on a barren hill in a south land beside the sea; and the land knew peace for a while.

PART III

CHAPTER XXV

The Kirk-Breaker

Simon was gone four years; then he came back, himself little changed, to find all things at Hepburn changed, save only the canons of the kirk immutable as ever.

Even Deborah Awe had begun to grow old, and her flesh to sit upon her like a many-creased garment, loose, threadbare, out-at-elbows.

Robin remarked it, not without glee.

"Your pelt begins to give out, Lucky," he said, puckering a critical eye. "It's gettin' gey and withered and a'."

"It'll last my time," said the Woman, unmoved.

Robin removed his pipe and eyed her with the sideways mouth of the connoisseur.

"Belike it'll wear better than it looks to," he said critically. "There's no sayin' but it might last your tongue out with botchin' a bit. If so, it has a long road before it yet."

Robin, so said the much-enduring Woman, never now opened his lips but to be rude; and

his Honour never opened his lips at all. Living her lone with siccan a pair of old billies, one dumb and the other no better than a heathen Turk, she would have been driven daft long syne but for her Danny, knight of the dear eyes and everlasting courtier.

In the past four years Danny had little changed save that about his jaws amid the pearliness had sprung up a heavy stubble like a crop of stabbing swords. The greyness added to the veteran air of the little knight, but the eyes of the Visionary, that looked out on the world as through a sunset mist of gold, seeing the eternal mystery and forever sad because they might not tell, changed not.

The Woman now affirmed that bloodying and such rude delights as appealed to the beasts of the field and Robin, possessed no more joys for her true man. Now, she declared, he loved best to lie all day long at the feet of the Laird, and with that still old man await his call.

"Blethers!" said Robin. "When our man is past caring to kill, he is past caring to live. See here, Lucky!" and he emptied his pocket on the new-scrubbed dresser.

"What is it?" screamed the Woman, and dropped Danny like a hot shot.

"His morning's murder," said Robin briefly and went out.

And it was ever so. Sweet of heart as Galahad, Danny was still bloody as a ferret. The old three-day forays, indeed, when he peered through the panes and smote the land from Hector-law to the sea, had long ceased. Yet every dawn he went a-hunting as of old, with his faithful henchman; and to such a diligent searcher after glory-sheaves there was much honour to be won within his own demesne. Never a limping brock, never a marauding tod, nor any of the lesser outlaws of the wilderness but knew him of old, the knightly Warden, and loved him for an honourable enemy.

Now while his Warden had grown grey, age had laid white hands upon the Laird. On Sabbaths still he marched to kirk, as a martinet to parade. His short cloak swept about him, he stalked up the aisle, numbered his flock with grim discerning eye, nodded to the clerk, and the Liturgy began; while Danny in the porch without, inexorable in courtesy as in resolution, kept the door against the laggards. Save on Sabbaths, when he stalked forth thus to garner his people into God's granary remorselessly as of old, he rarely stirred abroad. Much he sat with blind eyes and face uplifted in the hall, his cloak about him, girded as it were for the Passing Over; and ever wandered

in his sleep with old-man murmurings and sudden callings-out upon a name that kept the ears of the Watcher at his feet a-twitching.

Simon found that the bearing of the people towards his Honour was altogether changed. A new spirit was abroad—the spirit of revolt. The old lion lay dying; his roar still carried a phantom terror of its own, but was now no longer the compelling power of past time.

All were looking to the death of the Laird for release from the weight of the Heriot hand. Some there were, indeed, who were for throwing off the mailed hand before the hand within the mail was dead; and of these, Simon found, his minnie was the leader.

Now Simon fell in with the new mood of Hepburn gladly. In his four years' absence the lad had grown in experience if not in wisdom. He knew now that there were higher authorities in the land than the Laird; that there was another world outside Hepburn, and that in that world (which was still this) there was no compulsory kirk-keeping, and therefore no kirk-breaking and penalties. Religion, he had found in that far South land, was the luxury of the rich. A poor man had no religion; unless, indeed, it was made worth his while with blankets. In Hepburn, there was much religion and no blankets; and this, so Simon

argued in the ale-house, when Robin was not there, was demonstrably blethers.

The people agreed heartily, and congratulated the mother of Simon on the lad's return, and the improvement wrought in him by his sojourn abroad.

"Among the mad folk," replied that dark woman bitterly—"a pack of slavering softies!"

"A pack of slavering softies maybe," retorted Andra' Gilray; "but they've been the making of the lad."

"And maybe the unmaking of the Laird," replied the dark widow.

Andra' turned to look at Simon aghast.

"Will he murder his Honour then?" he cried—"his Honour that paid for the lad all the while he was away."

"He will do just what his minnie gars him," said the dark woman. "I'm his minnie yet, for all his foreign travels!" and fiercely eyed her son slouching in the corner.

"And what'll you gar him?" asked young Cockie Menzies, with interest.

"Ye'll see the Sabbath," said the dark woman and nodded.

They did see the Sabbath; for on that day, which was the first Sabbath after his home-coming, Simon, coerced of his minnie, broke his kirk.

Now hardly in the recollection of the oldest in Hepburn had such a thing been—never certainly since Missie's time, who, arch-kirk-breaker herself, would come between other kirk-breakers and the anger of the Laird.

The village waited in awe. So in his heart did Simon.

As the kirk-bell tolled its last, and at the street-end he heard the great gates clang familiarly, and knew the Laird was stalking down the road, the Keeper of the Door at his heels, a horror seized him.

He thrust his head over the garden wall, and it was like a sunflower among the honeysuckle.

There, marching down the centre of the road, grey-muzzled, and with lover's eyes, came the Keeper of the Door; but no grim Laird.

Simon, drunk with relief, rose to his feet, shouting like one possessed.

At the noise Danny looked up, stopped, and saw.

"I'll gar you murder a man's fathers!" cried Simon, thumb to his nose,—"You and your dadderin' old Honours."

The bell ceased; and Danny turned into the porch.

Later the village trooped out to tell Simon that he need not be fear'd, for his Honour had not kept his kirk.

Simon feigned indignation. Fear'd? Did they think he was fear'd of his Honour? What was his Honour to one who knew the world?

"Ay," said an old voice at his ear, "the world—the world of Imbesillies."

Simon turned to find Robin at his heels.

CHAPTER XXVI

The Heretic

Robin announced amid a hush that the Laird would speak with Simon on the morrow.

Then the village, who had been gathered round Simon as round a hero, fell away from him as from a leper; and Simon knew the black fear just as in times past.

All that night and the next morning his minnie primed him with liquor and with lies, rehearsing him his part, and herself escorted him to the great gates.

"There's little need to fear him now," was the dark woman's last word whispered in his ear. "He's far other than the man that killed your daddie."

"God send he may be," said poor Simon, and went quaking on his way.

As he came to the door of the naked house beneath the brae, Robin met him with weeping eye; and asked in much-moved voice to be allowed to shake him by the hand.

"After many years we have met," he said not untenderly, one old hand on Simon's

shoulder—"met just to part. But we part friends—is it not so?" he asked, looked into the other's eyes and turned tremulously away.

Simon was left at the door alone and horribly afraid.

Deborah Awe opened to him, gaunt, fierce-eyed, lank.

"So ye're back?" she said, grimly regarding him.

"Ay," said poor Simon, "and wishing I werena."

"I'm with ye there," said the grim Woman, yet thrust forth a hand like a shank-bone to greet him; for though she and the dark widow had been familiar foes these twenty years, this childless Woman with the mother's heart had ever cherished a sneaking tenderness for the afflicted lad.

"You will find his Honour changed," she cried, flinging the hall door wide, "and for the worse!" and snarled round the door at him who sat within.

Simon entered full of liquor and a great fear.

It was four years since he had stood before his Honour in that same hall of shadows; yet, save that he who sat before him in hoary silence, his head sunk between huge shoulders, was white who had been grey, Simon could have believed that he had but dozed a minute,

and in that minute had dreamed four years of life, and now had waked to find all things as they had been.

The Laird sat in his cloak in the centre of the hall, lonely, dumb, twining grey fingers. The light from the high hall window fell on the bleak face, uplifted, seamed, the wide eyes that looked not nor appeared aware of Simon leaning against the paneled door.

The silence fell on Simon to appal him. He snorted like a frightened horse. He sought his voice and found it.

"Hillo-o-oh, old billie!" he bellowed.

A minute passed, and the shout ceased rolling in the roof.

"You spoke?" said the Laird, mild terrible man.

"I just bledder't,"* said Simon.

"And why?" asked the Laird.

"To keep me company," said honest Simon.

"Have ye anything further to say," asked the Laird.

Simon shifted his feet.

"I was there," he said at last sullenly.

"Where?" asked the Laird.

"Where you was not," said Simon boldly; "keepin' my kirk."

"Indeed," said the Laird, and looked at him

*Bledder't: bellowed.

with gathering brows. "Consider again a bit," he said, sat back, and composed himself as though for sleep.

Simon considered.

"A-well," said the cautious lad, "whisper! Who tell't Mr. Heriot I was none there?"

At that there crept forth from beneath the Laird's chair a witness in grey with hoary muzzle and truth-compelling eyes.

Simon sucked his thumb and began to titter foolishly.

"And now," said the Laird, "let us have a little chat. How long have you been back?"

"Just since Tuesday," said Simon, surlily.

"And so," said the Laird, "you thought the fittest way of commemorating your return was to break your first kirk."

"I have been four years away," said Simon. "I was forgettin' the customs."

"There was your minnie to mind ye!"

"It was minnie minded me to forget!" Simon retorted.

"Ah," said the Laird. "So she minded ye to forget, did she?" and sat back with closed eyes, lost in thought.

"Have you anything to say for yourself?" he asked at length.

Simon, according to his mother's instructions,

fell back upon the first of the old-time lies: that the Laird had killed his father.

"What!" said the Laird irritably. "Ye've not forgotten that yet?"

"Na," cried the dutiful son, "nor will while minnie's there to mind me."

"Well, I'll tell ye this," said the Laird, "as it's time you should know. Your father in his life spent much and earned little. Since his death he has spent nothing and been earning a crown a week and a free cottage."

"The crown never comes my way," said honest Simon. "And as to the cottage," he continued, mindful of the mother's instructions, "it's none so good but it might be better."

"How's that?" asked the Laird.

"A-well," said Simon, "if there was a bit byre to it."

"Ah," said the Laird, "and a bit coo to put in the byre."

"Ay," said Simon, "and maybe a new roof and a——"

"What's come to the roof?" asked the Laird.

"There's a hole in it," said Simon, "where the smoke goes out and the wind comes in. And it is because of that hole that I broke my kirk. I had the trouble on me sore because of it."

"There are no chimneys in the kirk," said

the Laird. "It would have been healthfuller for you there."

"It's agin my conscience to keep your kirks," said Simon doggedly.

"I am keeper of your conscience," said the Laird, enunciating a leading article of the faith.

"If I follow your persuasion," said Simon doggedly, "it is like I will not be saved. The chaplain in the Home did shew me that."

"This is my parish," said the Laird, "and you are of my people, and I am responsible. Therefore, you will be saved my way or no way."

"Then," said Simon spitefully, "I would liefer not be saved at all. And you are responsible!" and he pointed his finger at the Laird.

"I am so," said the Laird, "while you bide in my parish."

He turned and wrote at a table; and turning again, handed the youth a paper.

"What's this?" asked Simon.

"Notice," said the Laird.

"To quit?" squealed Simon.

"Ay," said the Laird. "You and your minnie this day week."

As Simon trailed away in a maze, Danny courteous at his heels to shew him out, the grim voice pursued him.

"I sent for ye, hearing ye was back, to put ye

in the way of work, and see if I could keep ye away from mischief and your mother. But as ye cease to be of my people this day week, I need fash no more about you."

At the door Simon stayed and looked down at Danny with pale eyes.

"You are my devil," said Simon, biting thoughtfully upon his thumb; and Danny of the dear eyes smiled up at him a courteous acknowledgment.

CHAPTER XXVII

The Trade-Mark of Deborah Awe

Next morning Widow Ogg in all her weeds crept to the house door.

The Woman opened to her.

"What's your wull?" she asked, regarding the other hostilely.

"What's that to you?" snarled the dark widow with the evil eye.

"It's just this to me," replied the Woman, standing gaunt-elbowed in the way, "if ye dinna tell me, I winna let ye by. None shall cross my instep to ban this house while Deborah Awe's in the flesh," for the widow's ill reputation was a by-word in Hepburn.

"I come to plead for my fatherless laddie," whined the dark woman sullenly.

"Plead for your fatherless laddie!" scoffed the other. "I'd fain hear ye!" yet for Simon's sake shewed her into the hall, and left her there.

Standing before his Honour, a dark and drooping figure of woe, the widow made her whine: *She* had not broke her kirk. Was it fair *she* should suffer for her son's offence.

She had reded him keep his kirk, but since he was home from foreign parts, whither his Honour had sent him, he would not heed his old minnie. It was little fault of *hers*. Would his Honour be sore on *her?* Would he make *her* homeless who had been husbandless—husbandless (she paused to sniffle up the tears that were not there)—husbandless these twenty years?

"And is this your pleading for your fatherless laddie?" cried a fierce voice through the door.

"Begone, Woman!" cried the Laird; and hearkened like one dead until the widow had finished her whine; then he said briefly—

"Ye'll both go."

"Why me?" asked the widow.

"I know your mother's heart," said the Laird feelingly, "and that you could not bear separation from your son."

"I might make shift to bear it if it was your Honour's wull," said the dark widow.

"It's not," said the Laird, curt as a blow.

The widow began to go out.

"What if Simon should conform?" she asked, hovering darkly by the door.

"It'll be time enough to consider that when he has conformed," said the Laird.

The widow blazed into sudden flame.

"First ye kill the lad's father! Then ye

pack him off to the mad-house! And now you're for taking the home from over our heads! May the Lord requite you!" she cried.

"Shut the door," said the Laird, "and shut yourself the other side of it."

She trailed out, brooding, dark. Danny, courteous as ever, went with her; and the Laird composed himself to sleep.

He was roused by a rush as of a flat-footed whirlwind storming down the passage without; followed a shrill sudden squalling as of warring cats; then the outer door slammed.

A moment later the Woman flung into the hall, blood on her face, and Danny tucked beneath her arm.

The Laird had risen.

"Did she dare claw Danny?" he asked harshly.

"She did not," panted the bristling Woman. "She clawed me, and I clawed her; but she laid ne'er a nail to my man," and setting down Danny she mopped her face. "By God's grace I'd left the kitchen door ajar, and I catch'd a blink of her bending above my man to ban him. 'What ye at?' I shrieks, and came skirling down the passage. 'Just nothing at all,' says she, and smiles in her ill way. 'Then take that for thanks!' I cried, and catch'd her

a lick, 'and pack!' and she packed—and my mark along with her. I'll gar her or any ban my man!" she cried, mopping still.

"I care nothing for her bans," said the Laird, "so she keeps her claws off."

Bristling still, the Woman departed to tell all to Robin.

"I'll ne'er know peace for our man's sake till she is away, the ill-faur'd, warlock-woman!" she made end.

"A-well then," said Robin comfortably, "ye'll know peace this day week. She'll be away by then."

"Ay," said the Woman, "if Simon has none conformed."

"Simon shallna conform," said Robin, and rose. "I will see to that."

CHAPTER XXVIII

The Conformist

That night Robin trotted down to the alehouse, and found the backslider surrounded by a herd of folk, vociferous, loud, who dropped into sullen silence as he entered.

Now for long past Robin had marked the spirit of unrest abroad among the people. The respect due to him, his years, his dreams, his office as henchman to his Honour, was not now paid, or paid but scantily. True old Tory that he was, loyal to tradition, his Honour, and himself, he had set himself to slamming back the flood-gates of revolt, not indeed with much effect.

Now the Laird had waked of a sudden, and the effect was as of a giant long dead who sits up and scowls.

Robin saw the old fear had tided down upon the village. He saw the banner of revolt had dropped, and set about confirming the heretic in his unbelief with joyful heart.

Then and there, in the smoking tap-room before the people, he scoffed at Simon, throw-

ing it up at him that at the last he would conform; but Simon swore by his murdered father, smashing his pewter down on the bench to punctuate the oath, that he was a confirmed atheist forever.

"Ye'll no hold to it," sneered Robin. "Ye'll recant."

"Recant!" cried the youth furiously. "I will be just damned if I recant!"

"There's the thrawn laddie!" chuckled Robin, patted him on his unbelieving back, and too gleeful to stay and get drunk, trotted home to report to the Woman that as yet all went well.

So four days passed. The village stood like slaves gathered round an amphitheatre watching with awed eyes a struggle on the issue of which hangs their fate.

It was known that the mother of Simon was desperate and had been urging the lad to up and act, and that Simon had sworn, as always, by the blood of his murdered father, that he would indeed do something, though what he darkly refused to divulge.

He did indeed do something, but not much. As on a day Danny passed beneath the garden wall, Simon leaned over and expectorated on his back.

"*That's* for murdering my daddie!" he said with concentrated bitterness.

Danny stopped and looked up into the pale face above him; whereat, after a pause—

"It wasna me," said Simon, palely. "It was minnie."

That night Robin came from the village full of uneasy fear. He had not seen Simon; Simon's minnie was keeping the lad close; and Simon was reported to be wavering.

"The Lord send it is not so," said the old man earnestly, but it was so. For next day, a day of Autumn and dead leaves, as the Laird swept down the street, as not often in these later days, like a grey wind, lost in dreams, and Danny at his heels, the mother of Simon came out of the garden on him in the full face of the village, to tell him Simon would conform —on conditions.

"On conditions?" asked the Laird, eyeing her.

"That Mr. Heriot will repair the cottage," said the Mother.

"I don't buy souls," said the Laird and swept on his way.

"I see what ye're after! Ye're set on driving the lad to Hell!" screamed the mother passionately. "Death without a priest to you!"

It was quite other mood that next evening,

as he passed, she came forth—in tears now, her hair a-loose, and bodice disarrayed, to tell him that Simon had warstled all night and prevailed and would be received back into the fold.

Robin, who had come forth from the ale-house to watch, now marched into the middle of the street, and hand to his mouth proclaimed herald-wise to the listening village—

"I tell't ye—Simon's back-slid!"

The Laird stood like a tower, glum and dumb, hearkening.

"Will Mr. Heriot receive him back?" whined the dark woman—"and him the only son of his mother, and she a widow."

"It's not the only son of his mother you're thinking of," said the Laird. "It's the crown a week and the cottage."

"And what worth's a crown a week and a cottage to me?" cried the mother, flaring, "who lost my man, and Mr. Heriot should know how."

"Ye needn't have taken it," said the Laird curtly.

"O!" cried the other, "It's the hard mouth your Honour has!" and falling back into her whine—"Will ye no receive him back—just for his father's sake?"

"Call him here," said the Laird.

The mother turned with alacrity.

"Simon" she called sharply!

Simon came down the stone-flagged path between the roses, slouching.

"D'you conform?" asked the Laird.

Simon stood sullen, downward-eyed, digging with his toe.

"He conforms," said the mother, eycing him wolfishly.

"He conforms," sneered Robin, who had drawn close. "His like aye does."

"Ne'er heed old Brandy-hall!" cried the mother. "He conforms," she went on, blasting Simon with a look.

"I don't see much sign of it," said the Laird.

"He'd best," said the fierce-eyed mother.

"Let's hear him," said the Laird.

Robin drew closer.

"He does not conform," he cried with reviving hope. "Stick to it, Simie!" he cried, cheering him. "There's the lad of metal! Ne'er heed her! Be a man in spite of your minnie!"

"Hold your blethers!" screamed the mother. "Simon!" she snarled. "D'ye hear his Honour?"

Simon scraped the road with his foot.

"I conform," he said sulkily.

"Is it of your own free will and wish you conform?" asked the Laird. "I'll have no forced conversion—mind!"

"Oo ay," said Simon, one eye on his mother.

"He will give public satisfaction on the Sabbath," he said shortly, and stalked away.

Robin stayed and Danny.

"But what of the cottage?" cried Simon, when the Laird was out of earshot. "Will we keep it?"

"Will ye not?" said Robin.

"And will he repair it?" asked Simon.

"He will so," said Robin.

Simon drew a deep breath.

"I conform," said he fervently. "I would have conformed before if I had known that."

"Ay," said his mother winking, "it's worth it and a'," and in a sudden access of affection kissed her son.

"It's always worth while to be saved," said Robin unctuously, and followed the Laird.

Next day Simon Ogg gave public satisfaction before the people; and all Hepburn and the countryside came to see his shame. Even Robin was there, who alone of the Laird's people had dispensation from regular attendance because of his swoonings which habitually overcame him in the kirk, when he must be carried out, to the disturbing of the congregation. Yet on the occasion the old man sat out the service, his back to the congregation, his

face to the penitent; and that although to the two-hour Liturgy a chant was added by the Laird's command, and the clouds dreeped fatness for an added hour; while Danny lay with grey chin on the threshold and pitied Simon with his eyes.

When it was over and the congregation trooped forth, the Laird, herding his people before him, grim shepherd of sheep, came on Simon waiting in the door.

"May this be a lesson to you," he said and stalked in.

"Ay," shrilled Simon, resolute to right himself in the eyes of the gathered folk, "and when will Mr. Heriot begin the repairs?"

"The day you quit," said the Laird, "and that's to-morrow," and stalked on.

"What!" gasped Simon. "Are we to quit and all?"

"So I said," the Laird replied, "so I intend," and stalked away.

Simon was dumb; but his mother was not.

"And who is to have it over us?" she screamed.

"I am," said meek Robin, "if I live."

As the Laird and his Squire passed through the rowan-tree gate, the dark widow woke as from a trance, shuffled across the kirk-garth,

stumbling over the mounds of the dead, and falling on her knees upon the wall, spat down her curse upon the two marching in the road beneath.

"Banning breaks no bones," said the Laird and swept on, unheeding; but Danny, courteous gentleman, halted in the road with lifted face to hear the lady out.

Robin went home to tell the Woman.

"Our man's safe forever," he said gleefully. "Widow Ogg packs the morn."

"And when the morn's come and gone, and her with it, I'll know peace, and not before," said Deborah Awe.

CHAPTER XXIX

The Dark Woman

The morrow came, sunless and without song; and with it, toward evening, Widow Ogg, dark and drooping as the day.

The Woman at her wheel in the kitchen looked up and saw her in the door.

"What do you here?" she asked, beginning to bristle and eyeing the other's thin and sinister face, not without grim glee; "I see you bear my mark yet."

"Ay," said the dark widow, "and will so to my grave; and beyond belike into the presence of my Maker, to tell Him who put it there."

"I'd fain think so," said the Woman. "And is it to plead for your fatherless laddie you have come?" she asked.

"I have come," said the dark widow, shivering, "because his Honour gar'd me come."

"What would his Honour want with ye?" asked the Woman suspiciously. "It's to-day you should pack."

"I kenna," said the widow, shivering.

The Woman eyed her closely.

"I think you do ken," she said; "else why for are you fear'd?"

"Fear'd!" cried the widow, flaming. "And would you not be feared? He has killed my man! he has locked my laddie in the madhouse! he has taken the home from over my head! There's but one thing left of me to take—and that's the soul from out of my body. Would he take that too?"

"I kenna," said the Woman. "We will soon see," and led the way into the hall.

"I have here at my heels Widow Ogg saying Mr. Heriot would see her," she cried to him who sat and seemed to sleep within. "Is that truth or is that a lie?"

"It's truth for once," said the Laird.

The widow entered, and the Woman with her.

"I'll bide here along with you, if it's your Honour's wull," she said, and planted herself grim-backed against the door.

"It's not my wull," said the Laird.

"It is mine, though," said the grim Woman, nor stirred.

"D'you hear me?" said the Laird, opening his eyes, "Go!"

"I'd liefer bide," said the Woman.

The Laird made as though to rise, and the Woman went across to him.

"Your Honour'd not be that far left to bide your lone with her," she whispered. "It was to me Missie willed ye to mend ye and mind ye, and is that minding ye if I left you your lone with yon dark woman, that is well-kenn'd for little better than a warlock, and black and bitter against your Honour? What if she put out to ban ye, and me not here?"

"I'll take my chance," said the grim Laird. "Go!"

The Woman bent and snatched Danny from his feet.

"If it's your Honour's wull to be banned, *be* banned," she snarled. "But I'll have no ill-favor'd warlock-woman lay a curse on my man," and she marched out, Danny tucked beneath her arm, took a chair from the kitchen and planted it in the passage.

"Here I bide and here you bide, my man, in my lap, until I've seen the last of yon dark warlock-woman!" she said, and sat down there in a place where four draughts met, to watch like a grim dragon; and Danny lay in her lap, curled and asleep.

CHAPTER XXX

The Laird Recounts History

In the hall the dark woman leaned against the paneled door and was afraid.

Before her sat the Laird, wrapt in his short cloak, the light upon his bleak uplifted face, closed eyes, and grey fingers twining as of one who prays.

"Twenty-two years ago to-day, Widow Ogg," he began, "when I came off Gaunt Scaur in the rise of the morning, I was carrying your man, dead, across my shoulders. Across the moors I carried him till I came to your cottage, and the sun yet barely up. I laid him down under the peat-stack, and I went in to break to you, as best I could, that you was a widow through me. You was asleep. I wak'd ye, and told ye. You wouldn't believe it until you saw him lying in the first sun under the lea of the peat-stack. Then ye just came to me and kissed my hand, and never a word," said the Laird, "even of thanks."

"I was too overcome," muttered the widow.

"But two days after, when ye waked him, and you wasn't so overcome, you drank my health. You knew by that time," said the Laird, "that the accident meant a crown a week and a free cottage to you."

"And a lad born without a father!" cried the widow.

"I am coming to that," said the Laird. "When Simon was born a year or two afterwards, you will remember I was for taking the lad and handing him over to some decent woman on one of the hill-farms, to give him a chance," said the Laird, "and get him out of his mother's clutches."

"And your Honour will remember," cried the widow tremulously, "that I cam' to you, and kneeled to you in this room here, and begged you—you that once had a mother of your own, that well I remember her, dear lady, and your Honour's fondness for her—to leave my bairn to me—him that was only son to his mother, and she now a widow."

"And I did," said the Laird and dropped his chin. "And I believe," he said, and stared at the widowed form by the door, "that I lost that lad to God by so doing."

He paused; and the mother made no reply.

"God knows," he went on, not unfeelingly, "I did it for the best. A bad woman may make

a good mother, and herself become a good woman through her child. Many's the time I've seen it. And I thought—I hoped—I prayed, that maybe that child might be the turning point in your life—though God knows where ye got his father from."

Again he paused; and still she was dumb before him.

"What happened in those first years when Simon was a wean, I don't rightly know," said the Laird, "and I've never had the heart to inquire. But I do know that one day I found the only son-of-his-mother—poor naked brat, with his bones nigh through—picking over a refuse-heap for a crust. I carried him home to you, and I told you that if Simon died, you'd hang; and I'd see to it; and that stopped that."

"Ay!" cried the mother, bitter laughing woman, "first my man; next me!"

"After that," continued the Laird, "ye didn't let the lad quite die for the motherly reason that you darsen't."

For a long minute he paused.

"Then," said he, "my wife came," and again he paused.

"After she came," he continued, "for a time you did shew some mother's guts. You thought you'd play the only-son-of-his-mother trick on her—she being a child, and pitiful, and be-

lieving all your lies. I found you was wheedling out of her her few poor pennies of pocket money I gave the child for sweets and the like, and I stopped that," said the Laird. "Give her," I said, "slops and sympathy, slops and sympathy, till you're out of both. But if she asks for money, send her to me."

"Your Honour was aye a hard man!" cried the widow.

"When you saw there was no money in that trick," continued the Laird unheeding, "you became yourself again; and sold the only-son-of-his-mother to the skipper of an Ambermuth whalin' brig—poor daft lad, about as fitted for ship life as his mother for heaven.

"Luckily I found out and brought him back; and the lad came back on your hands, and you beat him for it; and when I heard of it, and the whole story, I was for ejecting you neck-and-crop. And I would have, but my wife came and begged me—begged me to give you one more chance — 'for my sake, Master,' said she; and said she'd take the lad into the house, and see what she could make of him herself."

"God bless Missie!" cried the widow, and began to sniffle.

"Within a week of that," said the Laird, "your best friend in this world passed over."

"God bless Missie!" cried the widow, and drew her hand across her eyes.

"I'd ruled this parish forty years by fear," said the Laird. "She ruled it for one year by love. I hadn't a friend in the parish when she came. She hadn't an enemy when she left."

"That she had not!" cried the widow whimpering. "God bless Missie!"

"I didn't think this people could love," said the Laird. "I believe they loved her."

"We did so," cried the widow, "God bless our Missie."

"On the day I bore her home," continued the Laird, "every living soul in this parish and for miles round—man, woman and unweaned child—followed her."

"We did," sobbed the widow, "we did."

"Except yourself," said the Laird.

"It was my washing day," said the widow surlily.

"And you," said the Laird, "stood in the door of your cottage, as we bore her past, and cursed her coffin. I heard ye, I heard ye."

He paused with blind eyes, and throat of iron; and the dark woman in the door stood cowed before him.

"What sort of a dog's life you led the only-son-of-his-mother after that," said the Laird, "I don't rightly know. I was a bit lost like

myself for a while just then. When I came to I endured him and you for some years, for the sake of her whose dead body you cursed. Then I found he was plotting at Danny, set on by you."

He paused.

"Now," said the Laird slowly, "you knew that dog was like a second soul to me; and you knew why."

He stopped regarding her with grave eyes.

"He was the one wee bit left to me of the one year that has made my life worth living." He regarded her gravely. "And you set yourself through Simon to taking the soul out of my life. That was too much; and I packed Simon off. And I'd have packed you off, too, but I knew you was drinking yourself to death and I hoped each day would be your last. Well," he continued, "you disappointed me. You didn't die. You lived, and for four years you've been the bane of my life; and I've done nothing. As I tell you, I've been living in hope. But hope deferred maketh the heart sick; and I was just about sick of hoping when ten days since Simon came home."

He paused.

"I wasn't sorry to see the lad home. No one was," he continued," except his mother; and you was just *wae*, just *wae*."

"Wae!" cried the mother. "To have him home, and him only son to me! Oh!" she cried. "Little your Honour knows of a mother's heart."

"I know what was the matter with your mother's heart," said the Laird. "Ye could blether away about your murdered husband, and Simon and the softies in the village'd likely believe you; but I know better. You thought by setting Simon to break his kirk, whoever came out undermost you was safe to come out top; if I bore with the kirk-breaking, you'd know I was no better than of no account, and you'd be cock of this midden; and if I turned on Simon and ejected him, you'd be left alone with your cottage and your whisky money. I stopped that," said the Laird. "I ejected you both."

He sat back.

"And that," said the blind Laird, "is the history in short of the past. I now turn to the future."

The gaunt chin dropped. He opened his eyes and stared bleakly across the hall.

"I've borne with you for ten years for my wife's sake. I'm now going to bear with you no longer for my own. In the past I've done everything man could do to oblige you."

"Ay!" screamed the widow, flaming ex-

citedly, "shot my man; locked my laddie in a mad-house."

"And yet," said the Laird, continuing like the tide. "You're not satisfied. You've abused my kindness in every way you know how. You've set the people against me; you've set Simon to defy me; you've plotted on Danny; and now I am weary of you."

"Sir!" whined the widow, "consider Simon."

"I have," said the Laird. "For twenty years," he continued earnestly, "I've tried all in my power to make amends to that lad for any harm I did him. I've felt for him as I've felt for few in my life—as I'd feel for any man that had you for mother; and I've not done with him yet. When you leave this parish—as leave it you will, if you like to let him bide, I will become responsible."

"Him bide that broke his kirk! and me go that did not!" cried the mother. "And is that your Honour's justice?"

"Or," continued the Laird, "if you don't like that, I will pay the lad's passage to America and give him five pounds."

"Money down?" asked the widow, pricking her ears.

"To be given him by the captain the day before he lands," said the Laird, and waited a reply.

"I will take none of Mr. Heriot's favours," said the dark woman proudly, and gathered herself to go.

"Except when they affect yourself," said the Laird.

"We will go forth," cried the widow, "Simon and me, like Hagar and Ishmael, into the wilderness together, there to die. And if ill comes to Simon through it, his blood be on your Honour's head," she cried, her hand upon the door, "as his father's was."

"And the insurance money in your pocket," said the Laird, "as his father's was."

She turned and curtseyed to him with trembling knees.

"May the Lord show mercy to your Honour as you have to me and mine!" she cried, and crept forth.

Outside she leaned against the door, one hand to her heart, until at length a creaking noise stirred her back to life.

She looked up. At the far end of the passage she beheld a gaunt-boned sentinel asleep; and on her knees one who stretched himself and yawned as one just awaking.

The widow took a step forward. Danny saw her, jumped softly down, and came to her smiling with dear eyes.

CHAPTER XXXI

The Devil in a Bag

The Woman woke with a start. She sat stark up-right and hearkened. There were no longer voices in the hall; all about her was silence, loneliness, and invading night; and Danny gone.

"Christ keep me!" she cried to her heart, rose, and rushed to the hall to see.

There sat the Laird, a shadow in the dusk.

"Send Danny here to me!" he ordered hoarsely, ere she had entered.

"Is he not with your Honour then!" gasped the Woman, her heart a-quake.

"If he was," said the Laird, harsh and hoarse, "should I send for him!"

"He is not with me," cried the Woman.

"Where then?" asked the Laird. "It was you took him out to safe-keep him while Widow Ogg was here."

"Is Widow Ogg gone then?" gasped the frightened Woman.

"An hour since!" said the Laird.

"Then God help your Honour!" cried the

Woman, "for our man is gone too!" and she turned and fled.

"And is this your safe-keeping?" cried the Laird after her.

"Belike he has just gone to meet Robin home from the street or bides him in the byre!" she screamed over her shoulder as she fled.

"Go and see and bring me word *at once!*" came the Laird's voice from the hall.

The Woman scuttled back to the kitchen, huddled a shawl about her head and was plunging forth into a night of storm and rain, when the sound of uncertain feet hurrying towards her in the dark stayed her.

"Robin!" she cried. "Robin Crabbe!" and the old man trotted in, dripping, passed her unheeding, halted jerkily and as jerkily sat down.

The Woman summed him up in a glance.

Hey'd-scared.

"You are fou! and you are fley'd! and ha' ye seen Danny?" she cried.

The old man seemed not to hear.

He sat drenched, leaning a little forward, his hands set stiffly on his knees; and breathed loudly through his nose.

The Woman took him and shook him by the shoulders fiercely.

"Hearken here!" she shouted as to one deaf.

"*Danny is away! Our man is away!* There's been no sign seen of him since yon dark warlock-woman left the house an hour agone. Did ye meet him on your way back from getting drunk?"

Robin shook his head mistily, irritably.

"Na," he said, "na, na."

"Did ye meet any?" shouted the Woman, shaking him.

"None but the Devil," said the old man testily.

"The Devil!" cried the Woman.

"Just the Devil in a bag on his way to being drowned," repeated Robin.

"O you man!" screamed the Woman. "O ye dirty drouthy tyke!" and plunged into the night, where wind and rain battled murderously.

Robin, left alone, began suddenly to snigger, smacking his knee and telling himself a tale.

"I was just within the gates when the warlock that was bearing him fluster't into me. "What's all that yelpin' and skelpin' under your arm?" I cries, and lays hands on her. 'It's the Devil I have in a bag!' she shrieks—'just the Devil I have in a bag. Hands off! I'm away to drown him.' And the warlock was away on wings fore ever I could stay her."

He fell into sudden laughter at his adventure, and rose to his feet.

"The Devil's drowned by this!" he was saying. "The world's rid of the father of Hell!" when the door burst open and the Woman was blown in, wind-battered and breathless.

"The storm's ower fierce!" she panted. "I couldna win to the byre!"

In despair she turned to the old man now going forth.

"See here!" she gasped, going across to him. "Our man is away—do you mark me? There's been seen no sign of him since yon dark woman left. Belike he bides over at the byre as whiles he does when the rain's on — and him ower cannie to get a wet coat."

"At the byre," Robin repeated, "as whiles he does," and began to go forth.

"And if ye should find he's not there ye'n to return and tell me," continued the Woman. "Mind now!"

"Oo ay," repeated Robin, nodding like a mandarin,—"return to tell ye."

"Sure now!" cried the Woman, urgent at his heels.

"Certain sure now," said Robin, and stumbled forth into the night; nor returned.

CHAPTER XXXII

This Side the Grave

Next day the Woman was down before it was well light, waiting Robin and the Warden home from their dawn-huntings on the hill.

Long she looked forth, but looked forth in vain; so she went back to her house-business, little distressed; for when the chase led the hunters far they would often be away till the heat of the day.

It was not indeed till noon that Robin appeared. The Woman, at work on her hearthstone, scanned him grimly.

"You are late!—and little wonder," she said, marking in the old man a certain familiar dilapidated air.

"Little indeed!" said Robin sourly, "seeing I have been all this while biding Danny on Fir-Tree Knowe, and yet he has not come to me."

The Woman knelt bolt upright.

"Biding him?" she screamed.

"These fower hours," said Robin.

"When ye reached the byre last night, was he not there?" screamed the Woman.

"There!" said Robin, round-eyed. "Na. I have not seen our man since our hunting yester's morn."

The Woman rose from her knees, as one stabbed to the heart.

"Then the Lord have mercy on us!" she cried. "Our man is gone!"

She swung about and rattled down the passage.

Some while she was away, and came back slow-footed.

Robin was awaiting her, gnawing his knuckles.

"What is it all?" he asked, afraid.

"It is just this," said the Woman; "it is your drunkenness has lost to us our man."

She sat down grey and gasping and told him of Danny's disappearance, and of the promise that he (Robin) had made and had not kept.

"I mind nothing o't," said poor Robin at the end.

"Ye'd not," said the Woman bitterly. "Ye was far ower fou."

"I was not that fou," Robin replied. "I'd been down the street to drink Widow Ogg godspeed, and maybe I'd just tasted but no more. Then I came home, and I do think I'd a touch of the fever, for I'd an ill dream that I met the Devil in a bag on the way to being drowned."

"'I CONFORM,' SAID HE, SULKILY."

"It was not the Devil that was drowned," replied the Woman, "It was Robin Crabbe—drowned in drink. And your drunkenness has lost to us our man."

Her hands were to her apron, and her apron was to her face; and she began to rock.

"Oh!" she cried "Oh!" unselfish still in her sorrow. "Missie hear me and send comfort to his Honour this day! He was more than son to him—and little less than soul."

"What said his Honour when ye tell't him?" asked Robin whitely.

"He ne'er uttered," sobbed the Woman. "It was just past words for him! He was more than son to him—and little less than soul."

"Belike he has just gone hunting as of old," said Robin, feigning a faint cheerfulness.

"Hunting!" scoffed the Woman. "He has not been night-hunting these fower years! not since the day his Honour took him on his knee in the hall and gar'd him not go. Na," she said, "na; it's yon dark warlock-woman has wrought her will upon my man. He has gone nevermore to return this side the grave."

She broke down utterly, and began to sob. "Nevermore will I let him out dawns to greet you," she keened. "Nevermore will you kill together now. Nevermore will I put a kiss upon him—my wean to me! Nevermore will

he wake his Honour of nights with his girnings, him talking to Missie in his sleep. Nevermore, I say, Robin Crabbe, this side the grave."

Robin regarded her a moment like a frightened child; then he drew a sudden breath and ran away at a little sodden trot.

"Where to?" cried the Woman, looking up with pouring eyes.

"To his Honour!" gulped Robin, trotting on.

"Na!" cried the Woman, clutching him back. "It is you are responsible. It is your drunkenness has lost to us our man. He will be like to kill you."

Robin burst into sudden tears.

"I carena a boddle for his killings!" he cried. "It is my Danny I am troubled for," and trotted on.

Huddled against the door, an old quavering figure, he told of his drunkenness, and the promise he had made and had not kept. No armour of insolence was now his, no rude nonchalance of demeanour.

Shakily, and not without much sniffling up of tears, the old man told his tale without adornment; and there came no word of comment or rebuke.

With restless fingers on the handle, Robin waited.

"Ha' ye nothing to say?" he asked at last,

staring dimly across the hall; but no word answered his appeal.

"Will ye no scold at me?" he begged, choking. "Ye might!" he cried, and drew a step nearer. "Just a bittie!" and then saw he was addressing an empty chair.

He ran back to the kitchen.

"The Laird's gone down the street!" he cried, hope glimmering at his heart. "He has gone to have a word with Widow Ogg."

The Woman looked at the clock.

"He's ower late," she said. "Our man will none return this side the grave."

CHAPTER XXXIII

Simon Dead and Gone

Widow Ogg was standing in the street in the rain, bonneted; the carrier's cart was at her door; the man was loading fast but not fast enough for her, when a still voice at her shoulder spoke.

"Let be," it said.

The widow leaped around, smothering a scream.

The Laird stood beside her, gaunt and bleak and white.

"Your Honour's before your time!" cried the dark woman, and the fear was on her horrible to see. "I'd have been away by now, but I was just biding—biding—biding." She stammered and stuck in her speech.

"Biding who?" said the Laird.

"The doctor!" said the dark woman glibly. "Simon's none so well. He was taken last night. It came on him sore and sudden. I ne'er quitted his bedside the night through. One while I did fear he was dying—my son dear

to me as my soul!" and she began to whimper in the old familiar way.

"He was dying, and yet you were for moving him in the rain!" said the Laird—"this son dear to you as your soul."

"It was your Honour's orders!" cried the other. "It's little pity Mr. Heriot has ever shewn to me or mine that I should think it like he'd spare us now."

"I'd see the lad," said the Laird briefly.

"Ye canna!" cried the widow, thrusting before him. "He's far ower sick.

"I must," said the Laird. "I've some skill in medicines."

"There's no need now!" cried the widow. "The lad's better."

"He can't be both," said the Laird, pushed past her, entered the sluttish room and looked into the sleeping-hutch beyond. Then he turned.

"You mistake," he said. "The lad's not dying. If he's anything he's dead—and gone!" and he pointed to the empty bed.

He came back to her, tramping.

"I can feel for you," he said, "for I too have lost a son, dear to me as my soul—and gone as mysteriously as your dear lad has."

"I know nothing of him," said the widow, shivering. "And as to Simon, he had the fever on him sore, as I tell't your Honour; and he'll

have just slipped out of bed and passed me while I was packin'; and the rain on, and him just in his sark! O," she cried, falling into the old whine, "I will be a childless woman the day! He'll have gone to his grave! he'll have gone to his grave."

"Heart up!" said the Laird: "here's his ghost back again!" and at the moment in shuffled Simon, ragged, rain-draggled, battered.

"O minnie!" he sobbed. "I am come home a corp!" and he flung himself face downward on the bed.

"I tell't Mr. Heriot!" cried the widow, and pointed dramatically at the broken figure on the bed. "He has the fever! he is raving!"

The Laird bent over him.

"What is it?" he asked.

"It is just Joliff has killed me quite again!" blubbered the youth, wriggling on his face. "Yon muckle Englisher has murdered me sure."

The Laird plucked suddenly at the sufferer's shirt. It came forth from his trousers and the lad's bare back was discovered.

The Laird looked with interest.

"The lad is in pain, but not in danger," he said. "Yet he's too ill to quit this day. I'll order the carrier to unload."

He stalked forth, gave his orders to the carrier, and stood a long hour in the rain seeing

them carried out; the people gathering in the street, heedless of the rain, to watch; then he came back to the widow.

"I am now going home in hope that my son may return to me as yours has to you," he said.

"What if he was dead?" said the dark woman with dreadful grin in the gloom.

"If he is dead he will not return to me," said the Laird. "But I will return to you," and he tramped off through the people.

CHAPTER XXXIV

The Laird Rides South

Arrived home, the Laird sent for Robin.

The Woman was afraid for him and implored him with tears not to go.

"It's the very way he was the night before he killed Simon Ogg's father!" she cried. "Do not go, Robin. He will be like to kill you."

"And I will thank him," said Robin, and went.

The Laird stood in the hall like a white Saul; and now there was no Danny David-wise to charm the dark spirit forth; but Robin stood by the door too miserable far to be afraid.

"What do you know of one called Joliff?' asked the Laird.

"Joliath!" said Robin. "He is no better than a heathen—he is Engleesh; and man to him of Altyre."

"Altyre!" said the Laird. "It was from Altyre the warning came!" and lifted a yellow label from the table at his side.

"That cam' from her of Altyre," said Robin. "Him that inhabits there is married on a

woman, and she is fair and has the fondness for Danny."

"How d'you ken that?" asked the Laird sharply.

"I was in Campbell-town at the Hire last back-End," said Robin, "and Danny was with me, and she came by in her chariot, and he saw her and followed after, crying to her like as it might be to Missie; and she stopped her carriage and got down and took him in her arms, and put a kiss upon him before the people, and slobberments, and yattered over him, eye-wheedling him. And he talked to her as he would to Missie. And I jalouse she has a devil and put a spell upon him because of his beauty."

"What like is this woman?" asked the Laird.

"She is like to nothing on earth," said Robin. "She is like to Missie, in Heaven, just decked out in the duds of the Scarlet Woman."

The Laird sat back with shut eyes.

"I will ride," said he.

Robin gaped upon him.

"Ride!" he gasped.

"I said ride," said the Laird. "Harness me Nebuchadnezzar."

"Neddy-cud-nebber!" screamed Robin. "He's not been out of the byre since Missie had him out, ten years since; he has a coat like a sheep."

"I will come round to the byre in one quarter, and climb him there," said the Laird.

"But I tell ye!" gasped Robin.

"And I tell *you!*" said the Laird.

"Man!" cried Robin.

"You hear," said the Laird and opened his eyes.

Like one dazed Robin went.

Twenty minutes later, for the first time since Missie's death, a horse's feet sounded on the gravel far down the drive.

The Woman in the kitchen heard the sound, and a wringer in her hand, scuttled round to the front door to see.

Then she stood, hand to her brow, and looked with amazed eyes.

"The World's End's on us and a'!" she cried and started furiously in pursuit.

"I'll gar you go horseback-racing, ye doited old ranty-go-round!" she screamed. "Are you daft quite? Will you go search him yourself? Come back! Come down! I order you! Is it no enough to lose the one but the other must follow!"

The Laird jogged on, like an old white Quixote on a white Rosinante.

The Woman saw the vanity of pursuit and stopped.

"Oh," she wailed, "he is clean daft! and deaf! and doited and a'!—him riding forth to war like Balaam on his cuddie, who should be in his bed on slops."

She turned to Robin who stood behind her, dull-eyed and miserable.

"Put out after him!" she ordered, "Rin, man! rin! Pull him off! Tell him I forbid him flat; Deborah Awe forbids him!—him and Neddy-cud-nebber going forth to search the highways and hedges with none to tend them."

Robin stood and moped.

"Are you a man?" cried the Woman. "Will you do nothing, and stand by and see his Honour riding to his death?"

"I care not," said Robin soddenly.

The Woman broke down and sobbed.

"You care not," she cried, "you that first lose Danny through your drunkenness and then stand by on one leg and wipe your eye, while his Honour goes horseback-galloping to his end. You care not—why should you? I will lose them both, but what is that to you? It was to me Missie left him to mind him and mend him and gar him change his feet; it is me she will be sore on when we meet—why should you care!"

"I wish I were dead," said poor Robin.

"Robin Crabbe!" cried the other shocked.

"I do so," said poor Robin.

"Then you have fallen far from grace," said the Woman. "Have you no gratitude to the good God who made you?"

"There is no God," said Robin brokenly. "Danny's dead; the Laird's daft, and I'm aff to get fou."

The Woman spent a lonely day upon her knees in tears and prayers for the soul of her wee man departed; and in between whiles solicitously kept a-stirring a mess of meaty comfort against his return.

And the Laird, like a great white icicle a-horse, rode south.

Towards nightfall Robin returned to peer blindly into the kitchen.

"Is he home?" he asked.

"Home!" wailed the Woman. "Home! He will never be home this side the grave."

"Woman!" cried Robin. "Have you no heart of a woman?"

And was stumbling forth with the dripping night to pour forth his heart's bitterness to Missie in the pouring heaven above, when the Woman caught and chucked him back.

"The Laird's gone, and Danny's gone; there's no need a third should go!" she cried wildly;

and set him by the fire and nourished him with a comfortable mess of gruel which she, motherly heart, had kept a-stirring the day through.

"It was for our wee man!" she explained. "But he will never need it now this side the grave," yet put another pan upon the hot and kept it stirring.

At midnight on her way to bed, looking into the hall, the Woman found the Laird returned.

He sat alone in the white of the moon, his cloak about him, his bonnet on his head, the grim eyes shut, like some dour soldiermonk whose vigil is passed, and seems to sleep in stone; and on his lips a strange white smile.

"Ha' ye any tidings?" screamed the Woman, and ran in on him.

He sat lost still in dreams, the smile upon his lips, nor seemed to hear.

"Do you hear me?" cried the Woman in his ear, and shook him. "Is Danny back?"

He stirred and came back from sleep.

"Not yet," he said. "I bide him here," and was falling away into his dreams.

"Will he be back then?" cried the other urgently.

"Surely so," said the Laird, and nodded and nodded in his dream.

"How d'you ken that?"

"She tell't me."

"Who tell't ye?"

"Marjory," said the Laird, and sank back smiling into sleep.

The Woman ran to tell Robin.

"His Honour has trysted with Missie outbye!" she cried, pale with awe. "And our man will return—she tell't him, who tells true."

His cloak about his shoulders, the Laird sat white-headed in the night; and the dreams were on him.

At last upon the stroke of one, it came to him, that for which he had waited since his home-coming—a crying in the night without.

Straightway he woke; and the dreams lifted.

He rose and tottered furiously across the hall; and already behind him down dim passages there was a hurry of shuffling feet and slamming of doors.

His fingers were hardly on the bolts of the outer door, when two hands clapped upon him from behind.

"Away out of it!" yelled Robin, and thrust him aside.

"Is he there?" screamed the Woman, scuttling up.

"Can I see through the door, Fool?" cried Robin, striving on his knees.

"Open, then!" she implored.

"Open!" gurgled Robin. "And am I no wrestling with it—and you—and the Devil—and a'?" and heaved the door wide.

In crawled a little shadowy misery.

Robin peered down.

"It's no him!" he screamed, and flung up his face. "Where is my God?"

"It's his wraith!" screamed the Woman. "Pity—pity upon us!"

Two anguished eyes turned up to them.

"It's himself!" screamed Robin. "Missie tell't true!" and fell back against the wall.

"My wean! My wean to me!" sobbed the Woman, "O Missie!" O my wean!" and wrapped him up in tender arms, clouding him with kisses.

The Laird said nothing. He stood in the path of the Woman with arms thrust forth.

"I have him!" said the Woman jealously; " there is no need for you to fash."

"He is mine," said the Laird, and stood like a pillar in her path with outstretched arms.

"Have him all to yourself then!" she snapped, and placed her treasure in his arms with a little bump.

Tenderly the Laird wrapped his cloak about

the little knight and marched upon hushed feet back to the hall.

"He is mine," said the Laird, and gathered him jealously in his arms. "He is mine," and marched away, the love upon his face.

CHAPTER XXXV

Robin and the Englisher

Far into the next day Danny slept, unlike himself.

"He sleeps late," said Robin, awaiting his battle-fellow at the kitchen door.

"Ay," said the ominous Woman, "and it will be well if it be not that sleep from which none wake."

At noon he did wake. Robin and the Woman watched him trailing miserably at the heels of the Laird.

"He is weary, is our man," said Robin uneasily.

"And it is not only weariness," replied the Woman.

Jael, the soot-and-sulphur cat, his enemy of old, crossed his track and cursed him deliberately and Danny trailed on unheeding.

"It seems he canna see," said Robin, sucking a knuckle.

"He can see," said the Woman. "He winna."

The two were still at the door watching as the little knight trailed home an hour later.

"He seems less," said Robin.

"He is less," said the Woman, "and like to be. He has left his heart behind him in the wilderness."

"If that is all," said Robin, "I will soon mend him for you."

"Never!" said the Woman. "Male he is for so God made him, but not man that he can pick a new heart from any dyke. It's yon dark warlock-woman has laid a ban upon him to take the power from him."

The Woman was right. Tender as ever, faithful still and of perfect courtesy, the heart had died out of the little man as the sun dies out of the West.

Now no more he sallied forth, gay gallant in grey, on lonely enterprise against the heathen of the wilderness. Instead he draggled all day long at the Laird's heels, or lay wearied of life and listless in the hall.

As of old he went his morning round with Robin in the dew, but now no longer alert to defy the thunder, he jogged palely at the old man's heels. Foumart might cross him, the scent of the otter rise like incense to his nostrils in the dawn, and he still plodded on, careless of insult.

"He has killed his last!" said Robin, returning home upon the second day, and sat down in the kitchen and sobbed.

"If that was all he would not die," cried the Woman. "He is not altogether man, is not my wean Danny. He can live for love as well as murder."

"That he can never!" gasped Robin. "Battle was his breath; blood his drink. He cares no more to kill, and he cares no more to live; and I aye tell't ye!"

"And I tell't you!" cried the Woman. "I kenn't the way it would be. He's in the just the very taking a lass was once I kenn't, that was ill-wished by such another as yon dark warlock-woman. She just lived, yet lay like one dead. There was no power in her, yet nor scar nor scathe on her to shew for it. Then she just divined and divined and divined—as does our man; and she seemed to little day by day—as our man; until she died—as will our man," and she began to sob.

Robin fell back upon liquor and a bottomless despair; and the Woman wrung her hands all day.

Of the three at that time the Laird seemed the least troubled. A dimness of dreams had fallen on him like a mist. For the most part he sat all day long in the hall, wrapped always

in his cloak in a sort of waking sleep; and Danny lay at his feet, like one dead.

"Danny might die!" cried Robin bitterly, "and his Honour would still just sit and glower, and sit and glower."

"He is far away," said the Woman, "and faring farther. He is just dreaming away and away. Since Missie trysted him in the wilderness he thinks of little else. I have heard him talking of her in his sleep."

And indeed it almost seemed as if it was so. That very noon, as she looked into the hall to see how it fared with him, he woke and stared across at her; and there was a letter in his hand.

"If any comes for me," he said, "I will see them."

"Who's like to come for ye?" cried the Woman, astonished.

"Missie might," said the Laird, and was back again in sleep.

She toiled back to the kitchen.

"The Laird has had his call," she said to Robin. "That's a sure thing. He thinks Missie is coming from heaven for him."

"And if any comes from heaven for him, who more like than Missie?" said Robin tartly.

At the moment there came a knock at the kitchen door, very low.

The Woman sat down with quaking knees.

"Open!" she gasped, pale as her apron. "Open, Robin! If it was Missie."

Robin had risen dully, and had gone to the door.

The Woman waited with shut eyes.

There was a long silence; then Robin spoke.

"This is no Missie from heaven," he said at last deliberately. "This is an Englisher from Hell."

The Woman opened her eyes to see a huge sun-bearded stranger grinning in the door.

. . . . . .

In the yard the Englishman, tender-fingered, sun-bearded man, sat on an old tree-stump, and Danny lay across his knees. The Woman was standing by watching, as a mother watches her child in the surgeon's hands; while afar off in the wood-shed sat one upon his thumbs, his back upon the little group.

To him the Englishman looked up and called.

"Do'st know what's coom to this lad o' thine?" he asked.

He who sat upon his thumbs far off, with bowed back, answered nothing.

The Woman came across to him.

"The gentlemans is speaking to you," she said. "Why for do you not reply?"

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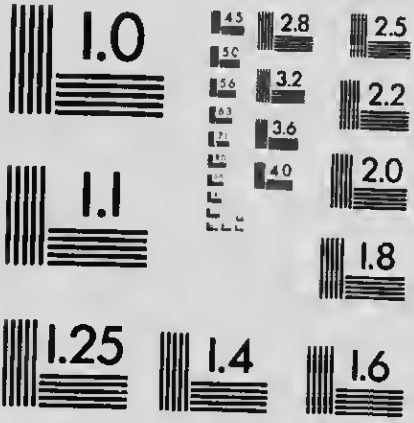

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"I have no Engleesh," said Robin loudly. "Myself I am a Christian."

"Be eeevil for the sake of our man," urged the Woman in hushed tones. "Maybe if you would reply to his questionings he could say what was amiss with our man."

"That would be fine indeed!" cried Robin, flaring. "I am to tell Joliath what is amiss with my man, and he will to go to his Honour—"

"Do you know then what is amiss with him?" interposed the Woman.

"I would not be like to know!" cried Robin bitterly, "I that have loved him and tended him and been fellow to him these ten years."

"If you know," cried the Woman sharply, "why have you not said?"

"I have not been askit," said Robin, tears in his eyes.

"Do you wait to be askit?" cried the angry Woman, "when Danny's a-dying, and we all seeking the cure?"

Robin rose and began to move away.

"If it is his Honour's wull to put the curing of Danny into the hands of paid foreign folk is it for me to interfere?" he asked.

"You was curing him fine!" jeered the Woman, "you that has been sitting sopping at the ale-house these two days, because you said Danny would die."

Robin came back to her with gleaming eyes.

"I will not shame you before your Philistine," he muttered in her ear, "you that are his concumbine for all the world to see I will wait to smite you in your mouth of lies till he has gone."

"Hold away!" shrilled the Woman. "Go and dream dreams and get drunk—you and your Devils in a bag."

"Talkin' o' bags!" called the Englishman after him, "see here! I've summat for the little man!" but Robin stumbled on blindly and ran into the Laird entering the yard.

"Where to?" asked the Laird, pausing, and eying him sternly. "To the ale-house?—to get drunker?"

Robin stood before him, a little ancient figure with dim ringlets and greatly shaking face.

"There is one biding Mr. Heriot in the yard," he said with shivering bitterness—"your Honour's Englisher that you have paid to do for money what I would have done for love," and he turned and trotted off villagewards.

CHAPTER XXXVI

Ban and Counter-ban

Noonday folk were drinking in the alehouse when the great gates at the str . clanged.

The pot-man went to the door, looked out, "God's sake!" he cried and drew a whistling breath.

"What is it?" asked old Andra' curiously.

"Whisht!" whispered the pot-man, motioning for silence. "It's his Honour."

"What of it?" cried young Wekie Menzie. "Who fears his Honour these days?"

"I do," whispered the pot-man, "when the wrath's on him."

"Is the wrath on him?" asked several, suddenly sobered.

"He's marching down the street like the death-wind," whispered the pot-man, withdrawing into the shadow of the door. "I'd be sorry for the soul that crossed his path this day."

A drinker rose, stole across the sanded floor, and peered forth. Another followed. Soon they were all gathered at the door, huddled

man behind man, the last of them upon a chair; only Robin, drinking in the dimmest corner, stirred not.

The Laird was coming down the street alone—not the tall old tottering man of these later days, but one who marched striding, great and gaunt and terrible, his mouth like a sword, his face like a thunder-cloud.

"What's yon on his arm?" whispered Andra'.

"It looks like a death-clout," whispered another.

"It'll be the Englisher's bag," said Robin dully from the dimness.

The topers in the door watched.

"He'll ha' come to call for some one," muttered young Menzies.

"God help whoe'er it be," whispered a second.

"It's Widow Ogg!" said all in one hushed breath, as the Laird turned into a garden and disappeared.

A moment later a sudden dreadful scream smote their ears.

"God's sake!" cried the pot-man, and staggered back.

"It's her death-scream!" said young Menzies, white as whey, but still holding his position at the door.

"God rest her soul!" cried poor old Andra',

shaken to the soul. "He's killed her as he did her man."

"Ay," said dim Robin, "there's power in his Honour's arm yet."

"Here he comes forth!" cried the watcher at the door, and in mortal fear fell back with the others behind the bar.

The Laird swept by the open door, cold, grim, inexorable.

A long minute passed; and no man spoke; then down the street there came a pattering of hurrying feet; and with it a whining, whimpering wailing noise as of some forgotten ghost hunting ancient earth-haunts; then the dead woman stood in the door.

Her hair was loose, and her face shewed dusky through it.

"I'm a dead woman the day!" she hoarsed, and tottered across to the bar. "Give me drink. I'd wash my soul in fire!"

"What ails the body?" chattered the potman, pouring for her with trembling hand. "What ill has his Honour done ye?"

"He put his hand on me!" hoarsed the woman. "He put his curse on me!" and drank, greatly gulping. "I'll ne'er see another dawn. He cursed me; and here's my curse again!"

She gave her skirt a sudden hitch, sank upon bare knees in the sanded floor, and with dread-

ful face uplifted, the foul hair loose about it, began to curse.

"May he never know rest in his bed or his grave! May his death come soon and may it come slow! May the child of his heart be the cause of his end."

She lurched, caught, recovered, lurched again and tumbled in the sand, her hair about her dusky face like cobwebs.

"Ay," said a dim voice from the corner, "there's power in his Honour's arm yet."

CHAPTER XXXVII

How Simon Failed to Earn a Guinea

Later Robin went home to tell the Woman what had befallen Widow Ogg.

The Woman hearkened, callous seemingly as stone.

"Is she dead?" she asked at the end.

"Na," said Robin, "it seemed it was but a fit."

"I would she were," said the gaunt Woman, hate like a black flame in her eyes.

Robin looked up, surprised.

"And you the Christian!" he sneered.

"Go in to the Laird," said the Woman hardly. "He has a word for you."

Robin went in and found the Laird sitting shrouded in the hall, and Danny like one dead at his feet.

Robin beheld his little battle-fellow lying listless there, and gulped.

"So your Honour's Englisher has cured our man fine!" sneered the old man, trembling on the brink of tears.

"He may not have told me the cure," said the Laird, "but he has told me the cause of the trouble which is more than ever you did—Widow Ogg kidnapped him."

"Kidnapped him!" cried Robin, startled out of himself.

"In a bag," said the Laird, "and ran off home and bid Simon take and drown him then and there."

"And did the lad dare?" cried Robin—"he that has the fear of Danny on him worse than the fear of the Devil!"

"Just so," said the Laird, "and his minnie knowing it, told the soft lad it was not Danny, but the Devil was in the bag."

"The Devil in a bag!" cried Robin as in a dream.

"And if he drowned him he'd rid the world of a worthless fellow and get a guinea reward from the police," said the Laird; and continuing told how Simon had set off then and there, had run all night, till he came in the break of the morning to the wee lochan on Windy-hope, and there had flung his burthen into the water; how it chanced that "your friend the Englisher" was not far, and hearing a strange outcry had come thundering up to find Simon skipping like a madman on the bank, screaming that the Devil was drowned, and that he'd earned a

guinea for ridding the world of the Father of wickedness, and pointed to the bag moving faintly beneath the waters. The Englishman had waded in, fished up the bag, and loosed the mouth. Out had crawled Danny more drowned than alive.

When Simon saw that—

"I aye kenn't he was the Devil!" he had screamed, and fled for his life; but the Englishman had pursued, caught and half-killed him. Later, on returning to the lochan to minister to Danny, he had found the little man gone.

"The rest," said the Laird, "you know—except that I have been down to Widow Ogg—and she packs, she and Simon, before nightfall."

Robin listened dumbly as in a dream.

"And now we've found the cause of the trouble," said the Laird, "the question is can we find the cure?"

"I would ask your Honour's Englisher," sneered Robin, trembling.

"I have," said the Laird, "and he says all Danny wants is heartening. Now can you hearten him?"

"So it is to me your Honour turns in the latter end," Robin cried passionately. "Cure him! Who would cure him if I could not, who

have been fellow to him in sorrow and sickness, and battle and murder, morning, noon and midday, these ten years. Cure him!" he cried with kindling bitterness—"if your Honour had come to me at the onset, there would have been no need to cure him at all."

"You'd have made him whole before ever he was ill," said the Laird.

"I would so," said Robin.

"If you could do this before," said the Laird, curtly, "why have you not?"

"I was waiting till you had finished fooling with him," said Robin, shivering. "You and your foreigners and Engleesh," and was going out.

"Put a name to this cure of yours," said the Laird.

"I call it the killing cure," said Robin shortly.

The Laird looked at him.

"The killing cure!" he asked.

"Killing is curing where Danny is concerned," Robin replied. "And if I can entice him back to caring to kill, I can entice him back to caring to live."

"Mind then!" said the Laird, hard as iron—"no murder."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

The Killing Cure

That evening Robin began the cure, hope glowing at his heart. He sat upon a basket in the sun outside the woodshed. Danny was on one knee and on the other a wire cage prisoning as gallant an outlaw company as ever harried a poultry-yard.

Then Robin began to whisper in the old man's ear of the good and bloody days gone by; and ever shook the cage to stir the souls within, while Danny, listless-eyed, reached up a fond tongue to caress the cracked cheek above him. Kindling as he went, the old man swept the strings of memory, singing the glories of many a stricken field; until Danny, kindling too, thrust forth a long gray muzzle to the cage and sniffed.

Sweet in his nostrils was the scent of the gentlemen banditti within, and memory-stirring. His soul came tiding back into his eyes. He waxed and waxed, until it seemed he was his ancient glowing self again.

Rising on Robin's knee he thrust forth a massive paw and tapped at the bars of the cage. Forthwith Robin set the cage upon the ground. Softly Danny leaped down, and cried to the gentlemen adventurers within to come forth and comfort him.

Then Robin clutched his champion by the neck and snatched him back, and thrust him forward, tarring him ever on.

Such was the noise of his urging that the Woman came clacking into the yard in her pattens to see.

"What is this rout and raging of the heathen?" cried she, hitching high her petticoats.

"It's the killing cure," Robin replied, thrusting, snatching. "Ho, the Danny! Ho, the man!"

"It is crueltee," said the Woman. "And it is a joy to you to make to suffer God's dumb creatures."

"It is that," said honest Robin. "Ho, the Danny! Ho, the man!"

"Ah!" cried the Woman, with high petticoats. "You're a' one are men and vermin. Killin's the least of your crueltics."

"It's all in a good cause," cried Robin, thrusting, snatching.

"What cause?"

"The cause of curing Danny," said Robin.

"You will never eure my wean by heathen-murders and bloddinesses!" cried the Woman. "He is not as he onee was, and as you still are. He has ceased to be a man; he has ceased to care for murder; he has come to be a Christian quite."

"Blethers!" said Robin, and shot forth a fat buck-rat, long in the tooth, pursy as an alderman, yet lusty withal.

It was a ten-yard course to the drain. The rat had four of them; then came Danny; and the rat got home by a tail.

"Wh-o-o!" whistled Robin, and drew a long breath; for Danny had stopped as if struck.

Then he eame baek, not scurrying for the mouth of the trap as of old, alert for the next, but ploddingly.

Robin snatched up the eage.

"Ho, the Danny!" he shouted, flaming forth with war-ery to stir. "Ho, the Danny! ho, the man! Remember Jonathan and the Passages of Miehmark!" and shook forth on top of him a shower of rats—a left, and a right beneath his nose, and a wrench; such as of old his soul loved.

He turned not a hair's breadth aside for one of them.

"Danny, man!" whimpered the old man, patting him as he passed.

For the first time in history the little knight snatched back his head and snapped.

The old man stood up and drew a shaking hand across his mouth; it was as if a son had struck him.

"Keep me!" gasped the Woman, and could say no more.

Danny trailed away. When he came to the gate he turned, looked at Robin, then trailed back to the old man's feet, lifted himself, and wagging a hopeless tail, licked the hand that he had snapped at; then he dropped, and trotted out of the yard, the most pathetic sea-grey misery that ever trailed a broken heart behind.

Twenty minutes later Robin and the Woman still stood in the yard.

"It was the pitifullest thing!" said the old man for the fiftieth time, while the tears coursed down his cheeks—"the pitifullest thing! Forgive me!" he said, "it was none of me. Danny's dead. And so," sobbed the old man, "he is."

"Where will he be?" asked the Woman, drying her own eyes.

"He'll none be far," said Robin. "He'll be lying his lone, and wearing his heart away because he will never kill more," and he turned off into the house to the Laird.

That old man knew already. He had been at

the window when there had passed before his eyes across the green a small, sad shadow in grey, trailing a broken heart behind.

As Robin entered he turned from his post at the window with bleak, angered eyes.

"Much good you have done!" he cried.

Robin looked at him.

"Kill him your own gate!" he sobbed, and flung forth.

All the evening and on into the dusk Danny was away. He shunned the house, and he shunned all company. Man-like, as the Woman said, he preferred to break his heart alone.

Towards nightfall, at the time of that deep stillness that often falls between the sleeping of the day and the waking of the night, the beetles twanging in the hush, and everywhere the scent and stir of night stealing forth from the hidden places of the dark, Robin was on the hill where the birch-woods march with the moors, searching a vagrant hen, who had stolen her nest up there.

On Fir-tree Knowe, on the western face of Lammer-more, in that same spot where in dear summer evenings of the long ago Missie had been wont to come, she and her young knight, to watch the shadows stealing over the land, pale Burn-Water,and afar the sea, like a spear of

gold barring the gate of earth, lay the mourner, grey head between grey paws, watching the glory gather in the west and fade away.

Robin stood afar off and watched him; nor for awhile could speak.

"Come, then, mannie!" he called at last, his heart full of tears.

The little knight rose and trailed across to him, weary, sad, and small, the dying glory of the sunset in his eyes; and Robin, sniffling, lifted him in fond arms and kissed him, there where none were by to see but God and the pale evening star.

Then the two sat off together through the falling night like a pair of lovers made one after many years; Robin with choking throat calling to mind the day when the ancestress of that same lady-hen they sought had mothered a mixed brood, and Danny, happening on them in the wood, had slain the little pheasants, nor touched the chickens, and what had come of it.

"It was 'Mind, no murder!' then," said the old man, tramping down the hill, "and it's 'Mind, no murder!' still. But now," he said with misty eyes upon the grey shadow before him, "I do think there will be never more any murders to mind."

It was Danny found her they sought in a

dry ditch among the bracken at the edge of the wood.

She would not stir for him, clucking curses at him; but Robin caught her deftly by the legs, and counted the eggs; and Danny sat by listlessly and watched

"She can bide here," said the old man, and replaced the clucking mother. "It's little like there'll be any on the hill now Simon Ogg and his Minnie are away."

A shadow, faint as a ghost, fell across his feet.

"I am here," said a voice as of that ghost. "and minnie is in Hell an hour agone."

CHAPTER XXXIX

The Warrior Wakes

Very sorrowfully next morning Robin awaited his Weary Heart.

Long he waited at the old trysting place beneath the riven fir where the two had met at dawn any morning these eight years past; yet no Danny came.

The minutes passed, the mists drew off from the face of the moors, and still there was no sad trailing shadow of grey. Once indeed he thought he heard a merry hunting cry in the wood above him, then knew it for the ghost of such a sound come to him out of the dead long ago.

A sudden horror seized the old man. The shadowy presence of Simon Ogg the night before, come and gone before he could stay it, had unnerved him. All night long he had tossed uneasily, and awhile before the dawn had fallen asleep and in his sleep had dreamed. And in his dream he had seen the Laird dead upon his bed, a handkerchief across his face, and on his breast one lying, eating his heart away. He

had screamed, and the eater had looked up and lo! it was Danny; yet not Danny, but one like him as himself only with serpent's eyes.

As he recalled the horror of it, a panic seized the old man.

He turned and fled fearfully down the hill towards the house; and just then there appeared to him cantering over the brow of the hill a sturdy warrior in grey.

The old man brought up with a gasp.

Danny came ploughing through the bracken at three-cornered canter, greeted the old man merrily as of old with grin and friendly twinkle of ears.

Robin regarded him incredulously.

Here was not the Weary Heart of the night before, who had refused with sad eyes to pursue Simon Ogg; this was the Warden of the Marches, glowing, battle-alert, the shadow lifted.

Robin fell upon his knees.

"Is it my man indeed?" he cried, and stretched forth doubting old hands to feel the warm body, throbbing and solid beneath his touch.

Then he rose from his knees.

"It is a miracle!" he cried with breaking voice, "or he has killed again."

As the two entered upon the woods, fragrant

and shimmering from bath of dew and stars, Robin dared hardly breathe. He walked stealthily, all eyes upon his ancient battle-fellow. And Danny, the delight of life, tiding back on him, marched in front as though to pipe music, his silver stern like a young knight's banneret amid the bracken.

Busy, bloody, alert, he went, rousing the sluggard woods. Now he stood at gaze, stone-still and with sentinel ears; now he scurried away, nose down and with spurting hind legs, as though upon the track of Missie late walking in the dew. Renewing fellowship with life, he greeted many a half-forgotten boulder and lawn among the bracken where, while he slept, had gathered in the moonlight councils of friendly foes—red tod and hoary badger and all the dew-loving outlawry of moss and moor.

And when by the cleft rock whence springs a rowan like a lady's plume, loved long ago of one who would lie beneath its feathery canopy and dream, the Warden flashed out of his path and slew a mole, with all the old fervour of devotion, Robin knee-deep in the bracken, took off his cap and with face lifted to heaven, cried, "He cares to kill: he cares again to live," and said grace to God because his warrior was himself again.

Afterwards he gathered the sleek corpse,

patted its little dead hands fatherly, and thrust it into his bosom for the Laird to see. Then he spoke burning words to the little knight and marched triumphant through the singing morning.

So they came to the northern borders of the wood, Danny still skirmishing in front.

Robin watched him hunt past the spot where last night the vagrant hen had pitched her tent, and cast on up the moor.

Robin wondered. The Lady of the Ditch had not arisen to curse him as he passed; nor had the courtly Warden thrown her greeting.

"She has deserted," thought Robin, and approached to inspect.

As he had thought, so it proved. The nest was deserted, and the eggs stone-cold; and yet he knew her for a mother, this gypsy lady, admirable among many.

The old man looked about him, marked a slur in the dry dust of the ditch as of a body dragged; and pursuing it came on a soft curled feather blood-dabbled.

There could be no longer any doubt: here had been a moorland tragedy. And at the moment up came Danny, rapt in search.

Robin scratched his head. And first he said it would be a tod; and then he said it would be a Visitation of the Lord; and last he said the

Laird would be a fashed man the day; for next to Danny the Laird held his Silver Greys dear to his soul, because in the past they had been the particular care of Missie.

Pondering thus, the old man trotted home to report. And because he was afraid, he clothed himself as ever in brazen armour. Brazen was his report and brazen his end.

"The Lord gave and the Lord took away; and there's just no more to be said on it."

The Laird rose to his feet.

"Ye breed o' the gowk!" he said, swept his cloak about him, and went forth into the morning, he and Danny and rude injured Robin, to inspect.

On the borders of moor and wood he stood over the scene of the tragedy, white, ominous, and with thunder-brow.

"How came it that you let her bide out here away in the wilderness?" he asked, turning to Robin.

"You never tell't me not," said injured Robin.

"I knew you for a fool," said the Laird. "I hardly thought you was an Abject."

Robin turned his back.

"Ye can tend yer own fools from now," he said shortly.

So while he sulked, Danny must needs show

the Laird all there was to see; and the Warden did his part keenly and with interest; and the Laird watched him.

"He is better," he said at last. "He is more himself."

"I tell't you if you left him to me I would cure him for you," said Robin, his back still on his master.

"It's no fault of yours," said the Laird. "It is this murder you have let take place."

Robin turned.

"And who was it but me left her there to be murdered?" he cried hotly. "There is no justice in your Honour whatever. I had to waken him as best I could, and well I kenn't the only gate was by battle or murder. And now that I have let this murder take place and have cured him for you, my reward is to be called a Abjeck! a Abjeck!"

"Blether!" said the Laird, and turned to Danny's cry.

The little man was busily unearthing the corpse of the murdered lady scantily sepultured beneath a juniper bush.

The Laird picked up the body. The neck seemed wrung, and a bead of blood hung from the beak. For the rest there was never a scar on her plump broody body.

"This is no fox," said the Laird.

"Na," said Robin, "it is just a visitation of the Lord."

"It's nothing of the sort," said the Laird, "it is murder."

He turned suddenly to find Danny behind him with lowered tail mouthing the murdered bird.

A wave of grey crept across his face.

He turned to Robin.

"Has he had any hand in this?" he asked quietly.

"Him!" cried Robin. "Would ye make our man a murderer?"

"I'd know that," said the Laird, very still and grey.

"Never!" cried Robin. "He'd sooner kill your Honour than a fowl. Minnie put that into him—'*A Murder, A Lie,*' ye ken. She taught him that fine."

The Laird stared at the little grey man now throbbing at his feet, and the colour tided back into his face.

"Well for him!" he said, striding off. "I will have no murders, mind!"

"*Why then have you murdered minnie?*" came a shrill voice from out of the woods.

The Laird came to sudden halt.

"Who's you?" he cried.

There was silence; then the voice replied—

"*The son of a murdered man and a murdered minnie!*"

The Laird turned to Robin.

"Is Widow Ogg dead?" he asked aghast.

"Ay," said Robin, "your Honour banned her and she died. There's power in your Honour's arm yet," he added with reluctant admiration.

"I never banned her," said the Laird. "God rest her poor soul. I must go and see to this. Come, Danny," and he strode off village-wards, Danny hopping three-legged at his heels.

CHAPTER XL

Her

The Laird was writing busily next morning when Robin appeared in the hall. His hand was behind him, and Danny at his heels.

"I was right," he said, nodding.

"You aye are," said the Laird, writing on. "What is it?"

"It's the Lord as I tell't ye," said Robin. "He has seen good to take young Obadiah," and held up a lank-necked cockerel.

"I knew it," said the Laird irritably. "Once you let it begin, it would go on. Where did ye find him?"

"I didna find him."

"Who did then?"

"Danny."

"He's worth six of you," said the Laird. "What's he at now?" he asked, peering.

"Catching the drops from the neb of the departed," said Robin.

The Laird looked and saw his Squire sitting still as a grey statue with delicate pink tongue

and tilted muzzle, catching the red drops as they fell from the beak of the dead bird.

"Danny!" called the Laird, sharp as shot. "Don't play at murder!" and the little man rose and came to him across the stone-flags looking for once a little foolish.

That evening in the dusk, the Laird tramping home from the village met Robin arrayed in all his blacks going village-wards.

"Where away?" asked the Laird, pausing.

"To Widow Ogg's waking," said the old man.

"No, you're not," said the Laird, "I'm not going to have you making a beast of yourself over this business," and laying great hands on the old man's shoulders, he trundled him, shrilly protesting, home, and thrust him into the kitchen.

"You're best out of the village till after the funeral, d'you hear, Crabbe?" he said. "There's black enough feeling among the folks without your stirring it."

"What!" cried Robin. "Will I no even follow her funeral?—I who have made it my duty to follow every funeral in this parish for sixty years and seven."

"You'll make it your duty to do your duty for once," said the Laird. "There's going to be a plague of murder among my fowls, from

what I can see; and it's for you to stop it. And as you'll never do that by yourself, I'll leave Danny to help you. Besides, I don't want him in and out of the village either just now."

"Why not?" cried the Woman. "He is not a drunkard, is not my wean. He is but a brute-beast, and not a God-made man."

"Because," said the Laird, "Simon Ogg seems scarce himself; and I'm afraid lest he might do Danny a mischief," and he strode off into the night.

Robin sat down in dudgeon.

"I winna follow the funeral as it is his Honour's orders," he said. "But if the Lord wants his Honour's fowls He shall have them for me."

Thereafter it was as the Laird had foretold: murder was among the fowls like a plague, and Danny, ever alert, unearthed the victims meagrely buried in secret places in the woods; but Robin refused to stir.

"What must must be," said the good old man, "and I am not complaining."

"You would not be!" cried the angry Woman. "The fowls are not yours."

"Na," said pious Robin, "they're the Lord's to do with as He wills," and sat with folded hands fast in his devout belief.

"And would it pleasure the Lord to put a plague on his Honour's fowls!" screamed the Woman.

"Ay," said Robin, "if Danny might thereby be made whole."

So far the old man was right. For Danny indeed the campaign of blood and mystery had done what seas of drops and drinks would have failed to do. He was born again miraculously, and Warden of the Marches, he was indefatigable in the Cause. Almost it seemed as if by double diligence he would make up for his battle-fellow's falling off.

Morning and evening he patrolled the hill alone, and it seemed he never slept. Now you might come on him visiting outposts on Lammer-more; again he stole forth form the lurking place of watch in the birch-woods, and stood anon, alert warrior-figure on some eminent knowe amid the bracken to scan the passes; yet the plague grew.

"We will lose all our fowls for sure!" cried the Woman in despair, on the morning of the fourth day.

"If the Lord has appointed it He will surely so," said the fatalist of the folded hands.

"The Lord!" scoffed the angry Woman. "It is little the Lord you are considering! It is just

spite because his Honour forbade ye the funeral because of your drunkenness."

"Ay," cried Robin, with sudden passion, "Seventy and seven years have I lived in this parish, and never thought to live to see the day when I would miss a funeral. Oh!" he cried, breaking down utterly, "it's enough to rive a heart of stone!"

That afternoon the old man was standing on a bare hillock in the birch-woods, hearkening wistfully to the tolling of the minute-bell in the village beneath, when he beheld the Woman moving secretly among the woods beneath, like a lean old witch.

He followed and sprang upon her.

"What gars ye anowt among my woods, Sowie?" he asked with asperity. "Are ye searching husks?"

"I'm just takin' a turn round," said the Woman shortly.

"Ha' ye seen anything?"

"I saw Danny," said the Woman.

"Danny!" cried Robin. "What then was Danny at?"

"What you should be at," snapped the Woman—"creeping."

"Creeping!" cried Robin. "Who was he creeping?"

"Her."

"Who?"

"Her what is murdering your fowls."

"Who is she but the Lord?" said Robin.

"You still hold it is the Lord?" asked the Woman, turning on him.

"Certainly so," said Robin.

The Woman shot forth a lean neck.

"If it is the Lord," she said, "why for do you set traps?"

For all his pious resignation, he did set traps. Deftly he set them, with gloved hands, lest the reek of his humanity should betray him; and Danny sat by the while and watched with earnest eyes, listening shrewdly as the old man expounded to him the ways of them.

The traps caught many—foumart and sweet mart, and once an otter by the saugh at the passage of the burn; and Danny out of his heart of pity went his rounds and put the captives out of pain; but never as Robin reported to the Laird, Her or any like Her.

"Her?" said the Laird, who, now the funeral was over, seemed to have fallen back on sleep. "Who is Her?"

"She is Her," said Robin shortly. "She that is plagueing your fowls, of course."

"I thought ye said——" began the Laird.

"I said nothing of the sort," interrupted

Robin. "I say She is Her, and Her ways are the ways of Death. She comes like the Shadow and goes like the same; and who She is in heaven or earth or under the earth I know no more than the unbornest babe."

Indeed She was a mystery and likely to remain so, for watch and ward as the old man might, he came no nearer to discovering her. There was no sign, no scent; nothing for him or Danny to take hold upon.

Sometimes it almost seemed as if with devilish laughter She was mocking the old man and his battle-mate; for when they went the round of the traps together in the hoary dawns, not once or twice but many times they found them unearthed and sprung.

Once even, when in a lonely likely spot beneath the wall of Lammer-more, where passes and repasses in the night the traffic of the moors, he had tethered a young bird as bait, and had set around an array of traps cunningly earthed over, and in the dripping dawn had hurried, he and Danny, to inspect, lo! the bird was dead, and all around in grim ironic circle, the traps lay naked, sprung, and grinning with clenched teeth at the mocking heavens.

Robin went home and into the hall, and flung the dead bird at the Laird's feet.

"There's just this one thing sure!" he cried,

passionate as a baffled child—"She is not of this world."

"Why that?" asked the Laird.

"If She had been," said Robin, "She'd have been of the next by this, or do not put your trust in Robin Crabbe."

"I don't," said the Laird, "else I'd be disappointed."

Robin turned on him.

"And how will I, that am but mortal, prevail against a wraith?" he cried hotly.

"Can't yer dreams help ye?" said the grim Laird, and fell back into sleep.

Robin retreated sulkily into the kitchen; but there was now no comfort for him; the Woman mocking him because he had not vanquished Her.

"It is little wonder She beats you," she cried; "but I do wonder She beats Danny."

"I will catch Her for you when I put out," said Robin, who had been up all night in vain.

"Have you not then put out yet?" scoffed the Woman.

"Not to say put out," Robin replied. "I have been waiting till Danny was all whole. This Visitation has been the mending of our man, and I do think Missie besought the Lord to send it upon us for his sake. And if I had caught Her at the beginning, he would have

"SAT OUT THE WORLD-WEARYING SERVICE"

fallen back upon his misery. It was worth a hantle of fools," added the old man, "to have Danny whole again."

"He is whole now," said the Woman, catching up her wean in fond arms. "He is himself again!—blessings on Missie who sent him so. Ye might put out now."

"And maybe I will," said Robin, "and you will see."

"And I will believe," scoffed the Woman, "when I see."

"I will bring you the Head of Her for your lap," said Robin.

"When?" mocked the Woman.

"When I have it?" said Robin.

"And when will that be?"

"When I put out," said Robin.

That forenoon, going the rounds of the traps on Lammer-more Danny found in one of them not Her but Jael, the soot-and-sulphur cat, squatting hag-like and with murderous eyes.

The little gentleman scuttled off hot-foot to tell Robin, scuttled back to tell the lady help was at hand, and setting down just out of claw-shot, bore himself to her courtly and with tender sympathy; and she cursed him for the woods to hear.

Robin loosed her and found her little hurt,

lean old harridan that she was. He bore her home and comforted her with milk and ministerings, while tender Danny licked her wounds to make them well; then the old man smothered her in the blood of a calf, and bore her lapped in a bloody handkerchief to the Woman.

"I have something for you, Lucky," said he.

"The Head of Her!" cried the Woman, wiping her hands upon her apron, grimly gleeful.

"Ne'er a doubt," said Robin, and rolled forth his captive into her lap, bloody and woe-begone.

The Woman did not scream.

"His Honour shall deal with you for this, Robin Crabbe," she said; and her hands were trembling. "You have killed her quite."

"Not quite," said Robin. "She lingers yet," and was marching off.

"I see how it is," screamed the Woman after him. "You canna catch Her, so to show you can catch something you thrust my motherless cat into your trap, and say you have snared her, ye misbegotten monkey-puzzle!"

"And how could I catch her with your weary cats putting their foots in my trap and setting them off?" cried Robin.

"She didna," screamed the Woman. "You thrust her in. I see ye!"

"You saw me!" cried Robin, pointing with accusing finger. "And you let her bide there! O ye——"

"Ay," screamed the Woman. "And you are a mock to the whole village because you canna catch Her, even Simon Ogg saying he kens what he kens, and that he could catch Her and kill her and stuff her and a' while you wiped your dreep-eye."

CHAPTER XLI

Simon Whispers

That evening as Simon Ogg crouched over the fire, untieing a string with his teeth, the door of the cottage opened.

He looked round, lowering, and saw one in the door regarding him, who did not speak.

Simon half rose, then sat down again, shivering.

"What gars ye glower at me that gate?" he asked at length, sullen and a little cowed.

"Just nothing at all," said Robin, staring on. "I was but just wondering if you would be long for this world," he added.

He leaned against the door-post, staring ever; nor made any move to go.

Simon fidgeted, the fear creeping upon him like a white mist.

"What is at all?" he asked at last, pale-eyed, furtive.

"It's just this," said Robin, spearing him with watery eye—"that you ken what you ken."

"In the matter of what?" chattered Simon.

"In the matter of this Visitation of my fowls."

"I do but suspicion," mumbled Simon.

"I do that myself," said Robin, darkly.

"Then there will be no need for me to tell you," said Simon with hunted eyes.

"None," said Robin ominously. "Yet if it might be like an ease to you to tell me that you ken, I will hear you—I who have his Honour's private ear, and maybe could satisfy him."

"Is it his Honour then?" asked Simon fearfully.

"Certainly so," said Robin.

The hunted look grew in Simon's eyes.

"I would ask Danny," he said. "There is few things hid from him."

"And I have," said Robin.

"You have!" cried Simon, leaping like a shot deer. "And what said he?"

"He tell't me," said Robin slowly, watching the other's panic, "that an enemy had done this thing."

Simon collapsed.

"It was shown to me," he said, shaking in his chair, "that it was a friend."

"A friend?" cried Robin. "Whose friend?"

"Danny's," said Simon, and watched the old man.

"It is the same," said Robin, carelessly. "He loves his enemies like the Christian he is."

Simon sat back.

"If She is Danny's friend then he will tell you the best gate to overcome Her," he said cunningly.

"What!" cried Robin indignantly. "Would ye ha' him betray his friends?"

Simon thrust his hands home in his pockets, and tilted back in his chair.

"I will tell you nothing," he said, and tat-tat-tatted with his heels on the floor.

"I am not asking you," said Robin. "And why will you not?"

"I canna," said Simon. "I just canna," and bowed his face in trembling hands.

"Why not."

"The Laird would kill me," said Simon. "That's just why," and he looked up in the old man's face.

"There is worse trials than death," said Robin significantly. "A dour man's his Honour. He spares none—and least of all one of your familee."

"And what can his Honour do to me?" cried Simon.

"What can he not?" said Robin. "The son of your father and mother should ken that without any telling of mine."

Simon rose to his feet.

"Ay!" he cried recklessly, "he may murder

here and there one yet; but he's wearin' awa', he's wearin' awa'. He'll soon be at his rest now, and Hepburn will know peace."

Robin regarded the youth with compassionate eyes.

"I will tell you this, Simon Ogg," he said softly, "for your father's sake what we killed on Gaunt Scaur, and for your minnie's sake, who came by her end we all ken how: the day of the Laird's death will be a day of dool for Hepburn and above all for you."

"It is the day I am living for!" cried Simon. "I will be free! We will all be free. There'll be no more Kirk-keeping and blethers! He is the last of them dour Heriots! When we've won through him there will be none left to follow him."

"None," said Robin quietly, "but one."

Simon looked up.

"Ay," he sneered. "Robin Crabbe."

"And more than me," said Robin.

"An heir?" cried Simon, startled.

"An heir," said Robin nodding, "and more."

"A Heriot?" screamed Simon.

"A Heriot," said Robin, "and waur."

"Waur?" cried Simon. "Who?"

Robin looked at him.

"Daniel, son of Ivor," said the old man in reverent voice.

"He is but a dog," said Simon with apparent uneasiness.

"But a dog!" cried Robin, and stared at him. "I do wonder at that from you of all men, Simon Ogg. Who was it tell't his Honour that you broke your Kirk? Who was it was drowned and came to life again?"

He drew closer mysteriously.

"I may not tell you much," he whispered, "but I will tell you this. Years ago, in the beginning, there cam' to me a hantle o' folks from the village who asked me if Danny and his Honour had the one soul between them. Ye may have heard the tale?"

"I heard they asked ye," said Simon, "and your answer was—'There's the door! Get ye gone!'"

"Ay," said Robin, "and they all went—all but old Curstie Menzies that's gone. He stayed. And I tell't him. 'Na,' he said, 'na,' upraising his hand as though to quell a clamour. 'I tell't none before, an I have tell't none since. But I will tell *you* this: There's some of ye hold his Honour for a hard man—I kenna what ye'll think when he's gone; but if you should be thinking that when he's away there'll be no more Kirk-keeping and the like ye'll be sore mista'en.'"

Simon sat long, wrought, it seemed, in mind

and body; then he rose like a host, and drew close to the old man.

"See here, Mr. Crabbe," he said, low. "I will tell you a *sure* and *certain* way to overcome Her, if you in your turn will tell me how you alone of all of us keep no Kirks."

"I have a dispensation from his Honour because of my swoonings that overcome me at Kirk, when I must be carried forth, and the people are disturbed," said Robin.

Simon sucked in his cheeks.

"And now," said Robin, "as to Her."

Simon looked up.

"Ye'll say no word to his Honour as to what you have tell't me as to the Kirks," he said cunningly.

"Trust me," said Robin, "and see."

Simon drew closer.

"Is Danny with you," he whispered.

"Na."

"Where is he?" asked Simon suspiciously.

"He is watching against Her while I am away."

"If I was to whisper you something, would he hear?" asked Simon.

"Not if you was to whisper low," said Robin. "He is a mile or more."

Simon tiptoed to the door and looked out;

then he locked it, went to the window, and shut the shutters.

Inside the room was darkness, and the red glow of the peat fire.

"Whisper," said Simon, and knelt beside the old man now sitting by the fire; and even in the dimness Robin marked his face white as a winter's moon.

Robin then rose.

"It's what I was going to do without any telling of yours," he said, and went out.

"Was ye?" cried Simon. "Then if ill comes of it do not blame on me!"

"And if ill comes of it," said Robin, turning, "be sure his Honour will deal with you as he dealt with your familee before you."

The door behind him slammed; bars and bolts rang home.

"Did not minnie say?" screamed a voice in sudden dreadful frenzy of fear. "'First your daddie! now your minnie! and next 'twill be you!—and then maybe his Honour'll rest content!'—that was my murdered minnie's last word to me!"

CHAPTER XLII

Robin Takes a Turn

As the Laird sat in the hall in the dusk of that evening, like an old deserted eagle, Robin came in.

Leaning against the door the old man shook with silent laughter.

"Where is Danny?" asked the Laird peevishly.

"He is here with me," said Robin, and laughed and laughed against the door.

"He is all the time with you these days," snapped the Laird. "He has quite deserted me."

"It is Her he is after," said Robin, shaking still with mirth. "I have taken a fine turn," he added, wiping his eyes.

"You've taken something besides a turn," said the Laird, "or I'm mistaken."

"Ne'er a taste or a toothful," said Robin, and laughed on. "I was hieing back from the village where I'd been——"

"Pot-swabbing," said the Laird.

"On your business," said Robin.

"While She visited my fowls like as not," the Laird retorted.

"Which I left Danny to watch and ward for you," said Robin.

"It was at the fall of night," the old man continued, "and I came by way of the wood for fear I might happen on Her for your Honour; and of a sudden I heard by me a girning and scraffling among the bushes. Her! thinks I, claps down on my flat face, and creeps and keeks, and creeps and keeks, till I came where I could see; and there in an opening stood a bit bushie, and anunder it like it might be a tod stirring and scraffling. And I kenn't She was burying her dead."

The old man paused to pass his hand across his mouth.

"A-well, I stopped to keek; and as I stopped the scraffling stopped, as though She suspeccion'd me. I just lay still and look'd, and there beside the bush against the light I saw two projectiles—like so!" said Robin, holding up two fingers.

"Like what?" snapped the Laird. "I can't see."

"Like two spears, or the ears of a tod upcocken," said Robin.

"Could ye see no more?" asked the Laird.

"Not a thing," said Robin. "A-well, a bit passed, then the projectiles dropped, and the scrafflin' began. Now is my time! thinks I; the Lord has delivered Her into my hand! and I het on to my stick and I lowpit."

He paused to snigger.

"And as I lowpit, She looked up."

"It was Her then?" said the Laird.

"It was Danny!" cried Robin, and leaned against the door shaking with laughter—"Just Danny!" he gasped, "who but Danny?"

The Laird thrust out of the dimness.

"Damn you!" he cried huskily. "Stop that giggling and get on!"

Robin pulled himself together.

"I am gettin' on widout your damns," he said with dignity, and got on.

"A-well, as I tell you, as I saw him, he saw me, and man!" cried Robin—"for the first time ever I kenn't it Danny was fear'd. He cower't away like as I'd been the Cherubim with the Flaming Sword, and he'd been the Serpent—yet glowerin' and girnin', his teeth stripped and hair on edge. I'm no easy fley'd, but I was maist scared myself—he look't that queer. And I'm no denying I looked fearsome myself—in the half-dark and my hand raised, and the battle-look on my face enough to put the fear into a thousand."

"Cut the cackle!" ordered the Laird hoarsely, "and get on!"

"Then he saw it was me—What, it's you, Robin? he seemed to say. I thought you was Her! and he came to me kind o' wore and wornkly and ashamed. But O!" said the old man, and began snickering again. "It was mighty laffable—me thinkin' him was Her; and him thinkin' me was She."

"I don't understand yet," said the Laird, hoarse still.

"Ye will in a while," said Robin, "for when I'd done laffin' and cryin' and pettin' him, he led me back to the bushie —'See what I have here for you, Robin!' says he, and brings her out——"

"Her?" hoarsed the Laird.

"Not Her," said Robin, laughing still. "Her handiwork!" and threw a dead bird at the Laird's feet.

The Laird sat breathing noisily in the silence; and Danny padded across the floor and sat down at his feet.

Robin was still laughing by the door.

"I affirm," said he, "I took a gey turn; but it was mighty laffable — what I thought was Her buryin' a corp bein' Danny unburyin' one."

"I don't know about the laughableness,"

said the Laird. "I know you gave me a fair turn," and he cleared his throat.

"If you were as good at catching Her as Danny at resurrecting their corpses," he continued, "I for one'd be a pleased man."

"I have catch'd her," said Robin, "as good as."

The Laird eyed him.

"What is it now?" he asked. "You have failed to catch your wraith in a trap; what will you try next—before you fail?"

"I will try poison," said Robin, "and I will not fail."

"What poison?"

"Nuts-vomit-Her," said Robin.

"Who put you to this?" asked the Laird darkly.

"I put myself to it," said Robin shortly.

"And what of Danny?" asked the Laird.

"He and me will lay it together," said Robin, "and I will tell him and he will ken, who is as clever as any Christian of us all."

"If there's going to be poison about, ye'll do more than tell him," said the Laird, "ye'll muzzle him. I'll have no playing with poisons."

Robin turned sourly.

"With regard to playing," he said, "it has been shewn to me that there is one in the village will be about playing on you for the time when

you will not be there. He is saying you are wearing away, and I was not denying it; and that the day of your death will be a day of jubilee in Hepburn."

"Who is that one?" said the Laird.

"Simon Ogg," said Robin.

"I knew the lad was black and bitter against me," said the Laird gravely. "I went to have a word with him after the funeral, and he glowered and glowered at me as though I'd been the Devil, and answered never a word. He seemed half scared out of his skin, and yet with a dark way to him like his mother at her worst. I suppose he puts her death at my door?"

"He does so," said Robin. "But it is not for his minnie at all, it is for himself that he is fear'd —because of her last word about your Honour."

"Her last word!" said the Laird. "What was that?"

"Just that if he didna kill your Honour, your Honour would be after killing him—'And who kills Danny, kills the Laird!' says she, and straight she put the Black Ban on ye and died."

The Laird was suddenly alert.

"Did she say that?" he asked.

"So they are saying in the village," Robin replied.

"Who was it put ye to this poisoning?" he asked harshly.

"I put myself to it," said Robin.

The Laird thrust forward in the dimness.

"Simon Ogg had no hand in it?" he asked insistently.

"A-well," said Robin, "maybe him and me together a bit."

The Laird sat back.

"To-morrow is the Sabbath," said he. "I will have a word with Simon after Kirk."

Robin began to move away.

"Simon's none so well," he said. "I do half fear that the morn he will be overcome with swoonings in the Kirk, and the lave of the congregation will rise to carry him out."

"How came ye by this?" asked the Laird.

"I have my dreams," said Robin, and went out.

CHAPTER XLIII

The Swooning of Simon

On the morrow the Laird marched to Kirk, as of wont.

As he stalked into the porch, the Keeper of the Door at his heels, he was looking gaunt and very old.

"The Laird has killed his last, I do think," said one of a little group beside a grave where as yet no grass grew.

"There is one left yet," said a bitter voice behind.

The Laird entered, stalked up the aisle and into the foremost pew, numbered his people with grim, discerning eyes, and nodded to the clerk, and the Liturgy began; while Danny lay down in the porch to keep the door.

Half-way through the Liturgy, as the Reader came to the dreadful words of the Communion Service—

"Lechery, Treachery, a Murder, a Lie—these are the Abominations," there arose a commotion at the back of the Kirk.

The Reader paused; and the Laird closed his book.

"Let no man stir!" said he, and folding his hands behind him stood in the foremost pew, tall frozen figure with white hair and inky cloak, his back to the congregation A great hush fell on all.

Then out of the stillness a voice spoke, low and urgent.

"Hi some of you!" it said. "I have fainted."

Then Andra' Gillray, hoary elder of the congregation, stepped up to the Laird.

"It is Simon Ogg, your Honour," he said.

"I heard," said the Laird briefly.

"Will we carry him out?" asked old Andra'.

"Why should ye?" said the Laird.

"He has swooned clean away, your Honour."

"Has he so?" said the Laird. "Then he cannot hear."

"That he canna," said Andra'. "He is deaf as the dead."

"Then it's little good continuing the services," said the Laird.

"None at all, your Honour," said Andra', and winked at the grinning people.

The Laird bowed his head.

"Let us sit down," said he, "and wait until Simon Ogg has thought better of his fainting," and he sat down.

So they sat down. In the foremost pew was the Laird, mute and mild and terrible; behind him the people like huddled sheep; and in the centre, lying comfortlessly, his red head rolling on the stony floor, the swooning Simon; while in the porch lay Danny, his chin upon the threshold, watching the sufferer with eyes of tender interest.

The minutes passed and no man stirred. At last Andra', greatly daring, rose and again approached the Laird.

"He is lying with his head in the aisle and his feet in the bench, your Honour," he whispered urgently.

"He arranged himself," said the Laird.

"The blood will puddle in his head," said the old man.

"He will come round the quicker," said the Laird; and Andra' retreated.

Ten minutes later Simon rose and stood uncertainly, for the blood was in his head like a mill-race; and dusted his knees.

"Get on with it!" he said sullenly.

"Take your time, my lad," said the Laird, not moving. "You will be more yourself in a quarter."

Twenty minutes later the Laird turned.

"How are we now?" he asked mildly.

"I'll sit it out," said Simon.

The Laird rose.

"And now," said he, "for love of Simon Ogg we will turn back and start from the beginning."

Two hours later Simon hurried forth first of the congregation.

Over the wall of the Kirk-garth leaned Robin.

"A-well, Simie," he said, "how is it you're behind your time?"

Simon came to him over the graves quickly.

"You have not catch'd Her?" he said breathlessly.

"A-well," said Robin. "I have not. I have not tried."

"Now I will try," said Simon, and was hustling off, when a great hand on his shoulder stayed him.

"I've been thinking over you, my lad," said the Laird, not unkindly. "And I judge you're best away for a bit. You're doing no good here, and for all I know you may be doing harm." He looked him gravely in the eyes. "So I've found you work away at the quarries at Bumfechan; and you'll start to-morrow."

"Will I?" said Simon insolently.

"Ye will," said the grim Laird; "I'll come and put ye away myself," and stalked off, he and Danny.

"Ay," screamed Simon—"first daddy! next

minnie! now me! It's just as minnie said, 'You or him,' says she. "T'ane or 'tither. One o' ye'll go: and t'ither'll stay.' And we'll see yet *which*," and he fled furiously down the street.

CHAPTER XLIV

The Night-watchman

All that Sabbath evening Robin and Danny worked together secretly in the birch-woods, and all along the burn where at night passes the traffic of the moors. And ever and anon in some hidden likely place the old man paused as one who sows; then he turned to Danny and spoke, and the little knight listened shrewdly, and understood as the other expounded to him that the seed he sowed was the seed of the Tree of Death.

In the hallowed calm of evening, the two came down together from off the hill; and at the brae-foot the Woman met them.

"And what bloodiness and slaughter have you been up to on this holy day?" she asked with ill-boding face.

"We have been after the work of the Lord, on this day of the Lord," said Robin.

The Woman eyed him darkly.

"How do you call that work?" she asked.

"Mortifying the flesh," said Robin.

"Whose flesh?" asked the Woman.

"Her's," said Robin; "for it was shewn to me in a dream that she would defile this day with Her murders, and it is not well," said the good old man, "that such as profane this day should go scatheless."

"It is *not* well," said the Woman, ominous-eyed.

"And so," continued Robin. "I having my Message, set forth blythely. And I do think, She will be like to take home with Her this night a comfort that will gar Her mind the Lord's Day for aye and for ever."

The Woman was long silent, scowling.

"So sure as you have defiled the Lord's Day, so sure you will have brought ill upon this House!" she cried at last.

Next morning Robin came into the kitchen early, uneasy and alone.

"Morn, Sluttie!" said he, assuming a pale cheerfulnes "Ha' ye seen Danny anywheres here-away?" and he peered about for his missing battle-mate.

The Woman slapped and slammed among her pans without a word.

"Come, sweetie!" coaxed Robin. "Honey! my hiennie! Where is the man?"

"Where he is like to be," snapped the Woman, "away."

"Away!" cried Robin, startled. "Where away?"

"With his Honour in his room," replied the Woman.

Robin looked at her, scared.

"What's come to his Honour then?" he asked.

"Come to him!" cried the Woman, her tongue suddenly loosed. "What was like to come to him with you breaking the Lord's Day! I tell't you ill would come of it! I tell't you you had brought a judgment on us, you with your mortifyings of Her, when it was you needed mortifying sorer than ever she did! And now it is as I said, and the Lord has laid His hand upon his Honour to afflict him because of you and your abominations."

"Is he in the Valley?" asked Robin, still afraid.

The Woman returned to her slappings.

"Na," she said; "he's in his bed."

"In bed is he?" said Robin, surprised. "Is he there of himself?"

"He is there because I forbad him to be otherwhere," snapped the Woman.

"Then he'll not be there long," said Robin. "An unbidable body is his Honour."

"When I bid," said the Woman grimly, "then he bides, though he was unbidable as Balaam's cuddie."

"He'll be up by this," said Robin. "He was to see Simon Ogg off this morning."

"Will he?" said the Woman grimly. "He just winna; for why?—I have his duds," and pointed to a bundle in the corner.

The Laird's chill settled on his chest. He stayed in bed querulous indeed, and reluctant as a stubborn child, but the Woman stood in the door like a long-toothed dragon and dared him to stir; and all day long Danny stayed with him.

In those days indeed the little man hardly could be brought to leave his lord. Day and night he stayed in the sick-room, faithful still; and that though duty and warrior desire called to him, Warden of the Marches, to up and away at the greasy heels of Robin and guard the passes against Her.

Every dawn indeed the Woman opened for Danny the great hall door after his night vigil. Down the steps he shot like a thunder-blue-bolt into the dews, gay and glad to be once more under God's firmament, the wind upon his brow, the rain in his face, speeding along grey lawns, up through reddening bracken-beds and spare birch-woods, to the old-appointed trysting-place beneath the dotard fir on the bald knowe on Windy-hope, where waited one

with dim ringlets to welcome him with cracked cheer and wide arms.

Together they made a hurried round. Robin laid new poison-baits secretly and with gloved hands—slabs of raw meat, succulent rabbits, crisp chicken-heads artfully prepared, and the inward and enticing parts of sheep—all set forth tastefully and to attract; and Danny inspected and approved. Then they went about to gather the victims of the old bait; and Robin reaped grim harvest—a polecat, stiff already as a ramrod, yet but an hour dead, a hoary raven wide-winged upon his back in the dew, thin feet in air; and lesser bandits of the wilderness.

The round completed, the new baits sown, and the victims of the old collected, Danny rolled in the dew, arose again and shook himself, wiping his feet upon the short sheep-turf with spurring scorn; then turned homewards to his faithful ministry.

And there was never surely a sick man's minister so tender, patient and inspired with love as proved the little knight.

By day he shared his dear ministry with the Woman. At night there was little need for further night-nurse when he was there, who lay in the flicker of the fire with one eye still

wide upon the truckle-bed and one ear sentinel to catch a sound.

And when the dreams were on the old man in the night, and he stirred feebly, muttering a dear name, it was Danny who stole across the room, and rose softly at the bedside like a little wise practitioner in blue-grey bed-gown, to regard his patient anxiously. Whereat the Laird, peering with old eyes dimmed with dreams and memories, and seeing by the meagre light of the solitary dip, two eyes, close to his own, tender, anxious, large, ceased his groaning.

"Child!" he whispered. "Child! Eh, I have waited——" and thrust forth a tremulous old hand, to find not the cool sweet brow he sought, but another brow, broad, too, firm, reassuring.

"What!" he muttered, disillusioned but still fond, "Danny! A-well, we must bide then yet," and soon stilled into his sleep.

The Laird in these days made no disguise as to which of his two nurses had his heart.

"Better than any woman o' the pack of them!" he husked one day. "O, haud away, Woman! you and your slops and slobberments. Give place to your betters!" and he thrust forth a petulant old hand to push her aside.

"And if I was taken you would get on fine without me!" she cried indignantly. "The doag would red you up; the doag would poultish

you; the doag would warm your feet, and hot your gruel, and mend ye and mind ye, as Missie willed. You would not miss me—O no!"

"I would miss your tongue more than I would miss you," husked the Laird.

"Then I just hope I will be taken!" snapped the injured Woman.

"It's what I've been hoping these fifty years," said the Laird, and slept.

The Woman chattered away, shrilly bewailing her fate—a lone woman-body left to the mercies of two rude old billies and a doag.

"A doag!" cried Robin hotly. "Is that how you speak of your man?"

"He is no more man to me," replied the Woman bitterly. "I, to whom Missie willed his Honour to mend him and mind him, I am less than nothing to him, beside yon yelpin', skelpin' tyke."

"You are jealous," said Robin, and eyed her. "I see how 'tis: you have the green in your eye."

"And have I no cause?" cried the Woman, flaming; and indeed she had.

All that day she bore herself to her man with high nose and scorn; and never did the little knight shew himself so true a gentleman as at that time endeavouring with tact like a lady and tenderness as of a child to comfort his Woman's wounded heart.

That night the Laird's breathing worsened suddenly, and he seemed nigh to stifle. The night-watchman, only more distressed than his dear lord, scuttled along the midnight passages to the Woman's door, whined, scratched, snuffled, yelped until she came, and then for once, forgetful of his courtesy, nipped her sharply by her scraggy heels and drove her before him—furiously, like an old barren hind of the hills, yammering shrilly as she went.

Next morning, as she was on her knees lighting the fire in his Honour's room, Danny came to her slowly with dear eyes.

"Back!" she snarled, "ye creepin' thing!" and cuffed him.

When she turned again he was standing behind her, grey-faced, doubtful, and with wounded eyes.

A second later, as she still knelt, a cold insinuating nose was in her hand; a warm body cuddling close against her knees, and he had set himself on her spread petticoats. She looked down upon the grey lifted face; then bent, dabbed a kiss on to his cold muzzle, rose hastily, and fled in tears.

When she next entered the room he came to meet and greet her with dear eyes. She could hold out no more. His anxious business, his desire to please, his readiness to take the

second place, won her back to her old allegiance of love. She forgave him that which it is most hard for any woman to forgive—the being better loved than herself. And soon their joint labourings in a common cause bound them with fresh bonds. She took him to her heart, and was lost in admiration of the fond faithfulness of her fellow-minister.

"Dear heart!" she cried, "to see him. He is that douce and cannie, you would never think God had made him male. And his Honour is just bidable with him, while he's fratchy as a lugged bear when he's none there."

Robin turned a blighting eye upon her.

"I ken that you are of little better than of no use," he said, "but could you not whiles tend his Honour your lone for one quarter?"

"Why should I?" asked the Woman, sprightly.

"So Danny might come after Her with me," said Robin.

"Na," mocked the scornful Woman. "It is you shall have all the glory of killing Her to yourself."

"I do not wish for vain-glory," said Robin sulkily, "I wish for Danny."

"Ye may wish," said the Woman. "Wishin's not gettin'. I wish too. I wish Her head for my lap; but I come no nearer gettin' it."

"You will never have Her head for any lap of yours in this world," said Robin.

"Is she dead then?" cried the Woman—"this wraith of yours."

"Dead as mutton," said the old man. "My nuts-vomit-Her has settled Her for aye and forever."

"How d'ye come by that?" asked the Woman, mocking.

"There's been no killings since the Sabbath," said the old man.

"No killings since the Sabbath!" echoed the Woman, and reported it to the Laird.

"No killings since the Sabbath!" said that grey old man hoarsely, opening his eyes.

"Robin's found none," said the Woman.

"There will have been killings," said the Laird, "but Danny has not been there to resurrect the corpse."

CHAPTER XLV

The Tear of Blood

In the dawn next day Robin came to the kitchen early. Now he was empty-handed, who of these late mornings had been wont to come in to her laden with the spoils of his sowings; and a shadow sat upon him like a fate.

The Woman looked at him surprised.

"Mortified none?" she mocked.

"I have not been my rounds," replied the dim old man, miserable as the morning without.

"What!" cried the Woman, "not to see to your night's handiwork, not to gather God's creatures that you have done to death!"

"I have not been out-bye," said the old man, dim as a mist. "I have not been after Her."

The desolation in his voice struck home to her.

She turned to look at him.

He was sitting by the empty fire, moping, miserable, a tragedy in every wrinkle.

"What gars ye look so dowie?" she cried.

"Ye might have mortified yourself by mistake for Her by the look of ye."

Robin sat with downcast eyes.

"She is not dead," he said, and bowed a dim old head.

The Woman returned to her Martha-business, scornful and relieved.

"That is old news to me!" she cried. "That day I have Her head in my lap that day I will believe Her dead—and not before."

Robin looked up.

"The day you have her head in your lap," he said slowly, "will be the wae-est day of your life, Deborah Awe."

"Wae it may be," jeered the Woman, "but I will not live to see it, I do think."

"You will so," said Robin. "Pity upon you or a Woman of sorrows, for that day you will be like Rachel mourning for your wean because he is not."

The Woman turned round.

"What's that?" she cried.

"The day you have Her head to your lap," said Robin, "that day you will see Danny dead."

The Woman looked at him, scared at last.

"Keep us!" she cried. "What's come to ye?"

Robin shifted in his seat.

"I have dreamed," he said; and now there

was no lightness or laughter as of old, about him no superior complacency of the seer who sees things held from men: nothing now but misery, ashes and hopeless woe.

The Woman saw it, and fear came upon her. She drew a chair beside him and sat down —she who in a long life had hardly sat down till noon except to peel potatoes.

"Tell us," she urged.

"I was on Lammer-more," began the old man in hushed slow voice. "It was at the edge of the dark, and the Kirk-bells were tolling."

"It would be a Sabbath," said the Woman.

"I was setting for Her," continued the slow old man.

"The Sabbath and a'!" cried the Woman.

"And as I sat I saw as it were a shadow hunting across the snaw."

"The snaw?" cried the Woman.

"The snaw," repeated Robin. "And when it cam' nigh to me I kenn't it—I kenn't it"—he drew a slow, long breath as of one breathing his last—"for Danny."

The Woman half rose.

"For Danny," pursued the old man, deliberately and desolately, "and there was blood upon him."

The Woman sat down, grey as her own hearthstone.

"One tear of blood," said Robin; "no more," and paused.

"Then there came a mist, and I could no more see. But I heard him hard by me; and he was at battle."

He drew a tremulous old hand across his lip.

"I could not see with whom he fought, and I could not stir hand to help him."

"Why that?" husked the Woman, grey and brief.

"I was set," said Robin, looking at her with eyes of anguish; "enchanted."

His old face began to tremble.

He rose to his feet, and his voice rose too.

"So there hard by me in the mist he fought—and She fought——"

"Was it Her he fought with?" gasped the Woman.

"Who other?" said Robin.

"I watna," said the Woman.

"And the roar and the rout of it shook the stars in the firmament." The flame of battle was in the old man's cheek. He stood before her, kindled, kindling. "And to me in the mist it seemed, there was stillness on earth, and war in the heavens. It was round me, raging like the storm, and about me and above me; and all the whiles," the passion suddenly ebbed away, "I could not stir."

The battle-mood had passed and left him like a dead leaf, trembling, withered, old.

"And O, Woman!" he peered down at her with frightened eyes, "somehow I kenn'd it was my man's Armageddon; and if I could not come to him it would all be up with him."

He sat down; and his face was in his hands. "'And I just could not!" he sobbed. "And I just could not."

The Woman was rocking.

"And I cried to him to heart up, and I would be with him yet—me that had never failed my man before in a thousand fights. And he cried back to me blythely—just as he aye would, when hard set. And yet I could not!" he lost his face in his hands again. "And I just could not."

"But what was it keepit you?" cried the Woman.

"It was Simon Ogg," said Robin, "holding me under and would not let me free."

The Woman gasped.

"And at last," Robin continued, lifting a wet face, "I could bear no more, and I fell away in a swoon."

"And when ye cam' back?"

"The mist was up and I could see."

"Ye was still there?" asked the Woman—"on the hill?"

"I lay just there where I had been," said Robin, "in the Neuk of the Brae." He gulped. "And so did Danny—on the snaw—hard by me—lying his length—my mannie—my Danny," his voice cracked beneath its weight of woe.

"Asleep!" gasped the other.

"Ay, Woman," said Robin, "sweet asleep; nor would ever waken more."

The Woman rocked, her bosom torn with sobs. Then she looked up.

"And Her!" she asked.

"There was no sign of Her anywheres," said Robin, drying his tears. "Yet some gate I kenn't She was deed."

"Little profit was there in that," wailed the Woman; "for so was my Danny."

"Ay," said Robin, "but Death was swallowed up in Victoree. As in life, so in Death, my man overcame."

For a while both sat silent. Robin was drying his eyes, and the Woman whimpering.

"And what of Simon Ogg?" she asked at last.

Robin shook his head.

"I kenna—I could see nothing: but I thought to hear him nicker in the birken-shaw behind."

"What d'ye make of it all, man Robin?" asked the Woman at last.

"He is fey," said Robin. "That is a sure thing. My man is fey. His fate is on him. Missie sent me that for sure."

The Woman rose to her feet suddenly.

"Where is Danny!" she cried.

"I kenna," said Robin dully.

"I let him out to ye," cried the Woman, horror-eyed. "He was off to the hill like a bolt to tryst ye."

"He will not have foremet me," said Robin, "and he will have come home. He will be with the Laird this minute."

"That he is not," cried the Woman. "I would have heard his feet on the floor. The Lord send."

She ran to the door.

Robin sat unmoved.

"Na, na," he said, "there's no snaw," and looked forth into the fair morning. "Forbye," he said, "it was the Sabbath."

"But he should be home by now," cried the Woman.

"And he is home," said Robin, as the familiar sound of slow mail-shod feet in the stone-passage without came to his ears.

The Woman leaped round.

The door pushed open. In it stood the little knight, sturdy, massive, regarding them with dear eyes.

"There is little amiss with my man!" cried the Woman, and ran to him with arms outstretched.

"Whisht!" hissed Robin.

The Woman stopped abruptly and stared round.

Robin stood behind her with staring eyes.

"Keep us!" gasped the Woman. "What is it?"

"There!" whispered the old man, pointing.

The Woman stared. Danny stood in the door, mighty-chested, wholesome, solid, and regarded them with dear eyes.

"What is it?" cried the Woman. "Speak!"

"The tear o' blood!" whispered Robin; "the tear o' blood!"

"Where?" shrilled the Woman, and stooped to look into the face of her dear man.

"On the hair of his chin," whispered Robin; "on the hair of his chin."

The Woman stooped to gaze. Danny faced her with calm eyes. Then he swaggered across to her with the roll and warrior gait peculiar to him.

The Woman burst into loud unmelodious laughter and snatched up her lover greedily.

"Blood!" she scoffed. "Blethers! There is no blood at all."

"There is not?" said Robin. "There *was*."

"Ye dreamed it!" jeered the Woman, rocking the grey knight, his head on her shoulder.

"I did so," said Robin steadfastly. "And as I saw it in my dream, so I saw it then."

"Where is it then now?" jibed the other, lifting the hoary chin upon her shoulder

"As I spoke," said Robin, "she licked it up with his tongue."

"Blethers!" jeered the Woman, jiggling her baby on her shoulder. "You and your dreams and your drink! What if there was blood? Will it be the first time he has been up to the killing? Na," she said, "not the last, my bloody wee murder-man!" and nursed him against her lean bosom motherly. "There is a bittock of venison to his breakfast for him!" she continued, wiping his feet on her apron and placing him upon the dresser. "Say his blessing, and he shall have it."

Then she turned to Robin.

"I am wondering what you had to your supper yestere'en, Robin Crabbe," she said.

Robin was trailing out, slow, dim, and bowed.

"It was nothing I had to my supper," said he. "It was the sending of the Lord."

An hour later he was back.

"I tell't ye!" he said soddenly. "She is back on us!" and flung a dead bird on the dresser.

CHAPTER XLVI

Watching the Weather

All that day Robin stood in the door of the kitchen, his old head back and dull eyes on the duller sky.

Once the Woman came to his side.

"What ye at?" she asked, curiously peering too.

"Watching the weather," was the dull reply.

Late in the evening the Woman, hard-driven by the Laird upstairs, came down to find him still there, with backward head and upward eye.

"Where ha' ye been all this day long?" she asked.

"Just here," said Robin, dully.

"Nor stirred!" cried the Woman.

"Ne'er a step," said dull Robin.

"Not been round your poisons?" shrilled the other.

"Na," said dull Robin.

"Then what in God's mercy ha' ye been at?"

"Watching the weather," said the dull old

man, and dragged away to renew his watch on highest Lammer-more.

About him there in that high, man-deserted land was mourning and dull insignia of grief, for summer was dead, and the music and rich mirth of the golden days gone by forever hushed. As he stood there, last sentinel, it seemed, of the outpost line of earth, there stretched beneath ruffed moors tear-dimmed, Burn-Water dead beneath the shadowing ramparts of the hills, and the far sea dull as a sheathed sword that not long since has flashed in the face of heaven like far-flung Excalibur; while at his feet the birch-woods seemed to mourn the glory departed from the earth; all around was the pomp and desolation of Nature's funeral.

There then till night fell the old man stood at gaze; then like the ghost of himself he trailed miserably down through yellowing woods, where not so long ago he and Danny had marched to the sound of song and battle music.

Next morning, when the Woman came downstairs, she found Robin at his old post of vigil in the door.

"Keep me!" she cried, "are you watching the weather yet?"

"What else?" said the old man.

"Ha' ye been there all the night?" shrilled the other.

"Since it was light," said Robin dully.

The Woman, who herself had been bustling since the dawn and wrestling with the Laird, fell upon him furiously.

"Let bide that daft staring!" she shrilled and shook him. "Did God make ye to admire ye, that ye do nothing all day but stand and stare starwards? Ye mind me o' my Jael when she had the mainge on her, with yer slinkie, down-dragget, do-nothing ways."

"It's little to you," said the old man, staring still, "but I care," he said, "I care."

"Will watching the weather mend matters?" shrilled the other. "Na, you will not mend the world by mourning over it. Set to! Shake yourself! Stir about! Forget you are a man; make believe you are a woman and a worker; for tho' God made ye male, there's a feck o' little things ye might do. If you have nothing else to be at, put out after Her. Watching the weather will not win Her that I can see!"

"If it would," said Robin, "I would never watch more."

"Ye promised me Her head for my lap," cried the Woman.

"The day Her head is in your lap will be the day my heart is in its grave," said poor Robin.

"Have done!" scoffed the Woman, "you and your dreams and your drink and a'. End Her, and you will mend yourself belike."

"The end o' Her will be the end of Danny and the end of the world," said the old man, "for Robin Crabbe."

That noon the Laird sent for Robin.

The old man left his post of vigil in the door reluctantly and went.

The Laird lay propped in bed, grim, and gaunt, like the wolf in Red Riding Hood. About his grey old throat was a muffler; on his hands the Woman's mittens; across his knees in bed lay the dead bird and at the foot of the bed Danny with dear eyes.

Robin stood in the door.

"They are asking after your Honour in the village," he said.

"They would be," said the Laird, "give them my dear love and tell them I will be with them on the Sabbath without fail."

"How is your Honour keeping?" asked the old man.

"I am bettering," said the Laird.

"I'm wae to hear it," said old Robin.

"Ye would be," replied the grim Laird, "while I bide in bed, there's none to gar you do your work—you can watch the weather all the while."

"While you bide in bed," Robin replied, "Danny bides with you, and while Danny is within doors he can take no scathe, though," he cried with sudden passion, "all the Hers in Hell were after him."

"And how is Her?" asked the Laird curiously.

"She is in Her health," said Robin," so far as I know."

"And tide to be," said the Laird, "so far as I know."

"I'd fain think so," said Robin.

"Has there been any killings of late, but this?" asked the Laird, holding up the bird.

"I have seen none," said Robin.

"Have ye missed any fowls?" asked the Laird.

"Na," said Robin, shortly.

"Have ye counted?"

"I've seen nothing of your fowls these three-four days," said Robin.

"How's that?" asked the Laird.

"They have not come my way," said Robin.

The Laird bent white brows upon him.

"And who has been feeding them?" he asked.

"Who fed the ravens?" said Robin, "I left them to the Lord."

The Laird looked at him.

"And what have you been at the while?" he said at length.

"Watching the weather," said Robin, and prepared to drag away.

"Stay!" hoarsed the Laird. "Watching the weather will bear waiting."

The Laird dropped his unshorn chin upon his hands and stared across at the old man by the door.

"How came you to find the bird and Danny not there to do it for you?" he asked.

"She lay on a bush before my very eyes," said Robin sullenly.

"On a bush?" said the Laird. "That's not according to Her custom. She has always buried them before."

"Ay," said Robin, "but I cam' on Her sudden, and She was in ower hot haste to be away to be nice as to the buryin'."

"Ye didn't see Her?" asked the Laird.

"Has Mr. Heriot ever seen a wraith?" asked Robin with irony.

"Nor any mark of Her?" continued the Laird.

"Just a heel-mark in the mud," said Robin.

"Your wraith then was wearing boots?" said the Laird, and leant back upon his pillows with closed eyes.

"D'you still hold you're right as to the wraith?" he asked.

"I aye hold to what I have said," Robin replied.

"Ye may be right," mused the Laird. "Only it's unusual surely for a wraith to do her killing with a string and a slip-noose at the end."

He held up the bird, and Robin saw about its neck, under a little ruff of feathers, a noose of string, the loose end hanging blue and thin like a disembodied vein.

Robin ran across the room, snatched the string, and peered at it with old blind eyes.

"What d'ye think of your wraith now?" asked the Laird.

"I think that if She is a wraith She is Widow Ogg's wraith," said Robin, a queer light in his eyes; "for it was just such blue string as this that She would aye wear round the neck of her whisky-jar."

"She took the string with her when She departed, I suppose?" said the Laird.

Robin answered nothing, still fingering the string thoughtfully.

"See here!" said the Laird suddenly. "Is Simon Ogg here yet?"

"He is so," said Robin, nodding and nodding as one thinking deeply. "But he is never seen. They do say he sits over his fire all day thinking on his minnie's last word."

"Is that so?" said the Laird. "Then I'd have

a word with him. Sunday I bid him go to work, away. Monday I was to see him and couldn't. As I can't go to him, he must come to me. Go you to him then this night and bid him come to me the morn's morn."

CHAPTER XLVII

A Flighty Bit

Next morning when Robin came to the kitchen, he marched to the mantelpiece with the quiet purposeful air of one set on some large enterprise, and took down from over it the old gun.

Then he turned and marched away without a word.

The Woman looked after him amazed. This was another man from that sodden ancient, who stood in the door all day with upward craning eyes, watching the weather.

"Where away with the piece?" she cried after him.

"To the woods," said Robin, never turning.

"What ye after?" she called, following in wonder.

"Her," said Robin, and marched on.

"And what of the weather?" cried the other, scoffing.

"The weather'll bide," said Robin, trotting on. "She winna."

"And what of your dream?" scoffed the Woman.

"Can a man put his fate from him? What profit is it to war against the Lord?"

"If the Lord's for Her," said Robin, marching on, "Minnie's for me, it is a fair set to."

The Woman retired upstairs to report to the Laird.

The Laird lay with closed eyes and grey old face like one asleep, Danny forever at his feet.

"Did he see Simon Ogg last night?" he asked hoarsely.

"I kenna," said the Woman.

"Send him to me when he's home," said the Laird, and fell off to sleep.

At noon the Woman returned to him.

The Laird opened his eyes.

"Is he home yet?" he hoarsed.

"Na!" cried the Woman. "He's clean doited from what I can make of it. He's all the while a-shootin' in the woods. It's bang! bang! bang! till I'm nigh deaved with it. There now!"

The Laird nearkened and heard an echoing gunshot.

"Go and search him on the hill," ordered the Laird, "and send him here."

The Woman went; and was back in ten minutes, pale, shaken, and with scared eyes.

"Ye've not been long away," said the Laird, regarding her.

She leaned against the door and panted.

"Long away!" she cried, "it's just God's grace I was not away forever."

"How that?" asked the Laird.

"He nigh shot me," panted the other.

"Who?"

"Robin Crabbe!"

"The fool-fellow!" grunted the Laird.

"But for a bit tree that took the shot," she panted, "I'd be dead and gone before this very minute.

"I went to the woods as your Honour bid me, and there I saw Robin, and he was trampin', trampin' up and down, and here and there, like a sentry-sojer, and his eyes were shut; and he was kickin' with his feet like a daftie and brandishin' the piece above his head like it might ha' been a banner. And I did think he was clean daft, and I gave him a cry; and he turned his back, and the piece pointed at me. And I loupit behind a tree, and but just in time, for off she went and shattered the tree with her shots like hail. It was but the grace o' God," she panted, hand to her side, "I'm here to tell it at all."

"And what did Crabbe?" asked the Laird.

"Him?" cried the Woman. "He just cam'

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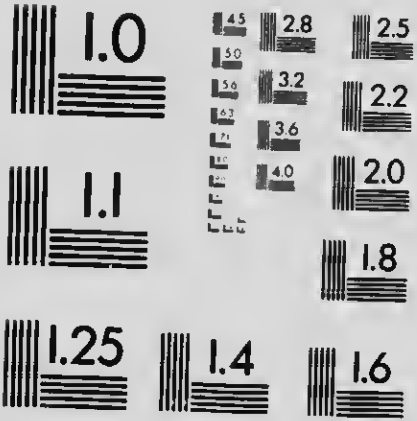

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to where I lay a-hint the tree dodderin, and he said, 'O! it's you, is it?' disappointed like, and just loaded the piece, and never a word or a by-your-leave or a by-your-pardon. 'Ay!' I tell't him, 'it's me, and no fault o' yours it's not my corp!'

"'If ye come sneakin' in my woods ye must just take your chance,' said he, and marched off; and that's all the comfort I got."

"And what was he shooting at?" asked the Laird.

"It's my belief," said the Woman significantly, "he keeps all the while a-bangin' in hope to bring rain instead of snaw."

"Send him here when he's home," said the Laird, and lay back with shut eyes.

Robin did not return until evening. Then he went straight to the Laird's room, and on his face a queer white glimmer that the Woman had never seen there before.

The Laird was sitting up in bed, Danny as ever at his feet.

"What's all this bangin' all day?" asked the Laird huskily.

"It's just the piece," said Robin, fondly regarding the old gun nursed in the hollow of his arm.

"What's come to the piece then?" asked the

Laird. "I heard ye let fire time and time and again."

"She popp'd off a bit," Robin admitted. "She is a laffable bit," he said, and began to giggle hysterically, his old lips uncertain and that white glimmer growing on his face. "There is no dependence on her at all. She will be like a woman—whiles she will, and whiles she winna. It hangs on her humour. Ye can never swear what she'll be up to next."

"She'll be up to murder one of these days," said the Laird with gathering brows.

"She might," said Robin, clenching shaking lips. "It's no affair of mine. She's her own master. I never interfere."

"And what's your aim and object?" asked the Laird.

"As to aim," said the old man, "I take none. As to object, she does please herself. I just walk the woods and brandish her a bit and whiles she lets off and whiles she dinna."

The Laird looked at him.

"Ye'll murder some one yet, I see," he said.

Robin rolled up his eyes.

"If the Lord wills it," he said with the sort of fervour of an inspired fanatic of old, "I will surely so."

"And if the Lord wills it," said the grim Laird, "you will surely hang."

"That I will never if there is justice in the land!" cried Robin. "If any's killed it is their fault for being there."

"Where?"

"Where the shot strike. And any gate, it is no affair of mine. It is the piece. She lets off when she wills. I do not instigate her. I may brandish her a bit, but I do not pull her off. The blame will [illegible] with her and not with me; and that is but justice."

"It may be justice," said the grim Laird; "it's not the law. Death by your shooting is murder, make no mistake about that."

"Death by my shooting," said Robin doggedly, "is death by miss-at-a-venture. Your Honour can swear to that, who has often affirmed that I could not hit a hill though I lay down to it."

"Ay," said the Laird, "and if ye did kill a man, where 'd you be?"

"I!" said Robin, with kindling eye, "I'd be just here; and Simon Ogg'd be in Hell-fire."

The Laird regarded him grimly.

"Did ye give Simon Ogg my message?" he asked at last.

"I did so," said Robin dully.

"When is he coming to see me?"

"He is not coming at all," said Robin.

"Why that?" asked the Laird harshly.

"He was saying he would not go to your Honour or to any man to be murdered like his minnie. 'If his Honour wants to murder me, he must just come and do it here,' said he. And I ken what the lad has in his mind; for they are saying in the village that you will never rise from your bed again, and that there will be no more Kirk-keeping——"

"Are they saying that?" asked the Laird.

"They are so," said Robin. "And Simon is thinking that if he winna come to you, and you canna get to him, he is safe either way."

"Canna!" said the grim Laird. "I kenna canna!*—and I'll shew him so the morn, and them too."

Robin looked at him with large eyes; then he turned and ran out with a little whimpering cry.

"The Laird 'll be up the morn!" he cried to the Woman, as he trotted through the kitchen. "And the morn's the Sabbath!—and there's snaw in the weather!" and he trotted out into the dusk, the gun upon his arm.

"Where to?" cried the Woman after him.

"To my work—and Missie's!" cried Robin, trotting on.

"Ye'll hang over this shooting yet!" screamed the Woman after him.

* *Kenna canna* is the motto of the house of Heriot.

Robin turned to find Danny in the dusk at his heels.

"And if it is hanging, I would hang for you, my man! and blithely!" he cried, and catching him up kissed him passionately.

CHAPTER XLVIII

The Face of the Dream

In the dusk Robin was manœuvring on Fir-tree Knowe.

On the bald crest above him stood the lonely fir, sombre against the West; and beneath him the moors lay silent, misty, dank, in the growing gloom.

Round the fir the old man circled crab-wise. His face was outward from the tree, and the old piece upon his shoulder pointing ever inwards at it with huge gaping mouth. Like a spider, slowly circling round a fly, the old man edged on with uncannie crab-like gait until he was not now ten yards from the tree.

Till then he had been circling to the right; now suddenly he reversed, taking a quick step to the left.

"God's sake!" screamed a sudden voice; and was still again.

Robin made halt.

"Is any there?" he asked, and waited a reply.

None came.

"As none's there," said the old man, never

turning, "none will be hurt should the piece let fire," and he began to back in upon the tree.

There was a movement behind the tree.

"Stir not, you that are not there!" yelled Robin warningly. "Ye'll scare Her off else!" and the piece began to joggle on his shoulder.

"Stop!" screamed a voice.

"Why should I?" said Robin, backing in.

"Ye'll shoot me else!" screamed the voice.

"Ye're none there to shoot," said Robin, backing in.

"I am so!" screamed the voice.

"I canna see ye!" said Robin, backing in.

"Could ye look out of the back of the head ye'd see me," screamed the voice.

"I canna," said Robin.

"Ye can hear then!"

"I hear as it might be an echo," said Robin, backing ever.

"Has an echo a red head?" screamed the voice.

"I canna tell ye," said Robin. "I have never seen one."

"Turn about then and you will see me!"

"Who?"

"Simon Ogg!" screamed the voice—"son to him his Honour murdered on Gaunt Scaur."

"How will I see through a tree?" said Robin, backing ever.

"I will come out if ye'll swear not to shoot," cried Simon.

"I'll none shoot," said Robin.

"Swear," chattered Simon.

"I'll none shoot," said Robin, and turned as Simon slunk out from behind the tree. "She might let off though," said the old man; and as he said it she did let off with a roar, and the shot were like hail in the upper branches of the fir.

"First daddie! next minnie! now me!" yelled Simon, and fell on his hands and knees.

"Just so," said Robin, reloading. "There is no dependence on her at all. Whiles she will, and whiles she winna. But she missed ye that time."

Simon rose to his feet and dusted his shaking knees.

Then he stood up; and the sweat was dripping off his face like water from a pressed cheese.

"Ye might ha' shot me," he said, and smiled horribly.

"*She* might ha' shot ye," corrected Robin.

"It's little matter to a shot man," said Simon, "who shot him."

"It's less to me," said Robin, and drew closer.

"What are you making in my woods, Simon Ogg?" he asked earnestly.

"I was just taking a cast about after Her," said Simon, quaking.

"Na," said Robin, "I am after Her myself."

"And I am here to help you," said Simon.

"I am here to help myself," said Robin, "I thank you."

"A-well, then," said Simon, "I'm away," and he began to move off.

"One wee," said Robin, "one wee."

"What is it?" asked Simon, shivering.

"You have dropped something," said Robin, and bent. "It'll be a fowl," he said, holding it up in the gloom. "And I was just wondering how you came by one of his Honour's fowls?"

"I just found it," muttered Simon after a long pause.

"Where did you find it?"

"Over away out beyond."

"And what were you doing with it up away here?"

"I was for bringing it up to the house."

"Was you?" said Robin. "Then why was you making away from the house?"

"I was taking a round," muttered Simon. "I was fear'd of meeting you and the piece in the woods."

There was a pause. Robin drew closer.

"How came you to find it?" he asked.

"Will I tell ye?" asked Simon, very low.

"Ay," said Robin.

"It was being buried," said Simon, whispering now.

"Who by?"

"Will I tell ye?" asked Simon, whispering still.

"Tell on," said Robin.

"Danny," whispered Simon.

Robin stood stone still in the dusk under the black-browed fir.

"Is it Her killing, think you?" asked the old man at length very quietly.

"For sure," whispered Simon, nibbling.

"There's no marks o' teeth," said Robin.

"There never has been," Simon replied.

"But there is a noose of string about her neck," said the old man, and swung slowly round upon Simon—"of the same kind as that hanging from your pocket."

He took one slow pace forward; and Simon never moves.

"I do think I have found Her!" he said quietly, and smote the other in the mouth.

CHAPTER XLIX

The Laird Gets Up from the Grave

Next day broke cold and harsh with a sky like a December sea.

In the chill of the dawn Robin came to the door of the kitchen and stood ere, grey as the morning without.

The Woman looked up, saw him, and wondered.

"What is it?" she cried, pausing in Mar business.

"It's the Sabbath and a'," said Robin, dry-throated.

"What if it be?" cried the Woman. "Is not that a thing to be thankful for?"

"There's snaw in the weather," said Robin huskily, his eyes upward.

The Woman came to the door, scanned the sky, and forthwith went back to her work, bustling, scornful.

"Get you about your business!" she ordered, "you and your dreams! What gars ye stand there and mope when there's work to be done?"

"I would see his Honour," said the old man.

"A-well, ye just canna," snapped the other. "I have not so mueh as waked him yet."

Robin took a chair, sat down dully in the door of the kitchen, watching the weather.

"I will just bide till he does wake," said he.

At noon, when the Woman eame down from above, he had not moved.

"Does his Honour wake yet?" he asked, turning.

"What's that to you?" snapped the Woman.

"I would see him," said the old man doggedly.

"I tell ye ye just canna," snapped the Woman. "His Honour's worse. He's had little rest the night, and he's canker't as a wean'd ehild. He'll scarce see me, let alone your likes!"

"He bides in bed then?" said the old dim man.

"Surely," said the grim Woman. "That is my bidding."

"And will so?" asks Robin.

"Surely," said the grim Woman. "I have his duds."

"And Danny?" asked the old man.

"Ye'll see none of Danny this day," said the Woman. "He lies at the foot of his Honour's

bed, and he'll just not stir till his Honour betters."

Robin turned to his watching with a sigh of relief.

"Keep him close!" he said. "Keep him close, and maybe Missie and me will win through yet."

From down in the village through the open door came the sound of Kirk-bells tolling.

Robin turned, and looked at the Woman.

"Hear them!" he said, in voice of uttermost woe.

"What is it?" cried the Woman, startled.

"Kirk bells and a'," said Robin.

"But there would be," said the Woman, her eyes on the clock. "It's Kirk-time."

"I tell't ye!" said Robin, dull with despair. "I just tell't ye!"

"What?" cried the Woman, afraid herself.

"It was on the Sabbath and a'," said the old man, "just as to-day."

"What was?"

"That what cam' in my dream," said Robin, "and the Kirk bells tolling——"

The Woman came to the door to scan the sky.

"There's no snaw," she cried.

"Not yet," said Robin.

"Nor will be," said the Woman, scanning the

dull sky. "Forbye Danny keeps by his Honour, and his Honour keeps in his bed."

Robin rose to his feet and stood a moment still as a dead man.

"Heark!" he said.

The Woman hearkened, her eyes on the ceiling.

"Dear keep me!" she cried. "His Honour'd keep his Kirk!" and fled.

When she flung into the room above, the Laird was sitting up in bed, gaunt, stark-throated, in his night-rail, a grey muffler about his throat.

"What is it?" screamed the Woman, slamming the door behind her.

"My boots," husked the Laird.

"Your boots, is it?" panted the other scornfully. "What for d'ye want your boots?"

"For my feet," hoarsed the Laird.

"Keep me!" she shrilled. "Is it his death Mr. Heriot is after?"

"If so," said the grim Laird, "Mr. Heriot would die in his boots."

The Woman marched across the room, picked up the boots that stood before the fire, marched to the door again and put her back against it.

"If Mr. Heriot will die, it is as a Christian should die," said she grimly, "and that's in his

bed. I will see to that, that am named Deborah Awe."

The Laird wound a grey woolen muffler about his throat above his night-rail.

"I am going out," hoarsed the Laird, and wound another coil about his throat.

"Indeed. are you?" scoffed the grim Woman, back against the door. "Then ye go as God made you."

"As God made me is good enough for me," hoarsed the Laird.

"And that's just stitch-stark," said the Woman.

"Not quite," said the Laird. "I have my socks," and he thrust forth a gaunt shank-bone, "and my bonnet," and patted it down upon his head.

She flung at him, hectoring.

"Get you back!" she ordered. "Back into your bed this instant! Cover yourself! does Mr. Heriot hear me? It is me that am telling you—me that Missie willed you to, that you should do my bidding."

"Duds or no duds," said the Laird, rising slowly, "I go to Kirk."

"To Kirk!" cried the Woman, near to tears—"to Kirk-Garth!"

"T'ane's on the way to t'ither," said the grim

Laird, and stood before her gaunt and stark and grey like one new-risen from the dead.

She came across to him.

"But what need is there for your Honour to go?" she said, pleading now. "Your Honour's soul is safe. A Kirk unkept will make little differ. Missie will put that right for you."

"Ye mistake," said the Laird, grey, tall, and shivering like an aspen-poplar in the dawn. "I do not go to keep my Kirk."

"What then?" cried the Woman—"to see the people keep theirs?"

"In part," said the Laird.

"But they will so," urged the other. "They will surely so. Your Honour need little fear for them. They will keep their Kirks if only to pray it is your deathbed you are on."

"I go to surprise them," said the Laird.

"You go to prove them right," cried the Woman, and began to weep. "They are praying you are on your deathbed, and they will have their prayer."

"Though I am on my deathbed, yet I will rise from it to be among them, such," said the grim Laird, "is my fondness for them."

The Woman surrendered with tears.

When he was clothed and cloaked she wound a plaid about his mouth and shoulders.

"And now," she cried with vindictive sarcasm, "how will you get? Will you walk? or will I order your coffin round to the door for you."

The Laird, muffled in his plaid, retorted nothing, tottered out of the room shakily and down the stairs, Danny solicitous before him.

In the hall the Woman, tying the strings of a bonnet beneath her chin, joined him panting.

The Laird paused, mouth muffled, and looked at her with grim eyes.

"I am for coming with you," panted the Woman.

"Ye'll do nothing of the sort," husked the Laird, and turned.

"Ye canna go your lane!" cried the Woman. "Ye must have some one!"

"I have."

"Who?"

"Danny?" said the Laird, and went forth into the grey afternoon, tall and tottering, and Danny at his heels.

The Woman stood on the steps of the house behind and railed at him.

"It will be your death, mark me!" she shrilled. "You will live long enough to repent it and no more. And when it comes to pass as I tell you, and you lie in your grave, do not turn on me and say I never warned you."

The Laird turned.

"If you said as little as I will say then," he husked, "I would be better pleased."

"Then ye care nothing for me," cried the Woman, "or what Missie will think of me. But ye might consider Danny, for you will be taken and he will be left—and what then?—poor lone mannie."

"He'll come with me," said the Laird, tramping on.

"And what o' me?" cried the Woman. "Will I be left my lane?"

"Na," said the Laird. "As long as you two live you'll not lack for company."

"Company!" scoffed the Woman. "Robin?"

"Na," said the Laird, "your tongue;" turned and tottered on.

Danny, with his heart of a gentleman, turned from going before his Lord, and cantered back to the Woman and bid her be of good heart, for he, Daniel, son of Ivor, was going with the Laird and would bring him safe home again.

So she blessed him; and they parted.

She watched him down the drive; then she shuffled off down to the kitchen.

"The Laird's daddled off to his own funeral!" she cried, and sat down and sobbed.

The old man in the door turned.

"It is here," he said, dry-throated.

"What?" she cried.

"The end of all," he said; and held out his hand and in the palm of it a flake of snow.

CHAPTER L

The Laird Keeps His Kirk

It was a harsh and haggard day full of the pressage of winter and Death coming to cast its shadow everywhere.

A ghost of a wind wandered forlornly betwixt earth and heaven, seeking rest and finding none; only the fallen leaves hearkened to its wail, and pattered and chattered and wrung dead hands in unavailing sympathy. The moors turned a dark face skywards, and afar, seen through the Throat of the Hills, the sea lay dull and grey as smoked steel; and above the bellying sky was big with snow.

Through the yellowing park, where the bents shewed rusty, lean and withered, the pair marched Kirkwards; and Danny led the way. Herald-wise he marched before, holding his master by the hand, as it were, and pioneering him with as tender a chivalry as ever Missie of old. There might be death in the day, and the wail of winter in the wind; but he, merry because his lord was once more abroad, and he, Daniel, son of Ivor, had come forth from his

week's vigil to feel again upon his brow the Breath of God and smell once more the sweet savour of earth, wet woods and wind-sweetened moors.

So he swaggered in front, brandishing his tail as a young knight swings his sword in the van of the fight. Now he marched merrily with three-cornered hoppings, one hind leg tucked up from contact with the cold earth; now he looked back over his shoulder at the gaunt figure tottering behind, and grinned delight at him with dear eyes; now he made halt and stood, with sentinel ears, knightly, alert, gazing up at dull uplifted Lammer-more and his dear battle-fields of old.

So they went, down the long drive, all among the dead leaves, to the sound of tolling bells, the gaunt old plaid-muffled man and gay herald in grey until they came to the great gates.

Before their cottages in the street the village clustered in weekday disarray. There was a hush upon each muttering group, a sense of awe easy to perceive; but though the bell tolled on and on, urging them to Kirk, no man went in to don his Sabbath blacks, and the women stood slatternly, unbuttoned, nursing their babies.

The great gates at the street-end swung back upon their hinges and clanged.

The people turned.

Down the cold street came one like the Shadow, and Danny led him by the hand.

A woman, a baby at her breast and horror in her eyes, stood in the centre of the street and pointed with dumb forefinger.

Blindly great Hector, the herd, stood with gaping mouth like one turned to stone.

"Hell!" he gasped. "He's on us!" and coming to life, plunged recklessly through the frightened mob, tearing his coat off as he went.

A panic ensued. There rose up to the chill sky the noise of women who screamed and clutched their children as they flew; and in the street was the mutter, jostle and shrill clamour of a stampeding crowd.

Deliberate, fell as fate, the Laird tramped on; and the people fled before him screaming, like wild fowl before a winter blast.

As he drew near the Kirk, the people burst forth from their cottages—doddering old men, comely young mothers, fearful-eyed children with flying hair. The men were thrusting into their coats, and many a one carried his neck-scarf in his mouth; the women were throwing shawls about their naked heads, and buttoning as they ran; jostling his Honour and each other in their hurry to be in God's Sanctuary before that slow-marching old man.

Under the grey-browed porch into the Kirk passed the Laird, unhurrying still, the shawl about his mouth and eyes that seemed not to see; his herald still before him.

Slow, still, and terrible he tramped to his pew; and Danny led him to the door of it, turned there, and trotted down the aisle, to take his place in the porch and keep the door; and the door was shut.

In his pew the Laird turned, his cloak swept about him, his mouth still muffled, and numbered his panting people; and there was a gap in the ranks of the worshipers.

CHAPTER LI

The Keeper of the Door

An hour later the congregation trooped out; sullen, cowed, and with frightened eyes. Last of all came the Shepherd of his sheep. Forth he tramped like some Grand Inquisitor, sure of his prey. In the little grey-roofed porch he stayed, bleak and black and gaunt, like some old harbour-ridden man-of-war. There he wound the plaid about his mouth and lower face until only above its folds were seen the rugged brow and dour eyes peering forth on to the harsh sky without.

So he stood a moment in the gate of God's sanctuary before launching into the pitiless grey day.

"Danny!" he called, his voice muffled in his shawl, and waited a moment for the Keeper of the Door to uncurl from the bench within the porch as ever and join him; and waited in vain.

He turned, and peered into the porch, where a greyness of failing day gathered.

Upon the bench there was no Keeper of the Door, curled and asleep. He called again;

and then remembered that once before the little man had come to meet him in the aisle, the service ended, and dallying behind, had been locked into the empty Kirk.

He went back to the door, unlocked it, and looked in.

The Kirk was deserted as a vault. Dusk was falling in the sombre pews, the black old timbers of the roof, and the austere walls. He could just discern the lectern, dark in the dusk, and fashioned with shadowy wings; the windows plain as the sky without; the cross of oak, old as the Kirk and strong as Time, steadfast against the eastern end, and at its foot, dimly seen, another cross of white flowers, placed there in Missie's memory Sabbath in and Sabbath out, these nine years, by the faithful Woman.

Huskily he called. There came to him no answering patter of busy feet hurrying down the aisle.

He turned, locked the door, and passed into the porch again; and he was greatly troubled. Never before in nine long years of a Sabbath and Kirks kept unceasingly had the Keeper of the Door not met him there.

Then he gathered himself, and his plaid muffled about mouth and shoulders, went out into the Kirk-garth. During service there had fallen a feathering snow. All about the land

lay badger-pied. The flanks of the weather-beaten hills were white; and the larch copses stood on the hillsides primly like spinsters poudrées at a ball; and the mounds in the Kirk-garth shewed white upon the weatherward side.

The Laird tottered forth into the cold.

"Danny!" he called hoarsely, and again "Danny!" to no effect.

Then he turned to the people, waiting his advent at the rowan-tree gate in fearful hush

But he noticed nothing. He had forgotten them and their backslidings. He was no more the Arch-Inquisitor, resolute to purge his people, but an old, old man in a tremble of anxiety because the child of his age had left him.

Standing among the graves above his people, he cried across to them—

"Ha' ye seen Danny?"

At the words tongues were loosed. Each was officious to aid with information, each was jealous to make himself conspicuous in the cause. They jostled, wrangled, lied and counter-lied, till the Laird stilled the babble with a word and turned to Andra' Gillray.

That old man testified garrulously that the Keeper of the Door had not been in his wonted place when he, Andra', came out first of the congregation.

A grimness came over the face of the Laird.

"Ye was there then?" he asked.

"Certainly I was so," cried the aggrieved old man.

"Last in," said the Laird, "and first out, eh?"

"Mr. Heriot kens I'm on in years," said honest Andra'. "I canna run so fast as some of they young billics."

The Laird turned again.

Tall he stood among the tombstones, and peered with his old eyes roving everywhere from side to side.

Then from among the people in the road a voice broke on the silence.

"Mr. Heriot is standing on a grave."

The old man turned.

"Eh?" he called.

"Mr. Heriot is standing on a grave," repeated the voice.

"There's no grave here," said the Laird, peering blindly at his feet. "There's no headstone."

"There's no headstone," replied the voice, "but there's a grave," and added, "Mr. Heriot is standing on the dead."

"Who lies here?" said the Laird.

There was a moment's silence, then the voice replied,

"Minnie."

CHAPTER LII

Simon and the Laird

The Laird moved off the grass and on to the path.

Then he came quavering down the path to the rowan-tree gate and peered down at his people in the road beneath.

"Is that Simon Ogg?" he asked.

"Like enough," said the voice.

"Step out here!" ordered the Laird, the grimness falling on him like a frost.

He with the flaming head at the back of the crowd made no move; but the people fell away from him, and he was left standing alone.

The Laird on the steps above him under the rowan-tree gate regarded him.

"I wished a word with you," he said, and came down the steps, slow, tentative, one foot leading, like a child.

"A-well, I'm here," said Simon, breathing hard.

"You have not kept your Kirk," said the Laird, grimly nodding.

"And I just have," said Simon insolently.

"Ye were not there when I numbered," said the Laird.

"I ken nothing o' yer numberings," retorted Simon. "I just was there."

"You would have me believe Danny admitted you?" asked the Laird, "after the door was shut?"

"I'd have you believe," retorted the youth, "that Danny was none there."

The Laird eyed him steadily, pausing on a step.

"He was none there, was he not?" he said. "Where was he?"

"On the hill," said Simon, scornful, triumphant.

"On the hill," said the Laird. "How d've ken that?"

"I saw him," said Simon, and shot forth a jeering face.

"Either you are lying," said the Laird, "or you have not kept your Kirk. Ye couldn't be on the hill spying on Danny when ye was in the Kirk at worship."

"I was in the Kirk!" cried Simon. "Was I not?" appealing to the people.

"He was so, your Honour," corroborated old Andra'; and others backed the oldman's word.

"If you was at Kirk," said the Laird, "ye came in after the door was shut."

The youth thrust forth a leering, triumphant face.

"Did I so?" he cried, and fixed the other with lank accusing finger. "If I did so, how came he to admit me? If I cam' late," he cried, insolent in triumph, "what gar'd him let me through. Tell me that, you that publish me for a liar before these gentlemens."

"And anyway," continued the Laird, unmoved, "you was not where you should have been when you should have been."

"Same as Danny," cried the youth.

"—And so," continued the Laird, "you will come to me the morn and I will have a last word with you before I go," and tramped down the steps. He passed through the village herd without a word.

Simon followed.

"What time will I come?" he asked sullenly. "I'm away to work at the quarries the morn."

"What time'd be most convenient?" asked the Laird.

"Twelve to one," said Simon shortly.

"Then come at any other time," said the grim Laird, and marched on.

Up the wintry street he went, solitary, grim shadow of a man, the tails of the plaid behind

him tugged at by the wind; and Simon dogging him still, like the shadow of a shadow.

"Will I tell your Honour where Danny is?" he asked, following his Honour at five yards.

The Laird marched on, unheeding.

"He is on the hill," said Simon, and drew close to the Laird's heels.

"Will I tell you what he is at?" he continued.

The Laird marched on, mouth muffled and with downward eyes.

"He is after Her," said Simon, and drew to the Laird's elbow.

They had come to the great gates. Through the bars of them the park lay grizzled, the long bents thrusting lean arms through a coverlet of snow.

Half a mile away, at the foot of Lammermore, stood the house, bleak, many-windowed, severely square, and dingy against the background of unaccustomed white.

The Laird's old hand, great, grey and ungloved, was on the gate; and Simon's hand was on his Honour's arm,

"Will I tell ye *just* where ye'll find him if ye seek?" the youth whispered hoarsely.

The Laird turned.

"Hands off!" he husked, his voice muffled in the plaid.

Simon did not withdraw his hand, and there was a sort of pale determination about his face.

"See yon bushie up away under the brant of the brae!" he said, pointing. "A-well, seek him there, and ye might happen on him," whispered Simon, and pushed pale eyes into the other's, "*or Her*."

The Laird passed through the great gate.

He turned and shut them and they clanged behind him like the gates of Doom; then he looked through the bars.

"We meet again," said he to him who stood without, "the morrow."

"The morrow," echoed Simon,—"if it comes," and stood watching at the gate.

CHAPTER LIII

A Thread of Fate

The Laird hurried, quavering, along the drive.

All the Grand Inquisitor was left behind the clanging gates; he was once more the old-maid-man, fretting for the companion of his age. And as he went ever and anon he paused, straightened his shoulders, and cried in a voice, shrill somewhat, and querulous—

"Danny! Danny, man!"

Where the drive bends in long loop southward and to the north the woods thrust down from Lammer-more, like a headland into the sea, he struck off on to the grass, and made across for the house, bleak-faced beneath the brae.

Skirting the borders of the wood, he paused, breathing uncertainly. The wind was in his face, and he walked with bowed face hardly, his feet giving back beneath him in the snow.

As he drew near the borders of the wood a gust of snow flicked him sharply in the face. The old man bent to it, and as he lowered his face he saw at his feet a track in the snow.

Blindly he stopped to examine it; and even

as he did so the wind and snow slurred the trail beneath his eyes. Yet he could see that there were two tracks in the snow meeting and merging at his feet. One led down the hill from out of the wood a few yards above—spidery, three-toed footing, this, of a bird; the other, running up the hill, round, firm, four-toed and thumbed, was that of some greater creature of the woods, easy to recognize Just where he stood the two tracks met and clashed. There was a medley of feet, three-toed, four-toed, and confused as though the two, meeting suddenly, had been thrown into a tangled skein; and across it all a smudge as though one with large brush had tried to wipe out the evidences of crime and failed. For in the heart of the smudge was a single stain as though a drop of red rain had fallen on the snow.

In the dusk the Laird bent and peered. A feather, like a curl from the head of some silver-haired cherubim, danced and drifted to his feet. He picked it up; and knew his fears confirmed. She was at her bloody work again this Sabbath evening; and of a certainty not far.

He gathered himself, his eyes grim above the mufflings of his shawl, and looked around.

All about him the park lay like a great white sea flowing up, ghostly and still, lapping the dark fringes of the wood. It fell away from

his feet, as the sea falls away in white retreat from the borders of the land, surging and surging again in the distance in long uncertain swell.

Upon the waste of white there was one blot. A hand's cast beneath him stood a lonely island brake, of thorn and fern and bramble, not so large but a score of maidens joining hands might encircle it.

It stood out in the dimness, solid, swart, as it were, a rock black in the white breakers of a surf-lashed shore.

It was to that very thicket that Simon, standing at the gate, one cold hand clutching his arm, had pointed, so the Laird remembered.

He made towards it, and even as he went he was aware of pugs, round, four-footed, firm, that had turned and doubled back on their tracks, and now led him unfaltering to that dark island brake.

Slowly the Laird followed them with downward eyes; and ever as he went he made pause, calling for Danny.

If Danny would but come, and together they could mark Her home in the heart of the thicket; then he had Her beyond hope of escape. For Danny the Warrior, Knight of the Shield of Snow, Danny, Valiant Heart, Danny, Lover of the Faithful eyes, Danny, the Bayard of the Northern Chivalry, would hold her fast forever,

if need be, and if need be would spend himself in the cause as gayly as ever did Cavalier for his King, or true Knight for his Lady; and while his Warden held Her there faithfully, he, the Laird, would hurry home for Robin and the gun.

So, calling, he came to the thicket; and there the trail lost itself. The Laird peered into its darkness and thrust in his umbrella.

The point struck on something soft. He forked it out. It lay at his feet upon the snow, a bundle of disordered feathers and lank neck.

The Laird picked it up, breathing raucously, the shawl about his mouth, and examined it critically.

It was fresh slain. A drop of blood like a bead was at its beak; but it had taken Death less calmly, so it seemed, than its fellow-victims. The feathers on the neck were shaken out like a ruff, and the body plumage disordered; but the earth-stains were on the feathers, to shew it had been hastily interred according to the killer's custom.

He made a round of the island thicket. If the murderer had bolted there must be tracks in the snow; but there were no tracks.

She was there, then. He bent and peered into the thicket, and almost thought he saw

two eyes like stars in the heart of the darkness set on him fixedly.

He walked to the edge of the thicket, stood there, his face upwards towards the woods, and pulling the shawl from over his mouth, called: "Danny!" urgent yet soft. "Danny!" and circled once again the thicket.

"Danny, man! Danny!" he cried again, standing now once more on the northernmost edge of the thicket, his face to the woods—"Danny, man! Danny!"

Behind him a twig snapped.

He turned sharply. Standing at gaze he thought he saw a shadow, stealthy-footed, shooting out of the thicket and away into the evening; but even as he looked a flicker of snow whipped his face and blurred his old eyes.

Hurriedly he retraced his steps, and on the weatherward side came on what he sought. A chain of black dots, like a thread of fate, ran across the snow which a moment since had been void of any stain.

"Danny!" he called. "Danny!" hurriedly tottering in pursuit across the snow.

Some score yards from the thicket the track ran away down a short incline into a peat-hag.

On the brow of the slope the Laird stayed and stood in the dimness, the wind tugging at his shawl, and called:

"Danny, man! Danny!"

The snow had ceased again and the land lay round about lapped in white; while that fatal thread lay like a weal across its face.

From his feet it ran down the short steep, in bold black dots as though of ink; sneaked along at the bottom, where the bents raised lean heads above the snow; threaded brokenly with many a gap mid bog myrtle and little pools, peering black-eyed through the snow; and in the heart of the bottom came to a sudden end in Danny.

CHAPTER LIV

Forever

In the centre of the hollow he was standing ankle-deep in snow.

At halt he stood with half-cocked ears, hearkening, as it were, to a call that comes he knows not whence.

With half-averted face, upon a hairy tussock islanded in a black-eyed pool, he stood like a grey king on his throne; and the snow was on his brow like a crown of diamonds. Languid, yet alert, he hearkened; languidly he throbbed, hanging out a delicate pink tongue, as on a summer's day, though now the wind crept like a comb through his coat to ruffle it.

On the brow above him stood the Laird. One hand was on the shawl that wound about his mouth; and his fingers twitched and twitched unconsciously, as though to pull it down. For the rest he might have been one dead. The face was grey as of a corpse, and as emotionless. No colour waxed there or waned, no consciousness ruffled that dead calm, and in his eyes the stark and dreadful look of one who looks into

Hell and sees there his own soul among the lost.

So he stood, like a grey-clothed corpse on the white brow. The shawl wound his mouth like death cerements, the wind tugged at the frayed ends of it, and from his hand the lank-necked corpse, swinging in the wind, as from a gallow's-tree.

And in the hollow beneath, the grey knight, with half-averted face, hung out a languid tongue and throbbed.

At last the Laird drew breath—long, slow, wavering, such as Lazarus may have drawn when first he came forth from the grave and gate of death.

The Life withdrawn flowed back. Over the dead face it crawled slow-footed as the tide. The fingers at his mouth ceased to twitch and were still. He closed his eyes and stood with blind face, uplifted to the callous sky.

Then he dropped his chin again and looked.

Beneath him still with half-averted face, the dust of diamonds on his brow, he stood whom once Missie had loved—dear sea-grey babe with the fond eyes; nor seemed to see the figure like a gallow's-tree on the snow above him.

Slowly the Laird swung round and looked along the way he had come. He saw his own trails broadly splashed upon the snow; he saw

that chain of dotted black leading from the thicket to his feet; and turned again.

From his feet the chain upon the snow—black, inky, damning dots—led across the virgin white, through bog-myrtle and reed-tussocks, skipping here, winding there, to end abruptly in that careless, throbbing form.

He looked beyond, and there upon the other slope, the snow lay as a winding-sheet.

The fingers at his mouth ceased twitching and were still; then they pulled aside the shawl, and his mouth was shown like a seam of iron.

"Here!" he hoarsed.

At that Danny turned with surprised ears, saw his master on the brow above, and came to him across the snow, grinning and with dear eyes.

Daintily he picked his way among the pools, hopping from tussock to tussock; then at a canter up the white slope with backwards ears and swinging tail.

A yard from the feet of his Lord he saw the lank-necked body swinging in the wind; paused on three feet, the fourth caught up delicately, and standing poised so, thrust forth a tentative long nose and sniffed, shocked, interested, faintly wagging.

Above him the Laird stooped, and stooped,

and stooped, until his face was close above the other's.

"You Lie!" he sereamed, and smote at him with the murdered bird.

Danny started as if stabbed. Then he looked up into the face above him, and his eyes were those of one who once, lying among her pillows, had prayed—"You will be good to him, Massa!—you won't—you won't——"

Then the soul died out of him as the soul dies out of a man.

He made no move to fly. Where he stood there he lay down in the snow, at his master's feet, shrugged together as a boy waiting a buffet from his mother's hand; only rolling up his eyes in dumb appeal to his dear Lord to strike quickly.

But the end was not yet. The old man stayed his hand.

He steadied himself. The wrack of rage had swept upon him like a tempest that leaps upon a countryside, sweeps across it, leaving desolation in its wake, and passes on.

He was left shattered, but himself.

At his feet lay the ghost of him who had onee been Daniel, Son of Ivor, Faithful Heart, and Knight of the Shield of Snow; not even now afraid of the Death that was his just due; but stricken mortally beeause he saw that by his

sin he had hurt to death this old fond man whom he loved as the faithful love their God.

"Up!" said the Laird.

Danny rose hopelessly. He set his snow-wet feet against his master's knee, as often of old with laughter in his eyes, stretching his toes cat-like and yawning hugely, when seeking a dear caress; now he waited without hope, to be dealt with faithfully.

The Laird essayed to speak. Thrice he tried, and thrice he failed; and his old fingers twitched. An ice-blast seemed to have swept upon him to petrify him in his purpose.

Iron of lip, iron of eye, iron of heart, he stood, not in anywise to be moved from his duty by any weakness of pity.

"Here!" he called, still now and terrible; and Danny in the snow, hopeless, heartless, crept in to his feet and nestled there.

"I trusted you," began the Laird, "and you betrayed me. I might forgive ye treachery," said he. "You did Murder," he went on. "God might forgive ye that. Lastly," and his voice began to grow, "your Life has been a Lie!" he paused—"a Lie!" he repeated with ever-growing voice—"a *Lie!*"

He looked down with burning eyes into the grey face uplifted at his feet.

"For that," he said, "there is one punish-

ment—Death at my hands, and Damnation, as I do believe, at the hands of God."

He drew himself up. No longer now an old man anguished beyond telling, he was the Judge, the Avenger, the Deputy of God, resolute to deal justly and without mercy; and Danny, crouching in the snow, hearkened at his feet.

"I cannot kill you," said the Laird, looking down into the dear eyes of Missie dead, "because—I cannot. I leave your last punishment to God," he continued after a pause. "But what I can do, I do."

He gathered himself, stood, greatly gaunt, greatly terrible; and with still finger pointed over the snow.

"Go!" he cried in Judgment voice. "I dismiss you from before my face—forever."

He turned and tottered quavering away. Danny stood and watched him, shivering, and not with cold; nor made attempt to follow. Awhile he stood so in the snow, quite silent, still; then he, too, turned and pattered rapidly away over the snow. Once he threw up his head as if to howl, pawing in the air as in pleading to the King of Heaven to pity; but no sound came. Often he blundered in the snow, righted himself and trailed on, in the

sodden way of one who is without hope in this world and the next.

So on, till he came to the broken wall beneath the lareh-tree wood.

Leaping on it, he stood there and looked baek —a shivering grey shadow, dim in the dusk, with long arehed back, hopeless tail, and eyes like wounds.

He saw the high-shouldered figure of the Laird, quavering lonely homewards, slipping in the snow, and stumbling ever in his old-man's hurry to be gone, the murdered bird still swinging from his hand; he saw his home beyond, dear, dingy, naked to all the winds that blow; he saw old Lammer-more bluffing it behind, white-headed in the falling night; then he erouehed, and leaped as one who leaps into the bottomless pit.

CHAPTER LV

Danny Dead

The Laird sat in the dusk of the great hall.

There the Woman had found him sitting, silent, stark, and cloaked, just as he had come in, and forthwith had fallen upon him to hail him back to bed; but for all heed he paid he might have been dead.

"Will Mr. Heriot bide here till Death comes to him?" she asked at last, with bitter irony, "for if so I will just light the fire."

"I bide here," said the Laird.

She entered with faggots and knelt beside the cold hearthstone, and as she busied herself babbled to the dumb old man of the death that was his due.

The fire lighted, the red glow of it fell on Danny's basket by the fire-dogs all unoccupied.

The Woman kneeled back, startled.

"Where, then, is my man?" she cried, turning sharply on the shadow sitting in the gloom behind.

"I kenna," said the Laird, and said no more.

"Did he not return with your Honour?" the

Woman asked, rising. "Did he not bide you in the porch?"

"No," said the Laird.

"Queer," said the Woman, and suddenly bethought herself. "I ken what it would be. While your Honour was at Kirk, he put out after Her, the bloody bit!" she said, and chuckled, "who has not been after Her this week past? He is the true man is my wean. God made the Sabbath for a day of slaughter, is what they hold. That will be it, and in a while he will be back after his tea."

She departed to return with a saucer full of tea that she placed on the stone-flagged floor beside the basket, just as she had done on any Sabbath afternoon since Missie was away; and in the tea she dropped the accustomed lump of sugar, "because," as she said, "it was the Lord's day, which should be made sweet to dog as well as man. And see to it he says his blessing before he has it," she ordered. "He has fallen away from grace, I do think, since Missie's day."

She tramped away.

As she reached the door, the voice from the gloom, hoarse and brief, followed her.

"Send Crabbe here!" it ordered.

"He's abroad," said the Woman shortly.

"Where?" asked the Laird.

"On the hill," said the Woman. "He was off with the piece* when it came on to snow. I heard him fire not ten minutes since."

The Laird was left alone. Long he sat in silence and the growing gloom.

Habited as when he had come in, the short cloak about his shoulders and the snow still wet on it, his bonnet on his head, the dead bird hanging limply from his hand, he sat stiff-backed in the half-arm chair like a frozen figure with muffled mouth and staring eyes; while on the leaded window overhead the flakes fell softly like finger-touches of the dead.

Twenty minutes passed; then the door opened. In it stood Robin, and behind him the Woman, a torch flaming and draught-blown in her hand, while down the passage was the rush of wind like a wolf pack howling through the open door of the kitchen far away.

Robin entered, thrust on from behind. The Woman followed, shielding her torch, slammed the door against the following wind, and placed her back against it. Neither spoke. Robin lolled against the wall, his head against his arm, the snow upon him, sobbing like a little boy.

The Woman, haggard-eyed, was watching the cloaked shadow in the gloom across the hall.

*The piece: gun.

"Sir-r!" she whimpered at last.

"Eh?" said the Laird, hoarse and harsh.

"Robin, man," urged the Woman, "tell!" and tried to pull his covering arms away from before the old man's face.

"I canna," sobbed Robin, and shook with sobs. "I just canna," and wriggled free.

"Try!" whimpered the Woman. "Consider his Honour."

"Tell!" cried the Laird; and his voice leaped out of the silence like the voice of a wolf-king.

"It is Danny," gasped the old man, burying his head in his arm against the wall as though to smother his grief.

The Laird sat back without a word.

"—That is," sobbed the old man.

"—That was," interposed the Woman, sobbing herself.

"Is?" said the Laird with thunder-brow. "Was?" said the Laird, "what?"

"Dead!" gasped Robin, and rolled his head on his arm.

"Dead!" wailed the Woman.

"Dead!" cried the Laird, and leaning forward slew them with a glance.

"Just dead," gasped Robin, "my Danny!"

"Just dead," wailed the Woman, "my mannie!"

"And his blood's on me," blubbered Robin.

"I am guilty of him who would have died for him."

"It was no fault of yours, Robin!" the Woman cried, valiant to comfort him. "The Lord just sent it."

"He might not," said Robin, and sobbed afresh. "He just might not."

"Maybe Missie had need of him," said the Woman, sobbing.

The Laird had risen and gathered his cloak about him.

"Where does he lie?" he asked.

"Stiff and stark on Lammer-more!" whined Robin, "just as it was in my dream, and I am guilty of him! who loved him like a son."

"Son," gasped the Woman. "Never a son like to him; a son without the trouble of them and the tribulation. A son!" she cried. "Dearer than any daughter was Danny to me!"

She lost her face in her apron.

"Since Missie was away I was childless but for him," she wailed. "He was my wean to me."

"He was my son to me," sobbed Robin.

"He was my soul to me," said the Laird, quavering across the hall.

CHAPTER LVI

The Expiation

The Laird pushed by them as they babbled, without a word.

He had passed down the passage and was now fumbling at the great outer door.

The Woman saw, understood, and ran at him.

"Dear your Honour!" she cried, breaking into fresh sobs. "You will never be going to him. Dear your Honour! Dinna, your Honour!" and laid hands on him.

"Crabbe!" called the Laird, thrust down his bonnet, flung back the door, and passed out into the windy night.

"I am guilty of him," sobbed Robin, stumbling blindly past her, "I am guilty of him, who would have died first," and he staggered after his master into the night.

The Laird was tramping down the steps.

The Woman, the torch still gusty in her hand, was at his heels, one passionate hand tugging at him to stay.

"Ye shallna!" she cried, and struggled. "It's death! Speak to him, Robin! Cry him

back!—and siccan a night and a—snawin' and blawin'! Ye shallna!" in a paroxysm of passion. "Missie willed ye to me to mend ye and mind ye, and mind me ye shall!"

The Laird turned on her with the glare and terror of the old anger.

"Hands off!" he cried, "Hold back!" and she held back, collapsing on the ground, a huddle of sob-racked humanity.

So the two set forth in the fall of the wintry evening, the snow about them. Out of earshot of the door, the Laird turned upon Robin sobbing noisily at his elbow.

"Crabbe," he said, and laid a huge hand on the old man's shoulder; "you did but do your duty."

The old man ceased his sobbing.

"Eh!" said he, mistily, —"duty?"

"Ye caught him in the act and shot him," pursued the Laird.

"Shot him," said Robin, misty, muddled. "Shot him! Oh, ay," he added, and seemed to understand. "I shot him a bit."

"It was your duty," repeated the Laird.

"It was so," said Robin, "seeing I kenn't he was Her."

"You ken't that!" cried the Laird, swinging on him.

"I kenn't none other was," said Robin, dully.

"And you said no word to me!" said the Laird, his hand gripping the other's shoulder to crack it.

"I was for saying it to you," whined Robin, wriggling himself free, "but the Woman would not let me by."

The Laird stood with both great hands upon the other's shoulders, and at last spoke.

"Tell on," he said; "tell all."

"There is little to tell," said Robin, sodden, sullen. "When it cam' to snaw, I put out with the piece, because of my dream, and that if so might be, with Missie helping me, I might meet him, and shoot him, and so make sure."

The old man's voice broke.

"And I did meet him," he whined, "hirplin' off the hill laffin'——"

"Laughing?" hoarsed the Laird.

"Laffin' like a daftie," said Robin.

"Who?" hoarsed the Laird.

"Who?" cried Robin testily. "Why, Simon Ogg."

The Laird breathed once, and his hands dropped from the other's shoulders.

"And I gave him a cry to stop," Robin continued, "and he just stopped; and when he saw me he was afraid."

The old man ceased to sob.

"And I asked him—'where'll you be from?'

"'From the hill,' said he.

"'What ha' ye been after?' I asked him.

"'Danny,' said he.

"'Where is he?' said I.

"'Up yonder,' said he, pointing. 'In the Neuk of the Brae.'

"'What's he at?' I said.

"Then he looked at me and I looked at him. It was on the edge of the dark, but I could see his face white as the moon, and him shakin'.

"'Will I tell ye?' said he.

"'Best,' said I, joggling the piece.

"'Eating poison,' said he, and began to run for his life, laffin' like a daffie."

The old man paused. "And just then" he went on at last, "the piece let fire and he gave a bit of a skelp, and over he went like a shot hare. And where he lay, there I left him. And I," said the old man, and came to a sudden halt, "I skeltered off up the hill, and there!" his words were drowned as it were beneath a water-flood—"I found him—my man—my Danny—cauld—cauld as clay—out by in the Neuk of the Brae."

The Laird removed his hands from the other's shoulder and held them before his face.

"I am lost," he cried, in the voice of the child who is frightened in the night; "I am lost."

At last he looked up.

"Then how came Danny dead?" he hoarsed, "and you guilty of him."

"It was the poison, I do tell you!" cried Robin with the querulousness of one who iterates and reiterates and still is not believed. "It was the poison. And oh!" he cried, rambling off into the old woeful refrain, "I am guilty of him! I am guilty of him, who would have died first, for it was me laid it, it was me laid it in the Neuk of the Brae."

"Was he with ye when ye laid it?" asked the Laird.

"With me!" cried the other in bitterness of scorn; "of course he was with me. Would I have laid it if he had not been with me? Na," he cried, "na," resolving into tears afresh, "he was with me, and I tell't him, 'What is good for Her and Her likes is bad for you and me, my mannie.' And he backed his ears, and grinned at me and snuffed it cannily like the Christian he was, but never made bid to touch it, and he kenn't——" he paused.

"He kenn't," said the Laird.

"He kenn't," sobbed Robin, "clever as a Christian as he was, he kenn't, he kenn't. And oh!" in a storm of woe, "it was just deleeberit."

"It was so," said the Laird, and breathed like a man coming to the surface out of the depths of the deep.

"And just to think of it," sobbed Robin, "our Danny—Missie's Danny—to commit a suicide."

"A suicide," echoed the Laird.

"And no cause why," sobbed Robin, "and no cause why."

"And good cause why," said the Laird.

"And why?" sobbed Robin.

"His heart was dead," said the Laird. "That's just why."

"And me thinkin' I had cured him!" cried Robin, bursting out afresh.

The Laird ploughed on his way without a word, and Robin followed.

It was not till they were clear of the policies and had entered the birch-woods that the Laird spoke.

"What of Simon Ogg?" he asked, pausing. "We must heed the living before the dead."

"Ye need take little heed for him," said Robin.

"Is he dead?" cried the Laird, and stopped.

"Not him!" said Robin dolefully. "He is little scathed from what I could see."

"AN OLD WHITE QUIXOTE ON A WHITE ROSINANTE"

"Ye did see him, then, when ye came off the hill?" asked the Laird.

"I did so," said Robin. "As I passed where he lay he gave me a cry to come to him, and I kenn't he thought he was killed by the wankly way of his voice. So I just went, and he lay where he'd fallen.

"'Robin Crabbe, you have killed me,' he said, when I cam' to him.

"'Indeed!' said I.

"'Ay!' he said, and after a bit he looked up and cried bitter-like. 'First daddy! then minnie! and now me! and you will hang.'

"'It is little to me,' I tell't him, 'little to me now my Danny is dead!'

"'Is Danny dead then?' he cried, raising on his elbow.

"'Dead,' I tell't him, 'dead as you'll be an hour on.'

"Then he lay back and shut his eyes, and I jalouse he thought his time was come and he'd best make his peace with all.

"'Kneel here beside me,' he whispered; and I knelt.

"'Tell his Honour,' he whispered, 'that Danny is not Her.'

"'Not Her!' I cried, and could scarce keep my fingers off his throat. 'And is it like his Honour would be putting that on my man?'

"'He might,' said Simon. 'He just might; and maybe ye'd best tell him that I was Her.'"

"He was Her!" hoarsed the Laird—"Simon Ogg!"

"Ay," Robin continued. "'I am Her, tell his Honour,' said Simon, 'and none other is.'

"'This is no news to me,' I tell't him.

"'It will be to his Honour, though,' he whispered; and tell't me all—how he had hoped to make an end of Danny by the poison, and would so have done but for me that was too much for him. And then knowing your Honour for a hard man, he was for putting it on Danny that he was Her, as though," cried the old man, kindly, "your Honour'd be like to believe him."

The Laird put both hands to his face as though to hide out the past.

Something dangling from his wrist tapped against his face.

It was the dead bird.

"And what of this, then?" hoarsed the old man, holding the body high in the gloom.

"Eh?" said Robin, peering, "that? Oh, ay, I was forgettin'. Simon tell't me that bit too. That is none of Her handiwork. Danny just killed that."

The Laird breathed faintly.

"Then," he said quietly, "he did murder, and I dealt but justly."

"Murder!" cried Robin hotly. "What kind of murder d'you call that, when she thrust herself down his throat. Murder!" he cried, "it was little murder indeed; or if it was murder it was murder in the way of duty."

"Eh?" said the Laird, all lost again.

"It was just this way, Simon was telling me," continued Robin. "Simon lay on his bed asleep to-day noon, never thinkin' your Honour would keep his Kirk. A-well, when he woke, he went to the door, and none was in the street, and the Kirk-bells done tolling, so he donned himself and ran to the Kirk; but Danny kept the door against him. They had a bit of a bat, and Danny prevailed. Simon cursed him; then he was off and away for the hill after his work that was Hers."

The old man's voice broke.

"A-well, he was just creeping yon bird in your hand that was dusting in the dyke on the edge of the wood to noose her, when he chanced to look up. And there in the park not four yards away was Danny who had followed him. As he looked Danny shot for him. Simon gave a strike, and the cockerel fluster't out from his feet and into Danny's jaws, and piked at my man, and piked, and piked. Danny just snapped back once, and the bird was dead."

The old man began to sniffle.

"Then, Simon was telling me, it was clear my man kenn't what he had done, and your Honour's anger, and Missie's teaching, and he forgot Simon, and he was afraid. And Simon said it was just pitiful the way he took on, running here and there, and giving a bit yelp, and back to the body again, and in the end he took it up and carried it off to hide it because of your Honour's anger."

The old man broke down and sobbed outright.

"And Simon just ran back to keep his Kirk, and there was none to stop him now; and what cam' thereafter," sobbed the old man, "I kenna."

"I ken," said the Laird, and ploughed on his way.

CHAPTER LVII

On Lammer-more

Up the hill he went, Robin slobbering at his elbow.

Within the woods now was darkness and mystery; only the snowflakes like shed fairies' wings meandered down through the branches of the trees, to light their way. So they went on until they came out in the failing light on the white moor, spreading a naked shoulder in the gloom.

In the place they call the Neuk of the Brae they came on him they sought, and not without search; for already the snow lay upon him, lapping him tenderly, as though the Host of Heaven would do for him with flakes of snow that office that once the robins with woodland leaves did for the two lost babes.

He was lying in the snow as a dog lies in the sun, not curled, with hollow flanks, and long grey muzzle laid along the snow, as often he had lain there at Missie's feet on a summer's evening, home from dear adventurings on the hill.

The tragedy was plain to any eyes. A dis-

tance off lay the fatal bait, half devoured. Here mortal sickness had fallen upon him; here when the pangs had racked him he had crawled, working out his agony alone; and then at last, the throes passing, had lain upon the tender snow to sleep.

Above the body in the gloom stood the Laird, stark, silent, sheeted in snow; while Robin sniffed noisily.

There was no mistaking the motive of the wee man's end. Death was the measure meted; Death his just due; Death it should be.

"He did murder," said the Laird slowly.

"Murder!" cried Robin. "She thrust herself down his throat, I am tellin' you. She piked at him. Was he not to pike back? He but clicked his teeth, and it was done."

"But his life was no Lie," continued the gaunt old man, all unheeding. "I thank yon God for that," he said with face upraised. "I thank yon God for that."

He bent and gathered his dead tenderly, brushing the snow off Danny's brow; and the little body was stiff already, and set in the snow as in a winding-sheet.

The Laird took off his bonnet.

"Let us pray," he said, and kneeled in the night, his face uplifted, the snow upon it, his arms outstretched before him, as though offering

back the dead to the God who gave; and behind him in the snow kneeled Robin.

"O God," prayed the Laird, "Thou Who knowest the heart of every living creature, receive into thy presence the soul of this Thy servant who all his years lived in Thy sight until the end, when he fell."

"He didna!" sobbed Robin; "he maybe slipped. Fall he did not."

—"And made atonement," continued the Laird, "as best he knew how. Amen."

"And 'Amen,'" said Robin.

"And Amen, say we."

AUTHOR'S NOTE.—The death of Danny is the one incident in the book which is founded on fact. The rest of the book is imagined; this is not.—A. V.

CHAPTER LVIII

The Voice of the Beloved

For a week Simon hung about the village like a murder-haunted ghost; then he disappeared, and some said he had gone to America, but Robin declared that it had been shown to him that the lad had gone to join his parents.

There is little more to tell, and that little is told by Robin, and no one believes him save, indeed, Deborah Awe; for he is very old and full of care. Moreover, since the Second Sight has come upon the old man, the coldness that has long existed between him and the village has intensified.

It is this matter of the second sight that is at the root of the trouble. The gift of dreams, as we already know, had been with Robin from his youth up; but the other and greater gift was bestowed on him, so he solemnly avers, on the afternoon of that Sabbath Day of Dool.

As his story goes, he was on that day sitting in the kitchen, reading the Book.

"How came you reading the Book?" inter-

posed Cockie Menzies scoffingly, "seeing ye canna read."

"I can read," said Robin, "in my dreams."

"You was in your dreams, then?" asked the inquirer.

"I have said," said Robin.

The other turned on the assembly.

"Mr. Crabbe was asleep over the Book," he said.

"I was in a trance," said Robin tartly, "when I was waked——"

"From yer trance?" queried Cockie.

"See here!" said Robin. "Am I telling this tale or are you?"

"You are," said the other humbly; "I am a truth-teller myself."

Robin eyed him long, and after long search for the retort he could not find came across to the youth and laid a hand upon his knee.

"I am deaf, my lad," he said, "and maybe it is as well for you. Had I heard what you then said in my young youth, or ten years since, you would be out of the flesh by this and into the bottomless pitch."

Cockie routed, Robin sat down again and went on to tell how on that afternoon he had been startled from his meditations by a long and lonely cry, close to him yet far away, like the wail of a lost soul drifting out into the night.

Straightway he recognized it for the warning cry of the passing of the Lairds of Hepburn, and knew that before the fall of night a doom would have fallen on the House.

There were certain of the villagers who claimed that they too had heard the cry, describing it as much the cry that Andra' Gillray's cur-bitch had given the night Cursty Gillray was away. But, as Robin retorted, not without some shew of reason, it was known that no more than one ever heard the cry, and that being so it was gey and likely the cry would pass over him who had served the House of Hepburn forty-score years and more in favour of them that walked in darkness without the gate.

"And the second sight has been with you since that day?" inquired Cockie earnestly.

"It has so," said the old man. "It is on me now," and closed his eyes.

"What do you see?" asked the other, winking at the assembly.

"I see," said the Seer, "a vision of the damned; and you are there along with most of these gentlemens."

The other rose angrily.

"If you see anything, I do think it will be snakes," he said, and went out, others following.

It is ever thus when Robin tells this tale.

At the start the audience is often large, and growing less throughout, until by the time he finishes there is of wont but one left listening, and that one a deaf-mute from his birth.

To him, however, Robin tells the tale as fully, as faithfully, as though he could follow every word. He tells of his pilgrimage through the wood with his Honour upon that night; how they found him they sought, snow-lapped in the Nuek of the Brae; how they knelt in the night and snow; and how the Laird, ordering that Danny should be buried there where he had died, had despatched him, Robin, for mattock and the Book.

Night had fallen when Robin emerged again from the wood on to the naked moor. In one hand was the mattock and the Book, and from the other swung a lantern. A distance behind shuffled the Woman, laden with wraps and cordials for her master, and clean linen and his own home-basket for her dead.

Up there all now was silence and great darkness; and the flakes of snow drifted like gossamer stains across the yellow shaft of lantern light.

As Robin comes to this part of the tale, he shifts in the inglenook until he is knee to knee with the deaf-mute in the corner. He removes his cutty from his mouth, and leaning forward,

taps the other with it, to enforce nearer attention, and tells on, his voice husky with awe.

"As I cam' to the Nuek, where I'd left the Laird, d'ye mind, I heard a noise as of knuckles knockin' on a door, and then a voice.

"And at first I thought it would be his Honour talkin' to our man—and him never hearing word of it, poor mannie! But when I cam' nigher, I kenn't it," here he paused, "for a woman's voice, and her garring herself talk gruff and grumblesome like to a man; and through it a laugh running like the waters of a burn to show that she warna what she seemed.

"And then," the old man tells on, hushed and low, "I kenn'd it for the voice of Missie, dead these nine years; just as she would talk when she was making believe to be his Honour to gar him laugh; and she was saying—and I heard her plain as I see you now—

"'Who's there?' gruff and grumbly.

"'Only me, Marjory,' said the Laird, and his voice was not as it was all the years I kenn'd him—all but That One—sour and dour and short; but just douce-like, as oftens I would hear him of summer evenings in That Year, when he thought none was by but her and the Lord God, walking, the three of them in the garden among the roses.

"Then Missie spoke again.

"Come in, Me,' said she, gruff still, and she was laughing through the tears.

"'And Danny?' said his Honour, all anxious.

"'And Danny,' says Missie, and now she was herself, and each word like a sob of tenderness. 'You—and me—and Danny, Massa! for ever and ever:'

"'O!' cries his Honour, he was greeting—greeting, as I am a Christian man. 'Child!' he cried, as though the content of it was more than he could bear; and I heard him garring to himself, rise, and fall."

Then, as he tells the tale, Robin drew closer, though afraid; the lantern light fell on the Laird. He was kneeling in the snow, his bonnet off, and Danny in his arms, and his face was revealed, as it were, transfigured.

Then he made again as though to rise, smiling with closed eyes, like a sleeping child, wavered, tottered, then fell softly away in his side, and lay there quite still, the snow on him, and Danny sleeping in his arms.

CHAPTER LIX

Sleep

In the old Kirk, at the trysting place of winds amid the hills, sleeps the last of the Lairds of Hepburn by the side of Missie and his grim forbears.

Not far from the two he loved rests Danny. On high Lammer-more he sleeps, where often of old he slept at the feet of his first love, and looks out everlastingly over his wide demesne. Far away shines Burn-Water like a jewel set at the feet of the established hills, and beyond the sea flashing like sheaves of shaken spears. There on his sentinel-height beneath the heather he sleeps, and sleeps well. The curlews haunt the sky above him; the feet of the fox, the old grey brock, and all the enemies he loved, pass and repass above his grave, nor wake him ever now; nor now shall cold of snow nor heat of sun, nor drumming wind, nor rain upon him ever rouse him more.

Warden of the Marches, he holds his post, and keeps his watch beneath the stars faithfully for evermore.