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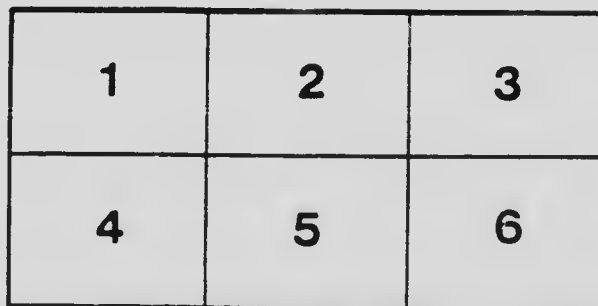
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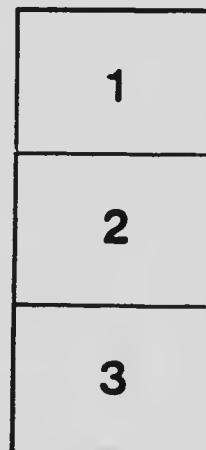
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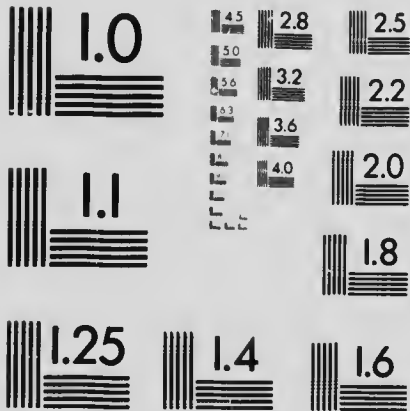
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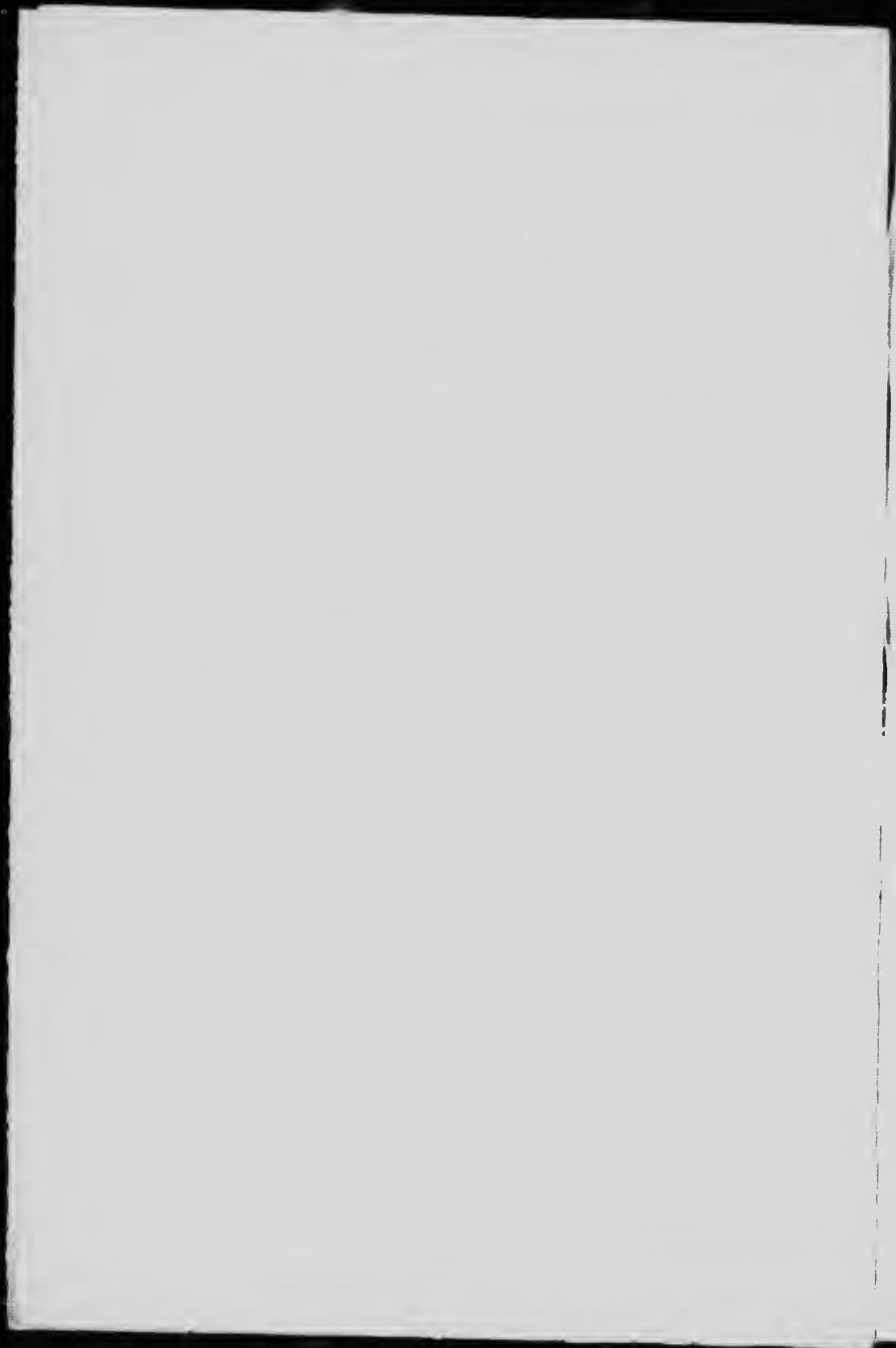
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Romances by
MAY WYNNE

HENRY OF NAVARRE
MAID OF BRITTANY
WHEN TERROR RULED
LET ERIN REMEMBER
FOR CHARLES THE
ROVER
MISTRESS CYNTHIA
A KING'S MASQUERADE
THE MASTER WIT

LONDON: GREENING & CO. LTD.

THE GALLANT GRAHAM

A ROMANCE

By
MAY WYNNE

AUTHOR OF "HENRY OF NAVARRE," "A MAID OF BRITTANY,"
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Dedicated
TO
MY MOTHER



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CHAPTER I

BACK TO SCOTLAND

CROMARTY BAY at sunset !
No wonder that the beauty of it brought Nigel Urquhart from his horse to stand gazing with eager eyes at the peaceful scene.

Across the bay floated the sound of the fishermens' songs as they turned homewards, their boats laden with the glittering spoils of the deep. The little fleet, with white and red sails bellying in the breeze, put a final touch to a fair picture.

A picture of home to the man who stood gazing there. Home once more after three years' exile.

He drew a deep breath as his keen eyes travelled slowly over the familiar scene.

Low on the sands nestled the little town of

Cromarty, so near the hungry waters which, according to legend, were doomed twice to engulf her.

And then away, across the bay, the towering forms of the two Sutors, gigantic sentries, holding back, as it were, the great walls of brown precipices, crested with thickets of pine and tangle of furze and briars, which bounded the coast to the mouth of the bay itself. The peaceful town, the hanging woods at the back of it, the sloping promontories beyond terminating in the mighty splendour of snow-streaked, cloud-capped Ben Nevis, formed fair panorama, even for a stranger's eye. But it was more than panorama to Nigel Urquhart, and a smile flickered over the tired, handsome face of the young man, as, slipping his arm through his horse's bridle, he strode slowly down a ravine, on the further side of which stood his destination, Cromarty Castle, the home of many generations of his race.

A mighty building, grey and lichen-covered, battlemented and turreted. A home for soldiers and men of valour, such as the house of Urquhart had bred from time immemorial.

No wonder that he, who returned to it after those weary years, laughed joycously to himself as he paused again to gaze.

Yet, even as he looked, the smile died and his glance became fixed on the castle wall, where rows of small turrets, connected by hanging bartizans, stood out in pair from the main body of the building.

Pshaw! What idle fancy had seized him on the sudden? What old memory stirred of a nursery legend listened to in childish awe and long forgotten?

The wee grey man of Cromarty! That harbinger of dule and sorrow; the bogey of bygone times.

A fancy! Of necessity! since he was no child now to be frightened by such a whimsey. Yet he could have sworn that, as he looked up at the old castle, crimson in the glory of sunset, he had seen, perched on the lintel of a small barred window in the eastern turret, the tiny figure of a dwarf, dressed from head to feet in grey, with long elfin locks and grey beard, whilst the little creature's hands were wrung with agony as he rocked himself to and fro, to and fro, in speechless grief.

Yet Nigel Urquhart, trying to laugh in mock of his own imagination, found his smile but a poor, twisted shadow of mirth, for a Scotchman's superstitions are part and parcel of himself, and the wee grey man with his ill-omened appearance to the returning exile struck a strange chill into the hot blood which had beat so joyously in his veins.

But there were others who had a warmer welcome than that of the castle phantom for the wanderer.

On the top of a larger turret, facing moors and bay, stood two men, Jamie Wilson, the old steward, and Donald Finlay, a lean, sun-burnt young Scot who had been the first to see the solitary horseman who made his way down the ravine opposite.

"E-eh!" he cried, gripping his companion's arm. "If yons not Maister Nigel, his nainsel!"

But old Jamie, blinking in the sunshine, laughed contemptuously. "Maister Nigel," he scoffed, "Maister Nigel, indeed! Weel, and how comes he the noo? Wi' an army at his back to bring Charlie Stuart haim to his ain? I'm thinking it's the only way Maister Nigel will be coming back to bonnie Scotland."

"Deed, an' I dinna ken sae muckle about the army," retorted Donald excitedly, as he craned forward over the turret's edge to the imminent peril of his neck. "But it's meself as would ken Maister Nigel frae the world's end; an' it's Maister Nigel, I say, wha gangs up the castle hill to the gates. Dinna ye see, Jamie, mon? Wadna ye ken the set o' his shoulders an' the blick o' his bonnie face? Win doon, Jamie, win doon to greet the young laird."

Half sceptical, half believing, the older man followed his companion down the winding stairs, shaking his head, however, from time to time with the air of wisdom and foreboding with which those of advancing years and cooling blood treat the hot impetuosity of youth.

"An' e'en if it be Maister Nigel himsel," he murmured softly; "it's no saying but the wee grey mon wha Jamie Craigen saw yestreen hae his bit message o' dule to gie: for it's no wi'out bluid that Charlie Stuart will gang back to the throne of his fathers—if so be 'tis the Lord's will he should e'en get there, which I misdoot me sair—I misdoot me sair. Ah, me! I ken I'm an' auld fule,

but I've seen muckle bluid spilt—bonnie bluid; an' a wadna see mair, though weel I ken it's no just for peace an safety that Nigel Urquhart hae come haim to Cromarty the noo."

But Donald Finlay heard neither the murmurings or complaints of his companion. Already he had reached the bottom of the turret steps and stood, breathless with delight, in the courtyard where Nigel was already dismounting.

"E-eh—Maister Nigel, to think of it," sobbed the honest fellow, and could say no more, though he caught the hand Nigel extended to him with a smile, covering it with kisses.

Nigel Urquhart needed no warmer a welcome home.

CHAPTER II

MONTROSE'S MESSENGER

THREE years had passed since the disastrous defeat at Philiphaugh had crushed—for the time—the Royalist hopes, and driven the gallant Marquis of Montrose and his adherents into exile.

Since then great events had shaken the sister kingdoms of England and Scotland, pre-eminent amongst them the murder of Charles I.

But, though the anger and grief of the Royalists had been raised to fever pitch by the crime, it had seemed that such indignation must be wasted in words since the strength of the Parliamentary party was too great for them to combat.

It is true that there had been several abortive attempts made in favour of the young

Charles Stuart. Chief amongst them being that of Hamilton's Engagement ; but it had ended in failure, and the remnant of the Engagers had to fly for their lives into fresh exile.

The rising of Pluscardine at the head of the great Clan Mackenzie had also been easily crushed, and now, in the year 1649, Charles stood hesitating between the proverbial stools ; on one side the Presbyterians urged him to take the Scottish Covenant, promising their support in his efforts to regain his crown if he did so ; whilst, on the other, stood the Marquis of Montrose, the greatest leader of his day, the man most hated by the Presbyterians of Scotland. Lanark and Lauderdale, chief survivors of the late Engagement, swore, indeed, that much as they longed for the King's restoration, they would rather not see it effected, than that it should be so by the help of the cruel and inhuman James Graham—a title but little deserved by one who stands out in the history of his times, typical of disinterested loyalty, bravery, gallantry, and nobility. There is little doubt as to which side Charles's inclinations leant, but the young King, like his father before him, preferred

ever to take that middle course—so fatal to honour—and temporized with both.

The terms of the Estates were declined—but only in such a way as to make future negotiations possible—and Montrose received the commission of Commander-in-chief of the Royal Forces and Lieutenant-Governor of Scotland. Blind to his master's double dealing, filled with high hopes of success, and burning with that desire for revenge which had possessed him since hearing of the royal martyr's death, Montrose set to work with all his characteristic energy, entreating and pleading for aid from the Powers, sending messengers and agents to Scotland, till, at the end of August, he contrived to forward a small force, chiefly composed, indeed, of Germans and Danes, together with some of the Gentlemen Volunteers who had shared his exile, under the Earl of Kinnoull, to the Orkneys, which belonged to the earl's uncle, the friendly Earl of Morton.

It was with this force that Nigel Urquhart had sailed, and, after leaving the islands, had pressed on southwards to Cromarty in hope of urging his cousin, Sir Thomas Urquhart, to join the Royalist cause.

That the venture on which his leader had embarked was a desperate one, he could not help admitting, even to himself, but its very desperation seemed but to awaken the more eager enthusiasm in his warm and chivalrous young heart.

As he journeyed, hope had been painting the future for him in the brightest of colours. The reception of the Earl of Kinnoull at Kirkwall was but a foretaste of that which would be accorded to the great Montrose when he set foot on Scottish soil.

How eagerly the Orkneymen had flocked to the Royal Standard. Poor, ignorant fishermen, it was true, with but little idea of warfare ; but there was good stuff in them, and training only was wanted to turn them into gallant soldiers. Besides, they would not long be dependent on Orkneymen. The whole land, he assured himself—as the dying Kinnoull assured his leader a few weeks later—"gaped after deliverance" from the yoke of the Parliament.

Fresh from such day-dreams of success and glory, young Urquhart passed through the crowd of servitors who had quickly gathered

to welcome him, for Donald Finlay was not the only one in Cromarty Castle to love "Master Nigel," as they still familiarly called him in remembrance of boyhood's days.

And little more than a lad looked Nigel even now, as with eager impatience he strode forward across the great, oak-panelled hall towards the little room at the foot of the stairs, where instinct told him he would find his cousin. And he was right, for there, sure enough, seated at his table, in almost the identical position in which he had left him three years before, when he bade him adieu ere fleeing into exile, sat Sir Thomas Urquhart, owner of Cromarty Castle and of one of the most extraordinary personalities ever possessed by man.

Wondered at by his own and succeeding generations, the character and genius of this man stands in many a complex light. Although but thirty-six years of age, he looked older by reason, of a slight stoop and the fashion of his hair, which he wore, according to the times, in long love-locks, with curling moustachios, and a short, pointed beard; his blue eyes were keen and piercing, his manner ner-

vous and slightly touched with pedantry. His career, so far, had been varied. In 1630 he had been prominent amongst those who took the King's side when trouble first broke out with the Covenanters, had fought bravely at the Trot of Turriff, and, after undertaking and successfully fulfilling the task of bearing despatches to the King of England, had been knighted by him at Whitehall.

But, from that time, when he had almost immediately succeeded to his inheritance on his father's death, Sir Thomas had withdrawn from all active interest in the Royalist cause and devoted himself to scientific research, where, as he told himself, "for the benefit of his country and the glory of mankind" he laboured year by year in the construction of his ingenious but unfortunate work, the "Universal Language," by which the curse of Babel was to be annulled and all the world, in the course of time, to speak with one tongue.

As his young kinsman entered the room on that sunny August day, Sir Thomas raised his head from his literary work with the dreamy preoccupied air of one to whom, at the present moment, all outside disturbances are unwel-

come. But at sight of Nigel his expression changed, and, though the smile with which he greeted him could scarcely be called one of warm welcome, still it was a smile for which Nigel was duly appreciative.

"So you have returned?" said Sir Thomas, re-seating himself and moving his papers slightly on one side with quick, nervous fingers and a resigned sigh, as his mind slowly travelled back from contemplation of the Urquharts of the times of Japhet to the far less interesting specimen of his race before him.

"So you have returned—may I ask why?"

Nigel's face flushed.

The opening did not seem propitious for his request. His warm, upleaping enthusiasm chilled under the absent gaze of those blue eyes.

"In the cause of our King," he replied.

"Ah," said Sir Thomas reflectively, and waited for him to continue.

It was not easy work, and the young man spoke hesitatingly at first, but, gradually warming to his theme and feeling the energy of his eager zeal returning to his veins, he sketched

in quick, bold outline the future campaign in colours which—alas!—it was never destined to wear. And all the time his cousin sat watching him, first thoughtfully, then wonderingly, till, as Nigel finished with a passionate appeal to himself to join the cause, a half humorous smile passed over his face.

“So James Graham takes the field once more,” he said, and the slight inflection of mockery in his tones brought the colour surging again into Nigel’s cheeks.

“Ah! the great Marquis of Montrose! If my memory serves me well, methinks we met last at the Trot of Turriff—but then he was on the other side. I do not think that we should serve well together—he and I.”

“And if at one time he served on the side of the Covenanters,” cried the younger man in hot indignation at the sneer, “is not that the very fact which proclaims him one of the greatest and most noble of men? It is not the weakling or the coward who dares to own that he was wrong, or dares to be honest enough to change sides because he ceases to approve of what his friends do. The Marquis of Montrose joined the Covenanters for the sake of his

country ; he left them when he found that country's honour lay on the other side. His Majesty has no truer, braver subject than the Marquis of Montrose—he is beyond man's calumny, for scarcely could they dub as time-server a man who leaves the winning for the losing side because his conviction leads him there."

Sir Thomas gently waved his delicate, white hand from side to side as one who would dismiss an argument.

"Let then the loyalty of the Marquis rest, if you will have it so," he said smilingly ; "but still understand that it leads him through paths which, in spite of your kindly invitation, I must refuse to tread ; and, at the risk of again wounding your feelings, my young cousin, permit me to add that this movement spells hopeless failure from the outset. Amongst the Highland clans the name of Montrose may be a power, but who dare count the clans as reliable allies ? The great house of Mackenzie still lies broken and bleeding after its failure in the spring—even the gallant Pluscardine will scarcely be able to rally them again to the cause—and for the rest they had

sooner be at each others' throats than a common enemy's, as your leader has found before to his cost ; whilst, beyond the clans, there will be but few to answer the summons of James Graham. A forlorn hope—dead at the birth."

Nigel did not reply. His kinsman's specious arguments had little weight ; his own loyalty and love for cause and leader would have swept aside the strongest proof which could be brought to bear on possible failure. The personality of Montrose itself, 'to all who came under its spell, was sufficient to engender blind, unreasoning faith and trust in his powers of success. At Inverlochy, Auldearn, Kilsyth and a dozen other battles had not his skill triumphed gloriously over numbers ? And why not again ? Therefore, he was silent before the arguments of the subtle man of letters who sat before him, looking into the future with the keen wisdom of cooler judgment.

" It is not alone the forlornness of the hope which leads me to refuse my service to the King's cause," continued Sir Thomas, glancing lovingly towards his papers ; " but the rea-

son which for the last eight years has caused me to sheathe my sword for the pen. . It is not only to my country, but to mankind, that I owe this debt. Science claims me, and her demands must be satisfied. Let me draw your attention to my work, cousin, which has marvellously progressed these last three years. My 'Universal Language' is now complete," and he waved his hand proudly towards a mighty manuscript which lay at his right hand. "Yes, it is completed," he said reflectively, as he pressed the tips of his delicate fingers together. "Completed for the glory of my country and my name, throughout future generations. The name of Urquhart shall not be forgotten, Nigel, but remembered and blessed for that work alone. See——"

But Nigel knew too well the length of the discourse that would await him, did he give ear to all his cousin had to say on the subject of his own works.

At the risk of offending this self-appraised genius he ventured on an interruption.

"Then you refuse to join the cause of our gracious King on the present enterprise, my cousin?" he asked, rising somewhat abruptly

from his seat ; and there was a keen note of disappointment in his tones.

“ When the right moment comes, Charles Stuart will find that the sword of Thomas Urquhart is ever at his service,” replied the elder man grandiloquently. “ For the present that moment has not arrived, and the calls of science have too strong claims on me to throw away a life which may benefit not only my country but mankind as well.”

If he saw the slight sneer which curled Nigel’s lips at his words he did not permit comment to escape him, but proceeded in a calm and more matter-of-fact tone. “ And you, cousin ? You are resting here for the present at least, I presume, seeing there is no immediate danger. There is no need of invitation for you to make Cromarty Castle your home.”

“ Indeed, such was my intent,” replied Nigel, “ if not encroaching on your hospitality ; for, though it is deep regret to me that you cannot accept my master’s summons, there are others to whom I must carry the invitation of the Marquis of Montrose. The lairds of Culbin, Tulloch and Kinard are loyal gentle-

men. Captain Mackenzie, too, and the noble Pluscardine, with or without his followers, will surely be ready to strike a blow for the King. Besides, Sir John Ogilvy, of Kilsbeth, will, I am sure, gladly welcome the chance of avenging his young kinsman of Inverquhartry."

Sir Thomas shrugged his shoulders with a whimsical smile.

"It may be so," he replied, as he drew his papers towards him, with the evident desire to resume his studies, "though rumour hath it that, since the battle of Philiphaugh, Sir John's opinions have wonderfully changed. But rumour hath an idle tongue and is not readily to be believed."

And with these words he bent once more over his manuscript, leaving his kinsman to make himself at home after his own fashion.

Indeed, as he had himself said, Nigel Urquhart seemed to need no invitation to Cromarty Castle. Early left an orphan, he had, according to the law of Scotland, become the care of his cousin and head of the House of Urquhart, the father of the present knight, and scarcely remembered other home than

the old grey castle, with its turrets, battlements, and picturesque surroundings.

His own father, Graham Urquhart, had belonged to a younger branch of the family, with but a small patrimony, but he had mended his fortunes by falling in love with, and marrying, the heiress of a wealthy English baronet, and it was from her, who died at his birth, that Nigel's inheritance had come.

But the fair English home in far-off Warwickshire saw little of its young master, and, even after attaining his majority, Nigel had still continued to call and look upon his cousin's home as his own. He loved it indeed, with an even more passionate love than its owner. Every stone of it had a friendly interest for him, every dell and nook, for miles around, a memory of boyhood's days, every legend of ghost or fairy, kelpie or mermaid a familiar sound. And so no wonder and no blame to him that his eyes grew dim for a few minutes as he sauntered out across the lawn, which lay beyond the arched gateway, and down the castle hill towards the town. A thousand memories were singing a welcome home to him after that long exile, which,

though voluntary in part, had yet been unavoidable, seeing that dearer even than home and country was the hero of his early manhood, the Marquis of Montrose, whose fortunes he had sworn to follow through sunshine and storm, prosperity and adversity.

He was not to remain long alone to his reflections, for the sound of steps came rapidly behind him, and his servant, an Englishman from his Warwickshire home, Guy Morris by name, appeared, panting, alongside.

"Is ought amiss, Guy?" he inquired, not without some wonder in his tones, for the usually ruddy, good-humoured face was blanched and drawn, and a look nearer fear than he had ever seen there before shone in the blue eyes.

"The Saints preserve us, master!" gasped the man; "but of a surety 'tis a fearsome place we be come to!"

"Fearsome?" echoed Nigel in puzzlement. "Nay, but your meaning is beyond me, lad! Say, what has affrighted you?"

Guy glanced behind him with a shiver.

"I have spoken with one Donald Finlay,"

he said nervously. "A wonderful jargon 'tis that he talks ; but, as far as I could learn from his twisted tongue, 'tis a fearsome place, this same Cromarty, swarming with bogles and witches and such like, till I could scarce stand for the tremors that seized on me ! "

Nigel laughed heartily as he slapped the fellow on the back.

"For shame, Guy lad ! " he cried merrily. "What ! The man who faced Leslie's troopers at Philiphaugh so gallantly, to be scared by an old woman's bogle ! For shame, I say ! "

But, though the dull crimson crept up under Guy's sunburnt skin, he stuck manfully to his point.

"'Tis not bogles alone, master," he said stoutly ; "though it was but yestreen that the old steward saw one with his own eyes seated on a window-ledge of yon castle ; but mermaids who are like to drag a man out to his death under the cruel waves, and green ladies who wash their goblin children in the blood of bairns of the house, and witches who can twist and turn themselves and every

one else to anything from a toad to a black-beetle."

Nigel laughed again.

"Tush, man!" he cried kindly, for it was clear that the honest fellow's feelings were worked up into a state of superstitious terror. "There must be no more gossiping with Donald Finlay, an' we are to stay long in Cromarty! As for such witches and spirits, if we are to face no worse dangers than they we shall soon be welcoming his gracious Majesty at Whitehall. So find your courage, lad, or rather, let it find you in a stoup of nut-brown ale and a good meal. 'Tis want of that more than the evil eye of old Stine Bheag of Tarbat¹ that's ailing you."

And, so saying, he clapped his hand on Morris's shoulder, and led him back in the direction of the castle.

¹ Stine Bheag of Tarbat was a celebrated Scottish witch.

CHAPTER III

ALL HALLOW'S E'EN

OPTIMISM is certainly the prerogative of youth, and thus it is that early enthusiasm will struggle on with the forlorn hope long after despair has drawn older and wiser feet from the perilous path. It was this optimism which buoyed up the spirits of Nigel Urquhart as he rode slowly homewards towards Cromarty after a fruitless visit to the castles of some of the neighbouring lairds, who he had hoped might have been willing to strike a blow in the King's cause. Fair words he had received in plenty, half promises of help in the dim future, when the canny Scotsmen should have seen more clearly in which direction the wind blew; but at present they bided their time, fearing too much the dread power of MacCallum More,

and more eager to save their skins than serve their country.

It was to be Montrose's misfortune, as well as that of his followers, to mistake this cold, calculating spirit for their own heart-whole devotion; and, in the present desperate issue, the mistake was a fatal one.

Perhaps a dim prescience of the fact dawned in Nigel's mind as he rode across the wild waste of moorland that autumn evening.

From the lairds of Culbin and Kinard he had hoped for different answers than the cautious, enigmatical ones with which they had put his impetuous pleadings aside; and theirs had been repetitions of a dozen others. During the two months of patient gleanings he had spent at Cromarty very few indeed had been persuaded to take up arms in the Royalist cause and join the little camp mustering at Kirkwall.

There, too, Fate had been busy at work. Within a few weeks of landing, the Earls of Kinnouall and Morton had been struck down with a deadly fever, and, though with his dying breath the former had sent urgent messages for Montrose not to delay his coming,

still the Marquis had been obliged to remain where he was awaiting fresh commissions from his Royal master at Breda. A delay which put the fatal touch to an enterprise foredoomed to disaster.

But, if such forebodings murmured their direful whispers into the ears of young Urquhart, he shook them off and rebuilt his vanishing castles of air with determined hand. Once let Montrose appear and all would be well; the clans would rise in a body at the call of that beloved chief who had led them so often to victory, and the clans would be followed by all Scotland, which lay groaning under the bondage of oppression.

A vivid flash of lightning, accompanied by a deafening roar of thunder, which rolled reverberating away amongst the distant hills, startled horse and rider, and the next few minutes were spent in soothing Cavalier's nerves, which, however, were scarcely reduced to temporary calm before another tremendous peal sent the high-spirited steed careering over the moor at a pace which threatened to unseat his master or plunge both into some treacherous bog.

Rain, too, began to fall in large and heavy drops, and a strong wind swept across the open plain with the murmur of the coming storm in its voice. A small wood of birch and larch gave shelter from the drenching rain, but it was too dangerous a resting-place whilst the lightning played among the trees, and again the horseman emerged upon the moor.

As he did so he became aware of another solitary equestrian riding in front of him.

In the gathering gloom it was difficult to distinguish the outline, but, as he approached, Nigel saw that the rider was a lady.

Her case was even sorrier than his own, for, whilst his thick buff coat afforded some protection from the downpour, her lighter riding gear must have long since been drenched through. Her strength, too, seemed to be failing her, for her slender figure drooped forward piteously in the saddle, whilst her long locks, having escaped from their confinement, streamed down from under her wide beaver hat in a mass of tangled curls. In a moment Nigel had spurred his horse

alongside his companion in misfortune, and but just in time, for her steed, stumbling on the uneven ground, would have fallen had he not leant forward and seized the reins from nerveless fingers.

"Pardon, madam," he said courteously, as the lady, startled at his sudden appearance, uttered a faint scream. "Allow me to assist you. It is difficult work to guide a horse across so wild a waste on such an evening, and you are unattended?"

He spoke the last words in a questioning tone, glancing in some wonder towards the girl's face, and noting only that she was beautiful ere he turned aside his gaze for fear of embarrassing her, for it was indeed strange in those days of strife and wild doings for a lady to go anywhere alone, however near her home might be.

The girl sighed deeply—a sigh in which misery and relief were strangely blended.

"Yes, sir; I am alone," she replied in so low a tone that Nigel had to bend forward to catch the words. "I—I started from home with a company of friends to ride to the hill of Nigg, but somehow I have missed them, and, losing

my way on this terrible moor, I had given
n. self up for lost."

She shuddered as a vivid flash of lightning
lit up their gloomy surroundings with a
strange, white light.

"Ah, merciful Heavens!" she moaned.
"It is terrible!—and to-night of all nights to
be so lost! What evil can it portend?"

"To-night?" echoed Nigel, who had now
dismounted and was leading both horses
across the boggy heath. "And why to-
night, fair mistress?"

"Is it possible you have forgotten?" she
whispered, bending forward and looking into
his face with dark troubled eyes. "It is—
ah, Heaven help us!—it is All Hallows E'en."

The terror in her tones found a sudden
faint echo in her listener's heart, for Nigel
Urquhart was not altogether proof against
the wild, superstitious beliefs attaching to that
fateful night; a night in which the powers
of evil are said to hold their reign in mysteri-
ous orgies unlawful for human eyes to behold.

Evidently the thought of these super-
natural terrors had seized the poor wanderer
with more agonizing alarm than the perils

of her position, and, seeing from the paleness of her face how unnerved she was, Nigel hastened to reassure her.

"Have no fear," he said gently, pausing a moment to bend back towards her, for the wind swept the echo of his words from him in its angry fury. "Old Stine Bheag and her friends have, methinks, too much work on hand to trouble their heads about us, and, in good time, methinks I see ahead the lights of Woodside Farm, and right sure I am that John McCulloch and his good wife will give us shelter from the storm, and beds too for the night : since, unless your home be close, 'twould be useless to attempt reaching it this evening."

"Nay, if this be indeed Woodside," replied the girl, "my home is many a mile away, for I live at Kilspeth, near the village of Rosemarkie, eight miles beyond Cromarty town, and, though I fear my poor father will count me lost indeed, still, as you say, to travel so great a distance, in such a storm, were impossible."

"Verily so," replied Nigel, "and so the more welcome will be yonder farmstead,"

and, urging on the horses to a gentle trot, he hastened forward.

A loud barking of dogs heralded their approach, but so great was the noise of the storm that Nigel had beaten long and vigorously on the outer door before it was flung open, and the farmer, a big brawny Scotsman, of Herculean proportions, stepped out, drawing the door to behind him, for the violence of the storm was great.

A few rapid words served to explain their dilemma, and no sooner did the worthy McCulloch recognize Nigel's voice than the warmest welcome was pressed on him and his companion.

"Coom awa' in, maister, coom awa' in," he cried hospitably. "And the leddie, too. Eh!—but ye're welcome to a' that John McCulloch has in the house. Hi, Colin, coom owt wi' you an tak' the laird's horses around to the yardie."

As he spoke, a tall, slouching lad of fifteen opened the door, the wind, as he did so, blowing so forcibly against it as almost to tear it from its hinges and evoking such cries of consternation from within that Nigel, sup-

porting his fair companion on his arm, hastened to step inside, whilst the worthy farmer followed, closing the door quickly behind him, as his son led the frightened, trembling horses round to the thatched barn which served as stables.

In pleasant contrast to the wild fury without, was the scene within. A strangely picturesque one enough, for, in every farm and cottage throughout Scotland, at that period, the festivities of All Hallows E'en were entered into with zest, and a wonderful belief in the supernatural agencies which, by strange signs and tokens, were to unveil the future, more especially with regard to matters matrimonial.

No wonder, therefore, that every lass gathered eagerly round the fireside to learn what was to be told her on such an important question.

In the farm of Woodside tradition had specially marked All Hallow's E'en as worthy of commemoration, for had not the founder of the family won his bride and the homestead through that very agency nearly a hundred years ago? Thus young Alaster McCulloch, the little Highland lad who

acted as herdsboy to the rich old tacksman then owning Woodside, had whispered his own name from the kiln-pot as the tacksman's fair daughter, Lillas, wound the clue, and so, convincing her of her wholly undreamt-of fate, succeeded a few years later in marrying her and inheriting the homestead as well.

Many another device had these gay-hearted trickers of fate to learn their destinies, and, though to-night had been too stormy to allow the young folk to practise the first ceremony of pulling the cailplants, still, judging from the merry peals of laughter which greeted the travellers, the succeeding fun was growing fast and furious round the great peat fire.

The farmer's wife, a buxom smiling woman, as comely as a full-blown cabbage rose, greeted them with Scottish hospitality, and carried the half-fainting girl off to change her dripping garments, leaving Nigel to join the fireside group and to dry his wet clothes as well as he might by the cheery blaze.

Many were the covert glances of admiration cast by the youths of the party towards the beautiful face of the unknown lady on her

reappearance, glances which, not being lost on their fair companions, caused more than one jealous pang, and more than one tossed-back head and pair of pouting lips.

But the object of so much attention was happily unconscious of it all. Dressed in some of Elsie McCulloch's garments, with a bright kerchief round her neck and little bare feet peeping daintily from under the rough serge skirt, she looked like a young queen amongst her humble companions. But there was no pride in the frank gaze of her blue eyes, only laughing wonder as she looked around, till her glance, falling on Nigel as he leant against the wall, caused a wave of colour to pass over her cheeks, and an involuntary glance downwards towards her feet. But she need not have feared ; it was her face, not the strange incongruity of her costume, which held Nigel's eyes, and even as she blushed he turned aside his gaze.

A table was quickly spread with refreshments, and after they had eaten, the two stranger guests took their places amongst those gathered around the fireside, whose laughter, though more fitful than formerly,

as the young people glanced shyly towards their guests, had broken out again over the discomfiture of the farmer's daughter, a bright-eyed little brunette, whose nut had leapt aside from that of her companion—a young farmer who, judging from his looks, was by no means indifferent to her charms—thereby causing uproarious mirth to their companions.

“Hoots, then, Elsie, lassie!” cried one damsel whose nut had burnt more peacefully beside her swain's; “it's no a verra gude kirkin' ye'll be ha'eing, if ye gang sic gait wi' Charlie. See, Jamie, lad, her nit hae loupit richt into the flames!” and another peal of laughter greeted this proof of the unsuitability of the projected match.

“I hae little faith i' the burning of the nits,” retorted Elsie, crimsoning with no little confusion at the merriment evoked by her nut's misbehaviour. “For myself, I'll be reading the glass the noo. Ye ken weel, Jessie McCrea, that there's mair i' the glass than in a' the nits ever burnt.”

The new charm quickly drew the fireside group from their nut-burning, and they crowded

round Elsie as she gently cracked her egg, after filling the glass with water, and allowed the white of it to slide down into it, quickly placing her hand afterwards on the mouth of the glass.

For a moment there was a silence of intense excitement, whilst her handsome young suitor, whose nut had gone awry, elbowed his way masterfully towards her. Then very slowly the girl withdrew her hand, and with face a little blanched with anxiety, peered down into the mysterious depths.

The heavier parts of the egg had sunk to the bottom of the glass, but the lighter now shot up and apart, their light and opaque tissues separating into fantastic shapes. It was the distinguishing of these shapes which was named "reading the glass"; wherein superstition declared that a shroud, a tomb, or a coffin presaged an early death; a plain covered with armies, that a soldier husband was to be the lot of the fair gazer; ships, perhaps, portended a sailor swain, and so forth.

For a moment Elsie's smooth brows wrinkled themselves into a little frown, then a

smile brought the dimples to her cheeks as she glanced swiftly up to her lover's face.

"I canna just preceesely say," she murmured bashfully, "but it hae the look o' a harvest field, wi' the waving corn, an' a bit hoos an' kail yardie ahint it. Has it na, Charlie, lad?"

Charlie bent with alacrity over the mysterious glass in close proximity to Elsie's face, but whether he read his fate and her's in the depths of the clear water or the clearer blue of her eyes it were difficult to say. At any rate, it was plain that fate had kindly decreed that Elsie McCulloch was destined for a farmer's bride, and the untoward behaviour of the nuts was forgotten in a shy blushing happiness on the part of both lovers.

When the laughter occasioned by the lucky glass had subsided a fresh glass was brought, and more merriment ensued, even the stranger lady joining in the game, with a frank, girlish enjoyment unhampered by a trace of pride. She made a pretty picture as she stood there in her simple peasant's dress, her brown curls, still wet and shining, falling far down over her shoulders, her cheeks flushed with warmth

and excitement, and her dark-blue eyes sparkling with fun as they bent to gaze down into the filmy picture of the future.

Behind her the crowd of peasants stood back a little with that inborn feeling of politeness which was their Scottish birthright, whilst the great fire threw a lurid light over the scene, which could only be looked at through a haze of smoke, since the kitchen of Woodside Farm boasted no chimney.

There was a sigh of disappointment as the girl raised her head, shaking it with a smile.

"Indeed, I fear I can see nothing," she declared, half regretfully; "the film takes no shape at all."

Elsie McCulloch, however, unawed like the rest by the strangers, could not allow so obvious a conclusion as she had already come to, to pass by unnoticed. Quickly stepping forward, she bent her own pretty head towards the glass, then looked up with a roguish smile, first directed towards one and then the other of her father's guests.

"Eh, leddie," she cried merrily; "but I ken ye'll no hae been reading the glass at Hallowmas sin syne, for it's lang sin I hae

seen a skance o' so clear a redding. Gar a blink o' it, Charlie, lad? Isna it a bonnie braeside, wi' the sodgers' tents aboon it as thick as bees i' the byke? Tak' anither glint yoursel', leddie, the noo? Eh, but it's plain that your gude-man maun be nocht but a sodger laddie."

A titter rose from one or two of the girls, but was instantly checked by Mistress Elsie herself as she stepped back from the side of the table, leaving her guest to stand, still gazing down into the glass, with the shadow of a puzzled frown on her pretty face.

Elsie's guess seemed to have been wide of the mark, for the thought of a soldier lover brought no quick blush to her cheeks, though on a sudden the colour came as she raised her eyes absently and met the direct gaze of Nigel Urquhart.

Seen through the haze of smoke as he stood facing her, he might almost have been the apparition of the one on whom she thought unknowingly; whilst, for the first time, she noticed the embroidered coat which was the recognized half military dress of the period, and an undefined feeling of fate held her for

a moment gazing wonderingly into the dark, handsome face which surmounted it.

Who was this unknown cavalier who had come so opportunely to her assistance? What name had the farmer given him as he made them welcome to his home?

Urquhart—Urquhart,—not Sir Thomas Urquhart, of Cromarty Castle! She knew *him* well enough by sight—so well that it seemed impossible that this tall, gallant gentleman could be a kinsman of his. And yet now she remembered vaguely to have heard of another of the name, one whom her brother had oft-times mentioned as being friend to the young kinsman who had been so cruelly executed by the Presbyterians after the fatal battle of Philiphaugh.

And Nigel Urquhart, already fascinated by the fair face before him, stood also wondering, little guessing that the chance succour had been given to the daughter of that Sir John Ogilvy from whom he hoped so much in his master's cause, and who he had even now been on his way to see.

The long and varied amusements of Hallow E'en went merrily on their way, with much

blushing on the part of some, and more audacity than might have been ventured on less auspicious evenings with others, whilst a fresh laugh was raised at the expense of little Elsie McCulloch, when three times she dipped her hand into the empty dish ranged with its two companions along the hearth—this proving beyond doubt that the reading of the glass was not to be trusted in and that the fate of the spinster must surely overtake her.

At this juncture, kindly Mrs. McCulloch came to her daughter's aid with the welcome announcement that supper was ready.

"An' ye'll do weel to just eat up your bit butter'd sowens hot, an' gang doucely haim," she observed tritely as she placed the great dish which ever constituted the supper of All Hallows E'en before her guests.

"The storm is nigh spent, an' ye canna all stay at the hoos, though the lassies wull be welcome to 'bide if they wull, for it's pit mirk the nicht, an' it's no just pleasant to gang owre the moor wi' sic feckless callants in sic a steer."

And she glanced severely towards one or

two of the lads whose mirth had been growing rather more uproarious than she approved of in the presence of the young laird from the Castle, as she called Nigel Urquhart, having known him since he had come there, a little kilted, curly-haired lad of seven, for whom there had ever been a warm corner in her motherly heart, in spite of the minister, Mr. George Anderson, who every Sabbath thundered anathemas against all servants of the godless Charles Stuart, more especially those who had followed—or were ever likely to follow—the banner of “bluidy James Graham.”

“Eh! they maun be ripening for hell fire, a’ the lot o’ the ungodly,” she would murmur to herself as she sat stiff and attentive beneath the worthy minister; “but not my ain bonnie Maister Nigel. Na, na, they shall na c— ain o’ the bluidy de’il, wi’ his sonsie —, an’ kindly tongue. Na, na!”

And the good woman gripped her mouth, nodding her head sagely, as she walked home, convinced that the Marquis of Montrose might be the devil himself as Mr. Anderson had hinted, but that no fleck of his blackness

could come near the bright-faced lad who fought side by side with him in battle, and whose name ever brought a smile of old memories back to her comely lips.

“Maister Nigel” had friends indeed at the little moorland farm, which lay close to the shadow of the Hill of Nigg ; friends who one day were to prove themselves worthy of the name.

CHAPTER IV

MARY OGILVY

PERHAPS in a spirit of atonement after her wild night's fury, Nature smiled her loveliest with the dawn of a new day.

The storm had passed, leaving behind it scattered boughs and roofless huts, broken trees and wrecked ships, but leaving also the sweet, ozone-filled freshness which seems, especially in autumn, to bring back the whispered memory of spring.

Every flower was born again into dewy beauty, every leaf had shaken off its dusty eld and glistened fresh and fair in the warm sunshine; the purple heather was ringing peals of fairy chimes from every dripping bell, and the rich tints of colouring glowed in a very prodigality of beauty, from the

brilliant crimson of the wild cherry trees to the pale gold of the stately elms.

Everything seemed to shout out its glad message, "Rejoice! Rejoice!" And sad, indeed, must have been the human heart which could not respond to the challenge.

Certainly the echo rang loud and clear in the hearts of the two who rode side by side over the moor that morning, leaving behind them the friendly shelter of the little farm, which, marked by the row of elms, lay to the east; a humble dwelling of turf and stone, as viewed by morning light, though verily a haven of joy in last night's storm.

"It is to Kilspeth that you ride, fair mistress?" questioned Nigel, as they turned their horses' heads southwards towards Cromarty.

"Yes," replied the girl, smiling as she read what lay behind the question in his eyes, then adding, with a light little laugh:

"And you, sir, are for Cromarty? See! I have the advantage, Mr. Urquhart, for you have not yet even asked my name, whilst I found out yours long ago."

"I—I"—stammered Nigel, but she interrupted him.

"I am no great lady wandering incognito, that I should make a mystery of my lineage," she said merrily; "being but the daughter of Sir John Ogilvy, of Kilspeth, near Rosemarkie Town. And that reminds me to hasten, Sir Cavalier, for my poor father must be by now wellnigh distraught with anxiety."

"Truly he must indeed," replied Nigel fervently, as he looked down into the beautiful, girlish face beside him, on which remained no trace of last night's pallor and terror, but was bright and rosy as a child's, dimpling with smiles as she frankly returned his gaze.

"As for Kenneth," she continued, following the train of her thoughts, "he will be in despair, for, verily, if ought befell me, the poor lad's case would be even harder than it is now, since my father would scarce bear him out of his sight, whilst he all the time must needs tug at his chain like a hawk who longs to be on the wing. But——" She broke off suddenly, eyeing her companion a

little doubtfully. Then she smiled again, more charmingly — Nigel thought — than ever.

“May I ask, then, for which side you are?” she demanded, a little hesitatingly, as she put the question which had, in those troublous days, become almost a formula of greeting.

“For the King, God bless him,” replied Nigel promptly, raising his broad beaver for a moment as he spoke.

Miss Ogilvy flushed.

“Yes,” she replied softly, “for the King. I guessed it from your attire; and in truth folk say we are all for the King now in bonnie Scotland, though Kenneth says the banners of King and Covenant would scarce be like to march long side by side, and for his part he would liefer——” Again she broke off, doubtful of her ground.

Nigel, perceiving her difficulty, smiled.

“For myself, mistress, I cannot say I am like to judge,” he replied, “seeing that, under the King, I look only to the King’s Lieutenant-General—the Marquis of Montrose.”

She gave a little gasp at his words, half

wonder, half joy, not unmixed with fear.

"Montrose!" she echoed. "Montrose! Ah! it is he of whom my brother talks, for it was under him that my kinsman, Alexander Ogilvy, of Inverquharity, served, poor lad, for the short time ere he met his cruel fate. Oh!" And her face crimsoned with anger and grief. "Oh! How I hate those cruel, cruel men when I think of him; not eighteen, and such a gallant lad, fresh come from the schools with my brother. How I remember the manner in which Kenneth wept when my father rode off to join the Marquis, leaving him at home, because, forsooth, he deemed him too young, or too precious, to strike a blow in the King's cause. And, yet, later, how glad was I that he had not gone, when news came to us that Alec had been taken, aye! and executed, too, lad though he was, by those—those devils—whilst their ministers stood by gloating in the work."

Her voice shook with scorn and grief, whilst she turned aside her face so that her companion should not see the tears which filled her eyes.

"I knew him," said Nigel softly. "I, too, was at Philiphaugh and saw him taken, poor boy. He fought gallantly, but they were too many for him, and I—pinned down at the time under my horse's body—could render him no assistance. But, though now it is too late to save, there is still time for revenge, Mistress Ogilvy, and when the banner of Montrose once more waves on Scottish soil, then doubtless there will be many a blow struck in vengeance, many a tale of retribution, ere the King comes to his own again."

His face flushed with gladness as he spoke. After so much unsuccessful work here at last seemed promise of hopes to be fulfilled; the father of such a daughter would surely respond whole-heartedly to his summons. But, to his surprise, his words were only greeted by a sigh, as his companion shook her head mournfully.

"Indeed, indeed, I cannot tell," she murmured. "So many plots and counter-plots there seem to be, so much fair, false reasoning, so many things I, for my part, cannot understand. Oh! if my father and his friends

would but see with my eyes, and Kenneth's. But alas! I do not understand. I—I only fear." She checked a sigh as she rode on, and Nigel, wondering anew at her words, rode beside her without further questioning.

Across the Sands of Nigg, dried now during the stream tides (except in the middle—where a narrow river-like channel, fed by the streams which discharged themselves into the estuary, bore the name of the Pot), skirting Cromarty on their right and then on through the Navity Woods, whispering and rustling in the autumn breeze, and out on to the wild tumultuous-mouthed Moalbuoy Moor they rode, and, as they rode, through sunshine and shadow, through leafy wood and over the heather-covered moor, they talked together lightly and happily, laughing and gay as they rejoiced in their youth and the subtle gladness which was already casting its first faint glamour over each other's presence. But presently, with a sudden quick reining in of her palfrey, Mary Ogilvy paused, and, shading her eyes with her little gauntleted hand, looked ahead to where, beyond a massy heap

of boulders—the tomb of some Pictish monarch, bearing the name of Grey Cairn—a small group of horsemen were seen approaching.

“It is my father,” she exclaimed. “Yes, it is my father, and Kenneth, and others—I cannot tell who, though there are many. They are doubtless seeking me—or my body.” And she smiled up into Nigel Urquhart’s face.

Then she looked again to where the little band came galloping towards them.

“I will ride to meet them,” she said half hesitatingly. “And you, you will come, too, so that my father may thank you for—for saving my life?”

Nigel bowed, as he raised his broad hat.

“Nay,” he replied, “Mistress Ogilvy, an’ you are sure it is your father himself, I will e’en bid you adieu, for, though, very speedily, I would do myself the honour of calling upon Sir John, it may be that he rides to-day with those whom I might find it scarcely advisable to meet.” He smiled as he spoke, adding low: “As Montrose’s messenger and follower, though not in hiding, I yet court

not distinction, and would fain, if possible, remain incognito to all but my leader's friends, If I might ask the grace, I would crave that Mistress Oglivy should forget my name in the presence of those who bear him no love."

She bowed a hurried acquiescence, whilst a dawning fear crept into her blue eyes.

"Hasten, sir, I pray you. Nay, for--for I know there are indeed some of those of whom you speak in the company. I—I—Oh, go! Go—and quickly!"

She turned from him with a backward wave of her hand, and a glance which more than repaid him for the abruptness of his dismissal. A glance which lingered hauntingly with him as he rode slowly back across the moor to Cromarty.

Half-way through the Navity Woods he chanced by accident upon his servant, the Englishman, Guy Morris, whose nerves on their first coming had been so shaken by Donald Finlay's stories. That the latter had been improving on so auspicious an occasion as All Hallows E'en was clear enough, for even with morning light the poor Warwickshire man's face was drawn and grey, and his

eyes had a haunted, timorous look in them as of one spell-bound in very truth.

His delight on seeing his master was unfeigned big tears rolling down his cheeks, as he told in a shaking voice of how Donald had feared to say, and more than feared—that he had been carried off to fairy-land by inexorable fates whose secret revellings had been interrupted; he had met with a yet darker fate at the hands of the Spirit of Evil.

Putting aside his attendant's anxious solicitations and bidding him for the sake of his own peace of mind leave supernatural topics alone in his conversations, Donald in the future, Nigel rode on to find his cousin strolling on the lawn in front of the castle, pausing, from time to time, to examine with the interest of an inventor the sundial which had been lately constructed under his master's eye.

Without commenting on his previous absence, Sir Thomas at once drew Nigel aside to display this last monument of his geometrical skill.

"A very masterpiece, although mine own

work," he declared emphatically, as he bent again to admire. "See, Nigel, here the hour is indicated in nineteen places, 'tis a veritable masterpiece, a work—if I may say so in all humility—of genius." And the little knight preened himself anew with a perfect overflow of pompous vanity.

The sundial, at that moment being of less importance to Nigel than his dinner, was admired with less zeal than was politic, for Sir Thomas, nettled by his indifference, turned his thoughts from his own skill to the enjoyment of sharpening his wits on so unappreciative a kinsman.

"And how goes the rebellion, my cousin?" he asked with the spice of cynical patronage in his tone which he knew would sting deep. "Throughout Scotland, doubtless, all flock to the standard of the preux chevalier, sans peur et sans reproche!"

Nigel flushed angrily.

"The Standard of the King," he retorted, "can scarcely be called that of a rebellion."

"Nay," replied Sir Thomas airily. "But in this case I meant not the *King's* Standard. Report says His Gracious Majesty is far too

busy with conferences of quite another character at Breda to contemplate setting up his Standard on Scottish soil in the manner in which my Lord of Montrose plants his."

"The Marquis will bear His Majesty's own commission for his deeds," replied Nigel haughtily. "And that commission is to all loyal subjects as the presence of the King himself."

"Yes?" replied Sir Thomas smiling. "Nevertheless, for myself, I shall prefer to await the King in person to emphasize his commission. In the meantime things appear a little difficult, for—is it his cause? or shall we say that of his Lieutenant-General?"

"Difficult!" retorted Nigel, ablaze with a sudden anger. "Pah! Difficult! We shall see. Perhaps when the Marquis sets foot in Scotland it will be a different tale with these cringing, time-serving, psalm-singing hypocrites. I tell you the yoke of the oppressor is heavy, and throughout the land all leal-hearted Scotchmen will rise at the call of one who has proved himself a gallant gentleman and intrepid, victorious leader."

"Yes," assented Sir Thomas still placidly

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smiling, "we shall see. In the meantime, I am ready, if indeed the King has need of my services. That, too, lies in the eye of the future. In due course we shall see."

CHAPTER V

FALSE AND TRUE

SIR JOHN OGILVY sat in his carved arm-chair, in the tapestry-hung, stone-paved hall of Kilsbeth Castle. Around him were displayed many of the arms, as well as portraits, of the dead and gone Ogilvys: leal men and true, all of them, whose painted faces looked down now upon their living representative with eyes as unwinking and expressionless as his own.

A tall, lean man was Sir John, with tanned and rugged face, grey hair and bright blue eyes, which looked out upon the world with an absent, wondering stare, except when the light of a cunning craft crept into them. The crafty look was there now, though veiled by the white lashes, as Sir John bent

to caress the head of the great deer-hound, which crouched by his side, with a careless gesture, though in reality he listened with eager interest to the words Nigel Urquhart addressed to him.

There had been little delay in Nigel's visit to Kilspeth Castle, and he had had small reason to complain against the courteous words with which Sir John had thanked him for his assistance to his daughter.

Nevertheless, a strange feeling of restraint possessed the young man as he opened the subject upon which he had come.

At the first mention of Montrose's name, he seemed to become aware of a secret hostility of feeling between him and his host which vaguely reminded him of the claws of a cat concealed beneath velvet paws. True, Sir John's outward urbanity remained imperturbable, but Nigel had caught a flash in the blue eyes which warned him to beware.

"So the standard of James Graham appears again on Scottish soil—he is a bold man," observed the Laird of Kilspeth, when he had listened in silence to the invitation to arms. "But, my young friend, does it

not strike you that the—er—rebellion may be a little unnecessary? If the conference of Breda ends, as all expect, in the welcome back of our King to Scottish shores, without bloodshed or trouble, why this movement on the part of the Marquis, which must needs plunge the country into civil war, without—in all probability—effecting its purpose?"

"The King join hands with the Covenant?" cried Nigel, springing to his feet. "To swear good fellowship with the dastards who sold his father to death? Nay, nay, Sir John, it is impossible. Traitors that they are, may they die traitor deaths! But you smile? Pshaw! No fear that Sir John Ogilvy could counsel such a course. The blood of a loyal house has flowed too freely for that, and these canting traitors are elbow deep in it, to boot. No! The hands that win back the crown to our sovereign lord shall be at least clean to grasp his Standard. The voices that proclaim him shall not be those that have grown hoarse in shouting for the blood of his loyal subjects!"

Sir John Ogilvy smiled cynically as he looked, with half-closed eyes, across to where

the younger man paced up and down the hall in his excitement.

"Nay, nay, my friend," he said softly; "you are hasty—too hasty. 'Condemn not and ye shall not be condemned,' is a command somewhat too easily overlooked. What if the Covenanters this time prove themselves in honest earnest to aid the King's cause?—What if I can prove to you that Charles is verily on the eve of joining hands with them?—what——"

"If the devil himself be converted to truth!" cried Nigel hotly. "I had as lief believe it of him as that MacCullum More has learnt to tread in a straight path. Nay, Sir John, and I could almost believe both, sooner than that you—even for an instant—hesitated to join the banner of an old friend, rather than that of a common enemy—aye!—and the enemy of your house and honour!"

Sir John winced, but nevertheless his mouth shut tightly with a look of resolution; and the crafty glint showed yet more ominously in his eyes.

"Three years have passed since Philiphaugh," he replied coolly. "And since then

many things have changed, much has altered. For my part, I think of my country above all, and for that country's sake, I say, let there be peace. Let, indeed, Charles Stuart return to his throne, and His Majesty be established throughout the land. But when such can be accomplished without blood, then I cry woe to the man who sheds it. You have my answer, Nigel Urquhart."

He spoke with some show of dignity, an apeing after disinterested patriotism which proved but a threadbare garment to hide more personal feelings beneath. Still, it protected him in his own eyes, so that he laughed inwardly, thinking to deceive others as he had succeeded in partly deceiving himself.

Nevertheless, he did not look the man who stood opposite him in the face, but stared vacantly in front of him to where the tapestry-hung walls portrayed the death-struggles of a gallant stag amidst the ferocious onslaught of the hounds. Perhaps the significance of what he gazed at failed to penetrate his brain, for still he stared, vaguely wondering why his companion did not speak, though perhaps

presently he would rather he had remained silent, for the words were not pleasant in the ears of the Laird of Kilsbeth.

"The answer I am to take to Montrose then, is that Sir John Ogilvy prefers the stronger side; the risks this time attached to loyalty are too great, he would rather fawn and smile upon his kinsman's murderers, the enemies of his house, than help to crush them as one more safely crushes the viper that bites unto death. Take heed, Sir John. Think well before I go. Alas, alas, for a noble name! That I should be bearer of such a message. An Ogilvy side by side with an Argyll!"

The scorn in his voice stung his listener to a sudden vicious anger.

"Make of my answer what you will," he sneered contemptuously. "'Twill make little difference, seeing that ere many weeks are gone the heads of your leader and his gallant company are like to have risen beyond the pinnacle of ambition to the height of the Tolbooth. As for adding mine to the noble list, I have little mind to it, which you may tell your *master*, young sir, if you wish, and

my condolences on a fool's enterprise with a fool's ending in view from the start."

Nigel bowed, not daring to trust his voice in answer, so hot was the anger and disappointment within; but, as he strode across the hall, he paused one instant.

"And your son?" he inquired coldly. "Is he also of your mind?"

Sir John Ogilvy half rose from his chair, his face working with passion.

"Begone, sir," he cried thickly; "begone, or I warrant me you will find it less easy to depart that you thought. My son—what know you of my son? Aye!—my voice is as his. Begone, I say."

With another haughty bow, Nigel scarcely waited for the second dismissal but strode out, his anger in no wise cooled by the old man's sudden outburst.

Yet still he wondered, remembering Mary Ogilvy's words, and the light in her eyes, as she spoke of Montrose and her murdered cousin. Was she the only loyal one left of what had once been so loyal a house? As he passed along the narrow, steep path which, belted with firs, led down the little

hill on which the castle stood, he fell, not to thinking of the treacherous man within, but of the young girl whose bright, lovely face had haunted his thoughts these past few days.

And, even as he thought of her, he saw her coming slowly towards him in deep converse with a tall, broad-shouldered man, whose face he could not see, but whose hair glowed ruddily as the sunlight caught it through the overhanging firs.

With a smile and uplifted hat, Nigel advanced, when, to his surprise, the girl, catching sight of him, turned suddenly aside into an opposite path, with scarcely more than one swift, frightened look of recognition.

For a few moments Nigel stood still, hat in hand, staring after her slender, crimson-clad form as she disappeared with her attendant cavalier through the glade. Then, once more placing his beaver on his head, with a muttered word, which sounded the reverse of complimentary to women in general, he turned on his way, passing down the avenue with the long strides of a man whose temper needs the finding.

Disappointment and ill-temper are bad travelling companions, and Nigel Urquhart had already cursed himself roundly for a fool, and more than once regretted that he had made the journey to Kilspeth on foot, when his thoughts were abruptly checked by the appearance of a youth who suddenly sprang from the shelter of a copse on his right.

In quarrelsome mood, Nigel would have continued his oaths aloud upon the head of the intruder, thereby relieving his feelings to a considerable extent, had not something in the young man's face checked him. It was flushed with excitement, the fair curls flung back in disorder, and eyes sparkling with eagerness. It was a face almost girlish in its young beauty, yet with lines of resolution about the mouth and in the dimpled cleft of his chin which spoke of strong, though early, manhood. His rich dress and lace collar were disordered, and he drew in his breath as if he had hastened hot-foot to his rendezvous. But the smile of frank good-fellowship with which he extended his hand disarmed all Nigel's suspicions, and smoothed the gathering frown from his brow.

"I am Kenneth Ogilvy," said the boy, with his quick, eager smile. "And you, sir, if I mistake not, are the Mr. Urquhart to whom my sister owed her safety not long since, and to whom, therefore, our most grateful thanks are due."

"Nay," replied Nigel with a touch of haughtiness. "Such service was of no account, and forgotten already by Mistress Ogilvy."

"Indeed, I crave your pardon," replied her brother. "Mary is little like to forget the deed or the doer," and he smiled again.

But Nigel's tone grew colder.

"Forgive me if I needs must prove you wrong," he said; "but the proof was plain when I met your sister just now, and she did not even vouchsafe to recognize me."

The lad echoed his words wonderingly, then laughed, so gaily and merrily, that Nigel's own heart seemed to lighten at the sound.

"I can read that riddle the more easily by the telling of mine own story first," he answered, "if I may walk with you across the

moor, sir, for the unfolding may prove longer than your leisure."

Little loath to have a companion on so long and dreary a walk, Nigel assented, and the two turned their steps in the direction of the White Bog road, which winds its way from the Burn of Rosemarkie across the dreary Maolbuoy Heath towards Cromarty.

"What has passed between you and my father I can guess," commenced Kenneth Ogilvy, glancing away across the moor and speaking in a low, constrained voice. "It grieves me, more than I can say—too much, indeed, for words. I cannot speak of it or explain his reasonings, only adding that neither Mary nor I share his views. To us the cause of the King and the cause of the Covenant are two distinct ones, and for my part ever will be. Between the two lies the blood of my dearest friend and kinsman—Alexander Ogilvy."

Nigel bowed his head, and after a brief pause the lad continued fiercely.

"Oh, Mr. Urquhart, if you knew how we have suffered—how we are suffering—to know that our father has joined hands with his

murderers—that even now the honoured guest at Kilspeth Castle is Dugald Grant, the emissary of Argyll, coming to bind him, with specious promises of the King's restoration, to the side of those who sold the royal martyr to his death. But he is blind to their treachery—blind to their double dealing. He listens and believes, whilst, alas! alas! the Standard of the King is being raised by the most gallant leader in Scotland, and an Ogilvy is, for the first time, deaf to the summons."

Tears stood in the boy's eyes as he spoke, and his voice shook with emotion. Nigel Urquhart, touched by the loyal feeling which struggled hopelessly against the stern parental authority, laid a kindly hand on the young man's arm.

"Nay," he said gently. "The time may come when your father sees again with your eyes. In the meantime——"

"In the meantime," interrupted Kenneth eagerly, "I, at least, can strike a blow in the good cause. I, at least, will march under the same banner as Alec did, and cry vengeance on the cowards who compassed his death. I,

at least, will cry, 'God save the King,' when the great Montrose brings him to his own again."

Nigel was silent—loudly though his heart echoed the boy's words. Yet full well he knew the difficulty of bidding a lad quit his father's home against his father's bidding to follow an all but hopeless cause. But how to temporize with the hot young blood of his companion he scarcely knew.

"And your sister, what would she say?" he asked, speaking the thought uppermost in his mind.

"Mary," replied Kenneth proudly. "Mary would bid me God-speed, and weep that she could not buckle on sword and armour to join us. Though sometimes I fear me hers is, and will be, the harder part."

"And why?" questioned Nigel wonderingly.

"Why?" returned the lad hotly. "Aye, why, indeed. Poor Mary! What think you, then? Though I blush to tell you. My father, an Ogilvy, whose name has ever spelt loyalty, would wed his daughter to a minion of the traitor Argyll—this same red-haired

Dugald Grant, who comes at his master's word to win the honour of my father and the hand of my sister."

With a pang Nigel remembered the tall stranger who had accompanied Mary when she turned from him an hour ago, and his eyes grew suddenly hard as he asked briefly:

"And she?"

His words were echoed with a world of scorn by Mary's brother.

"And she—poor lassie!—she hates the man; would hate him under any banner, she declares, but doubly so when it is his influence which guides our father from the path of loyalty. Yet he pursues his courting for all her scorn, counting on my father's influence and commands to win by force what he cannot win by love."

"Yet she listens to him," said Nigel involuntarily, remembering how the girl had drawn her companion aside in the fir grove.

Kenneth laughed.

"Listens to him!—yes, truly," he retorted; "for, as I told you, he pursues her relentlessly. But to-day there was reason for her kindness somewhat wide of that which Du-

gald hoped ; for, knowing I would have speech with you, and fearing what might follow your encounter with one who is in truth Argyll's spy, she kept him to her side with unwonted smiles, which, I warrant me, have by this time faded. But," continued the lad, returning eagerly to his first theme ; "but tell me, Mr. Urquhart, of our leader's plans ? When are we to strike the first blow for the King ? "

Nigel smiled.

"Nay, I know little beyond the fact that the gathering at Kirkwall musters but slowly," he replied. "All hangs in suspense till Montrose appears, and as yet he comes not, though I hear he has dispatched a large and well-equipped force to the Orkneys under William Hay—now, since his brother's death, Lord Kinnoull. It is thither I am shortly returning, since my work here, alas ! is done, and I must needs go to report the excuses with which those who write themselves loyal gentlemen have received the summons to aid their country."

"And I ride with you," declared young Ogilvy hotly. "What !—you would say me

nay? No, no, Mr. Urquhart, your words but determine me the more. I *will* go, aye! and fight, too, with my last breath for such a cause, and such a leader."

His boyish face glowed with enthusiasm as he flung back his head with a gesture almost defiant, noting his companion's dissentient shake.

"But I *will* go," he reiterated. "And alone, too, if ycu will not take me. Do but hear me, Mr. Urquhart. I am twenty years of age, two years and more older than Inverquharitty when he fought at Kilsyth and Philiphaugh, and I will be tied no longer to leading-strings, such as my father deems necessary. For yourself, now,—had you struck no blow ere you reached my age?"

"I am now twenty-six," smiled Nigel, touched by the lad's impetuosity, "and I have been fighting for the last eight years; or, rather, I should say, for five, since my sword has hung idle now for three years past. But then I had no father to gainsay my wishes, and, indeed, none at all to say me nay."

"And I will not be said nay to in the matter," replied Kenneth fiercely. "My heart is

in the cause, Mr. Urquhart, and go I must and will. Promise me, then, you will not leave Cromarty without taking me, or at any rate seeing me again? "

" 'Tis a promise somewhat difficult of compliance," said Nigel hesitatingly, "for I must ride North in three days' time, and I fear I should scarce be welcomed at Kilsbeth did I call for you *en route*."

And he smiled.

But Kenneth did not respond. He walked moodily on, kicking the heathery clumps of turf with his foot as he pondered over the problem. Presently he raised his face, the light once more leaping into his grey eyes.

"The Fair of Cromarty!" he cried joyously. "'Tis an inspiration! I pray you, Mr. Urquhart, listen to my scheme. The fair takes place on Tuesday next—but three days from now—and in natural course I shall ride to it. There will I meet you, and you shall give me your answer. Is it agreed? "

"The Fair of Cromarty," mused Nigel. "And at that same fair will be gathered many it were wiser I should not see. Nay,

nay, friend ; I must be far from Cromarty ere the fair. Or, at least," he added, noting the keen disappointment on the boy's face, "I must not risk meeting such an array of Forbes and Grants, Irvines and Leslies, as may muster there ; for I am known to many by face, and, once seen, my mission may be guessed, and the old fox, MacCullum More, put on the scent of my trail. Nevertheless, I will meet you, an' you care to be at Morial's Den by sunset."

Young Ogilvy's face cleared as he wrung Nigel's hand.

"At Morial's Den by sunset ! Aye—I will be there," he said gladly.

"At Morial's Den."

And, as he turned homewards, he repeated the words softly, over and over again, as if they contained a charm for him, whilst he laughed joyously to himself, rejoicing in his strong young manhood, as he painted the future with the glorious deeds which noble youth dreams of whilst waiting eager-footed on fate and opportunity to make them bright reality.

But Nigel Urquhart, as he strode onwards

through the darkening Navity Woods, thought only of the girl whose flushed and startled face had looked for one brief instant so pleadingly into his. And he, too, painted the future in the colours of his dreams.

CHAPTER VI

MORIAL'S DEN

UNDER the grey, lichened walls of the old castle the yearly Fair of Cromarty was at its height.

A strange and motley scene it presented, too, on that bright November day.

Lowland Scots, bonneted and armed, jostled brawny Highlanders in all their glory of tartan and sporran. Shrill-voiced women screamed over their bargains, and children clamoured and cried amidst the general din.

Wary eyes watched doubtful neighbours, for in those days a word and a blow, or often the blow without a word, terminated many a bargain ; and, besides, many of the clansmen needed no excuse to fly at the throats of one or other of their hereditary foes and neighbours. Thus a Grant mistrustfully eyed a Macdonald,

or a Macleod scowled as he gripped his dirk in passing a Leslie. It only needed the match to put all to a flame, and, therefore, the townsfolk, canny in their generation, held their fair under the protection of the grim old castle.

Cromarty in those days was looked upon as the capital of the North, and the fair was by far the largest held anywhere north of Edinburgh. Therefore, all the more need of Nigel's caution, for he was little minded to be the tow to set the country-side into premature blaze.

So, after bidding farewell to Sir Thomas, he had ridden forth early, accompanied only by Guy Morris and Donald Finlay, who had pressed eagerly to be with him. These two he had sent on to charter a boat at Hilton and prepare for their journey, which he intended to make by sea, whilst he awaited the coming of Kenneth Ogilvy in the secluded valley a little west of the town, which from the earliest days of tradition, had borne the name of Morial's Den.

It was a lonely spot, on the road from the sea coast into the interior. The steep rugged

sides of the ravine were covered with sloes, brambles and sea hip, a narrow path alone leading to the fields above. Like every other ravine and valley for miles around, the spot was said to be haunted by witches and mermaids ; but, indifferent to the spells of either, Nigel Urquhart rested with what patience he could muster till the red ball of the autumn sun dipped towards its setting, and through an opening of the glade he could catch glimpses of the feathery line of the waves tinged with the rosy glow of evening light.

Kenneth Ogilvy was no laggard. Indeed, the long hours till the appointed time had dragged wearily enough with him, but at last he had stolen away from the hum and bustle of bargaining men and women, and, leading his horse by the bridle, gained the opening of the den. Nigel noticed, not without some joy, that the lad was equipped for a journey ; lace and velvets had been discarded for buff coat and long jack-boots, a bandolier with ammunition crossed his shoulder, and his silver-clasped buff belt contained sword and dagger.

" I have come to ride with you, Mr. Urqu-

hart," he said simply, as the two men exchanged greetings. "As I told you, my mind is made up. The King"—he raised his hat gravely—"shall have at least the sword of one loyal Ogilvy to help him to his own again."

"You will not be without kinsmen on the battlefield," replied Nigel, grasping his hand. "Ogilvy of Powrie will be there to bid you welcome to the cause, and others, too, I hope, of so brave a house. But not least will His Majesty welcome your sword amongst them, my friend—though my mind misgives me," he added hesitatingly. "Your father's anger will be difficult to soothe. You are not yet of age. Bethink you before you take the step, of what you are doing. If all goes well, indeed, you carve your way to fortune; but, if adverse——"

He was interrupted by a sudden movement which seemed to come from a thicket of sloe-thorn and sweet briar behind them, and the next instant an armed man sprang out upon them with sword drawn.

That the new-comer came with hostile intentions there was little doubt, but Nigel could not repress a swift ejaculation as he



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recognized the red head and bold, handsome features of Dugald Grant. Even if he had doubted the man's identity, it would have quickly been established by Kenneth Ogilvy, who pronounced the name in such a tone of anger and surprise as made the intruder turn on him with a snarl.

"Go home, lad," he cried contemptuously, then fell a-laughing in mocking scorn as dim twilight showed him the bunch of blue ribbons Kenneth wore on his coat.

"Eh, I need not have feared for your father's son," he cried, with glib spite. "It's a bonnie colour you wear, Kenneth, lad, a bonnie colour! 'Twas surely the one that the gallant Montrose chose for his soldiers when he led the Parliament troops into Aberdeen."

Kenneth crimsoned as he tore the ribbons so heedlessly worn to the ground. "Ill fa' the colour," he stammered, hot with boyish resentment and anger.

"So says Montrose it seems," gibed the Highlander. "Since he's changed sides as well as colours, it's a bonny red one he'll be taking and may be wearing before long."

But, before Kenneth could find speech for retort, Nigel has stepped forward.

"Beware, sir," he said gravely, "how you speak of my master lightly in my hearing."

Again Dugald Grant sneered mockingly.

"Oh, I'll be very careful, Mr. Urquhart," quoth he, "though, to be honest, methought that a mistress might have been nearer your thoughts than a *master*, in Morial's Den, this e'en."

"I do not take your meaning sufficiently clearly."

"Oh aye, I'll be speaking more plainly. 'Tis a douce place for trysting a fair lady, and nain may doubt that Mistress Ogilvy——"

"You had best beware, sir——"

"If you dare name my sister, Dugald Grant——"

Fresh laughter to greet hot speeches.

To do him justice the Highlander was no coward. His object was evidently to provoke a quarrel.

"I'll take care—in future, laddies. Fresh fruit is most to my liking."

Nigel's blade was already half unsheathed.

"You dare insinuate——"

"Nothing, nothing. A lassie *may* meet her jo beneath the trees by twilight and be as cauld as Diana's self. But I would not tell the lassie's father lest he misdoubted that same."

Kenneth sprang forward.

"Apologize for the words you dare breathe against my sister's honour or you're a dead man."

But Nigel had already pushed the lad aside.

"Nay," said he, "this insult is for me to wipe out. You will fight, Mr. Grant, and learn your lesson for daring to drag an innocent lady's name without excuse or pretext into a matter with which she has no concern."

With a snarling cry Grant flung himself forward, and forthwith ensued such a fight as would have filled the wild hearts of the Highland men with joy had they known of it a short half-mile off. But, fortunately for all, the interests of the fair were still paramount, and no prying eyes or wandering feet came near the dell, as backwards and forwards the men strove with each other for the mastery.

Dugald Grant was a shrewd man and a

canny. He had detected symptoms of unrest in the young son of his host, and had not been slow to piece together the outline of what had passed; for of Nigel's visit and its object he had heard from Sir John himself. Therefore he had watched and waited, thought and planned, with the result that he had easily tracked Kenneth to his rendezvous, well aware both of his intentions and his sister's connivance therein. A possible interest subsisting between Mary and Montrose's messenger had been a bow at a venture, the effect of which was perhaps not quite so satisfactory as he had hoped, for Nigel Urquhart was no mean swordsman, and the glint in his eyes was dangerous.

Kenneth stood on one side, panting and excited, his grey eyes sparkling with the triumph begotten of victory, whilst to and fro over the slippery grass trampled the combatants.

So far neither had been touched to any serious extent, though there was blood on Nigel's left coat-sleeve, and Grant had an ugly gash across his cheek.

But, presently, the fortunes of war brought

a speedy termination to the duel, for, slipping on the long grass, Grant fell heavily to the ground, and, before he could rise, his adversary was upon him, gripping him by the throat.

"You cur!" he muttered, shaking him as a terrier does the rat. "You mongrel cur of a false breed! Shame on you, for a dastard and a coward, so to steal on honourable gentlemen. I would as lief rid the world of such carrion were it not for the soiling of my hands. As it is, we will leave you to the company you are fit for—the kelpies and witches of Morial's Den."

The Highlander's mouth twitched, and his cunning black eyes grew suddenly terror-stricken. Brave with the savage bravery of a brute, he yet possessed all the superstitious fears of his race.

"Ye'll no leave me here?" he snarled as his enemies proceeded to bind him as he lay. "Ye'll no leave me?"

Nigel smiled grimly. "And why not?" he asked. "Ye need time for reflection, my friend, to check in future too free a tongue. A man whose black heart can stain a fair lady's

name is fit company for night birds and such-like."

Dugald writhed in sudden frenzy.

"The deil fly away with you both," he gasped, "if ye dare leave me."

Kenneth was busy securing the knots which held the cords round the legs of his father's quondam guest.

"Wishes like corbies come home to roost," quoth he. "Morial's Den, I've heard's a fine trysting-place."

"The deil——"

The Highlander's eyes rolled as they encountered Urquhart's scornful gaze.

"We leave you to your chosen company, friend Dugald," added Kenneth, boyishly gleeful.

"You're not leaving me *here, alone?*"

Kenneth's merriment was contagious. Even Urquhart smiled grimly over the retort.

"The good people will doubtless bear you company. A moon-lit night amongst yon braes will not fail to tempt them even without your welcome company."

"Nay, nay, ye can't leave me here. I'll go mad. I tell ye—I'll go mad."

But Nigel had turned gravely to his companion.

"The red-haired spy has decided the question after all, laï," quoth he. "There is no turning back now. You have committed yourself too deeply, I fear, in my quarrel—if quarrel it can be called. So now it must even be *en avant* together, and hey for the good cause."

Kenneth Ogilvy flung up his hand with a gay laugh.

"Hurrah for the King," he cried gladly. "Yes, Urquhart, we'll drink to him to-night, you and I, and to our own good fellowship through the future too!"

"And to the most gallant chief that ever led army yet to victory," added Nigel, catching the enthusiasm of his young companion. "God save the Marquis of Montrose!"

Their hands met in a firm clasp. For a moment the man lying so near was forgotten. "A soldier of Montrose," whispered young Ogilvy, and his eyes were moist.

"To live and die for loyalty," replied Nigel, smiling serenely back into the flushed, enthusiastic face.

"Come, we must not delay. To horse and away."

The last words roused Grant to fresh terrors.

"Ye black-hearted deils," he moaned.

"But ye'll not leave me?"

"You came hither at your own pleasure, Sir Spy," retorted Urquhart quietly. "You remain at ours. Learn your lesson. It's one ye'll need to remember. And so—farewell."

But terror had drowned for the moment even Highland pride.

"Sirs, sirs," quavered the luckless prisoner, "I'll be mad before morning. Don't ye see the faces peerin' at me through the leaves? They're mocking me—laughing at me. Heaven's curses on ye if ye—if ye——"

But the shrilly-rising voice was becoming dangerous. The rest of the appeal was lost in a muffled curse as Urquhart thrust a woollen gag between the speaker's teeth, and rose, smiling.

"Come, lad."

Kenneth's smile was radiant in answer.

"To Montrose and glory."

They did not look behind as they strode up

the side of the glen, leaving the prostrate figure to writhe and twist amidst the misty shadows which gathered wraith-like around it.

CHAPTER VII

THE LEADER OF A FORLORN HOPE

ONCE more Fate stepped forward to point a warning finger against an enterprise doomed to destruction. Once more brave hearts sank low as news came—in the shape of a few straggling survivors—of the fate of the little fleet with twelve hundred men which had set out so gaily for Scottish shores.

A violent storm had dashed many of the ships to pieces against the rugged rocks of that inhospitable coast, and only two hundred men reached the land, together with a few field pieces saved from the general destruction.

Once more came the weary time of waiting, during which dauntless hearts were to fret and chafe at a fatal delay ; and not till the

end of March did news reach Kirkwall of the arrival of their long-looked-for leader.

Montrose had come at last, and the time of action drew near. The force, swelled only by a small party of gentlemen volunteers, was at present inconsiderable. Some stout Danish and German mercenaries, a handful of raw Orkney men, and a few Highlanders, in all about 1,500 troops, comprised the army which fond, delusive hope dreamt was to help place the King on the throne once more.

Blind enthusiasm alone could have made such a mad enterprise conceivable. But, conceived it was, and every heart beat high as the gallant few rallied round the royal banner with its strange, weird device of a bleeding head upon a black ground, and listened to their leader's words, which painted the future in a glowing picture of glory and victory.

The leader of a forlorn and desperate hope, Montrose's gallant bearing brought tears to more than one pair of eyes as he stood once more amongst them, graceful and dignified, his long brown curls framing a face handsome of feature but characterized chiefly by

its noble expression and the eagle glance of his quick grey eyes, which seemed to pierce through all who met his gaze, reading them as easily as one reads a chapter of a book. Nature had designed him for a great man. Fate had made him an unfortunate one. But, above all, here was a man who knew how to win love as well as command hate. A noble man by nature as well as birth. A very knight-errant come to do battle against Fate itself, with the enthusiasm of one who fought, not only, or, above all, for a living master, but with the fierce spirit of revenge which had burnt within him since he heard of the execution of Charles I. Whitehall.

He was here as an avenger—the avenger of blood—risking all at a hazard as desperate as it was chivalrous.

The spirit of the enterprise seemed woven into the embroidered emblems of his own banner, where, on a white damask ground, a lion crouched on a rock for a hazardous leap across a yawning chasm, with the motto “Nil Medium” beneath.

An enthusiasm which flung itself so whole-

heartedly and unreservedly into the cause in hand with such passionate loyalty could not fail to inspire the followers who loved him. And amongst those of the little band gathered around him were many who had ever proved themselves gallant soldiers and gentlemen. Hurry and some of his old officers were still with him, and foremost amongst the volunteers who had responded to his summons were the Earl of Kinnoull, Viscount Frendraught, Sir James Douglas, Sir William Hay, and Ogilvy of Powrie. These, with a handful more, formed all the cavalry of the little army; but, nothing daunted by the smallness of his numbers, buoyed up with the hope that, as he advanced, many, especially amongst the Highland clans, would flock to his standard, Montrose decided to advance into Scotland.

It was the second week in April when the little camp at Kirkwall was broken up, and, a landing being effected at the north-eastern extremity of Caithness, the perilous march was begun.

The strong Castle of Dunbeath was seized and garrisoned in order to secure his retreat in case of reverses, and thus, with numbers

still further reduced to little more than a thousand, the army moved southwards.

But Montrose's enemies in the meantime had not been idle. The declaration he had published on landing had been burnt by the common hangman at the Cross in Edinburgh. Everywhere the Presbyterians denounced him in terms of loud-voiced, scurrilous abuse as a traitor. Those suspected of favouring his cause were flung into prison, and throughout Scotland his name was held up to execration.

Still undaunted, Montrose pushed onward through Caithness, Sutherland, and Ross. But, alas! No single ally joined his little force. Cowed by the late and terrible vengeance of MacCullum More, the inhabitants dared not obey his summons, but fled in terror before him. No welcome array of kilted Highlanders met him, although he had confidently counted on the support of the great Clan Mackenzie, whose chief had countenanced their rising, but who, broken by their late ineffectual rebellion, now showed no signs of obeying the fresh call to arms.

The Earl of Sutherland with his vassals, though not daring to attack the Royalist

army, hampered their movements and intercepted their communications with the south; but by the time the Firth of Dornoch was reached Sutherland had been joined by Colonel Strachan, who, with a strong body of cavalry, had been hurriedly sent north by Leslie, who himself was hastening to follow at the head of three thousand men.

The case of the Royalists was desperate. They were hemmed in on all sides, with Sutherland guarding the passes into the hills, and Strachan and his cavalry moving up the south side of the firth towards them. Still, Montrose—badly served, as at Philiphaugh, by his scouts—guessed little of the enemy's real strength.

On Friday, April 26, news only had reached him of the approach of a single, weak troop of horse, and that night his army lay down to rest without dreaming of the trap in which the morrow would find them caught.

It was a fine, starlit night, cold enough, however, for men to be glad to gather round their tent fires. The scent of battle and action was in the air, and speculations were rife as to the morrow's prospects.

Late into the night Nigel Urquhart and Kenneth Ogilvy sat talking together over the cheerful blaze; around them by degrees silence began to fall, as men rolled themselves in their cloaks and laid down to sleep. But the excitement of the coming fight kept the two young men from their slumbers. Ogilvy, more especially, seeming restless and ill at ease. It was not till the conversation had gradually dropped into monosyllables, and his companion showed signs of following the example of the rest, that the lad spoke—hurriedly, almost shyly—of what was in his heart.

“I have somewhat of a favour to ask of you, Urquhart,” he began. “I—I——”

“Out with it, then,” laughed Nigel, wondering at the colour which had come to the boy’s fair cheeks. “Seeing it is the first you have asked, it should be the more easily granted.”

“Nay, but I fear you will think me but a sorry fool,” replied young Ogilvy, still shyly. “But I have a feeling—a presentiment, perhaps—that I shall fall to-morrow, and—and ——” he fingered a packet he held in his hand nervously.

“Tush!” cried his friend, smiling. “’Tis

your first battle, every beginner has the same feeling. 'Twill be gone after your baptism of shot and fire. I felt the same myself eight years ago."

"Nay," persisted Kenneth quietly. "'Tis more than that with me. My first battle will be my last. For, hear me, Nigel, last night I awakened from sleep three times, to find Alec standing beside me. Each time he smiled and called my name. His voice has rung in my ears ever since. I know the meaning of his call!"

Nigel was silent. In those days such omens or fancies, as we may call them now, were treated with more credulity, even by those of the upper classes; and that the spirit of his friend should have called his young comrade seemed no matter for light laughter or unbelief to the listener.

"See," continued Ogilvy, speaking now with less constraint. "The favour I would ask is the giving of this packet to my sister, with—with my dearest love. Poor Mary!"

"Nay, nay!" cried Nigel as he placed the packet in his breast pocket, and laid an affectionate hand on the young man's shoulder.

" 'Tis but a fancy at which we two will laugh to-morrow, lad, as we drink the King's health and damnation to his enemies in the Covenanters' own wine cups. Take heart of grace and have no fear. We'll thrash the rascals to Dunrobin Castle itself, and look after our own skins into the bargain. And now we must e'en to sleep, unless we would have the morning sun catching us napping."

And with a smile and laugh, trying to drown the dim foreboding which had suddenly clamoured at his own heart, he rolled himself in his long coat and laid down beside his comrades on the heather.

Saturday morning dawned bright and clear. The Royalists, in gay good humour at the prospect of a coming fight, laughed and sang as they prepared themselves for the attack ; little dreaming of the grim soldiery who lurked amongst the wooded, broken country around.

Montrose himself, confident, exultant, eager as any lad at his first fight, rode at the head of his men, pausing on a high ridge to survey the enemy's strength. By his side was a gay throng of Cavaliers, the pride and flower

of his army, imbued with their leader's enthusiasm and their leader's hopes.

Already in their mind's eye they viewed the broken columns of their foe flying before them.

Defeat in such a cause, and with such a leader, seemed a thing impossible.

To the right the Presbyterian army could be seen advancing slowly over the broken and uneven ground.

It was the moment, so Montrose decided, for one of those impetuous charges which had so often won him victory and renown in days of yore.

At a word from their leader, General Hurry led the whole of the Royalist cavalry to the attack, a ringing cheer rising from those gay ranks as the gallant cavalcade swept across the barren track with resistless impetus mindful to carry the battle at the first wild onslaught. But, alas! The movement was fatal.

Strachan was no boy in the craft of war, and well knew what his enemy's tactics were like to be, and so, as the flower of Montrose's army approached, the two wings of the

Parliamentary army sprang from the ambush of broken hillocks and ridges around.

The surprise was as complete as it was disastrous.

In an instant the Rovalist ranks were flung into confusion.

Yet they rallied bravely, these men, inspired by high enthusiasm and blind courage. Nil Medium had been their motto. Nil Medium it should be to the end.

What though behind them disaster and ruin already broke up the ranks of the foot where the raw Orkney men, terrified by the charge of Strachan's cavalry, in their midst broke and fled all directions ?

In vain Montrose strove to rally his men and withdraw them to a wooded hill. The mad delirium of fear was spreading amongst the main body of his footmen though the mercenaries fought stoutly as men who have learnt to take and sell life at a price.

As for the cavalry they were fighting still, yonder amidst those fatal ridges.

Heroes all, meeting overwhelming odds with that superb courage which was their birthright.

Gallantly did young Menzies of Pitfoddels strive for the Royal Standard, and when at last it was seized by the enemies' hands it was wet with his life's blood. Douglas and Ogilvy of Powrie lay dead beside him, whilst Montrose himself, wounded and unhorsed, fought bravely on with the strength of despair. But in a few minutes he, too, must have been taken had not young Frendraught, himself wounded, struggled to his side with the offer of his own horse.

"What matter what befalls me," cried the young viscount eagerly, as he pressed his point, "so long as His Majesty's General is safe?"

Urged to it by a vague hope that perhaps all was not yet lost, Montrose leapt into the saddle, and galloped off the disastrous field, followed by Kinnoull and a few of the survivors of the little band.

Meantime Nigel Urquhart had fought on through that terrible day with the grim tenacity of purpose which characterizes the Scottish soldier. Once through the swirl and din of battle he had fancied he caught a glimpse of Dugald Grant's evil, glowering face; but,

though he struggled forward to meet him, the press of horses and fighters drifted them apart, and they had not met again. It was not till the Royalists, beaten and outnumbered, were gradually scattering apart, struggling ever more feebly against their victorious enemies, that he found himself side to side with Kenneth Ogilvy. The lad's face was flushed with the fever-heat of battle as he fought on still with desperate eagerness, as one who would fain turn the fortunes of the day by his single arm. His fair curls were clotted and tangled with blood, his sword dripped ruddily in the April sunshine.

"God save the King," he cried with a ringing laugh, which sounded incongruously enough on that stricken field, where the King's followers fled in all directions. And, with a swinging blow accompanying the words, he cut down a tall trooper who would have fired his musket at a comrade. Then, turning, he saw Nigel Urquhart beside him.

"After all——" he cried.

But what he would have added Nigel never heard. One moment the flushed, boyish face was turned to his with all the glow of gallant

youth aflame in it ; the next, the slight figure was swaying in the saddle, clutching vaguely with empty hands, whilst a grey pallor spread from chin to temple.

Leaning forward from his own charger, Nigel caught the falling figure in his strong arms. Then, unable to lift the lad from his saddle, he supported him with one arm, whilst with the other he turned the horses' heads from the battlefield.

Not wholly unconscious, Kenneth Ogilvy rallied sufficiently to cling feebly to his seat, and so at last, with much difficulty, his friend managed to make good his way, galloping slowly off towards the wooded hills which earlier in the day had proved so disastrous a shelter for the enemy's ambushade.

No word was spoken ; only from time to time Kenneth's breath came in long gasping sighs. So quickly did they gain shelter that their escape appeared to have been unperceived, and after riding for some distance Nigel reined in his horse.

It was evident that his companion was sorely wounded, and even with the cessation of movement he lapsed into total un-

consciousness. To dismount and lay him on the heather seemed a matter of impossibility, and Nigel was wondering how best to accomplish it, when a familiar voice from behind caused him to utter an exclamation of wonder.

It was Donald Finlay, one of the two attendants who had followed him from Cromarty. With the faithfulness of a dog, the man had striven to be near his master's side in battle, and though, being on foot, he found this almost impossible, he had not been far off, and, quick to perceive his movements, had followed him from the field, tracking him with the ease of a swift-footed Scot born amongst the heather.

Together the two laid Kenneth Ogilvy on the ground, covered first by their own cloaks. With the gentle touch of a woman, Nigel bathed his face with water that Donald brought from a neighbouring burn; but the extent of his wounds they did not attempt to discover, only relieving him of the heavy cuirass which he wore over his buff coat, for only too clearly the finger of death was resting upon the wounded lad.

Presently he opened his eyes, and looked up wonderingly into Nigel's face.

"Alec," he murmured. "Alec! Yes—I heard you calling, cousin. We had to go together, you and I. Only—you would not wait before—for me. I—am so glad you—you have come back again. I am coming—now—Alec."

But, even as he muttered, the film seemed to pass from the soft, grey eyes.

"Nigel," he murmured. "Ah!—Nigel! How goes the day——"

"But ill, I fear, for the cause," replied Nigel sadly. "The fight was a gallant one, but we were outnumbered and cut down. Alas, alas, lad, that I should have brought you to this!"

He turned aside to hide his emotion, but Kenneth pressed his hand gently.

"I—I thank God for it," he murmured, between great gasps of pain. "My first battle—and my last,—but—I struck a blow for the King. It,—it—is easy to die in such a cause, and"—his grey eyes brightened—"and—with such a leader."

All the devotion which, in that brief ser-

vice, he had lavished on Montrose, leapt into the dying eyes.

"Tell him," he muttered, "tell him—the house of Ogilvy—is loyal, ever loyal."

Then his mind—confused amidst the deepening shadows of swift-coming death, wandered farther back along the short pathway of his life.

"Mary," he murmured. "Poor Mary! She will be lonely without me. For my sake, you will shield her, Nigel? It is harder for her, poor little lassie—and Dugald Grant——"

His pleading eyes said all that the poor, halting tongue was unable to speak.

"For your sake and her own, I will serve her," muttered Nigel hoarsely; and, though he could say no more, perhaps the dying boy read deeper comfort in his eyes, for he smiled.

"Tell her—for my sake—to love you—a brother," he murmured disjointedly.

Then suddenly a light sprang into his eyes.

"Alec," he cried, looking past Nigel to where the shadow of the trees fell thickly athwart grey boulders and purple patches of heather. "Alec, you have come . . . !"

He raised his arm, as if he would wave his

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sword above his head, with all that glad strength with which he had wielded it a short hour back. But the arm sank heavily to his side. Once more he looked up into Nigel's face and smiled.

"God save the King," he whispered faintly, and was gone.

CHAPTER VIII

FROM A STRICKEN FIELD

HUNGRY, weary and faint-hearted, two men travelled slowly and painfully on their way across the mountainous wilderness of western Sutherlandshire.

For twenty-four hours Nigel Urquhart and Donald Finlay had so wandered, lost, yet dreading to be found, in that lonely, unknown waste ; unable to exchange their garments for any disguise, whilst to be seen was to be hunted down and taken prisoners by the soldiery, who, since the fatal battle of Invercarron, had been scouring the country-side for fugitives.

Still, between starvation and imprisonment there is little to choose, and when, far off, Nigel descried the form of a Highland drover seated by a river bank, he hastened towards

him in hopes of obtaining food and some intelligence of the direction in which to go.

But the drover seemed as anxious to avoid a meeting as he to make one, and it was only by stalking the plaided figure round some intervening boulders that he was able to approach within hailing distance.

To his surprise, however, the drover no sooner caught a fair sight of his dishevelled appearance than he came rapidly forward, holding out his hand, with a wan smile.

"Kinnoull!" exclaimed Nigel in astonishment, barely recognizing the young Earl in the plaided, emaciated figure before him. "Kinnoull—is it indeed you?"

"Yes, it is I," replied the Earl sadly. "In sore straits as yourself, I fear, judging from your appearance. What news can you give us?"

Nigel shook his head.

"Alas! none," he replied. "For a day and night I have wandered over these wilds, fearing to speak to or ask succour of any. It was only my desperate need which led me in pursuit of you. But tell me, what of the Marquis?"

"He is here wounded, as I am," replied Kinnoull. "After the battle we escaped towards these wildernesses, though it was not long ere we dismounted and turned our horses adrift for safety's sake. After succeeding in exchanging clothes with some peasants, we wandered afoot hitherwards, but, like yourself, have not dared to seek food or shelter."

As he spoke, he led the way with feeble steps towards a small cairn, beneath the shadow of which two other figures, dressed in the same disguise as himself, were seated, in attitudes of exhaustion. One, an Orkney gentleman of the name of Sinclair, was but slightly known to Nigel ; but in the other, pale and haggard though he was, he had no difficulty in recognizing the noble and dignified features of Montrose.

Fever-stricken, wounded, starving, but with ever dauntless courage, the great Marquis had struggled on in the hope that all might not be lost.

"If we can win alive through this wilderness and reach Dunbeath," he said, with a wan smile, as he greeted his two followers, "all may yet be well. The clans may have

been on the point of rising. I scarcely deem it possible that Pluscardine is not already on the march to meet us. If, for a few weeks, we can hold our own at Dunbeath, friends may rally round us and the Cause triumph."

But his words failed to find response, for alas! it was but too clear to all, that there was little likelihood of the far-off haven of Dunbeath ever being reached by the little band of wounded and exhausted men, who wandered guideless and lost amongst desolate and unknown wilds.

All that day they walked, wearily and aimlessly, along the banks of the Oikel river, but their footsteps grew hourly weaker and weaker, and at last, overcome by hunger, fatigue, and his wounds, Kinnoull laid down to die.

With hands scarcely strong enough for the task, and eyes dimmed with weakness and grief, his friends buried him there in that lonely spot, amongst the gloomy hills and beetling crags, with none to sing his requiem but the fast-flowing river which rushed by over its stony bed; none to mourn his loss but those few friends, who seemed, indeed,

already tottering on the brink of the fate which had overtaken him.

A few grey boulders alone marked the spot where lay one of Scotland's peers and noblest sons. And yet happier was he resting there, amongst his native hills and valleys, in that narrow, lonely grave, than his unfortunate master and friend, who but wandered on to find treachery and shame before death joined them once more.

Towards evening on the day of Kinnoull's death, Nigel spied from afar a little cottage set solitary at the head of a ravine, and, after a hurried consultation, it was decided that Donald Finlay should go forward and see whether food were obtainable.

After a brief delay the young Scotsman returned with a supply of bread and milk, which he said had been given him with some hesitation by the woman of the hut.

To famishing lips the welcome food was as new life, and when they had finished the frugal meal the wanderers set off again along their perilous way, with hearts into which newborn hope and strength had been infused.

All through the night they pressed on, and

the next day too : but hunger and exhaustion once more slackened their steps, and, as the sun sank in the west, they laid down to rest in the quiet valley of Assynt.

Montrose and Sinclair fell into an uneasy slumber and Nigel Urquhart was about to follow their example, when, far off on the top of a low hill, his quick eye caught sight of a man's figure in Highland dress silhouetted against the light.

As he looked, other figures joined the first, and stood, hesitating, in a little knot, looking down over the valley. Hidden by a boulder, the fugitives had so far escaped their notice, but an advance would at once have discovered them to their enemies.

In an instant Nigel was on the alert. Touching Donald, who lay beside him, lightly on the arm, he bent over him to mutter a few words.

"Stay here—do not leave the Marquis as long as you can succour him. If you escape, and it is possible, take this packet to Kilspeth Castle, and give it into the hands of Miss Ogilvy—but to no other. Do not attempt to follow me, and for your lives bid all lie still for the next few hours."

Thrusting the packet given him by Kenneth Ogilvy into the astonished man's hand, Nigel rose swiftly to his feet and stood a moment to allow the men on the hill-side to take full stock of his figure ; then, turning, he ran, as fast as his weakness permitted, in a direction which would lead his pursuers far away from the spot where Montrose lay sleeping.

A hoarse shout behind him told that the ruse had been successful ; but, minded to give them as long a chase as possible, Nigel redoubled his speed, panting and gasping as he leaped from crag to boulder, and stumbled, rather than ran, across the intervening spaces of heather.

The sharp report of a musket, and the spattering of shot on a rock hard by, told him beyond doubt that the men were no mere party of drovers, but soldiers on the search for fugitives ; and the knowledge made him smile as he thought of the chagrin they would have felt had they known of the richer quarry they left behind them.

Across a narrow burn he plunged, the cool waters giving him fresh courage to struggle

on, though already a mist was dimming and blurring his vision and his legs trembled beneath him.

One swift, backward glance showed him that his pursuers were fast gaining on him; he could hear the Highlanders' guttural yells and the loud-voiced curses of the accompanying soldiery—and again he laughed as he flung back his head and thought of Montrose lying secure and unseen in the now far-off valley.

On and on, heart and brain beating in a confused and suffocating way, which made him oblivious of past and present; on and on, like some strange machine, which, though working rapidly down, is still propelled forward with spasmodic jerks. Then, suddenly, a false step over a heathery hillock, a stumble, a fall, and then deeper and blacker unconsciousness of everything.

When Nigel opened his eyes, he found himself lying full length on the heather. Where was he? What had happened? At first he could be conscious of nothing but the fact that it was agony to move a limb. The aching pains in his head were spreading over his body too. What did it mean? The effort

to raise his hand told its own tale. He was bound, hand and foot, with stout cords, so tightly knotted that they seemed indeed to cut into his flesh.

A groan escaped him, and the sound of his voice brought one of his captors to his side.

Where had he seen that handsome, cruel face, with its poll of red hair and thin sneering lips before?

Nigel strove hard with his confused, aching brain to remember, and, on a sudden, memory returned to him.

It was Dugald Grant, the man he had left bound in Morial's Den. The young Highland chief—Argyll's spy—and Mary Ogilvy's would-be lover.

Well, since they last met the tables had been turned. It was he, not Dugald, who lay bound and helpless, and Nigel was sufficient judge of character to know that his enemy was not likely to be backward in repaying old scores with interest.

For a time Grant stood looking at his captive with a smile of triumph, then he stooped and cut the thongs which bound his hands, and,

calling one of his men, told him curtly to bring food and drink.

A starving man is seldom a proud one, and Nigel ate ravenously, though not without dim misgivings as to the goodwill of the offering.

When he had finished Grant laughed softly.

"I did not want you to die—yet, my friend," he said maliciously. "No, no! I would not cheat the hangman of so dainty a morsel, or the Tolbooth of so handsome an ornament," and he chuckled as he allowed his eyes to travel contemptuously over his prostrate foe.

Then his face darkened. Perhaps he was thinking of those sweating hours of fear, when the shadows of Morial's Den had mouthed and gaped at him.

"Were is not for the pleasure of seeing you hang," he muttered savagely, "I'd leave you here for the wolves to find their supper off you. Curse you!"

So saying, he rose abruptly from the boulder on which he had seated himself and stalked off towards his men, leaving Nigel to shudder over his last words and wonder at his own approaching fate.

It was evident that Grant had no idea of pursuing his search for other fugitives, being quite content with his solitary prize ; and seeing that they had to go on foot over the broken, wild country, he and his men were by no means desirous of protracting their stay in so desolate a region

Presently Nigel found his bonds cut, and two stalwart Highlanders bade him rise, each seizing an arm as he did so and dragging him onwards after the rest of the party, which was already a mile in advance.

Dugald Grant paid little further heed to his prisoner beyond a few scornful words from time to time and mocking allusions to his fate at the Grassmarket. But, from the conversation he overheard from two troopers Nigel gathered that his destination was Tain, where Leslie and his army were shortly expected.

Once more on level ground the journey was proceeded with on horseback, Nigel's steed being led by the two Highlanders who had been constituted his body-guard.

Weary and exhausted as he was, at first he had scarcely been able to sit in the saddle ;

but food and a night's rest by the way put new life into him, and by the time the familiar town of Tain was reached he felt strength returning to him, and—with strength—that desire for life and liberty which is every man's birth-right

Leslie had not yet arrived at Tain, and, to Nigel's surprise, Grant, instead of awaiting his coming, ordered his men again into their saddles and continued his way.

A very familiar way to Nigel, through Tearn, across the moor, where the little farm of Woodside held tender memories of that wild All Hallow E'en, across the mysterious sands of Nigg, skirting the town of Cromarty, and over Moalbuoy Moor.

He could guess now whither his captor was leading him, and his heart grew sick between hope and fear as he thought of Mary Ogilvy and the news that they were bringing her.

Poor Mary! And Kenneth was her only brother—the only sympathizer she had in her struggle against parental authority—and Dugald Grant. The wife of Dugald Grant! Was that to be her fate?

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In the silence of the summer evening, as he rode, bound and helpless, in the power of the man he defied, Nigel swore to himself that it should not be.

CHAPTER IX

LOVE LAUGHS AT LOCKSMITHS

IN a little, cell-like apartment of the western turret of Kilspeth Castle sat Nigel Urquhart. He had been spared the dungeons, though why he knew not. Certainly not from love, for Sir John Ogilvy had spared neither curses nor reproaches as he bitterly upbraided him for the death of his son.

The news had been brought, not by Dugald Grant, but by a carrier who passed on his way from Cromarty to Fortrose. Sir Thomas Urquhart—the man said—had had tidings that his cousin, as well as the young Laird of Kilspeth, had been killed on the battlefield at Invercarron, though whence his information came the man could not say.

On hearing the news Sir John's grief had been overwhelming, though, strange to say, his anger and bitterness lay, not against the slayers of his son, but on those whose cause he had espoused.

Perhaps he feared lest his own position had been imperilled by his son's rash act, and so the more loudly and fiercely did he rage against those at whose door he declared his son's undoing lay.

Hot upon his anger and grief came Dugald Grant with his prisoner; and, when the old man recognized in the latter no other than the man whom he declared had led his son to death, his fury knew no bounds.

Thankful indeed was Nigel when the door of his prison closed upon him and he was left alone.

Of Mary he had caught no glimpse, though he had gathered she was at home from the answers Sir John made to Dugald Grant's tender inquiries. He found himself wondering whether the girl would now smile on her suitor; whether the shock of her brother's death had turned her loyalty into the hatred which seemed to consume her

father for the cause he had himself once espoused.

From the narrow slit of his window he could see down over the groups of fir trees and broken glades of larch and pine to where the desolate moorland stretched away towards Rosemarkie. Would he be soon travelling that way again, on his last journey towards the fatal Grassmarket? Life leapt so strongly in his veins that he could not repress a shudder at the thought.

The hangman's rope!

Ah! if such were to be his fate, how happier far had been that of Kenneth Ogilvy and Earl Kinnoull sleeping peacefully in their lonely graves.

And yet he rejoiced in the thought of the sacrifice which he fondly hoped might have saved his leader from a death of ignominy.

If Montrose might escape, right cheerfully would he meet his own fate, however hard.

The thought comforted him as he sat with his head resting in his hands, waiting—as he must wait now—till the scene shifted for the last brief act of life.

The shadows fell long through the high

turret window, and darkness crept gradually into the little cell.

A step outside brought his mind suddenly back to the fact that he was still alive and very hungry.

He looked up eagerly as the key turned and the bolts shot back. It was his jailer with food, doubtless. But no! It was no jailer who stood in the doorway, but a girl, a young sad-eyed girl, dressed in a long black cloak, with its hood pulled low over her brown curls, and a world of sorrow and sympathy in her beautiful face.

"Mary!" cried Nigel, springing forward with an irresistible impulse, and then stopping short, the colour burning redly in his hollow, sunburnt cheeks.

A wave of colour, too, sprang to the girl's pale cheeks at the sound of his voice and her name, though she made no protest, but, closing the door behind her, stepped forward towards him; and something in her upturned face as she looked at him with her soft, sad eyes made the man's heart beat fast with a vague delight, so that in the joy of the moment he forgot the perils of present and future.

"Mary!" he whispered again, more softly still, as he bent to kiss the hand she held out to him.

And with the one word she understood all that he would say, whilst he read his answer in the silent promise of her eyes.

"I have come to save you," she whispered, as they stood together in the darkening room. "Hush! Do not speak; only do as I say. To-morrow it will—it will be too late, but I cannot tell you more now or here. We must hasten whilst there is time."

He understood the fear in those last words, and the faint tremor in her voice filled him with strange gladness. She loved him still, and loving had risked her father's bitter anger in coming to save him.

Instinctively her hand rested in his; though she was his rescuer it was he who must take the lead now.

Hand in hand, breathless with excitement, they slipped from the little room and down a winding flight of steps to a landing below.

Here Mary paused, her finger to her lip as the tramp of feet near told of a watchful sentry.

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Close back into the shadow of a doorway they pressed, so close together that the girl could feel the deep pulsations of the heart against which she rested.

What would discovery mean?

Ah! How well she knew the answer to that question!

There would be no to-morrow then for the man she loved.

Dizziness threatened to overcome her at the thought and the nearness of their peril.

Only a few paces closer those footsteps need come—and discovery was inevitable.

A little nearer!

Nigel heard the gasp which escaped his companion as the tramp of heavy steps died slowly away in an opposite direction.

But it was no moment for parley.

"Quickly, quickly," whispered Mary.
"Oh! for your life, Nigel."

No need to urge him.

Together they hurried down the wider stairway to the hall. At this hour it was silent and deserted enough. Not so much as a hound raised an inquiring head to watch them as they stole forward.

What next ?

Nigel's eyes mutely asked the question.

For answer Mary raised a curtain of the faded arras which hung round the great hall, motioning her lover silently to creep into a niche behind.

No time for long speech or thanks ; only one swift glance from blue eyes to grey.

"I will return—after," whispered the girl breathlessly.

The heavy tapestry fell back with a dull swish into its place.

The bustle of supper preparing, the hum of voices, later on the strident tones of men talking together, reached the fugitive as he leant back against the wall of his lair.

The thick tapestry rendered it impossible to distinguish words spoken, though presently the sounds of song and revelling broke upon his ears, scarcely according, as it seemed to him, with a house of mourning and bereavement.

Then a loud shout rose above other sounds, a confused hubbub of clamour and cursing. The tramping of feet close to his place of

concealment, then a dying away of sound, succeeded at length by silence.

Another spell of suspense, which was rapidly growing unbearable, when again the tapestry was raised, and Mary Ogilvy, cloaked as before, stood before him.

"They have discovered your escape," she whispered. "All is going well; they have missed one of the horses from the stables, and have started in hot pursuit. Come quickly now, before those who search above discover us."

No need to bid him hasten. Side by side they hurried across the wide hall, where overturned chairs and half-drained flagons told of the interrupted feast; out into the cool night air, down along the same narrow path amongst whispering firs, where jealousy had first discovered the knowledge of love; along the avenue, pausing from time to time to listen for sounds of pursuit, then on again out on to the dreary waste of moorland.

"The Burn of Eathie," whispered Mary Ogilvy. "It is there where I thought for to-night to hide you. They will not search

so near home, and to-morrow I will come to you, and we will think of all—of all that is to be done.”

He paused, turning to her and taking both her little hands in his.

“And you have risked, and will risk, all this for me?” he whispered, looking down into the face, which gleamed white in the moonlight.

She smiled at him, half doubtful of telling her secret, although his eyes had told her his already so many times that night. But her own were traitors now, for he stooped to kiss her with the glad whisper of her name on his lips before she could answer. Then, as she made as though to hasten on, he stopped her, with a little gesture of authority.

“Nay, sweetheart!” he said, and there was a masterfulness in his tones which there was no gainsaying. “The Burn of Eathie is near, and right easily shall I reach it now; but I will not have you travel alone and unattended across this desolate moor. Indeed, I have a mind to see you safely housed once more in Kilsbeth Castle, ere I make my way thither.”

"Nay! nay!" she replied, glancing fearfully behind her to where the moonlight cast weird and fantastic shadows over the deserted track of road from the rocky boulders and stunted alders which scattered the heath.

"Nay! That were to work the undoing of all. Hasten, Nigel, hasten for my sake, or it will be too late. There is no shelter here to hide you if the horsemen return. See, I will do your bidding and go, but lose no time in gaining the burn ere it be too late."

Still he lingered in spite of her pleading, fearing for her safety, loth to leave her thus. But she urged him, promising to come to him on the morrow, begging him for her sake, as well as his own, not to throw away the only chance which might offer for his escape.

"To-morrow, to-morrow, I will tell you all," she whispered, as, with gentle hands, she strove to push him forward. "But now I dare not. It may be that I shall be missed, and if so——" She hesitated, looking at him with appealing eyes, so that perforce he had to yield to her bidding.

"To-morrow, then," he murmured, as once

more he drew her to his side. "To-morrow I shall see you."

"At the Burn of Eathie," she said softly, smiling again as their eyes met. "Do not fear that I shall betray you, or leave you to starve. Even from Dugald Grant's watchful eyes I will escape by some means, or my wits shall never serve me again, and so——"

"It is au revoir, as they say across the water," said Nigel, bending to kiss her little hair. "Though the hours will be long ere I see you again, sweetheart, and hear the unravelling of the mystery which opened my prison door."

"Nay!" she made answer, laughing at him with eyes which gleamed merrily in the soft moonlight. "Surely, Sir Cavalier, the mystery finds an easy solution—in your heart."

Before he could make answer she was gone, and, straining his eyes, he could see her slim, black-cloaked figure hurrying swiftly homewards across the moonlit moor, now sihouetted against the light, then lost behind a clump of drooping alders.

And, as he watched with tender eyes, the

man's heart beat thickly with that great joy which had been sleeping within him those last few months, and had now awakened into new and wondrous life at the glance of a girl's blue eyes.

Truly the hills and valleys of life are strangely set, for, as Nigel Urquhart pressed onwards across Moalbuoy Moor, with the joy of spring in the air, and the joy of love in his heart, it seemed to him that, at a bound, he had stepped from the shadows of the very valley of death to the heights of Paradise.

CHAPTER X

THE BURN OF EATHIE

THE Burn of Eathie is within a few miles of the town of Cromarty, and joins one of those wildly romantic valleys which the imagination of the neighbouring country-folk peopled with fairies, many declaring that they had often seen myriads of the "good people" dancing at sundown at the edge of the dell.

And, if the legend were true, certain it is that the wee folk could have found no fairer spot to gambol in. For nearly a mile the ravine runs inland from the sea, shut in by a line of mural precipices, tapestried with ivy and overhung with birch and hazel; flowers and ferns cluster and clamber in every nook and cranny, contrasting in their rich and varied colouring with the pale yellow of the

stone. A tiny stream, leaping down in a silvery cascade from the height of thirty feet from a perpendicular wall of rock at the end of the dell, flows merrily over the mossy banks seawards ; whilst birch and hawthorn, hazel and briar, form a tangle of wood and undergrowth on either side. Above the cascade the precipitous bank of the dell recede into a long hollow, terminating in a perpendicular precipice.

On a smooth, grassy spot between the stream and the receding banks stood, at the time of which I am writing, a small, rudely erected meal mill. Small and insignificant though it appeared, yet the " Mill of Eathie " was celebrated for many miles around as a nightly meeting-place of the fairy folk.

None dared approach the place an hour after sunset, for, did an unlucky wight of earthly mould chance to be caught napping in or near the good people's stronghold, never—so the legend ran—would mortal eyes see him again.

True, the miller himself, staying one night later than his wont, had caught sight of a troop of small, red-capped, grey-garmented

figures not three feet in height, issuing from the wall of rock before his eyes ; but, more fortunate than others, he had escaped, and lived to tell the tale to many a wide-eyed audience gathered round his fireside.

It will easily be seen, therefore, that Mary Ogilvy could scarcely have chosen a less likely place in which search would be made, and Nigel Urquhart had little need for watch against a sudden surprise as he laid down under the shelter of a mossy crag to sleep ; his belief in the fairy lore of his country-folk being wholly inefficient to rob him of his rest, though at the time he felt profoundly grateful for their supposed guardianship. Certain it is that he slept peacefully the sleep of exhausted nature under the shadow of birch and hazel, and awakened to find the sunshine of a May morning peeping through a canopy of leaves, and the birds on brake and briar pouring forth their canticles of praise.

With morning light danger stepped once more upon the scene, and, after a brief plunge in the rippling waters of the burn, Nigel betook himself to the most wooded recess of the dell, farthest from the mill and the beaten

track which crossed the upper part of the ravine, leading from Rosemarkie to Cromarty. Here, on a bed of blue bells and primroses, he lay, watching and waiting, as a hare in her lair listens for the distant baying of the hounds, and wondering when his lady-love would find it possible to redeem her promise.

So he waited, dreaming fair dreams, planning, wondering, torturing himself at times, as the hours dragged by, with thoughts of what mischance might have befallen her.

And, in the midst of his reveries, all suddenly, without warning of her approach, she stood before him, having stolen soft-footed and unheard over the mossy sward upon his hiding-place. As he had seen her first, she stood there, in her dark riding gear and broad beaver hat, but radiant with rosy health and excitement, though deep back in her blue eyes lay the shadow of a sorrow not yet time-healed.

The morning had brought a fresh shyness which the excitement of last night's work had partly taken from her, and she faltered as she laid the little basket of provisions she had brought before him, whispering that she had been delayed.

"And, after all, you must have thought I meant to starve you," she murmured with a smile as he drew her down to a seat beside him on the flower-starred mound which formed his retreat. "But—but—there were so many difficulties—and I was all alone."

Her lip quivered, and he knew that her thoughts had flown back to Kenneth, the brother who had shared all her thoughts and acts. There was silence between them for a few minutes, then, when Nigel had satisfied his hunger, she put her hand into his.

"Now, tell me," she whispered, "tell me about—about him. I want to know, oh! so much. It feels as if I cannot think or rest until I hear all. Is it—is it true that he is dead?"

Perhaps, deep down in her heart, a lingering hope had fought desperately against the hopelessness of inward conviction, for bright tears blimmed in her eyes, as Nigel bowed his head. Then, low and sorrowfully, he told her all the simple tale of her brother's first, last battle, the brief career of blind devotion, the peaceful death, faced as bravely and calmly as the young kinsman—whom he had loved and

mourned so passionately—had faced it. He told of those last messages the lad's dying lips had faltered to her, of the packet he had been obliged to entrust to other hands when Dugald Grant and his men had tracked him and his leader in the far-off wilds of Assynt, and of that promise Kenneth had pleaded for from him, that he would protect the sister he loved so dearly.

"And yet," said Nigel gently, as he took her hands and looked down tenderly into her face "the promise is broken already."

"Broken?" she made answer wonderingly. "Broken? And—and wherefore?"

"Not for *his* sake, dear though he was to me," he replied. "But for your own sweet sake, little one—and never as sister. Nay! blush not, for the promise was in your eyes last night. The promise that I may cherish you as the woman who will one day be my wife."

She did not reply. Perhaps there was no need. Brief and strange though the wooing might be, in face of the stern dangers of the present there could be no girlish coquetry or dallying with love,—that love which had been

born, as it were, at first sight, and had ripened almost unknowingly in a day, only, however, to be realized in its full strength when death had suddenly stepped between to part them for ever.

"Listen," she whispered presently, waking from the dream which, perilously sweet, brought danger ever nearer with his furtive strides.

"Listen, Nigel, for, oh ! I have so much to tell you, and yet so little time, since Dugald Grant is a cannier man even than my father, and—and I fear that he already doubts and suspects me. But now you shall hear all from the beginning, and tell me if what I have done is right."

The little shadow of anxiety on her face brought a smile to Nigel's lips. Once free, with his native hills and vales around him, danger and death seemed far enough off spectres to his sanguine mind. It would need a sharper man than even this red-haired Dugald Grant to catch and cage him again,—so he told himself.

Nevertheless, the anxiety came to his eyes, too, as he looked into the face of the girl

beside him, and thought, not of his safety, but of hers. The danger to both of them was doubled, as he knew, by their love.

"We thought you dead as well—as well as Kenneth," whispered Mary. "And, oh! how terrible it was to hear my father curse your memory whilst I wept not only for one but both. Life seemed suddenly to have grown quite dark, and it was then that—that I knew——" She smiled at him through a mist of unshed tears as she continued hurriedly. "Then you came. At least, they told me you had come, though I feared to see you lest I should betray my secret. And the joy of the news was made even darker grief when I learnt that on the morrow you were to ride to Edinburgh, and that there"—she shuddered—"there you were to die. The thought made me cold with horror, but it made me desperate too.

"To begin with, I knew not what to do, but wandered in my frenzy to the door of your prison, which, to my joy, I found guarded by one who, not only had loved Kenneth with all the devotion of a foster brother, but who I knew had grieved sorely that he had not

ridden with him on his enterprise. I spoke to him ; I told him you were Kenneth's friend ; I would have pleaded with him, but it was unnecessary. Hugh Wilson needed no more persuasion than those few words. He would assist me, he declared, even if it cost his life. Our plan was quickly arranged. Whilst my father and Dugald were away, Wilson left the door unguarded ; then, when you had been safely secreted in the hall, he took horse and rode for the coast in order to serve as a decoy, declaring, too, his intention of leaving the country and taking service in Holland or France. The rest you know. Your flight was discovered, pursuit ensued, but not capture. Hugh made good his escape, and, though the country-side is still being scoured, you may well elude your enemies. But hush !" she added, raising her finger as Nigel would have interrupted her tale. " That is not all I have to tell you. This morning Dugald would seem to have been suspicious, or else, perhaps, he deemed it a fitting time for paying his hateful addresses. At any rate, I saw no chance of escape from his company till I hit on the expedient of a pretended engagement to

a friend in Cromarty ; and, though he offered his company, I suggested it might be better that he went rebel-hunting instead, and so left him, cursing and swearing, I doubt not, with suspicion writ large on his face. I rode hither with my attendant ; or, rather, I rode, as I had said, to Mistress Anderson's at Cromarty. But after a brief stay with her, methought of a plan, and therewith, leaving my man at the Manse, turned my steps as secretly as I might to Cromarty Castle. Marry ! but your good kinsman, Sir Thomas, looked fairly amazed to see such a visitor, and the more so when I told him of my errand and your case."

"Bah !" laughed Nigel ; " but I can dimly imagine it. And a brave lady you were, sweet, to so beard the lion in his den. But the hearing of my plight could scarce have moved him to such warmth as the finding of an Urquhart of Cromarty in Japhet's great-grandson would have done."

"Nay. There you wrong the good knight," replied Mary, laughing, too. " For verily, he became all attention, and was very creditably incensed at the notion of an Urquhart

figuring at the Grassmarket. Indeed, he would have ridden hither at the head of his retainers to carry you in triumph to the castle, there to be held against all comers, had I not pointed out that such a course would but swell the number of the victims, and, perhaps, lose to science one of her brightest ornaments."

"An argument which had due weight, I warrant," interposed Nigel.

"Aye," she retorted; "as I intended, sir. Nevertheless, Sir Thomas has promised to give you shelter and all aid in his power to make good your escape. And besides all this," she added, "I learnt that the bearer of the tidings from the field of Invercarron was no less than your own servant, one Guy Morris, who was forthwith summonsed to hear of your escape, and who, good fellow, after many tears of joy at the news I brought him, promised to be here at sundown, with fresh clothes, so that you shall with greater security make your way to the castle."

"But all this for me, lassie, and what, meantime, of yourself?" asked Nigel tenderly. "Is there no danger to be feared from Dugald Grant? For, if there be, right loth am I to

leave Scottish shores whilst one hair of your head is in peril."

Mary's face clouded slightly, then, with a smile which chased despondency aside like sunshine on an April day, she shook her head.

"Nay!" she replied. "My father loves me too well, I think, to use force, and Kenneth's death will be sufficient pretext to stop all thoughts of a speedy betrothal. We must wait, therefore, you and I, and for the present think only of your safety. Have no fear for me."

"The Marquis of Montrose may yet return at the head of the clans," said Nigel hopefully. "And then, methinks, Sir John may be glad of another suitor for his daughter's hand than yon red-haired Covenanter. If so, ere many months go by, you shall see me riding blithely to the gates of Kilspeth Castle, sweetheart, to claim the bonniest bride in all Scotland."

She laughed gaily and happily, lingering still by his side—in spite of the moments being danger-fraught—to build bright castles in the air of those days of future triumph, dreaming as little as he did that already the great Mar-

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quis lay betrayed by traitor hands into his enemy's power, and that the last hope of a desperate enterprise, as chivalrous as it had been fool-hardy from the first, was quenched for ever in death and disaster.

CHAPTER XI

THE HAUNTED MILL

LONG since the sun had set in the west. Long since the miller of Eathie had taken his homeward way across the moor, leaving his little mill to the sole possession of Queen Mab and her fairy courtiers. But still under the shade of his leafy lair Nigel Urquhart waited and watched.

The long hours of the May day had dragged tediously since Mary Ogilvy left him, and, man-like, he had fretted and chafed at the enforced inaction as he lay, watching the long shafts of sunshine slowly shift themselves slantwise down amongst the trees and finally fade away, leaving only the whispering shadows of twilight behind them ; and still

he waited and watched in vain for the coming of Guy Morris.

At last he rose, stretching his stiffened limbs and looking down deprecatingly at the disordered, battle-stained clothes which must be so patent a tell-tale did he venture forth in them. No! Wait he must, however impatiently, for, to be seen in such gear, would be to court instant suspicion and summary re-capture.

A crackling of the undergrowth along the burnside reached his listening ears, and, as he stepped forward cautiously to peer towards the opening in the wood, he caught sight of Morris's round, honest face and stalwart form, pushing its way through the tangle at break-neck speed.

On seeing the master whom he had for days past mourned as dead, the good fellow's emotion, combined with the excitement of present tidings, wellnigh overcame him, and it was with no little difficulty that Nigel gleaned his story from the incoherent torrent of gasping words he poured forth.

It then appeared that the well-laid plans of the morning had met with serious

checkmate from a wholly unforeseen quarter.

Mistress Anderson, the good dame to whom Mary's visit had been ostensibly paid, was no other than the wife of the Cromarty minister, a dour counter of the strictest sect.

Mary had conceived this master-stroke in diplomatic thinking in this way to throw dust in the eyes of Lagald Grant. But she forgot that, whilst blinding one enemy, she was opening the eyes of another, for between the Mansie and the Castle of Cromarty a deadly feud raged. Never a Sabbath indeed passed but the Rev. George Anderson hurled anunciations, black and bitter, against Sir Thomas Urquhart and all his house, into the wondering ears of his flock.

Only last week had he enjoyed to the full the task of depicting the fearful end of the ungodly in the defeat of Montrose at Invercarron, and more especially the death "o' the waefu' traitor, Nigel Urquhart!"

Small wonder then that neither the worthy minister or his wife received with joy the tidings—brought by Mistress Ogilvy's serving-

man, and quickly communicated to them by their own rosy-cheeked Bessie, that this same Nigel had not only escaped death, but also imprisonment from Kilsbeth Castle; this last being mysteriously accomplished by supernatural power, the devil himself having appeared to carry off his servant from captivity, together with the unfortunate jailer who guarded his prison door.

But Mistress Anderson received the latter part of this intelligence with an unbelieving sniff.

Like many of her sex, she was apt to jump at a conclusion first and find out the reasons for it afterwards. This time, unfortunately, her surmise fell little short of the truth, and when, later, she learnt of Mary Ogilvy's visit to Cromarty Castle, alone and unattended, she bridged the whole proceedings of the case and summed up emphatically.

"If Mary Ogilvy dinna ken whaur the fause traitor is hidden, I'm nae a living woman," she declared to her husband. "The lass is a true Ogilvy, for a' Sir John's words o' grace, an' the hoos o' Ogilvy, as a' ken, is a fause, ill hoos frae stock to stem. Didna the lassie's

ain brither fa' beside the bluidy James Graham i' the bonnie battle when the guid lads o' the Covenant under Strachan smote the ungodly hip an' thigh? An' weel, I ken Mary's nae behint him in her lo'e for the wicked doers!"

What the answer of the minister had been to this scathing denunciation Morris did not know, but certain it was that, ere many hours passed, a rumour had run through the length and breadth of Cromarty that the traitor, Nigel Urquhart, lay hidden somewhere in the near neighbourhood with the price of a goodly sum of Scottish merks on his head, and that therewith all the men, who were not engaged in their herring fishing, had started to search, with an eagerness more begotten of the hopes of gain than the zeal conjured up by their minister's exhortation.

A few of the seekers, with true Scottish canniness, had dogged the steps of Morris, doubtless suspecting that the servant would sooner or later carry news of the search to his master. Hence the delay in the worthy yeoman's appearance. Indeed only the desperation of the case had forced him to run the

gauntlet of prying eyes, and even now he feared he might be tracked.

The matter was urgent. Even with the exchange of clothes which Morris brought with him, recognition was inevitable. Moreover, as they spoke, the truant breeze bore towards them, as they stood in doubt, the sound of men's voices approaching the dell.

It was too late to escape, and although the twilight fell deep in the glades, still friendly darkness had not yet come to cover their departure. Only one hope lay before them, and with quick intuition Nigel grasped it.

"The mill, man—the mill," he whispered, seizing Guy by the arm and dragging him forward.

A sweat of fear broke over the Englishman's brow.

Amongst his other tales of terror Donald Finley had not failed to dwell on the strange inhabitants of the mill of Eathie ; but, with the sound of their pursuers in their ears, it was no time to play the coward, and without remonstrance the poor fellow allowed himself to be dragged along towards the unwelcome shelter.

Only just in time did they reach it, for scarcely had they laid themselves, panting, on the floor of the upper part of the mill than the greensward below was peopled with a small throng of Cromarty men, all eager with excitement.

Amongst the bushes and brakes of the ravine they searched and hunted for their quarry, but without success. A little knot finally gathering in front of the mill.

By this time twilight had faded into a grey gloom, which blurred with strange, indistinct outlines every surrounding object. Anxious as they were for the reward, it was not without inward misgivings that the men found themselves at so witching an hour in so unhallowed a spot. The spells of the Burn itself were potent enough, but to march against the stronghold of the pigmy spectres seemed to require stouter hearts than the band could muster.

"Wha's afeart?" cried one boldly, making a step millwards and looking back with a brag-gish wag of his head. "Coom on then, lads. Hech! but we'll no' be letting the siller slip

through our hauns for fear o' an auld carline's tale."

"Na! na! mon!" cried another from the throng. "It's na auld carline's tale. Didna Jamie Wilson himsel' see the guid people gauging out frae the verra rock itsel'? An' didna Tam Macintosh coom to hold revel wi' them, an' didna they just tak' the puir laddie, pipes an' a' sae that naebody e'er garr'd blick o' him again?"

"An' a' the time we dinna ken that the mon's there!" suggested another.

"For mysel', I dinna believe that Morris ganged this gait at a', but passed along an' oop 'tither side across the moor. Its mysel' will be ganging towards Rosemarkie toon before the moon's up yonder!"

One or two seemed to agree with this latter proposition, but the main body of searchers still stood hesitating before the mill, till the silence was broken by a low, melancholy cry coming from the shadow of a neighbouring thorn. In calmer moments few would have had difficulty in distinguishing the voice of the night owl, but, coming upon overstrained nerves, the weird echoing sound seemed

evoked by some spirit of evil, and to accentuate this belief at that moment a small grey form, indistinct and shadowy, suddenly appeared upon the face of the mass of rock immediately in front of them.

That the strange apparition was no other than one of the small spectral beings, with which tradition had peopled the mill and its surroundings, was clearly obvious to all, and, with a simultaneous yell, in which even the boldest spirits joined, the whole party turned tail and fled, never stopping to look behind them till they had reached the safe shelter of their homes, there to pour forth so wondrous a tale of the perils from which they had escaped, as to carry conviction into the most unbelieving hearts.

And in the meantime the wild cat, who, by her timely appearance had played so important a part in the comedy of the evening, scrambled with loud caterwauling back to her young in the cleft of the rock, doubtless equally possessed with the belief that her peaceful retreat had been invaded by demons.

But in the mill itself two men laughed long

and loudly over their enemies' discomfiture, and swore to toast Queen Mab and every bogle of the burn for the unwitting service they had rendered them that night.

CHAPTER XII

THE TRAITOR OF ASSYNT

IT was some hours before Nigel Urquhart and his attendant stole forth and across the now moonlit burn and out on to the moor beyond. The tell-tale buff coat and the long blood-bespattered boots had been buried deep in the ground by the burnside, and in the garments of a well-to-do tacksman few would have suspected the fugitive officer of Montrose's army.

Nevertheless, the two went cautiously, glancing from side to side as they sped on towards the town.

But, though all the searchers had long returned from their fruitless toil, the haven of Cromarty Castle was not to be reached without further adventure.

They had entered Navity Woods and were

already passing down the hill towards the town when their steps were arrested by seeing in front of them a figure dressed in the attire of a Highland drover walking with slow, halting steps in the same direction as themselves. Nigel paused, then, seeing that the man was alone, and moreover appeared from his staggering gait to have been drinking heavily, he walked on, and had nearly overtaken the stranger, when, with a low groan, the latter fell to the ground.

"The fellow's ill, I fear," said Nigel, as he bent over the prostrate figure; then, as the moonlight revealed the features of the unconscious man he uttered a low exclamation of surprise and horror.

"Merciful Heavens," he cried, bending lower, "it is Donald Finlay!"

Morris pressed to his side, wide-eyed with wonder.

Yes; there was no mistaking him, emaciated, unkempt, and blood-stained, yet it was no other than Donald himself.

It was not long before the young Scotchman opened his eyes, staring wildly around with the hunted look of a man who fears his

enemies have found him ; but recognition soon crept into his face and he smiled faintly at his master.

A few drops of brandy from Morris's flask revived him wonderfully, and though Nigel protested that they would wait for his story till later, he insisted on telling it at once.

"Na, na," he muttered ; "ye maun hear, ye maun hear, for it's sair wounded I am, an' I'll no' be deein' till ye ken a'."

And so, there in the moonlight, with no other listeners than Morris, and the whispering trees of the wood, Nigel Urquhart heard the story of a great man's betrayal. And, as he listened, the sweat of anger and grief broke out on the young man's brow, whilst he cursed the name of the traitor who had wrought the deed, as every loyal heart was to curse it through the time to come.

Brokenly, almost unintelligibly at times, Donald Finlay told the tale, and when he had finished lay back faint and exhausted in his master's arms.

And this is what he told.

It appeared that shortly after Nigel had departed to draw off pursuit Montrose had

awakened, and, when he heard what had transpired, the little party, now reduced to three, had hurried onwards along the river-side. But faintness and exhaustion once more proved overpowering, and when a gleam of light showed a cotter's hut Montrose had himself approached in search of shelter.

The cotter treated them civilly, and when Montrose heard that the surrounding land was the property of an old adherent, Neil Macleod, of Assynt, he determined to throw himself on his loyalty and ordered the man to conduct him and his companions to the laird's house at Ardvrech.

Macleod had received his noble guest somewhat hesitatingly, being a weak man and timorous of his own safety, having indeed for that reason turned from his old fealty to espouse the cause of the Covenant. But in the end his visitor's pleas prevailed, and he agreed to shelter and hide him, if possible, from his relentless enemies.

But the mistress of Ardvrech was by no means subservient to her husband's views. Herself a strong-minded Covenanter, and sister of Monro, of Lamfair, one of Strachan's

officers, she argued long and loudly with the laird against the course he had adopted.

Not only was it sin, she declared, to give shelter and protection to such a vile traitor and bloodstained wretch as James Graham, but it was also widely against their own interests. What was there to be gained by such an end? Montrose was beaten, crushed, never likely again to be able to raise his head or be a power in the land. The cause of the Covenant was not only righteous, but strong; and, moreover, 400 bolls of meal was the price of the Royalist leader's capture.

To such arguments Macleod lent at first a hesitating, then a willing ear. Montrose was at once secured as a prisoner, and though he begged and pleaded for death rather than to be delivered alive into his enemies' hands—though he tried to touch his captor's cupidity with offers of money—Macleod was inexorable. Indeed, it was too late now to change, for his wife, knowing her husband's vacillating mind, had forthwith despatched messengers to Leslie announcing the capture.

Meantime, in company with his leader, Finlay had also been imprisoned; but Don-

ald, knowing how short a shrift so unimportant a person as himself was like to get when the Covenanting General appeared, had set his wits to work with a will.

To compass Montrose's deliverance was, indeed, out of the question ; but his own was an easier matter. Possessing a smooth tongue and handsome person, Donald's tactics were employed in the conquest of a certain tender-hearted Highland lassie, who, bringing her woman's cunning to work with his, had contrived cleverly enough to outwit the jailors and bring her would-be lover safely out of durance vile.

But, ere his escape had been successfully accomplished, poor Donald received several wounds at the hands of a jealous herd, who had watched and waited for revenge on the man who had—so to speak—stolen the kisses of his Jessie from under his very nose.

The wounds, however, were not mortal, and Donald, in desperate case, had struggled on till, after many an adventure, through all of which he had passed with the luck of the proverbially nine-lived cat, he reached his

native wilds, and had almost gained his goal, when Fate brought him again to his master's side.

Grief-stricken though he was at the news of his leader's capture, Nigel Urquhart was not the man to sit down and weep weakly in despair whilst yet a shred of hope hung on action.

To leave Scotland was now out of the question. However desperate the risk, however forlorn the chance, that risk must be run, that chance pursued, whilst there remained any shadow of possibility of rescuing Montrose out of his enemies' hands ere it was too late. For full well did he know that Argyll would lose no time in executing vengeance on the man he had not dared to face for seven years past, and whom he hated and feared with all the vindictiveness of a coward for a brave and noble enemy.

How such rescue was to be accomplished Nigel did not stop to question. True, he could not, with all his generous devotion, snatch the captive single-handed from the midst of Leslie's troopers ; but, at any rate, he would be near him till the end, watching and waiting for

the smallest loophole which might open up a way of escape.

Meanwhile, with his mind surging in a tumultuous medley of thoughts, he stooped to raise the faithful messenger who lay swooning on the ground, and, with Morris's assistance, carried him down towards the castle.

No prying eyes, no listening ears, saw or heard them as they passed—shadows amongst shadows—moving silently on, bearing their burden between them.

No need of summons to open the castle gate to them. Through many a long hour old Jamie Wilson had watched, growing ever more anxious as he peered forth in vain for signs of their coming. Now, as they approached, the gate softly swung back, noiselessly closing behind them, as, still silently, they passed up the flight of stone stairs till at last they stood in safety in the great dim hall. Then, leaving the still unconscious Donald in the hands of Wilson and Morris, Nigel crossed towards the little apartment at the foot of the stairs, where he rightly guessed Sir Thomas would be found, engaged, in spite of the lateness of the hour, on his literary work. There sat the worthy

knight, so absorbed in his meditations as to be altogether oblivious of the reason which had kept him from his bed. In fact, as his kinsman entered, he gazed at him for some minutes with the dreamy, far-off look of one whose mind is still travelling in the back centuries. However, when he at last grasped the situation of the moment, his greeting did not lack warmth.

"Right glad am I to see you here in safety, Nigel," he said, taking the young man's hand. "My mind has misgiven me sorely since Mistress—Mistress Ogilvy, I think it was—told me of your plight. I would have ridden to your assistance, but she assured me this was the better way. And now, once here, you are safe enough. Aye! even did Leslie with all his Covenanting rogues at his heels batter the walls to get at you!"

"Ah!" replied Nigel slyly, though touched by the unwonted warmth in his kinsman's tones. "But think you what that would mean? Were old Leslie to bring the castle about your ears, as I fear in time he would, how would it fare with Dame Science?"

Sir Thomas's cheek flushed as he cast a

loving glance at his papers, but nevertheless he stuck stoutly to his point.

"Nay!" he replied, with a touch of his old pedantry. "When the honour of the Urquharts is at stake even the claims of science, powerful though they are, must stand aside."

"Kindly spoken, my cousin," said Nigel warmly. "But this time I fear I shall not be able to accept so generous a hospitality. All I would ask is a horse and arms. In this gear, I fear me, I cannot wear a sword, but pistols and a dagger I can well conceal."

"A horse—and arms?" echoed Sir Thomas in astonishment. "Nay! had you asked for a boat and a pair of stout rowers it had been more reasonable to my mind. A horse? Tush, lad—you rave! Why the country-side bristles with Leslie's troopers on the look-out for fugitives from Invercarron, and once outside these walls my power will, alas, be gone."

"Nevertheless, if I have not a horse I go on foot," said Nigel with determination. "But now have I heard the news that Montrose is taken——"

"And you must needs bear him company, forsooth," interrupted Sir Thomas scornfully.

"Bah! cousin, there will be harvest enough of heads to adorn every city in Scotland without adding yours to the number. Be advised, and if you will go, go to France or Holland, unless you have indeed a very earnest wish to figure at the Grassmarket!"

"Methinks my hand will save my head yet," smiled Nigel; "or my wits save both, perhaps. But, be that as it may, I ride at dawn whither Leslie's troopers are to be found. Have no fear, cousin, that my face is so well known as to risk detection on the sight of it. I run no worse danger than if I stayed here, where mine enemies know and hate me."

"And where your friends love and help you," retorted Sir Thomas—adding slyly: "And the young Mistress Ogilvy is very fair too, lad, and was mightily put about when she visited me this morning to tell me of your case. A brave lass, and a true, if the writing of her face speaks faithfully for her."

Nigel coloured hotly, but, though the thrust went home, he parried it with a laugh.

"No lady loves a Knight of the White Feather," he said lightly. "I must e'en win

my spurs ere I sue for Mistress Ogilvy's favour."

Sir Thomas shrugged his shoulders.

"St. Johnstone's cravat or the headsman's axe are more like to be your guerdon on the present venture," he replied, shaking his head. "But 'tis useless to argue. A hot-headed fool must have his way—and you will have yours, my cousin. Only, blame me not for the ending of it."

"That will not I," laughed Nigel, as he went his way to snatch a few hours' sleep before he started on his perilous mission.

On the stairs he was stopped by the old steward.

"I dinna ken whether yon puir lad's deein', sir," he said sadly. "But he's speirin' for ye, an' I ken he willna rest till he's just satisfied—if ye'll forgie me for troubling you."

Donald Finlay lay back on the couch whither Morris and Wilson had carried him; his breath came fitfully, and a greyish pallor had crept slowly over his thin, haggard face.

As he saw his young master, his hand fluttered feebly towards his breast.

"The packet," he whispered faintly—"the packet!"

Nigel bent over him. Full well he knew the crumpled, blood-stained packet given him by one whose hand now lay cold in death.

It was Kenneth's farewell to his sister.

"Nay, Donald," he said gently, as he laid the soiled missive beside the sick man. "The packet is in your keeping—deliver it to Mistress Ogilvy, as I bade you. Die, man! Nay! A sound night's rest and good wine will make you see things in a different light to that. It is not death that you will get from wounds like those. Sleep, and trouble not yourself with such bogies. And when you are mended take the packet and tell Mistress Ogilvy she may perhaps look to see me sooner than she thinks."

Donald's face brightened at the cheering words. With gloomy forebodings, begotten of long fasting and sleepless nights on an unhealed wound, he had settled himself to die with the firm conviction of fate peculiar in special degree to his race; but Nigel's words opened up a possibility of recovery so wholly unthought of that from sheer surprise he accepted it, and lay back to sleep as peacefully as he had thought to lie back to die, whilst Guy

Morris, seated at the foot of the bed, grinned slowly to himself as he rubbed his curly head reflectively.

"These Scots are queer folk," he muttered to himself as he watched a more natural colour creep back to the sick man's face. "At the last gasp, I'd have sworn by all the prophets—and just because he's told he ain't far gone, he turns round an' goes to sleep as peaceful as a baby. Well! well! If that's what they call being canny in these parts I'm glad I was born an Englishman."

With which soliloquy he too went to bed.

CHAPTER XIII

A TRAPPED LION

THE market-place and streets of Inverness were crowded with sightseers : plaided women, barefoot urchins, unkempt Highlanders jostled with Lowland Scots, wealthy tacksmen, beggars, and gentry, for a better view of the procession which filed along the street before them.

David Leslie, with his staff of officers, rode proudly past, but he rode unheeded.

Cavalry and soldiery tramped by, but the eyes of the gaping, wondering crowd were not for them, but solely for the one strange figure which rode in the midst.

He was seated on the back of a ragged Highland pony, a pad of straw serving for saddle and a rope for bridle ; wrapped in an old dark red plaid, wasted and worn with fever and ex-

haustion, with undressed wounds and unshorn face, his feet tied beneath his little steed by a tether, whilst a musketeer walked at each side. Still it was possible—nay, easy—to recognize in the still calm and noble features the unfortunate Marquis of Montrose. No shame had been spared him by his mean-spirited captor; no hardship seemed too great for the sick man to undergo.

As he passed, low murmurs of pity were changed to cries of scorn, as, urged on by the ministers of the Kirk, the people began to hoot and rail at the helpless prisoner.

With angry curses many of the women pressed forward to hurl their denunciations at his head for the ill he had wrought in the land.

But Montrose heeded them not; and, presently, as if in very shame, the outburst of fury passed, and in silence the gloomy procession went its way to be further swelled by the rest of the prisoners from Invercarron, who lay awaiting their doom in the city tolbooth.

As the cavalcade paused for refreshment and rest in the market-place, a small group of gentlemen, who stood somewhat apart from the crowd, made their way forward;

and, after receiving the required permission from the General, approached the Marquis, who had been allowed to dismount and drink a little wine and water which was brought him.

Amongst the group were many of those whom Montrose had hoped to have seen before in far different circumstances. The Lairds of Tulloch, Culbin, and Kinard now came forward together, with the long-looked-for Pluscardine, to offer their sympathy where, for their greater honour, they should have offered their swords.

Words cost but little, and in words only did these gallant gentlemen deal. Deeds might cost too dear. No suggestion of a rescue offered itself to their minds, only specious condolences on a fate already sealed, which were received with that courtly, gracious dignity which never, even in his ignominy, for one instant failed their fallen leader. Only, as he replied to the set phrases of his fair-weather friends, a slight shadow rested on Montrose's face—the weariness of a man who could not believe in a devotion which—unlike his own—was not heartwhole to a cause.

When they left him the shadow seemed to deepen, as his eye, keen and piercing still, in spite of the fever-light in it, scanned the jostling, seething crowd which eyed him and his fellow-prisoners as children may eye, with mouthing gapes, the safely-caged and helpless lion. And, as he looked, one face held his momentary attention, the face of a man in whose eyes he read an answering fire—the fire of a love and devotion which he above all men could understand.

In a second the face had disappeared amongst the struggling crowd, but as he, too, turned aside, the Marquis's brow was flushed with a new-born hope, for he knew that in that crowd was one friend who loved him even unto death.

After that one brief glance at his leader, Nigel Urquhart quickly made his way from the market-place and, with Morris at his heels, hurried down a side street, where, at the little inn which had been their lodging on the previous night, their horses awaited them.

"It is at Castle Stuart he rests to-night," muttered Morris as they sprang into their saddles.

"No hope of a rescue there, my master."

Nigel was silent. Indeed, so overcome had he been at the sight which he had just witnessed, that speech was impossible to him; though, presently, Morris heard him cursing very softly beneath his breath.

But cursing does little towards the attaining of an object, and Nigel Urquhart had good reason to despair as nearer and nearer the army drew on to its goal of death.

Leslie was by no means willing to allow his prize to slip through his fingers through careless generalship, and no loophole or possibility remained open for secret communication.

But, within a march of Dundee, a sudden hope was to dawn unexpectedly upon the horizon.

The preceding night the force with its little band of prisoners had encamped in a field, and Morris, ever watchful for an opportunity to glean news, came hurrying back to his master with the intelligence, heard through the merest accident, that the next night Montrose and his guards would be lodged at the house of the Laird of Grange, which lay on the outskirts of Dundee.



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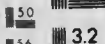
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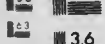
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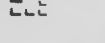
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The news meant little to Morris beyond the fact that they would know which road to take, but to Nigel it brought that glad hope which was so nearly to bear fruition.

"The Laird of Grange!" he echoed eagerly, as he sprang to his feet. "Now, Heaven send us a safe gallop, for, unless the marrying of a dour old Covenanter has strangely changed Elsie Cockburn from the leal, loyal lass she used to be, we shall have a friend indeed at court to aid us with her wit!"

Without understanding the drift of his master's remark, but content to know that an adventure of some sort was on foot, Morris ran to the side of the horses, which stood tethered to a tree at some little distance, and, springing into the saddles the would-be rescuers galloped off, making a wide détour of the sleeping camp and finally reaching the Dundee road some miles further south.

"A long ride, and a hard one," cried Nigel, as he reined in his steed for a moment's breathing space, "but something at the end of it, maybe, lad, that will pay us for all!"

Morris did not reply, though perhaps the grim smile on his face was born of the thought

which Sir Thomas had voiced two days previously—that the payment of the enterprise was most likely to be at the end of a halter or on the block.

Nevertheless he rode on by his master's side with the smile deepening on his honest face, as he thought to himself of the price at which—if the worst came to the worst—he would sell his life; whilst, in the meantime, Nigel Urquhart pressed on through the quiet night with a great joy in his heart at thought of the hope which grew every moment stronger within him that the time and opportunity had come to redeem his vow and snatch his loved chief from the very jaws of that death to which he went in such shame and degradation.

CHAPTER XIV

THE LADY OF GRANGE

AT an open window in a small, oak-wainscotted room of the old Manor sat the Lady of Grange.

One hand toyed idly with the flowers which—still wet with the morning dew—lay on her lap, whilst the other supported her smoothly-rounded chin as she gazed out across the sunny garden. Not a sound disturbed her reverie save an occasional rippling splash, as a trout leapt in the moat, the lazy drone of bees as they flew, honey-laden, from flower to flower, and the carols of birds in the old gnarled apple trees, which stood dressed in their spring glory of pink and white blossom.

Yet the dreamer's thoughts were for none of the beauties on which she gazed, but for

memories, born of the scent of the flowers she held—as old memories so often can be.

Ah! How often she had raced, a barefooted, bareheaded, laughing lassie, at the head of a troupe of brothers, over brae, across burn and brake, to search for the pale primroses and sweet-scented violets in glen and glade; and, when they had been found, and she, as queen and mistress of the sports, crowned by her adoring courtiers, they would carry her home in triumph, a merry, shouting crowd, over which she ruled with the sway of a despot, for she knew full well that from big Jock to little Maurice, who was her senior only by three short summers, there was none they loved so dearly as their wee sister.

This, after all, was but natural, seeing that the mother who bore them all had long lain cold in her grave, and their father was a grim, stern man, whom they feared rather than loved.

But year by year, alas! the little court grew ever smaller, as one by one the big brothers left the old home and their little queen, to go out into the world beyond the sheltering hills.

And sorely did Elsie weep as she bade each one farewell, but most sorely of all when her own turn came, and, at her father's command, she had had perforce to marry the old grey-haired, hard-faced Laird of Grange.

In vain she had rebelled—in vain she had pleaded: her father's will was law, and, in the end, she had yielded to the force of circumstances over which she had no control, and ridden away with her dour old bridegroom to the gloomy Manor near Dundee, which was henceforth to be her home.

That was eight long years ago—such long, dreary years, which no child-voices had come to shorten and brighten with baby comfort. Instead, she had only to watch the husband she came almost to hate grow yearly more decrepit, more cantankerous, more exacting, till now he had sunk into that state of senile decay which kept his mind occupied only with thoughts of eating, drinking, and sleeping, whilst she, young, beautiful, and high-spirited still, chafed and fretted against the bonds she was powerless to break, and a dreariness of existence which maddened her with its monotony.

How the days passed, indeed, she hardly knew, but they dragged by leaden-footed for the most part, only brightened at rare intervals with visits from her brothers; and they came but seldom, for between them and her husband lay the gulf of differing political opinions, many of them having espoused the Royalist cause in defiance of their father, whose sympathies, together with the old Laird's, were strongly in favour of the Covenanted party.

A voice at her elbow brought the reverie to a startled conclusion, and with an exclamation which savoured strongly of annoyance, the lady turned to find the steward bowing before her.

"Your pardon, mistress," said the old man gravely, "but a fellow craves audience with you an' it be your pleasure."

"A fellow?" echoed she. "What manner of fellow? Scarce a gentleman, or your description were at fault—and, if not, why wants the caitiff audience with me? If a messenger, a message were enough without his presence. 'Tis scarce likely to be so urgent or so secret as to want whispering in my private ear."

The old man eyed her curiously.

He knew his mistress's scornful moods. Still the stranger had been urgent, so, braving another outburst, he replied :

" 'Tis a tacksman from Mains, my lady ; come at the Laird's bidding, he said, wi' certain matters aboon the auld mill."

" And if he came to see the Laird, let him see the Laird," she cried petulantly, with a stamp of her little foot and a flash of anger in her brown eyes. " What care I about mills and farmers? I am busy, Graham. Tell him to wait the Laird's pleasure."

Still Graham lingered.

" The Laird's sleeping, my lady," he replied doubtfully. " And I'll no be disturbing him the noo. The mon wadna keep you lang, he said, an' he sair wanted to see you."

With an impatient shrug his mistress yielded, unable to repress a smile at the old man's importunity.

Evidently the tacksman had urged his case in a manner more substantial than words, and, being kind-hearted in spite of her petulance, she was willing to give way. Accordingly, without more ado, the young tacks-

man was shown in, and the door closed behind him.

"Your business is about the mill?" said the lady, without raising her eyes from the flowers she still toyed with idly; but, on receiving no answer, she looked up, and, as her glance fell on the face of her visitor, idle indifference changed to wide-eyed wonder, in which was mixed both gladness and doubt.

"Nigel Urquhart!" she cried, with all three emotions ringing in her voice, as she sprang to her feet, letting her flowers fall in a shower of soft petals and blossoms to the ground. "Nigel Urquhart! No! it is impossible!"

"Hush!" he whispered, as he came quickly to her side, clasping the hands she held out to him. "I am welcome. "Hush, Elsie, if I may call you so. Yes, it is I, Nigel Urquhart, and right glad indeed to find you have not forgotten me."

"Forgotten you!" she echoed, the bright colour coming to her cheeks as she spoke. "Forgotten you? Nay, Nigel, that were scarce less likely than that I should forget you saved Jock's life at Kilsyth."

Her great dark eyes looked frankly into his, and he read in them, with a thrill of joy, the same leal spirit which had made them almost as sister and brother in the days of long ago. Wholly as sister had she been to him, and, if she had had other than sisterly love for her brother's friend, he at least had not guessed it. Now, after long years, they met, and if her heart beat with quicker pulsations than his, yet she could look him in the eyes with the frank kindliness of a woman, who, for honour's sake, had buried a love she hardly confessed to herself deep in her own heart.

"Tell me," she said simply, as she seated herself beside him on the low window-ledge which overlooked the garden. "Tell me—what brings you, and in those garments and with such a tale?"

She smiled as she pointed to his rough clothes, for she guessed that this was no chance visit, and vaguely wondered if he had come to her as a fugitive flying from his enemies.

"You were at Invercarron?" she questioned hurriedly, not waiting for his reply. "Tell me, were Jock and Malcolm there?"

A world of fear and dread darkened her

eyes as the thought came swiftly to her that he had brought ill tidings of her dear ones.

But he shook his head with a smile.

"Doubtless they would have been," he said. "And sorely must they have chafed at being absent from Montrose's side, but they had taken service under the French King for a time, and were far away fighting his battles when the Standard was set on Scottish shores. And well for them," he added with a sigh.

She echoed it, though the cloud had passed from her white brow.

"And all is lost?" she whispered sadly. "Alas! alas! And is it true that they have taken the Marquis prisoner?"

"He was betrayed," he said, in a low, tense voice of suppressed feeling. "He threw himself with noble trust on the loyalty of the Laird of Assynt, and the trust was betrayed for the sake of a few measures of meal and a wife's traitorous pleading."

"Betrayed!" she echoed. "Betrayed!"

Then a fire as warm as his own leapt into her beautiful eyes.

"Oh, if I were but a man!" she cried.

"If I were but a man, that I could help to

save him. Tell me, Nigel, is it possible that they will kill one so gallant, so brave, so noble ? ”

“ Gillespie Grum is scarcely the cat to let the long-watched-for mouse escape him,” said Nigel bitterly. “ High revels must the noble Earl be keeping in Edinburgh town to think of his coming triumph. But is it true, Elsie ”—he leant forward as he spoke, looking into her face so closely that once more the rosy colour dyed it from lip to brow—“ is it true that you would help him—if you could ? ”

“ Help him ? ” she replied wonderingly. “ Aye, I would die for him if I might ; for what is my life ? ” she sighed, “ in comparison to his ? ”

“ Nay, ’tis no question of life and death for the Lady of Grange,” he replied. “ But more of wit and woman’s craft. Ah, Elsie ! could you but have seen him as I did two days ago, wounded, scorned, insulted. Even had he been the basest instead of the noblest of men, such treatment would have shamed his captors. But the godly ministers of the Kirk forget the commonest humanity in their devilish blood-lust.”

He spoke fiercely, watching the answering sparkle of generous anger in her eyes, before he put his request to her. He had no fear now but that she would help him. Her anger was fanned to white heat, he could see, though she did not speak, knowing instinctively that he had more to say.

"To-night," he whispered, dropping his voice still lower, "the soldiers of the Covenant will bring their prize to the Manor of Grange. Many will guard it, for they know well its value, but still there is a chance—the last desperate chance before Edinburgh is reached—that it might be stolen from them by craft, where force is of no avail."

Her breath came short and sharp, her dark eyes were rivetted on his in wonder and astonishment, her lips moved dumbly.

"Here?" she gasped at length, the blood surging to her cheeks at the sound of her own voice. "The Marquis of Montrose here?"

He bowed his head.

"Here," he made answer, "for one short night's rest on his way to the gallows at Edinburgh. I have followed him all the way from Tain, hoping till hope seemed dead, to plan

a rescue. His friends fall away; their caution is too great, their own necks too precious—or it had been easier work. But now, once more, Fate would give him, it seems, a chance of life. Will you lend your aid to it, Elsie? or do you find also that the danger is too real when you see it face to face?"

"Danger!" she echoed scornfully. Then her lips parted in a slow smile.

"*Danger?*" she whispered. "In—in aiding *him* and you—Nigel—against our enemies? But let me think—think. Ah! That's what you give me too little time for. And yet Heaven help us with a ready wit. Quick Nigel, you must hide. The Laird still sleeps—may his dreams be long—and none are likely to see us. You must hide in my wardrobe for the nonce and leave the scheming to me."

For one brief moment Nigel Urquhart looked into the flushed, beautiful face, sad-eyed yet eager now, with brimming thought crowding aside empty memories.

Then he bowed low.

"My honour and Montrose's life are in good hands if my Lady of Grange promises to guard them."

She sighed.

"Ah me! The Lady of Grange! Yet 'tis the first time that I have had reason to be glad of a Covenanting husband."

The brave smile on her lips faded suddenly into a pitiful little shadow as she turned from him to lead the way above.

Nor had she planned too soon.

Ten minutes later, when all flushed and trembling she returned to her little sitting room, the Laird was already there.

A grey-haired, sour-faced old Puritan, with crooked temper and gouty limbs, ill husband indeed for so fair a dame.

Fate had done cruelly by pretty Elsie Cockburn. Yet she smiled as she entered, her hand straying to the ribbon at her throat.

Her husband's voice jarred against the echo of the last words which she had been listening to—words of gratitude and affection from one—from one——

"Elsbeth!"

How the colour surged in her cheeks as she hurried forward—meekly submissive, yet with strange lights in the depths of brown eyes.

"You called me, Ebenezer?"

The Laird's stick came down heavily on the floor.

"Eh ! there ye are ! Where have ye been, wasting precious time owre the things that perish wi' the using ? "

He wheeled round in his chair as he spoke, uttering a grunt of utter dissatisfaction at sight of the fair young figure standing there in the gloaming.

"Woman ! When did I tell ye to put that garment from you ? " he cried, pointing to her gown of soft crimson cloth, "flaunting in scarlet like a creature o' Babylon instead o' in sober colours as your neebors."

His wife checked a sigh, her eyes sparkling with a sudden and novel spirit of mockery.

"You told me that nothing was mair sinful than waste, Ebenezer, and so—having bought the gown——" She paused, mischievously deprecating.

But the Laird little guessed the possibility of mockery.

"Ye forget what is due to yoursel' as wife to such——" he began.

The Lady of Grange stood demure behind his chair.

"A shining light as the godly Laird of Grange," she snuffled, mimicing him. "But see, I will go straightway and change this Babylonish garment for more chaste apparel."

"Presently, presently," he grumbled. "Hæ ye so little heed to the duties of a wife as to think o' nothing but the adorning of your ain perishing flesh? Fetch the last volume o' John Bunyan's noble works an' read me a chapter."

His wife's sigh was unchecked this time.

John Bunyan when her whole soul cried out to Heaven for means to save James Graham from his enemies.

What should she do?

Not read John Bunyan! So Fate decreed. The tramp of armed men and clash of steel told of unexpected visitors. Unexpected by more than one at Grange.

But, as the Lady of Grange watched from her window the approaching body of soldiers who advanced slowly towards the house, her heart beat in passionate welcome and devotion to him who rode in the midst of those stern-faced Covenanters.

A man, swaying, faint and exhausted in his

rough saddle, unkempt, dishevelled, with broken wounds and disordered clothing, yet bearing himself proudly even amidst utter degradation and the scorn of traitor foes.

Thus came the gallant Graham to Grange, and thus, sobbing at so sore a sight, prayed the mistress of that house for power to save so noble and unfortunate a guest.

CHAPTER XV

A TOAST IN TOKAY

THE Lady of Grange sat at the head of her well-spread board, her cheeks flushed rosy pink, her brown eyes sparkling with laughter, her long amber curls falling gracefully over the wide lace collar of her velvet dress.

Gathered around the upper part of the table were a number of officers of the Covenanting army, whilst the men, brawny Highlanders for the most part, revelled in high enjoyment at the lower end amongst the domestics of the Manor household. Colonel Lawer, the commander of the little force, sat at his hostess's right hand, and smiled with a grim, saturnine humour at the brilliant sallies which sent the younger men into shouts of uproarious mirth.

But it was the Colonel who held the lady's attention.

"Come, sir," she implored him, with a smile which should have warmed a less frozen heart, "you must be hungry after such a weary journey. Let me tempt you with some more pasty?"

But the Roundhead leader was firm in refusal. "Nay, madam," quoth he, "I have already sufficed my inner man, and gluttony is a sin abhorrent to me."

The Lady of Grange sighed, eyeing the pasty wistfully.

"It is a sore disappointment," she murmured, "to my worthy husband that he is too sick to be amongst us on sae glorious an occasion, but at the moment of your arrival he was taken by such giddiness——"

With scant ceremony the soldier cut her apology short

"No matter, madam, so long as our prisoner is safely disposed and we are afforded shelter for the night."

The answering smile was deprecatingly sweet.

"There is no fear for your prisoner's safety, sir; the door itself is strong enough

to defy the efforts of ten men, and there are guards without as well." She paused over the words—that lovely Lady of Grange—and her eyes shone like stars as she raised silver goblet in white hand.

"A toast for all," cried she gaily. "For Covenant and Scotland."

The cry was taken up on all sides.

The pledge was as welcome as the wine, but Colonel Lawer wiped his lips thoughtfully.

"A wine to be used with discretion," he remarked gravely.

But his hostess was pat with her answer.

"As all creature comforts must be. But I am thirsty still, sirs, not for wine but news,—the glorious news of your victory. Rumour, though welcome, is scarce reliable."

"Welcome indeed, Lady. Joy, joy will flood your gentle heart to hear that the horns of the righteous are exalted on every side. The ungodly flee, seeking shelter and finding none, sheltering in caves and lonely hill-sides, only to be tracked down and slaughtered, as the Amalekites, in righteous retribution."

If beneath the table white hands were clenched together in desperate, impotent anger,

the listener smiled sweetly enough into the speaker's face.

"Worthy, oh, worthy deeds, for the sons of the Covenant," she cried ironically. "So all are slain?"

"Aye, mistress, or soon shall be. The followers of James Graham perish more swiftly than the grass of the field."

The Lady of Grange laughed gaily; and who could tell the meaning of that strange, vibrant chord in her mirth?

"Heroic work!" she cried, breathless, "to cut down and slay fleeing men, unarmed and faint for lack of food. A right *glorious* task——"

The Colonel's glance was vaguely suspicious.

"Your words are true, madam. The spirit which animates them is, let me hope, worthy of the Lady of Grange."

"Can you doubt it?" she questioned, flashing a glance at him which revealed once more those strange depths in brown pools of beauty. "Ah! would I were a man! Would I were a man! I would fight. Yes, and slay. I would strike down all the ungodly—*all*. I—I would not spare."

Rosy grew her cheeks as she spoke, whilst once more she raised her goblet—smiling.

“You will not refuse another toast at my hands, sir? Come! I pledge you this time. “For Covenant and King Charles.”

The echo of her clear young voice rang down the hall ere any spoke, whilst all gazed in much wonder—and some doubt.

But the Colonel smiled sourly as he raised the cup to his lips.

“A toast, madam,” said he, “which I drink as a staunch servant of the Parliament, yet in view of a certain conference which comes, I hear, to a happy issue at Breda, I commend it with all good will and sincerity——”

The Lady of Grange stood, straight as garden lily and as fair, at the head of her table.

“For Covenant and King Charles,” she cried gleefully, and again—“For Covenant and King Charles.”

They drank deeply, those rugged, stern-faced men, though from lower down the board came a dissentient growl.

“Na, na. The auld toast’s the best, ‘For

Covenant an' Scotlan', an' a swift death to the bloody Graham."

The Lady of Grange heard—and smiled still.

"Nay," she cried, "we'll toast all tastes—'For Covenant and Scotland,' too, if you will."

They willed right merrily and drank thirstily, but the Colonel frowned as he glanced round, noting flushed faces and unsteady limbs which in more than one case failed to support their owners.

"Your ale, mistress," quoth he, "is of too ancient a brew, and, as we start early on the morrow for Edinburgh, it were well to cease such carousings as wax unseemly."

But even he could not resist the pleading kindness of so fair a damsel.

"Nay, sir, the poor fellows are weary; as for the ale, it is home-brewed [and in no way heady; permit me to fill your glass with some of this wine of Tokay, on which my husband sets great store."

With her own hands she filled the glass, smiling sweetly the while. The Colonel watched her, frowning.

"I must be going my round, mistress, to see once more to the safe disposal of my prisoner."

"Nay, sir, the night is—is cold, and the prisoner, I vow, safer than if he were within the Tolbooth. You'll at least drink your wine first?"

The Colonel looked from glass to lady, and rose—a little unsteadily.

"'Tis plain, madam," he corrected her, "that ye are no soldier's wife. Beware how ye would lize the servants of the Covenant from the narrow path of duty."

"As a hostess I try not to forget mine sir."

She hid the sparkle of her eyes behind, veiling lashes. "If you only knew how great an honour I esteem it thus to have ministered to the wants of the brave soldiers who hunted down and slew a handful of traitors, albeit they were mostly but ignorant, simple peasants who knew nothing beyond their duty to their King."

"Madam!"

"What bravery!" continued the Lady of Grange with mock enthusiasm, "what devotion! How it stirs my blood! And to think that such honour has been done to our poor

dwelling in thus sheltering so noble a head as Colonel Lawer's."

The Colonel set down his glass, turning to the door.

"Avaunt, false flatterer," he observed sternly. "Your pardon, lady, but I am a blunt soldier who knows but his duty."

"I honour you in it, sir. Still—ere you go—I should prize your opinion of 'his Tokay.'"

"Abstinence, madam, is the watchword of the soldiers of the Parliament. Drinking and carousing we leave to the malignants."

But, for all his grave words, he took the glass from fair fingers and drank with that ever-increasing thoughtfulness which marks the connoisseur.

"An excellent wine, madam."

The Lady of Grange again hid a smile as she refilled an empty glass.

"My husband sets great value on the wine. He will be proud to know that you appreciated it, sir."

The Colonel raised the wine to his lips.

"An excellent bouquet. A rare vintage."

"Be seated, sir. It is early yet for your round, though I would not keep so gallant a

soldier from his duty. Still—this wine is the finest to be found in any cellar for twenty miles around Dundee."

"I can believe it, madam. It—it's excellent, ex—cellent."

The Colonel's eyes were growing heavy. The day's march had been a hard one. The Lady of Grange and her wine flask ceased to appear as temptations of the devil.

Once more the glass was filled. Drowsy eyes were closing.

Around the table, near, the Parliament men were sleeping soundly—if inelegantly—sprawling here and there, some in their seats, others on the floor, more than one half across the table.

That home-brewed ale had strength in it after all. So had the Tokay.

The Lady of Grange laughed softly to herself as she stood in the midst of her hall.

"A sound sleep, my friends," she murmured, and her eyes were scornful.

"Beasts! Well! Lie wallowing there, good beasts; to-morrow there'll be but one toast left for ye to drink."

She raised her head as she spoke, listening for approaching footsteps. A servant hurried into the hall.

"Ah! Colin. You have done my bidding?"

The man grinned as he louted before his mistress.

"Malcolm and me nainsel hae been to every mother's son o' them a', leddy."

"And they sleep—like these?"

"Every mother's son o' them, leddy."

The Lady of Grange clasped her hands in sudden triumph.

"We'll save him yet," cried she very joyously. "We'll save him yet—our gallant Graham."

CHAPTER XVI

FOILED BY FATE

SHADOWS in the great hall. Figures lying on floor and settle, huddled and sprawling—unconscious all—in the heaviest of drunken sleeps.

Yet the shadows moved swiftly down the stairs to the side of the Lady of Grange.

Cloaked and hooded in woman's garb, few would have dreamt that that shrouded figure was no other than the Marquis of Montrose himself.

The Lady of Grange curtsied low, her hands wrung with anxiety.

"Oh, my lord, my lord. Heaven take you safely from the hands of so many cruel enemies."

The Marquis inclined his head with grave and gentle courtesy.

"Surely, fair lady," he replied softly, "Heaven has sent an angel this night to open my prison door."

"Alas, how little have *I* done, though blithely my heart went with that little. But it was Nigel Urquhart's planning."

Montrose laid one hand on his companion's shoulder, whilst, with the other, he raised the lady's fingers to his lips.

"Brave friends, how can I thank you both? The hope of deliverance in the hour of despair is sweet indeed, yet sweetest because, in the murk of a black night, I see a star shining which tells me of a time, when, perchance, I may again raise my sword and cry "A Stuart and Montrose."

He paused, smiling wistfully into the eager faces so near his own.

"So dreams a mad man," said he, "with the halter still around his neck."

The Lady of Grange gave a low cry.

"Oh, go, go, my lord," she implored. "It is true. Every moment is an added danger."

"I obey, mistress. Yet—the sentries?"

"No sentry will challenge you. All are as besotted as these."

"And in the wood yonder," added Urquhart, "awaits my servant with horses. We will yet cheat Argyll and win the coast."

Montrose smiled.

"To cheat Gillepsie Grum were a task well-pleasing to a Graham. Come, Urquhart, but let us first bid farewell to our good angel. My wife and bairns shall thank you better another time, sweet mistress. In the meantime the gratitude of a doomed man is yours."

Tears brimmed in the woman's eyes as the Marquis bent low over her hand.

"After to-night I shall not wail at Fate," she whispered, "if that same Fate gives me the happiness of seeing you free."

She turned to Urquhart. "The postern door is open."

For a moment the young man lingered.

"My brave Elsie! My brave Elsie! We shall meet again ere long. My thanks then."

"No need for thanks, Nigel. To save *him* were sweet enough guerdon for any woman."

"We *have* saved him—or rather, you have done so, brave, wise lassie."

These last words rang strangely sweet in the woman's ears long after the sound of softly retreating footsteps had died away. . . .

Meantime, the two fugitives hurried on their way. As they passed sentry after sentry all were found plunged in the same drink-begotten slumber as their comrades of the main guard. Higher and higher rose their hopes. Surely all must be well now. The goal already lay in sight, the outmost guard had been passed—the shade of the wood had been reached. Yet, even as they stepped beneath the safe shelter of the trees, with a scarce-drawn sigh of relief, a sudden challenge rang out into the night air, and a man, in the dress of a trooper, stepped quickly on to the path before them.

No drink-besotted sentry was this, but a man alert, lynx-eyed, and sober,—a man, indeed, who, being quartered close by, had come prowling round on hearing that good ale and wine were running like water at the old Manor house.

So unexpected was the encounter that for one brief instant all three stood staring at each other in silence ; but, before Nigel

could spring forward, the man had uttered a loud cry, and rushed towards the tall, cloaked figure before him.

The hood had fallen back, and the Marquis's features were clearly discernible in the bright moonlight. In vain did Nigel Urquhart leap upon his antagonist. With one crashing blow from his clubbed musket the soldier laid him bleeding and unconscious on the ground, whilst Montrose, hampered by his female gear, had hardly had time to draw his pistol before the man gripped him by the throat with a loud yell of triumph.

There was no mistaking the prize, for he had himself been present at Montrose's capture in the Laird of Assynt's house, and, with loud curses, he now bade the struggling Marquis surrender if he did not want to be knocked on the head as his companion had been.

Running footsteps announced the fact that the shouts had aroused some of the sleepers at the Manor or the soldiery who lay encamped near, and Montrose, in silent despair, yielded to a fate the more cruel and bitter for the

bright gleam of hope which had been so near to fulfilment.

So excited was the captor that for a time no thought of his second prize entered his head as he dragged the still cloaked figure onwards towards the house; but later he remembered the man who had first sprung on him, and so nearly wrought his undoing with his long dagger. So, having yielded his prisoner to the safe custody of a score of enraged guards, he hurried back to the spot with half-a-dozen others in search of the body; but, to his surprise, only a pool of blood marked the place. No trace of the victim could be discovered. In vain they searched, swearing and cursing, amongst the undergrowth of the wood.

Finally they desisted, agreeing, with fresh oaths, that Bob Halkett was right, and that either the foul fiend had himself been instrumental in so nearly effecting Montrose's escape, or else had succeeded in carrying off the servant who had been sent to execute his designs.

In the Manor of Grange all was confusion. Roused from their slumber by the shouts

without, the Colonel and his men prepared to hurry from the hall, whilst cries rose from all sides.

"Montrose escapes! the prisoner escapes."

White to the lips stood the Lady of Grange.

"The prisoner escapes!"

Ah! Who had raised that alarm?

With a cry she sprang forward.

"Nigel! Nigel! Oh! it cannot be!
The horses! Save yourselves!"

But Colonel Lawer intercepted her.

"What means this, madam?" he cried.

"Montrose——"

But she pushed past him, delirious with terror.

"Out of my way, false traitor. I *will* save him. I *will* save——"

The words died on her lips as the door behind was flung open and several soldiers appeared, dragging between them the dishevelled figure of the unfortunate Marquis.

"Montrose!"

Colonel Lawer's voice rose triumphant.

"Ha! my lord, so——"

Montrose raised his head proudly, for all the ashen pallor of his cheeks, and his eyes

never quavered before the sneering glee of his captor.

"I am your prisoner, sir. It were vain to remind you that I am the Marquis of Montrose."

But the Colonel's mood was an evil one, since the Tokay had been powerful and the shock of his awakening great.

"Bind him first, before we have the story," he snarled. "And no loose bonds for such a devil's friend."

"You dare."

The anger of the Lady of Grange was impotent though blazing.

Montrose smiled sadly.

"Fate is less true a friend, mistress, than the Lady of Grange."

She would have gone to his side, as she saw how roughly they bound him regardless of his rank or dignity, but the soldiers pushed her aside.

The Colonel was smiling yet more grimly.

"I begin to understand, madam," said he. "After all, it seems, ye are but a misguided woman who learnt deception from Mother Eve. And now for the story of this

ill plot for the deliverance of yon traitor.
Who planned the escape?"

The soldiers looked wonderingly one from the other, but the Lady of Grange, flushed crimson in defiance, stood forward.

"'Twas I myself,—no other. If I could have saved him I would have given my life to do it."

The Colonel's answer came stern and threatening.

"As you have given your husband's honour and your own, madam."

She drew scornful breath at the gibe.

"Honour! *You* to talk of honour. *You* who boast of butchering helpless fugitives and laugh at the tears of widows and orphans."

"Your zeal, madam, would be glorious in a better cause. Let us hope the Laird of Grange will convert you in time. Then, surely, will you bless Heaven for saving you from so foul a deed."

Tears filled the lady's eyes, but, alas! they were no tears of contrition.

"If I *could* have saved him. Oh! my lord, my lord."

Once more she would have flung herself forward, but Lawer restrained her.

"The dawn breaks," he observed sourly, "and it seemeth that, whilst the taint of malignity rests upon this household, which should verily have been the abode of righteousness, it were better not to remain longer herein. The horses, fellows—the horses. We ride for Edinburgh."

A cry echoed his words.

Slipping from his grasp this time, the Lady of Grange had reached Montrose's side, kneeling before him, his hand clasped in her own, before any could prevent her. "Oh, my noble lord! If I *could* have saved you. Argyll——"

He checked her, his calm, gentle dignity soothing the tempest of her grief.

"Nay, fair mistress. Weep not for me, seeing that, methinks, I go, ere many dawns, before a greater Tribunal than the Scottish Parliament, and a greater Judge than his Grace of Argyll. And thus—I have no fear."

Her sobs nearly choked her.

"How can I do else than weep, my lord; if not for you then for King and Scotland,"

His smile was passing sweet.

"Those words have been my watchword ;
they'll not fail me now. My vow's fulfilled,
I think, or speedily shall be."

He raised his dark head fearlessly. A
ray of dawning light shining on his noble
face.

"I live and die for loyalty," he whispered
very softly.

But the lady's tears fell fast.

CHAPTER XVII

THE HUT IN THE WOODS

WHEN Nigel Urquhart opened his eyes after a long swoon, it was to find the honest face of Guy Morris bending over him in anxious trouble. For some minutes he strove in vain to remember what had chanced.

The racking pain in his head seemed to dull every sense; the air he breathed, too, was so foul and smoke-laden that the tears of weakness and suffering filled his eyes. Then sleep, or a fresh unconsciousness, overcame him, and he remembered no more.

An eternity of time seemed to pass before he again returned to a realization of life, and was able to put the feeble question which tortures so many sufferers.

"Where am I?"

"In safety, sir, in safety," replied Morris's voice close beside him.

"In safety?" repeated Nigel wonderingly, and then, slowly and painfully, the obscuring mists broke asunder, and the past came back to him, piece by piece, like fragments of a terrible dream.

His head still ached painfully, and he felt feeble as a child as he lay on his rough pallet of heath and rugs; but his pulses were stirring at last, and a shudder ran through his frame as the last brief scene in the wood came back to him with the sudden vividness of a lightning flash which, for one brief instant, reveals and stamps upon the mind a panorama unseen in the darkness before.

Again he recollected the swift, glad joy of escape—the hope dawning into certainty of success, then the sudden quenching of that hope, almost of life itself, in the despair of failure.

The captor's cry rang in his ears, the savage exultation of the dark face as its owner leapt upon his prey. The noble, passive features revealed by the moonlight as the victim met his fate; the crushing blow which had laid

him bleeding and helpless at the moment when that fate hung still trembling in the balance.

A groan broke from his lips, the sweat of agony stood on his brow, as he thought of the despair of that moment. Then, in dim wonder, he looked around him. This was surely no prison in which he lay. The low, smoke-blackened rafters over his rude bed seemed rather those of a peasant's hut; the air, too, was close and oppressive. Besides, no guard but his own faithful servant stood near him.

"Where am I?" he asked again, with a shade of impatience in his voice as he strove to raise himself.

A woman, old and wrinkled, squatted over a small peat fire in the middle of the room; but, with the exception of a rickety table, a stool and another couch of heather piled in a corner, the hut was empty, though, even as he sank back with a sigh, Morris hurried in through the half-open door, carrying a small pannikin of milk in his hand.

After he had drunk with feverish avidity, Nigel repeated his question for the third time.

"Where am I, Morris, tell me—all?"

Morris scratched his head, as his fashion was when perplexed.

"For the telling of all, I fear 'tis beyond me, sir," he replied slowly. "All I know is this: I stood where you directed with the three horses, an' I was thinking for certain that I heard you coming across the wood, when a great shout came buzzing out of a thicket close by, and then another. So, guessing something was amiss, I made straight for the place with never a thought for the beasts, and came upon you lying across the path, for all the world as dead. There was still a shouting and yelling going on near by, so, without waiting to inquire, I dragged you off with me as fast as I could. It was hard work, and as for the horses they had wandered off, though even had they not, I couldn't have used them. So I just tramped on, wondering mightily that none of the noisy gentry behind came along to relieve me. And when I had gotten off a mile or two I found this hut. 'So,' methinks, 'twould be safer to go on a bit without doubt; but 'tis little good carrying a man to save his neck, when the carrying's like to bring him to his death without further

notice.' So, I lifted the latch, and in I walked. The old lady there fussed a bit at first, an' talked a jargon which might have been curses or blessing for all I knew. But she understood the language of a few Scotch merks better than my apologies, and let me lay you down here without further parley. Whilst for the rest of the matter I know no more than you, master! "

Nigel pressed the man's hand feebly. That he owed his life to the faithful fellow's devotion, he understood well enough, but it was not the thought of his own life just now which troubled him, but the bitter sorrow of the knowledge that all his efforts to save his friend had been in vain.

Perhaps Morris understood what was passing in his master's mind, but he said nothing then, only pressed him to drink some of the broth the old woman had made, and which to Nigel tasted like a fiery libation of smoky water. He was, however, too weak to complain, and presently sank again into an uneasy slumber.

When he awoke Morris was absent, but the old crone brought him some milk and poured

forth a long oration in wholly unintelligible Gaelic, seeming to imply from the way in which she pointed to the door and shook her head, that the second stranger had been gone some time.

As the hours wore on a vague feeling of alarm on his servant's account filled Nigel with apprehension, but at last the door was thrust open and Morris, accompanied by a cloaked figure, entered.

For a moment Nigel's heart leapt within him ; but the figure, alas ! was too slight and short to conceal Montrose, and, as she pushed back the hood, he saw that it was no other than the Lady of Grange herself. Her face was pale, and the heavy rings round her eyes told of much weeping, but she still carried her head proudly, as she was wont to do.

" Elsie ! " whispered Nigel, as she came quickly to his bedside. " Ah, Elsie ! we failed after all—he is taken ! "

She bowed her head, great tears gathering in her dark eyes.

" He is taken," she whispered : then, with a sudden passion-light gleaming stormily

through her tears: "The devils!" she cried, "the devils!" and fell to weeping afresh."

Nigel groaned.

"In vain—in vain!" he murmured sadly. "And I would gladly have given my life for his. My noble chief! And yet, still there may be a chance—a shred of hope. Surely some hand will be raised to save him—some voice to plead his cause?"

And yet in the hearts of both the doom of the Marquis of Montrose lay already written. They had fought Fate bravely, but its iron grip had crushed them aside relentlessly. The power of MacCullum More lay heavy on the land. Presently they parted, for Elsie feared to stay lest suspicion should once more be aroused, and the fugitive traced to the lonely hut amongst the hills. But she promised to return, lingering wistfully over her adieux as she looked pityingly down on the white, sad face lying back amongst its rough pillows.

Then she passed out, and Nigel lay alone to fight with the grief which crept heavily over his soul.

And only once through the darkness of despair there flitted the shadow of another

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thought which brought joy and comfort, as he remembered the sweetness life still held for him in the love which, lying warm in his own heart, he had seen reflected in a girl's blue eyes.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE VENGEANCE OF ARGYLL

THROUGH a soft screen of sheltering leaves the warm beams stole gently down to give their last lingering kisses to fern and flower ere they sped westward to where the sun set in a golden glory over hill and dale.

But in old Maggie Gowdie's little hut the shadows already fell long and cold.

A little mattress had taken the place of the rough couch of heather in the corner, and on it lay Nigel Urquhart, struggling slowly back to life and strength after many weeks' illness. Only the unremitting care of Guy Morris, assisted as much as lay in her power by the Lady of Grange, had brought him through those long days when fever had kept him tossing deliriously to and fro on his narrow bed. And now, after the grim battle with

death, he lay weak and exhausted as a child, but conscious once more of all that passed around him.

He was alone that sunny evening, for Morris had gone fishing in the little burn which ran noisily through a neighbouring valley, and old Maggie had hobbled off as was her wont to gather sticks in the woods.

Perhaps the loneliness oppressed Nigel, for sickness weaves strange fancifulness in the strongest and bravest, or else the sadness of his own thoughts brought more than one dreary sigh to his lips.

The small peat fire in the centre of the room sent up its volumes of smoke, which, after writhing into fantastic shapes in the heavy, close atmosphere of the hut, crept slowly out of the rough hole in the turf roof which served as chimney.

As he lay, in a dull lethargy of mind and body, watching the vaporous clouds as they floated upwards, a sudden, unaccountable chill seemed suddenly to strike the sick man whilst his eyes became drawn with a strange fascination towards the farther corner of the hut, where the twilight shadows fell thickest.

Was it fancy? or did those shadows seem to weave themselves slowly into a form, dim and unreal, yet gradually growing clearer to the wondering gazer? Was that a face looking at him with steadfast, mournful eyes—eyes which even in the gloom appeared to read into his very heart?

Ever more distinct grew the vision; the shadows—shifting and wavering—stood back from it. To Nigel's fancy it seemed to draw near to the bedside. Plainly the scarlet suit, overlaid with silver lace, glittered in the darkness; he could see the wide beaver hat with its gold band, the long carnation stockings—the ribboned shoes. No detail escaped him—and yet, in the cold sweat of strange fear, his eyes seemed rivetted only on those intent and sorrowing eyes, those pale, calm features, framed by straying love locks.

“Montrose!” whispered Nigel, the word creeping in a short gasp from lips that could scarcely frame the syllables. “Montrose!”

The word broke the spell of fascinated horror that bound him; the figure faded slowly back into the shadows, mingling with them in ever fainter outline till it was

gone, though still Nigel lay staring vaguely, almost lovingly, into the deepening gloom, as if his eyes would fain pierce the shade which enveloped the weird mystery and find again that strange presence on which he had so lately gazed.

Well he knew—with the hope that had struggled so vainly for life lying dead within his heart—that never again would he see the living face of James Graham.

Inverlochy was avenged, and the vengeance of MacCullum More taken at last.

Two days passed, and on the third came the Lady of Grange.

"Montrose is dead," said Nigel Urquhart gently, as he looked up into the beautiful, tear-swollen face.

She started, looking wonderingly at him, whilst fresh tears rose slowly to her eyes.

"You knew?" she whispered sorrowfully. "Who has told you?"

"I know he is dead," said Nigel, still very gently, for his grief lay too deep just then for tears. "But tell me—all."

"My brother Hugh brought the news last night," she wept. "Poor lad, he is still well-

nigh crazed with the grief and shame of having stood by without raising hand to help him. But what could one do against a city of murderers ? ”

She shuddered ; then, reading in his eyes that he must know all, she told her story in a low, strained voice as one who tells a tale from a book, striving not to realize the meaning of the words ; yet from time to time breaking down, overcome by emotion.

“ They brought him to the city from the Canongate ” she said slowly, whilst her eyes, still wet with tears, looked straight before her across the hut to where, through the open door, glimpses of woodland could be seen.

“ They bound him high on a cart drawn by four horses. They hoped the people might stone him, all helpless and exposed as he was, but not a hand was lifted against him, not a voice was raised from Water Gate to Nether Bow except in tears to see so sad and shameful a sight, saving that of his friend’s sister,¹ who—shameless woman that she is—spat upon him as he passed her balcony.

“ And so they brought him to his prison and

¹ Jean, Countess of Haddington and sister of Gordon.

his death, for though it is true that Parliament gave him the mockery o' a trial, the sentence had long since been passed, the gibbet already erected, amongst festivities which seemed to proclaim a nation's rejoicing instead of a nation's shame. And then—and then—after many days—days in which his captors spared no torment that tongue could invent to harass and distress him—they led him forth to die. Oh ! there was a mighty crowd in Edinburgh that day, Hugh said, to see the vengeance of Argyll fulfilled ; but when they saw our Marquis, so gallant, so brave, facing them with a fearless smile on his bonny lips, there were many around who fell to weeping sorely, crying shame beneath their breath that so kindly and noble a man should meet a felon's death.

“ But alas ! no hand was strong enough, no voice loud enough to save him, and so he passed to where, at the Cross of Edinburgh, the executioner awaited him, with such a crowd of witnesses as men said had never before been seen in the streets of the town.

“ He would fain have addressed the people, but his enemies feared too much that if even

this grace were permitted the townsfolk and onlookers would rise to snatch the prey from their ravening jaws. He spoke to the magistrates, but in too low a tone to be heard by the crowd. Then the ministers of the Kirk drew near, not, indeed, with Christian comfort to a dying man, but to hurl their last words of abuse at their enemy. But he replied not, bending his head in silent prayer, with one hand raised as if to appeal to a Just God on an unjust fate.

“According to the sentence, which spared no detail of shame that petty spite and coward vengeance could invent, the executioner tied round his neck copies of his last declaration and his own Memoirs by Wishart, but he made no resistance beyond asking, with a smile, if they had any more compliments to bestow upon him. Then—Hugh said—amidst a breathless silence he ascended the ladder with a calm dignity, in which was no shadow of fear, but rather of triumph, and from crowd and hangman alike a great sob broke forth as a brave man’s soul went home to its Maker.”

For a few minutes after the telling of the tale, there was silence in the little hut ; only

a stifled sob came from time to time from the corner where the big Englishman, Guy Morris, wept like a child, as he listened to the story of a hero's death. But Nigel was silent, and when he spoke it was in a low, quivering voice, in which pain fought with passion.

" ' Vengeance is Mine,' saith the Lord. Yet shall we pray that vengeance may fall heavily on the man who did this deed, as fall it surely shall."

The Lady of Grange did not reply. She was thinking, perhaps, of that part of her story left untold, the brutal inhumanity, which had not even spared the poor, lifeless corpse, but hacked it limb from limb in fiendish wantonness, to show, forsooth, the mouldering members to the great towns of Scotland in token of the power of Argyll.

She was startled by Nigel's voice, which spoke now in calmer tones.

" In a suit of scarlet cloth overlaid with silver lace, with a gold ribbon about his beaver, Montrose went to his death—is it not so, Elsie ? "

Again she looked wonderingly at him.

" You knew ? " she asked once more.

"But how is it possible—none have come to tell you?"

He smiled dreamily.

"I can hardly tell," he replied gently.
"And yet, I knew it was so."

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CHAPTER XIX

A WOMAN'S HEART

“**A**ND you will return to Cromarty, Nigel ?
Nay ! it is madness ! There, where so lately they sought your life ! There, where no disguise will hide you from eyes that know your every feature ! Why, *why* are you so blind ? so reckless ? ”

Down a winding path towards the road which led from the town of Dundee walked the Lady of Grange ; beside her, his hand through his horse's bridle, strode Nigel Urquhart, pale still, after his long sickness, but recovered sufficiently to sit in his saddle once more.

But, with recovery, had come the longing to be on the wing again, and so, that midsummer morning, he and Morris had bidden fare-

well to the little cot which, with its wrinkled crone, had sheltered them so long, and turned their horses' heads, with a great sigh of joy, northwards. Yet Nigel had not gone without a word of thanks to the one to whom in many a sense he owed his life; and so it came to pass that together they walked down the little valley which led him on his way.

He smiled down now into her pleading, anxious face with a great gladness in his own.

"And yet, were it a hundredfold more madness I would go," he cried.

"And why," she persisted. "Why?"

He hesitated, looking away across the wooded hills before he replied.

"Why, Elsie? Nay! It were no hard matter, surely, to guess. There is but one thing beside honour that leads a man blindfold, even to death, with a smile on his lips; and that is what takes me so blithely back to Cromarty."

"And what?" she whispered, though she knew, with a sudden tightening at her heart, what the answer was—"What takes you?"

"The woman I love," he said simply ; then, with another smile, "What, Elsie ! Were it so hard to guess—and you a woman, too ? "

"I never loved my husband," she said very quietly, whilst the burning blush swept over her sad face.

Nigel was silent. In those five words all the emptiness of a woman's life—all the horror and burden of it—seemed summed up. He dared not ask her further ; only a great pity filled his heart for the girl who had been dear to him as a sister.

She looked so young—she was but twenty-six—and so beautiful. Yet life for her could be filled only with shadows. Poor Elsie !

She broke the silence first, struggling to regain her composure, though he could see the tears wet on her lashes.

"Tell me," she said gently, "what is she like—the girl you love ? "

"To me, she is the most beautiful in the world," he replied, with all a lover's ardour. "And as sweet in nature as fair of face."

"And she loves you ? " she asked, raising

her great dark eyes to his for a moment.

"But, surely, she must do."

"Nay, not surely," he replied, laughing gaily. "Yet truly, she does love me very dearly. And so, Elsie, you wonder no more that I ride to Cromarty in spite of watchful enemies?"

"No, I do not wonder," she said softly, "I think I understand—now."

She did not say more, but they walked silently down the winding path till they came to the road.

"Farewell," she said, smiling through tears which she could not restrain. "And though we may not meet again, do not forget the Lady of Grange, who will not cease to pray for your safety and your happiness."

"Good-bye," he said tenderly. "Good-bye, little sister—as I used to call you in the days of long ago. I cannot thank you for all you have done, because I think you understand better all I would say. But, if ever I may serve you, such service will but add to the debt I owe to one of the sweetest ladies God ever made."

He stooped to kiss her on the forehead, as

he would, indeed, have kissed a sister ; and, as he did so, he wondered why she looked so white, then crimsoned so suddenly.

But she made him no answer save a smile, as he sprang into his saddle, and shook his horse's reins. And, though he cried, " Farewell " and waved his hat, she only smiled still, though her lips quivered as she stood watching him, with wistful, sorrow-filled eyes, till he was out of sight. Yet, as she turned away, the smile faded, and she shivered slightly in the warm sunshine, though deeper than ever in her heart lay the secret she had never whispered to herself—and—scarce knowing why—she thanked God that Nigel Urquhart had gone.

Meantime, with Morris at his side, Nigel rode on through the summer day, slowly, with eyes and ears alert for signal of danger ; since, though they went to court it, yet neither were they mindful to be trapped in their turn by its secret snares.

Thus, as they went, they laid their plans for the future, which seemed, indeed, likely to be fraught with the need of caution.

To go to Cromarty Castle might endanger,

not only Sir Thomas, but the very end Nigel had in view; for it was not merely as an impatient lover that he sought again to see Mary Ogilvy.

Well he knew that the execution of Montrose and the death-blow of the Royalist hopes would mightily influence Sir John Ogilvy in the bestowing of his daughter's hand.

Dugald Grant was high in Argyll's favour. And, besides being thus a rising man, he had also the knowledge of Kenneth Ogilvy's part in the late rebellion—a part which might, with careful manipulation, redound to Sir John's ruin and the confiscation of his estates.

With these half-formed fears in his mind, little thought had Nigel for seeking safety in a foreign land till he learnt how matters fared with his lady love, though such learning must be a matter of some difficulty.

After much consideration, he decided that Sir Thomas were best kept in total ignorance of his reappearance.

The good knight had proved himself a leal and kindly kinsman in the hour of danger, and the young man felt diffident of again

seeking a favour which, though it might be granted, he knew the donor would have little stomach for. And so the worthy Sir Thomas should be left to his scientific researches and the unearthing of the prehistoric family tree, which afforded him such infinitely greater pleasure than the present branches.

Therefore, after due thought, a large cave on the coast, not far from the Burn of Rosemarkie, was fixed on as headquarters.

This cave—known as the King's Cave, from an old legend which told how three sons of some ancient king of Norroway were drowned close by the spot—led by a winding, secret path to the moor above, close to where the Grey Cairn marked another king's resting-place.

The refuge was little likely to be discovered, for the place was a lonely one even in summer time, and it had the advantage of being scarcely two miles from Kilsbeth Castle.

From here they could reconnoitre, and, at the same time, make necessary preparations for a hasty flight to Holland or France.

So they planned and consulted as they rode along, and ever as they drew further north

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the shadows of the past seemed to Nigel to grow less gloomy as he looked forward with a lover's joy to the thought of once more seeing the fair face of Mary Ogilvy.

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CHAPTER XX

DONALD'S WOOING

THE sun had long since set, and grey twilight shadowed the land with her veil of mystery.

It was the hour for fear to clutch at a man's heart when thoughts of the supernatural came to warn him of vague possibilities he dared not face.

But for once, such fears and superstitious terrors were absent from the ever-lively imagination of Donald Finlay as he stood in the shadow of the Grey Cairn that summer's evening, waiting patiently ; and when, across the gloomy moor, glided a dark, mysterious little figure, he only smiled broadly to himself and went to meet it with the assurance of a man whose conscience fears no spectral foe. Nor was he disappointed or surprised when the

dark hood disclosed the laughing, rosy face of little Janet Craigen, the prettiest lassie of the country-side, and, withal, the confidential hand-maiden of Mistress Ogilvy.

"Eh, Jennie lass, but ye're late," he said reproachfully, taking reward for his long patience by a sounding kiss on her cherry lips. "An' it's ill waiting i' the gloaming on Moal-buoy Moor; but it's news I wis' ye'll be bringing wi' you?"

News indeed seemed bursting from Janet's pursed-up lips, and dancing in her eager eyes. Nevertheless, with the inborn coquetry of her sex, she put him off with a gay little laugh and innocent opening of her big blue eyes.

"And was it news garr'd ye wait sae lang by the auld cairn?" she questioned saucily. "An' no just to see mysel'?"

Donald saw his mistake, and, with the quickness born of long experience in the ways of women, strove to rectify it.

"Aye, lassie," he responded in a tone as innocently unconscious as her own, "it's just your bonnie wee sel' I've been wearying for, an' weel I ken ye wadna hae left me to bide by my lane sae lang hadna something happit.

An' sair I feart that the donnert auld fule of a Mither M'Gregor had caught an' stoppit ye."

She tossed her head, falling easily into the trap which covertly impugned her powers of outwitting the housekeeper of Kilsbeth.

"Na ! na !" she replied with some asperity. "It's nae sic an ain as yon auld carline as wad stop Jennie Craigen when she went to meet her jo. But, weel, it was nae mair nor less that the puir young leddie hersel' ; for hoo cud I gae an' leave her to greet sae sair by her lane the noo ? "

"An' what for did she greet ? " asked Donald eagerly.

But Janet was too sharp for him. Again she put aside the direct question with a sly laugh.

"Eh, Donald laddie," she said airily. "But it's no o' Mistress Mary I ken ye'd be speirin', but anent mysel'—is it no so, dearie ? An' anent the day when we'll be ganging to the kirkin'. And wunna I mak' a bonnie bride ? "

Donald checked an exclamation the reverse of loving and strove to fall in with her mood.

"The bonniest in a' Scotland," he sighed fervently. "But I'm afeart, lassie, 'twill be no mysel' wull be the gude mon, for I'm thinkin' the owney bride I'll be takin' is the wuddy."¹

"The wuddy!" she gasped, turning pale this time in real alarm. "Eh, mon, but ye'll be joking? The weddy!"

He nodded gravely.

"The wuddy hersel'," he replied in an ominous tone. "Gin I dinna hae the saut waters 'tween me an' bonnie Scotland, it's short shrift they'll gie me gin they find oot I fought at the bluidy fecht o' Invercaron."

"Eh—eh," she cried, with a catch in her voice, which sounded like a sob.

Then, desperately — "But they shallna tak' ye, Donald, laddie—they shallna. But, ch, why do ye bide here in sic danger? Ye maun awa', mon, ye maun awa'."

"But I canna gang till the young laird's haim," he said, cautiously, working round to his point.

¹ The gallows.

"But he mayna coom," she replied anxiously.

He nodded his head.

"He'll coom," he said, with an air of one who knows. "Didna he tell me mysel' to tell Mistress Mary he wad be comin' to see her bonnie face? Weel I ken he did when he gied me the bit packet for the lo'e—an' me a deein' mon."

"Deein' mon!" she repeated, gazing up at him with eyes that first sparkled, then saddened. "Tut!" she sighed. "But what guid wull it be if he cooms the noo, when the puir leddie maun hae taken anither jo!"

"Anither jo?" echoed Donald innocently. "Na, na, Johnnie, but didna ye tell me yersel', lang syne, that Master Nigel the leddie lo'ed?"

"Ay," she retorted sharply. "At weel, she may lo'e the ain an' marry t'ither, canna she? Didna I tell ye she greet sair? An' weel she may puir bonnie burd, when the auld laird tells her she maun marry yon ug-some carl, Dugald Grant, within ain short week, whilst she wearies for her ain true lo'e,

who dinna come, an' whom maybe she'll ne'er see again."

"Hech! but 'tis ill news the same," responded Donald gloomily. "Ain week, did ye say, lassie? We maun be moving blithely then. An' the leddie greets, ye say, to think o't?"

"Aye, greets an' greets till 'twould melt a heart o' stane," said the little hand-maiden, tears brimming for very sympathy in her own bright eyes. "But it's sair am I for my leddie, puir doo, wi' her bit heart breakin' for lo'e, an' her marriage morn sae mirk as 'tis like to be."

Donald smiled—it was his turn now.

"An' what wad ye say if I tauld ye there was a chance o' the bonnie leddie having a blick o' her own true lo'e the morrow morn?" he asked.

Her eyes flashed on him.

"What wad ye say, laddie?" she asked eagerly. "A chance! Na, na, 'tis far frae Kilspeth the puir mon is the noo, I ken. But what mean ye by sic words?"

"Oh, ay," said Donald lightly. "We winna talk o' sic matters, for we didna come to

speir anent my maister, but just to speir anent
oorsel'—is it na sae, lassie? An' sair I'd be
to leave ye behint me, gin I gae frae Scotland.
I maun tak' risk o' the wuddy an' bide by ye,
I ken."

She stamped her foot in a whirl of impa-
tience as she looked around her.

"I maun be gaun," she cried; "for the
gloamin' fa's heavily, an' Mither M'Gregor
will be speirin' why I hae been abroad sae
long. Tell me, laddie"—and she put her face
coaxingly near to his as she drew her hood
once more round her head—"tell me what
ye meant anent your maister the noo?"

Donald smiled in triumph, but yielded to
her importunity.

"Tell the leddie," he whispered softly in her
ear, "she wad see ain she lo'es if she happid
to be at Woodside Steading at noon to-
morrow."

Janet's eyes grew round with wonder.

"At Woodside Steading!" she cried, with
an indrawn breath of amazement. "Auld
McCulloch's bit place nigh to Nigg! Eh,
mon! 'tis bonnie news that. But"—she
added with a sigh, "I dunna ken how she'll do

it, wi' Sir John to watch her, like an auld baudron that he is."

"I ken the leddie wull find a way," chuckled Donald, "just as easy as ye did the nicht, for its no verra difficult for a lassie to find a way when it's her jo at t'ither end."

Janet laughed, then, bidding her swain a tender good-bye, over which perhaps he lingered longer than the prospect of Mistress M'Gregor's wrath made advisable, she slipped away through the gloaming, well pleased with her evening's tryst, and eager to see the light she knew she was going to bring to her young mistress's sad eyes.

And just as well pleased was Donald Finlay as he hurried across the moor at a round pace, finally descending a narrow and precipitous path, partly concealed by whins and broom, which led down the face of the cliff into a large cave. Here, stretched on couches of dried sea-weed, he found his young master and Guy Morris resting, worn out after their long journey. But Nigel was not asleep, and he rose, as, through the darkness, he heard footsteps approach.

"It is you, Donald?" he questioned softly.

"Yes, master, its mysel'," came the reply, and the next minute a bright ray of light shone through the cave, revealing a large vaulted apartment, hollowed out of the cliff, with huge stalactites glistening from the roof, and a floor covered with shingle and sand.

Fixing the torch in a cleft of rock, the two men sat down to talk, for Morris still lay snoring loudly on his rough bed.

"You saw her?" asked Nigel eagerly. "She is to be trusted?"

Donald nodded vigorously.

"Ou, ay, she's a guid lassie," he said sententiously, and forthwith gave a short and graphic account of the news he had gleaned.

Nigel listened with bent brow and tightly closed lips, and for some time after the brief narrative was concluded remained silent.

"One week," he said at last. "One week—or else too late for ever!"

"Eh, but it's seven long days," replied Donald encouragingly; "an' a mon may do muckle in that, sir."

Nigel smiled, but the gloom did not pass from his face. To him there was only one bright thread to be seen in the woof which

Fate appeared to be weaving for him, and this was that on the morrow he would see Mary for one brief interview—even though it might be the last.

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CHAPTER XXI

WOODSIDE FARM

AFTER all, the omens of All Hallows E'en had proved themselves in the right, insomuch that pretty Elsie McCulloch was Elsie McCulloch still, and the handsome lover had gone, like his ill-fated nut, far away from his little true-love's side.

But Elsie's heart was, fortunately, of the material which does not break easily, and her face had lost none of its old sunniness as she greeted Nigel Urquhart that bright June morning, whilst her eyes took in a favourable impression of the stalwart henchman who stood beside his master.

"Ech, sirs!" cried the merry damsel as she ushered them into the kitchen. "An' to think o' seeing ye the noo, Maister Nigel. An' sair o' heart will mither be nae to gar a blick

of ye. An' feyther hae gone to the Tain market an' winna be back before noon. But ye'll wait, maybe, to see him, for blithe he'll be to see ye again."

More doubtful of his host's welcome to a fugitive Royalist than his daughter's, Nigel was profoundly glad to find her mistress of the situation. Strange indeed would it be if he could not win her over to be a willing participator in the plot of the stolen interview.

And he was not wrong.

Elsie listened, understood at a word, and rejoiced with girlish glee at the prospect of being an onlooker to the brief chapter of a romance she had foretold at its birth.

Brimming over with excitement, she ushered Nigel into the little room behind the kitchen, and came back, with no small alacrity, to pass the time which must elapse before noon in pleasant flirtation with the master's man.

Morris was by no means behindhand with his wooing, and the two had begun to find each other's company more than interesting when a clatter of horses' hoofs outside told of the coming of their visitors.

Scarcely had Morris the time to secrete himself behind one of the panels which hid the farmer's bed from view, before the door opened and Sir John Ogilvy, supporting his daughter on his arm, entered. The girl's face was very pale and she seemed on the verge of fainting as, with Elsie's assistance, she was laid gently down on the settle.

"My daughter has been seized with sudden faintness," said Sir John in his thin, grating tones, glancing round the kitchen, meantime, with an air not altogether devoid of suspicion. "She would fain rest here, wench, if she may, and I will return for her anon, as I have business to perform at Nigg."

Elsie replied with some volubility and many expressions of deferential sympathy for the sufferer, but she could scarcely keep the dancing fun from her eyes as Sir John turned and strode out of the door.

"Hist, leddie," she whispered, as Mary Ogilvy, with more alacrity than she seemed capable of showing two minutes previously, sat up from her reclining position and looked eagerly around her. "Bide a wee, till the auld gentleman hae gone safely awa'. Your

bonny jo's awaiting ye in the ben,¹ an' I'll tak' tent to let ye ken when ye maun be coming back."

The colour rose swiftly to Mary's pale cheeks, and she pressed her pretty sympathizer's hand warmly, as, with footsteps which trembled in reality, she crossed the kitchen towards the door indicated by Elsie.

That discreet damsel, with delicate fellow-feeling, left her to pass through alone, and returned to release Morris from his concealment and continue the pleasant badinage which had progressed so favourably on its way to a courting.

Meantime, Nigel and Mary sat in the tiny parlour enjoying to the full the brief moments of their stolen interview, though the tears came into the girl's eyes as she told her lover of the terrible predicament in which her father's command had placed her.

"I cannot marry him," she sobbed as she leant her head on Nigel's shoulder. "I cannot. Oh, Nigel! tell me, what shall we do? For in one short week, alas! if you cannot save me, I shall be the bride of Dugald Grant."

¹ Back room.

"Never!" he said in a low, firm tone.

And, looking up at him with tear-filled eyes, she read hope in his.

"Do not fear, sweetheart," he said gently, "for Dugald Grant's bride, or the bride of any but myself, you shall never be. What! Were the difficulties ten times harder, I would still find a way. But, now, it will be simple—with Fortune on our side, as she must be for the sake of true love. Tell me, then, quickly, for time presses, when this false, overbearing gallant, who would woo a bride against her will, comes to Kilspeth Castle?"

"In four days' time," she sighed. "It would have been sooner, but that Argyll ordered him to ride again on one of his spy's errands. But, at the latest, 'twill be four days."

"And he comes from the south?" questioned Nigel eagerly.

"Yes; from Inverary itself."

"That is well," said Nigel gladly. "Then listen, sweet. In four days' time, at gloaming, this same Dugald Grant, with bonnet drawn low over his brow, will come to you, asking your favour of a walk with him

in the pleasure. You will go with him ; and the rest will be easy."

She drew a deep breath, looking at him in wonder, scarcely understanding his meaning, yet reading happiness in his smiling eyes.

"All will be well ? " she echoed doubtfully.
"All will be well."

"Well ! " he said tenderly, "if you deem that well to be the bride of a man who must fly for his life with you to foreign lands, to live, perhaps, in penury and hardship, with love only to make the silver lining to the cloud till such time as our King—God bless him—comes to his own again."

She smiled at him with the happy confidence of love reciprocated.

"Ah ! " she said. "It is only the silver lining that I see, no cloud at all in such a prospect. The cloud, methinks, remains to hang over poor Scotland, till such time as you speak of. And then," she added, smiling, "we will return like the swallows, to nest in our native land, and my father will forget his anger with the changing of the times."

So they two sat and built their castles, happy and gay, forgetful—in the sunshine of

the present—of the clouds of past or future.

But the golden dream was all too soon broken by a hasty summons from Elsie, and Mary had scarcely time for a brief good-bye or to regain the kitchen settle before the door was opened to admit Sir John.

Elsie, however, acted her part with spirit, attributing the flushed cheeks and still startled look of the quondam invalid to an attack of nerves, eagerly soliciting that the young lady might rest still longer till her indisposition passed.

But Sir John waved her protestations and assurances aside, and, bidding his daughter accompany him, left the farm not without another shrewdly suspicious glance towards Elsie, who became suddenly conscious that the large mug still half filled with nut-brown ale which stood conspicuously on the table could scarcely be supposed to have been required by a young lady in a state of faintness and collapse.

However, Sir John's suspicions, if he had them, were confined to looks, and Elsie breathed more freely when she had watched

the two riders safely out of sight across the moor. She returned to find Morris comfortably finishing his home-brew, whilst Nigel stood leaning against the table watching his follower with an amused expression.

"You have indeed entertained us royally, fair mistress," he said, bowing, with laughter in his eyes, to Elsie. "Morris still drinks the health of the prettiest lassie he has seen this side of the Border. It grieves me that we must leave such pleasant company in such haste."

"Ye'll no be going?" Elsie said, her face falling in some disappointment. "Winna ya bide, sir, an' see father? He'll no be tarrying lang the day."

And she cast a wistful look past Nigel to where the big Englishman stood wiping his mouth with a brawny hand, whilst he set down the now empty mug on the table.

"I am more than sorry to disappoint you after such kindness, sweetheart," said Nigel kindly. "But 'tis as much as our heads are worth to tarry, and, if it sounds not ungracious to your ears, I would, for his sake and my own, you told not your good father of our

coming, leal and loyal though I know him to be."

She stood looking at him, part resentful, part pleading, but her woman's shrewdness told her he was in earnest, and her kindliness of heart accepted the spirit of the speech as it was meant, though a tear was not far from her pretty eyes as she bade farewell to Guy Morris, which he, honest man, seeing, strove to divert with a kiss, and went away laughing, with the lightest of clouts for his pains and the remembrance of eyes which looked anything but angry at his impertinence; eyes, indeed, which told him that he might have another and yet another at the same price. But coquetry was checkmated by the near approach of horse's hoof galloping over the soft, heather-covered ground, and McCulloch himself reined in his steed at the wicket gate, his good-natured, weather-beaten face looking in some surprise over the intervening hedge of bourtree towards the little group.

"Eh, Mr. Nigel, an' is it 'deed yoursel'?" he cried in astonishment, as, springing down, he hastened to unbonnet with the respect he felt due to an Urquhart of Cromarty. "An'

it's just the bit news I've heard the noo at Tain market that will be bringing ye back among us again?"

"And what may that be?" asked Nigel, smiling as he advanced to greet the worthy farmer, yet inwardly anxious as to this unexpected and decidedly unwished-for encounter.

"E-eh, ye'll no hae heard?" cried McCulloch, his face reddening with the excitement of being news-bearer; then, halting midway up the path, and baring his head once more, he announced in an impressive voice:

"Charles Stuart hae landed in bonnie Scotland, an' is on his way to Scone to be crowned King."

His listeners stared in amazement. Nigel echoed the words dully, with a red flush deepening on his cheek, for well he knew what those words meant, even that the King, for whom Montrose had laid down his life, already joined hands in friendship with his faithful servant's murderers.

"Eh, but it's grand news!" cried the farmer, not noticing the effect his tidings had had already on one of his hearers. "An' Colin was aye for ganging awa' to join the Standard

as soon as he heard, an' there'll be mony a braw laddie gleg to do the same, for—though it's hard just to choose precisely atween Kirk an' King—when they march thegither in lo'e an' friendliness there's few in Scotland to haud back. They tell me," he added, turning to Nigel, "that Sir Thomas Urquhart gangs, too, wi' a bonnie company. Atweel ye'll be ganging wi' him the day?"

"Sir Thomas going to join the Standard?" repeated Nigel, in much surprise.

"An' did ye no ken?" asked McCulloch, still more amazed. "Eh, but 'tis the talk o' the country-side. Hae ye no' come frae the Castle, sir?"

"No; I have but just arrived in these parts," replied Nigel evasively, "having been sick of a fever for many weeks. So that I am ignorant of passing events, and"—he added—"even now I am not bound for the Castle, fearing that my welcome in Cromarty would be none of the warmest after what has passed. For which cause I would beg of you, my friend, to say no word of my coming or going."

The farmer nodded, with a shrewd glance at his visitor's face.

"But ye'll be ganging to Edinburgh to see the braw doings?" he remarked curiously.

"No," replied Nigel, in such a tone that McCulloch forbore to ask more, guessing something of the suppressed volcano of feeling which lay smouldering under the brief monosyllable.

"There's mair than we ken i' the face o' it in the coming o' yon laddie," he soliloquized, as he watched the two young men pass out of sight across the moor. "Weel, weel, hot bluid will be hot bluid, an' it's nae mysel' wud help i' the letting o' sic an ain as his."

"You'll not be crossing the sands yet, sir?" asked Morris deprecatingly, as he kept pace with his master's long strides.

His voice brought Nigel back from his meditations with a start. Truth to tell, the anger which McCulloch's news had lighted within him had rendered him almost oblivious to the present with its surrounding dangers. Now, however, he halted, realizing the precariousness of the situation.

To be seen by any at this hour might well spell ruin to their plans; yet he had

been heading straight for the toils in open day.

He looked around anxiously, but Fate this time had stood his friend.

No one was in sight. Before him lay the Sands of Nigg, with the treacherous Pot oozing slimily in the sunshine; behind, spread the bare expanse of moor.

Not far off, however, the fugitives spied a small cairn of rocks, standing at a sufficient distance from the road to make it a safe shelter from the eye of the passer-by, and behind this partial shade the two ensconced themselves to wait till nightfall should bring security for them to travel on towards their hiding-place.

It was a long, weary wait, and, withal, a thirsty one, which brought the most tantalizing will-o'-the-wisp fancies to the slumberous Morris of nut-brown ale and cool shade, together with the merry, laughing face of pretty Elsie McCulloch.

But to Nigel no such day-dreams came. His heart was hot within him for the shame of an unkingly King, who, even now, rode in triumph on his way to receive a crown from

hands still wet with the blood of one who had deemed his life but a little thing to lay down for that King's sake.

Not to bring ten such kings to their own again, Nigel told himself in bitterness of spirit, would he join with such cowardly murderers.

And then he fell to wondering afresh as to the cause of his kinsman's leaving his treasured work at such a call.

Poor Sir Thomas! In the days to come sorely must he have repented the sudden outburst of loyalty which sent him hurrying at the first summons to his King's side.

Honour and pathos, indeed, blend together in the flickering light cast over the doughty knight's subsequent career.

A Cavalier to the finger tips, he must have found the comradeship of the Presbyterians, who formed the chief part of the army, trying in the extreme; but he stuck to his post, clinging with a humorous tenacity the while to the three huge trunks which contained his hundred manuscripts. The battle of Worcester, however, proved fatal to both author and work. The former being taken

prisoner, the latter destroyed by the soldiery of the Parliament, with the exception of his genealogy and the preface to his Universal Language.

After spending some time in the Tower, Sir Thomas escaped to the Continent, dying on the eve of the Restoration, from joy, it is said, at hearing the news.

CHAPTER XXII

“THERE’S MANY A SLIP ’TWINX CUP AND
LIP”

THE full glare of a hot summer’s day was fading into a welcome coolness; most welcome indeed to the two men who travelled wearily along the white ScarpCraig Road from Fortrose towards Rosemarkie.

Dugald Grant had travelled far, but not--if truth be told—with any urgency or speed.

It had scarce been at the pace a lover generally choose when he returns to his mistress; but Dugald Grant rode slowly, inasmuch as he was filled with the conscious satisfaction that the bird, which had fluttered so long against his outstretched hand, was safely caged at last, and not likely to escape ere he took it into his own possession.

He smiled as he rode along, the smile of a

man who triumphs in success. And, indeed, Fortune had given to him freely of late with both hands. It was good after all, he reflected, that the young, hot-headed fool, her brother, had gone his way to death, for now there would be none to share the inheritance of the heiress of Kilspeth.

Those broad acres and well-filled coffers made ample amends for the flouting of a capricious girl, who would soon be taught the duty owing to her lord and master, whilst meantime, her wealth would pave the way—that long and difficult way, slippery with the blood of those who failed—which led to ambition's heights.

Rosier and rosier grew his dreams as he rode slowly along that dusty, glaring road, followed at a short distance by the Highlander who was his sole attendant.

The men—before whom now he cringed and bowed—were but stepping-stones, to be flung aside into the stream once he had reached the bank. He would join the King's army in its southward march; he would gain the King's ear. His gold—or his wife's gold—would win him a way; and he—Dugald

Grant—would rise by it and his own subtle skill to power and fame.

He checked his horse a little as, turning from where the White Bog Road met his own, he passed down through the shade across the Burn of Rosemarkie.

Before him, on the other side, stretched Moalbuoy Moor, with the Grey Cairn far away on his left, and Kilsbeth Castle near at hand on his right. He smiled as his horse clambered the steep ascent, for his thoughts had returned once more to the present and his bride. And, as he thought of her, the smile grew slower and more cruel, like that of one who is glad at the thought of seeing and inflicting pain.

Little did he heed, so deep in thought was he, that the shadows fell thick amongst the trees which fringed the steep pathway of the burn-side.

On he went, smiling still, till a sudden, muffled cry from his henchman brought him to a startled halt.

Scarcely had he the time to turn when a man sprang from the thicket, snatching at his bridle, whilst, simultaneously, another on

horseback pushed his way to his side, and, leaning forward, flung a heavy plaid over his head before he had time either to cry out or draw his sword.

Struggling, swearing, and cursing like some meshed and infuriated bull, Dugald Grant strove against his captors. But it was in vain. Strong hands lifted him from his saddle, and he fancied that, through the thick covering which enveloped him, he caught the sound of a smothered laugh as he was borne rapidly away.

Presently he was laid down, and very cautiously the folds of the plaid were removed, his captors, however, taking the precaution to tie his legs and arms before they did so. Hardly indeed was the suffocating wrap loosed than a gag was forced roughly into his mouth. Thus, helpless and powerless to move, Dugald Grant glared around him like a wild beast caught in an unexpected trap.

Seated on a fallen tree-trunk close beside him, smiling very calmly and sweetly, was Nigel Urquhart ; whilst, kneeling still at his side, was the slim form of Donald Finlay.

At no little distance the mighty bulk of Guy

Morris could be seen forcing its way through the under growth with the Highlander swung across his shoulder as he might have carried some new-killed buck.

"The horses are tethered, sir," he whispered to Nigel, who, still smiling, rose, and beckoning to Donald to replace the plaid, helped to lift his fallen enemy.

"The gloaming has fallen thick enough now," he said softly to his followers. "Let us make all speed to the cave. I would reach Kilspeth ere night overtakes us."

In darkness, and seething with impotent rage, Dugald Grant felt himself borne swiftly along, first uphill, then down what must have been a precipitous descent. The rope which bound him cut into his flesh, but it was nothing to the iron which at that moment seemed entering into his very soul. Death, he felt, had spread its shadowing wings over him in the very hour of his triumph; for, judging others by his own feelings, he had little doubt but that death, and death alone, lay before him.

A sudden cessation of movement and a sudden contact with what seemed to be hard

shingle announced arrival at their destination. Once more the plaid was removed and he was able to gaze around him.

In the dim torchlight it was difficult at first to distinguish objects; but, from the glistening stalactites which hung from the high roof, he guessed his prison to be a cave, a fact confirmed by the low boom of waters which broke on his listening ear.

Dim forms flitted around him, whilst beside him lay two others bound and gagged like himself—the one nearest lying quiet and still with impassive resignation, whilst the other, a smaller object in black, writhed and gurgled in inarticulate wrath and fear.

Presently a brighter light flashed over the surrounding scene, and by the flare of added torches each object became distinct.

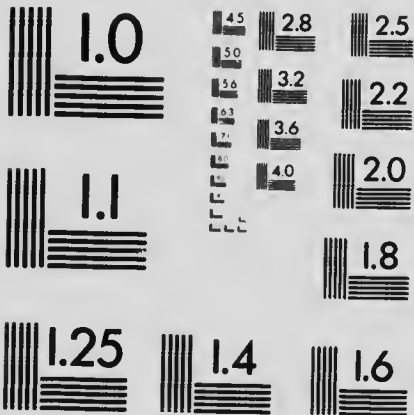
Nigel Urquhart he recognized once more with a sudden fury at his heart, which seemed to choke him.

The young man wore the air of one bent on a desperate task, and, as he knelt by the side of his captive and slowly cut the bonds that held him, Dugald Grant felt that his last hour had come.



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To his surprise, however, Nigel's proceedings bore a mysterious rather than murderous air ; for, with the help of Donald Finlay, he forthwith divested his prisoner of his clothes, replacing them with his own, whilst he arrayed himself in the strangely borrowed garments. All was conducted in perfect silence till the exchange was completed, and Dugald, with a faint glimmering of the truth, stared in mute rage as Donald, with low chuckles, placed on his master's head a glowing wig of ruddy locks, over which he drew the Cove-nanter's hat, thereby finishing a transformation which was sufficiently startling to the man thus robbed of his personality.

With a sweeping bow Nigel raised the hat as he addressed his fallen foe.

"A thousand pardons, my friend," he said sweetly, "for what, I fear, has put you to some little inconvenience. But allow me to hasten to make you what reparation is in my power. You went a-courting, methinks ? Then, in good sooth, I am to blame, for no lady should be left sighing for an errant cavalier. I will e'en do my poor best to console her, and—though not the rose itself

—these borrowed petals may suffice in soothing her troubled nerves.

"Do they become me well, Mr. Grant? I fear me scarcely more than my slashed and faded doublet suits your complexion, which at this moment hath somewhat the appearance of an apoplexy. Calm yourself, my good friend, I prithee, and for your further consolation I promise that ere long your eyes shall be gladdened with a sight of sweet Mistress Ogilvy herself. Will she not come swiftly when she hears of your need? I trow it well! So rest you—rest you peacefully here in happy company. I swear I will return anon."

Dugald Grant glared at his mocking enemy with eyes which seemed, as Nigel had said, apoplectic in their spleen.

But words, in spite of the removal of the gag, at first failed him.

Then—"You devil!" he cried. "You cursed devil—I'll—I'll——" He choked with rage, even the fear of death swallowed up in a maddened fury.

"Swear as much as you will, mon ami," replied Nigel with a shrug of his shoulders, "to

me. But, as such language can scarcely be permitted to sully the white purity of a lady's ears, Donald shall gag you once more ere he comes, though," he added, smiling again. "I would not by choice have been so churlish as to spoil your pleasure at a marriage feast. In the meantime you admit that I do not discredit the noble clan of Grant?"

"The black de'il take your mocking tongue! But beware—beware!"

Urquhart laughed lightly.

"Oh, aye—I'll beware. Let me see if I must bear my part well. A trifle of difference in height, I fear, between us. At gloaming such will pass. A masterful carriage I have it to perfection! Dugald Grant of Castle Corbie! Hoot-toot! The bagpipes should be playing before me! A countenance somewhat enflamed? My plaid may hide an odious sallowness and leanness of cheek. And these sun-kissed love-locks may go far to baffle curious e'en. Thus I leave you, sir, for the masquerade."

His bow was perfection, his enjoyment of his enemy's rage evident.

Dugald Grant gasped in a frenzy.

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"Curse ye! Curse ye! Give me my sword,
a dagger. Fight—fight, ye coward loon,
Ye false spawn o' Beelzebub."

"An elegant vocabulary. But I pardon it.
You are over-excited. Be calm, I pray, and
listen to the earnest exhortations of Master
Anderson here."

He pointed to a groaning bundle, clad in
the black coat and breeches of a covenanting
minister. No less a person than Master
George Anderson, the Minister of Cro-
marty.

"And now," added Nigel gaily, "I must
be going. I should not keep a lady waiting,
though I vow she will pardon *your* delay,
seeing who comes as substitute. Still I'll
not be selfish. Come! Have you no love-
message to send your bride? No sweet
whisper for dainty ears? Am I to have *all*
left to myself? I hope, sir, I shall not
abuse your confidence."

Speechless, Grant writhed on the floor of
the cave, with Donald Finlay watching him
as a terrier may watch a rat—ready for the
shaking.

Urquhart drew the broad bonnet over his

ruddy locks, carefully adjusting the plaid about his face.

“A Highland chief a-wooing came,
sang he, very softly and maliciously,

“One Dugald Grant his noble name,
With a hi, ho, hi, ho, ninny.”

The insult was too great to be borne in silence. Grant found his voice in a shriek of fury.

“Ye spawn o’ Beelzebub,” he stuttered.
“Ye babe o’ the pit. Ye——”

But his torrent of abuse was checked once more by the gag ; and Donald rose chuckling, having secured his legs and arms again with the cord.

“Eh, mon ! but we maun be ganging for the bride !” he cried in the prostrate man’s ear.
“But we’ll no be lang, an’ ye’ll ha’e the company o’ a godly meenistaire, as weel as your ain loon, an’ the bauckie birds an’ kelpies into the bargain, whiles we’re awa’. So keep up your speerits, an’ we’ll come again wi’ ye bit bonnie bride to glad your e’en.”

With which comfort Donald followed his

master out of the cave, chuckling uproariously, leaving Morris to guard the three prisoners, who lay in bitterness of spirit, grovelling upon the ground in helpless fury.

CHAPTER XXXI

A BOLD VENTURE

MARY OGILVY sat in her quiet chamber watching the evening shadows as they crept slowly over the face of the purple moor.

What help was coming, vaguely mysterious? Were those shadows to rescue her from a fate which seemed to stretch forth inexorable hands for her? Only two days more and then——

She shuddered, as ever the thought of that cruel, handsome face made her shudder. Those shifting, subtle eyes fascinated her, but it was the fascination of a trembling bird before the spell of the venomous snake. Those cruel lips spoke to her mutely of what life with their owner would mean, and she shivered at the tale.

Only two days! Only two days—between her and that destiny.

Strong though her faith might be in her lover's promise, she knew he could work no miracles, and a miracle alone seemed needed now to save her. In agony she flung herself on her knees in prayer, covering her eyes as if to shut out the vision of that cruel, haunting face.

And, as she prayed, a light step crossed her room, and Janet Craigen touched her shoulder.

"Mistress!" she whispered. "Mistress, he's come."

Mary sprang to her feet, her face white, her eyes strained with fear which fought with

"Who?" she gasped.

"Mr. Grant is below, my leddie, an' wad speir for ye to come to him the noo," quoth Janet aloud, though all the while her dancing blue eyes told—or rather hinted at—a thousand glad secrets which the lips dared not reveal.

"He's in the ha' awaitin' your coming." And she curtsied primly as she drew her mistress's cloak over her arm and glanced

anxiously towards the door as if she feared an eavesdropper.

"Mr. Grant?" repeated Mary faintly.

And then came to her those words of Nigel's, uttered in the little parlour of Woodside Farm.

"In four days."

Yes, it was four days, and Dugald Grant had come as he had said, and she was to go to him, and with him, and all would be well. Yet, to herself, she cried again and again, How? How? for surely Dugald Grant would not plot against himself, or conspire to his own destruction?

In a maze with the thoughts which confused her, Mary passed down to where in the great hall the lover she feared and dreaded awaited her.

He stood in the shadows, leaning one arm against the wide chimney corner, his face turned from her.

Nevertheless, her heart gave the little thrill of fear with which his presence ever inspired her as she caught the glint of his ruddy locks, which he wore à la cavalier fashion in long curls, the better, as Mary had scornfully told herself, to enable him to play his rôle of spy and traitor.

She swept him a low curtsey, and stood before him, mutinous, yet wondering, scornful, yet doubtful of his will.

He doffed his hat, turning to her and away from the lower end of the hall, where a group of servants lingered, eyeing the little scene curiously, well knowing their mistress's mind of her bridegroom.

"My father will doubtless be glad to receive you, sir," said the girl coldly, keeping her eyes on the floor as she spoke. "Being sick of an ague, he has perforce kept his chamber to-day, or he would have himself given you the welcome which, I fear me, I express but ill."

She raised her face as she spoke, forcing herself to looking into the one she thought to see bent towards her, mocking and cruel, as it was ever wont to be.

But, as she looked, meeting the eyes which gazed into hers out of the shadows, the colour suddenly swept all warm and rosy into her cheeks, then died away as she glanced swiftly towards where the steward, a fox-faced man with a crafty, suspicious look well matching his master's, appeared to be occupied with hastening the preparations for supper, though, at the

same time, he cast shrewd glances towards the hidden face of the guest.

"Nay, sweetheart," said the latter, speaking low, "the welcome of bride to bridegroom surely lacks no warmth? As for the good Sir John, right glad would I have been to hasten to his presence, but that the varlets said he slept. And so, I ventured to ask if the fairest lady in Scotland would honour me with her presence."

She dropped him another curtsey, but this time her eyes did not leave his face.

"Since, indeed, my father sleeps," she said, reading her lesson slowly from him, as he still stood bending towards her, "will you not also seek rest, sir, in your chamber till supper is served? You must e'en be weary after so long a journey?"

She strove to throw the first scorn with which she had spoken into her voice, though it quivered slightly in spite of her efforts, as she noted the steward's watchful gaze.

"By your leave, sweet," replied Dugald Grant, speaking in that low, thick voice, which sounded hoarse and strained to more than one pair of ears, "I would have asked

your company for a stroll on the terrace, since the evening is warm, and the air more refreshing, methinks, than rest."

She hesitated, acting her part now with more ease, as the light began to glimmer before her. Then, yielding to his importunity, she acquiesced with scant grace.

"I am at your pleasure, sir," she said aloud, though her tone was cold.

"Evans, bid Janet bring my cloak, and tell Sir John, if he wakes, that I walk with Mr. Grant on the lower terrace."

Her manner seemed to reassure the suspicious Evans, though he still lingered, peering eagerly forward, as the two passed slowly towards the door, as if he would fain have looked into that averted face, half concealed by its long locks, and close-drawn hat.

But Janet, laughing and drol, intercepted the wily steward's vision by her own sprightly person, drawing an unwilling attention to her whispered quips, till her mistress, attended by the mysterious cavalier, had safely reached the door.

"Wae's me!" she said pertly, whilst the sound of Mary's voice—scornful still in the

distance as she addressed her companion—
died away.

“ Wae’s me for tne bonnie leddie, who’s to
wed sae ill-faur’d a callant as yon. Marked
ye the gleam i’ his black e’en, John, as she
flouted him? Eh! puir bird, an’ well I
ken she may greet to ca’ *him* gude mon!”

Evans scowled darkly, and, with a muttered
growl, the purport of which did not reach her,
proceeded with his work of rating the servants
who hurried to and fro at their tasks with
scared faces. But Janet, after a little more
laughing banter, which fell on deaf or unre-
ciprocative ears, danced off, singing the refrain
of an old song, as she ran nimbly upstairs.

No sooner was the little handmaiden out of
sight of prying eyes, than her song ceased as sud-
denly as it had begun; whilst, hurrying to her
own room, she snatched up a black cloak, and,
wrapping it round her, slipped quickly down a
back passage, making her way with beating
heart and quick, nervous steps towards a
postern door in the rear of the Castle.

Almost was her goal reached, already the
colour was coming back to the cheeks which
it had momentarily forsaken, when a hand

was laid on her shoulder and a voice which brought a suppressed cry to her lips, said softly :

“Not so fast lassie. Whither away the noo ? ”

“E—eh,” cried Janet, her wits forsaking her for one brief instant ; then, flashing round on the steward with the fury of a little wild cat :

“Unhand me, ye fause loon ! ” she cried, and fastened her sharp white teeth into the man’s fingers.

He loosened his grip with a curse, and, twisting eel-like from him, Janet flew towards the door. It opened to her eager pressure and out she sped into the darkness like a flash of light. But hot on her steps, swearing lustily the while, his narrow face aflame with anger, came Evans.

The race was short but swift. In the darkness the girl might have escaped had she not tripped. Ere she could regain her balance her enemy was upon her, seizing her with no gentle touch as he vowed to have her forthwith into Sir John’s presence to reveal the plot which he shrewdly guessed was brewing.

Silently, but furiously, poor Janet struggled in her captor's hands, but in vain. Back towards the little postern door he drew her—each step contested and yielded; nearer and nearer to what she knew instinctively would be a grim fate.

“Eh, Donald, Donald!” she wailed hopelessly.

And, at the words, from behind the shadow of a projecting angle in the Castle wall, a tall figure stepped swiftly out.

With his back towards it, Evans moved on with his now resistless victim hanging limply in his arms, when suddenly a blow, delivered with all the power of a strong right arm, crashed down on his head from behind, felling him as an ox is felled in the shambles, so that without a cry he lurched forward, rolling down a mossy incline, at the bottom of which he lay, still and mute.

“He’ll no be troubling us mair the nicht,” said Donald coolly, as he bent over the prostrate body; “though, maybe, I’ll be just tying him up for fear o’ accidents.”

With which soliloquy he proceeded to bind the unconscious steward's legs and arms, finally

lifting him up and carrying him to some little distance where he deposited him under the shelter of a tree.

"He'll sleep safe eno' there," he added consolingly, as he returned to Janet's side, "though nae doot, he'll no be feeling preceesely happy when he wakes the morn. But 'twill make him tak' tent, how to treat lassies in the future. An' did the ill carl harm ye, Jennie, me doo; for, gin he did, it's Donald Finlay himsel' will gar him haud his clavers for ae?"

"Na, na, Donald," cried Janet, between laughter and crying at the sudden joy of deliverance. "Eh, mon, but it was grand to see ye!"

And she looked up into her lover's face with pride.

"An' ye'll be coming wi' me, lassie?" he said eagerly. "Fain, I've been wearying here lang syne."

"I cud na coom before," said Janet, her old spirit of badinage returning with the warm blood to her cheeks. "An' noo I dinna rightly ken why I cam' at all. What would ye say to me then, Donald?"

"Ye ken weel what I would say," he replied reproachfully. "Ye ken weel——"

"Na, I dinna," retorted Janet, sidling, nevertheless, nearer to his side and looking up into his eyes with a look half mischievous, half tender. "What would ye say, lad?"

"Say!" he muttered hoarsely, then, without further ado, took her in his arms in an embrace, which, though somewhat resembling the [hug of a too loving bear, appeared in no way distasteful to the recipient.

"Ye'll come, lassie?" he whispered in her ear. "Ye maun come, for I canna gang wi'out ye. An' if ye dinna——" he paused, then, as he slowly released her: "Weel—its food for the corbies your laddie wull sune be making, for I'll no gang me lane."

"Weel," said the girl reflectively, after a pause of due consideration. "Weel, I dinna ken but that I'd be laith to gar ye dee, Donald, an' so—well—an' so"—she added, ever more slowly, watching with keen enjoyment the changing emotions on his face, dimly seen in the gathering darkness. "I'll coom"—she concluded at last with deliberation, after which, having received another demonstration of de-

light from her tortured lover, she continued briskly : " We maun be ganging noo, laddie, for its getting mirk, and my mistress——"

" Ou, ay, an' me master ! " echoed Donald, suddenly brought back to a recollection of his duties. " Eh, lassie ! " he cried in horror. " We maun be ganging in airnest, or they'll ae be ganging wi'out us."

" Ye blate booby ! " cried Janet in a whirl of anxiety. " An' why did ye stand blethering here when ye ken't it a' the time ? We maun rin, mon ! Rin ! for it's no Janet Craigen wull be left behind when her mistress gangs awa'."

With a meekness, begotten of the knowledge—which sooner or later must come to all men—of the utter uselessness of arguing, Donald obeyed, not daring to point out that delay had been occasioned by woman's greatest difficulty—that of making up her mind.

Forthwith the two set off at a round pace, threading their way through wood and avenue and across the bleak, dark moorland towards their destination, not meeting any on their way, though once Janet stopped, declaring she saw, flitting past them in the direction of Kilspeth, the shadowy figure of a man. But

Donald only laughed at her fears, and, without a backward glance they hurried onwards towards the winding path amongst the cliffs which led down to the King's Cave.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE ELOPEMENT

THE shadow of the fir trees formed a welcome shelter, and, having once reached it, Mary Ogilvy drew a long, deep breath of relief.

"Nigel," she whispered; "oh, Nigel—how did you dare run so great a risk?"

He laughed gaily, echoing her last word in scorn.

"Risk!" he cried, taking her in his arms and kissing her as he had never dared to kiss her before in their brief courtship. "Risk! For the sake of the sweetest lady on God's earth? Fie! sweetheart, for such words!"

She clung to him, sobbing in the very greatness of her joy, which seemed like a burst of radiant sunshine through a black storm-cloud.

But presently, growing calmer, she raised big, wondering eyes to his.

"I cannot understand," she whispered, a little glad laugh checking the sob in her voice. "It is all so strange—and so wonderful."

And so there, in the very shadow of a scarcely escaped danger, they stood, like children who linger to kiss each other on the verge of a crumbling precipice, whilst he told her the simple tale of Dugald Grant's capture. And the tears dried on her cheeks as she listened, whilst the dimples deepened in their place as she laughed softly over her quondam bridegroom's discomfiture.

"And now?" she asked, when all the tale was told. "And now, what shall we do?"

She glanced up at him timidly, as one, who, feeling her way along the ice, scarcely dare as yet trust, on the slippery journey, to the strong support of a single arm.

He saw the half doubt in her eyes, and answered very gently, in spite of the pain it gave him.

"The future lies in your hands, my queen," he said softly. "What you will, that shall be done."

"But what can I do?" she asked piteously, still lingering between love and the dim misgivings or maiden shyness.

"If you would return to Kilsbeth Castle," he said steadily, "Sir John shall never guess that you knew how or why Dugald Grant disappeared. Neither shall the latter trouble you again. Or, if you fear to do that, I would take you to the care of a lady, very noble and good, who would shelter and love you willingly, I am sure, for my sake and your own. Or else——" his voice quivered—"or else, if you fear not to trust yourself to me, you shall come this very night to France with me as my wife; though this, as I have before told you, I scarcely dare to ask, seeing that now I am a homeless wanderer, with little but my sword to carve my way to fortune, till such time as King Charles returns to his throne and restores me once more to my own."

She could detect the overmastering emotion in his voice, and every generous impulse of her warm, loving heart cried to her to comfort him with the assurance of that love within her which laughed at hardship and poverty if shared with him.

But the torturing little vagaries of her woman's nature kept her perversely from her purpose, and sent a quick pang of jealousy through her as she asked slowly—almost carelessly :

“ And this lady—so noble and so good—a friend of yours ? ”

“ A very dear friend,” he replied, with an innocent warmth, that sent the jealous prickling afresh through her veins.

“ And doubtless beautiful ? ” she questioned, a shade of hardness in her voice.

“ Very beautiful,” he answered, whilst the picture of a sad, sweet face, with great dark eyes and red gold hair, rose before him, so as he had seen it first after long years, in the framing of an old mullioned window, and the carved outline of oak wainscotting. “ Very beautiful,” he added yet again.

Mary's heart beat thickly, the tears in her eyes were no longer tears of joy.

“ And what is the name of this lady you love so tenderly ? ” she cried, and this time there was no mistaking the anger in her tones.

He looked down at her, startled at her vehemence.

mence in so simple a question, and, with swift comprehension, saw the tears on her lashes.

"Her name, sweet," he said tenderly, "is the Lady of Grange. She has always been little sister to me, although she is but two years younger. I have known her and her brothers—who also are very dear to me—since we were wee bairns together."

She looked up at him with a silent plea for forgiveness, the anger in her eyes melting as swiftly as it had come, like snowflakes in the sunshine.

He did not say more then, since he was waiting for her answer to his first question with an eager impatience born of the anxiety which present danger brought to him. It came now, very softly and quietly, as she slipped her little hand into his.

"Let us come together," she whispered. "I—I am afraid here, Nigel. Oh! do not leave me?"

"Leave you!" he whispered passionately. "Nay, my darling, not unless you send me from you."

"Then I do not send you!" she said, with a gay little laugh, and the darkness hid her

blushes. "I should be—ah! so lonely if you went, for there is no one else in the world but you, Nigel."

He bent to kiss her tenderly.

"No one else," he whispered. "No one else but you, and me, little one; but what matter if there were not indeed? We have each other."

Again she smiled happily as she drew closer to his side.

"Let us hasten," she said softly. "We have lingered too long already, and I fear me that Evans suspected you for all your ruddy locks!"

"Nay, they shall not have you now!" he cried under his breath, as he drew her onward along the dark path. You are mine, lassie, *mine!*"

And she was content that it should be so.

"Though I feared—for all your words," she murmured, as they hurried on their way. "It was as if nought but a miracle could save me from my father's will. And though I prayed for that same miracle, still I doubted."

"And now," he whispered, "you doubt no more?"

"Doubt!" she echoed softly. "Nay, there is no room for doubt when love has triumphed. And for that triumph, dear one, I thank the good God."

"Amen to that," said Nigel Urquhart gently.

CHAPTER XXV

LOVE'S TRIUMPH

THE flare of torches flung lurid light and heavy shadow on a strange scene that night in the King's Cave. So strange that Mary Ogilvy drew back close to her lover's side at sight of those three bound figures and the man who sat on the boulder between them.

Guy Morris had had a trying vigil.

"Dugald Grant," whispered Mary, and the name gripped her throat in a quick gasp of fear.

But Nigel's arm was around her waist.

"Nay, dear heart, do not tremble. He cannot hurt you now. True, I would that I might have had opportunity to mete him out the fate he deserves. Yet a brave man shrinks from killing even vermin in cold

blood. But come, Dugald Grant shall henceforth be no concern of ours. Tell me, sweet, can you trust me? Have you courage for the step?"

She raised her lovely face to his, a smile on her lips and in the depths of blue eyes.

"Trust you? Aye, Nigel, with my life."

How his pulses stirred at her words. With her life! Ah! what better gift could Heaven have bestowed?

"'Tis that I ask for, dearest."

Her soft laugh was born of pure happiness.

"As for courage, I have no need of any when I am with you."

"But think," he urged, "what it means. If you wed me 'tis but an ill life you must needs share. A poor exile whose lands have been confiscated, and on whose head a price is set. I do wrong to demand such a sacrifice."

For answer she nestled the closer to him.

"A sacrifice, Nigel? Think what it would mean did I—did I return to Kilsbeth?"

Instinctively they looked back to where the huddled figures of the three prisoners could be seen.

Mary shuddered.

"The wife of Dugald Grant," she murmured. "The wife of one of those men—those murderers—who killed my brother and hanged Montrose."

Nigel's breath came quickly.

"Never."

"The only way——" she whispered.

"Lies beyond the seas—together."

"Together!"

Mary's echo was full of sweet content.

"In Paris," Urquhart added, "we shall find good friends, and, though an exile, I am not wholly a beggar."

"Better poverty with you beside me," she made answer, "than the fairest kingdom with an 'her.'"

"Your love crowns blackest night with golden stars of hope."

Again she laughed. How sweet it was to listen to such whispers and find them echoing in her own heart.

"When I saw you in the hall at Kilsbeth but now I could scarcely believe it possible."

"And when I saw *you* there. Ah! sweet it was hard not to take you in my arm

there and then, sure no power or strength could snatch you from them again."

She clung to him, happily.

"Such strong, brave arms—and now——"

"My wife!" he whispered, "to hold against my heart to the end of life."

"There's nae so much time for wasting," came Donald's voice from behind. "Morris hae gone up yonder pathway. He's fearing——"

But Nigel broke in with a laugh.

"No cause for fear," quoth he. "Yet you are right, Donald. Where's the minister?"

A groan from the corner answered him.

Donald fell to chuckling silently.

"Oh, ay," he replied, "the meenistaire is ready. An' the bridegroom's ready, an' the bonny bride. Eh! An' there be nae lack o' witnesses!"

The last thought appeared to cause the worthy fellow the utmost amusement as he hoisted the unhappy minister to his feet.

"Ye've nae cause for fear," he bellowed cheerfully in the Rev. George's ears. "It's jest a marritche ceremony, an' gin ye'd like to be dancin' in honour o' the happy day, ye can do it by your lane afterwards."

The prisoner blinked dismally.

"E-eh," he moaned. "E-eh. Ye miserable sinners! An' I a marrit man wi' ten bairnies an'——"

But Donald Finlay checked further flow of speech by a hearty clap on the speaker's back.

"We've nae brought ye here to prate o' bairnies," he growled. "But to marry yon bonny leddy, an'—ithers. Coom, quickly, wi' your book, an' let's get it done."

Once more the minister groaned.

Such lightness scarce savoured of honesty. But, alas! his body at present was in too imminent a peril for the immediate relief of his spiritual feelings.

Slowly he advanced as he was bidden to the centre of the cave.

* * * * *

Glittering stalactites and shining walls gave back their sparkling rays, and made a fairy palace of a gloomy vault. Gathered in the midst stood the little group, the flickering light playing on faces which looked white and strange amidst their weird surroundings. Little would the onlooker have

guessed that he saw before him a bridal party.

Still bound and gagged, on the ground in the corner lay Dugald Grant and his henchman. The latter had resigned himself from the first to fate, and now snored vigorously and unmelodiously in a profound slumber. But Dugald Grant lay watching the scene before him with eyes which seemed starting from his head in a speechless frenzy of wrath, whilst Fate laughed at the trick she had paid her crafty wooer as she tortured him with the cruel reversion of her fickle favour.

And cruel, indeed, seemed the destiny which bade him look on to see his triumphant enemy taking from before his eyes the bride whose well-lined coffers were to have formed the stepping-stones to his ambition, and whose beauty had, at the same time, made her to be desired by him above all other women whom he knew.

Unable to curse, except to himself ; unable to move, except to roll in helpless fury on the floor of his prison, he lay and watched the strange ceremony.

Held up by Donald Finlay, assisted by the smiling Janet, the godly minister of Cromarty stood glowering in impotent wrath upon the two whom he had been called upon to bless.

The pastor's legs were still bound, but his arms and tongue were free, and for some minutes he ventured to give rein to the latter in a way wholly at variance with his cloth. But a few stern words from Nigel reduced the reviler to a state of fresh and abject fear, and he now stood eyeing, with uneasy side glances, the pistol which Donald held unpleasantly near to his bald and reverend head.

"Ye'll no be using it, mon," he whined, as he strove to shrink farther from the neighbourhood of the small black barrel. "Ye'll be careful o' the ungodly weapon, an' me a marrit mon wi' ten bairnies an' a wife greeting for me at haim!"

"Oh, ay, I'll be carefu'," replied Donald nonchalantly, twisting the weapon a shade nearer the pastor's ear. "But ye maun be quick wi' the service, laddie, if ye'll be ganging haim the nicht."

The Rev. George sighed, as his small vindictive eyes once more took in the two silent figures before him.

Here was the man whom he would fain have hounded to a cruel death; the man he hated—whose house he hated—with deadly and unabating hatred. And Fate—cruel jade that she was—had bidden him become the most unwilling instrument to his happiness.

He glanced from bridegroom to bride, and his gaze rested approvingly for a moment on the beautiful, pale face from which the hood had fallen back, the long dark cloak half concealing, half revealing the dainty figure in its rich dress and falling lace.

In two days' time he had anticipated mating this fair young creature to a very different bridegroom—even the man whom he saw writhing and grovelling on the ground ten yards away. The thought of the missed fees, the junketing and carousing to which he had looked forward in what he termed "godly joy," brought tears to the worthy man's eyes as he dolefully shook his head.

"Eh, lassie!" he whined. "An' na'e ye weel conseedered the step, before ye

plunge head foremost into the bottomless pit o' destruction? Ha'e ye thought o' your puir father greeting sair for the loss o' a fair dochter? Ha'e ye thought o' yon graidly mon who lies there in bitterness o' speerit to see his bonnie bride louping into the verra flames o' hell?"

The cold rim of a pistol barrel brought the minister's fervent exhortation to an untimely end.

"Haud your clavers, me bonnie corbie," muttered Donald in his ear. "An' gae on wi' the blessing, or its ownny your nainsel' that's to blame if ye dinna mak' a braw dine for the fishes."

Shivering at the ominous tones in which this threat was delivered, the pastor turned hurriedly to the waiting pair. The words of the brief marriage ceremony appeared to choke him, and never did blessing have more the ring of a malison than that with which he concluded. But neither Nigel nor Mary heeded as they took each other's hands and looked into each other's eyes as the harsh, unwilling voice pronounced them man and wife.

"An' noo, ye'll be letting me gang my way," growled Mr. Anderson, looking angrily around him; "for 'tis pit-mirk the nicht, an' I ha'e my ain wife an' bairnies greeting for me at haim."

Nigel laughed, as, at a sign from Donald, he in his turn gripped the minister's shoulder.

"Nay, we must crave your kind services a little longer, I fear," he replied lightly.

"There are yet others of your flock to unite in holy wedlock, my reverend friend. Nay, Janet! Look not so bashful, and you, kind sir, not so gloomy, for time presses."

"Na! na!" cried the pastor, struggling vainly in Nigel's grip. "I'll do nae mair o' your de'il's work. An' ye, Jennie Craigen, whom I ae looked on as a guid an' discreet lassie; ye wud be the bride o' this bluid-thirsty an' ungodly mon? Eh, bairn, it's nae possible; an' your ain father an elder o' the Kirk."

Janet tossed her pretty head with her customary pertness.

"An' blithe wad I be if my father was here to see me marrit," she cried saucily.

"But ye ken, Mr. Anderson, it was nae just

convenient for him, puir mon, an' he comfortable in bed the noo, after his wee drappee. But ye'll, nae doot, tell him the bonnie bride I made, an' the bonnie callant I'm calling gude mon, for I fear me it's lang since I'll be ganging haim the day, as Donald wull be finding the air o' Scotland na' just suiting his health."

The minister opened his mouth wide in speechless amaze at the temerity of this hitherto humble and discreet lamb of his fold. But, ere the avalanche of words could issue from his burning lips, Nigel checked him with scant ceremony.

"We've neither time nor taste just now for your sermons, Mr. Anderson," he observed tritely. "Reserve them for more willing ears and a more acceptable time; your business now is to marry the man and woman before you, and unless you do it before I count twenty, your blood be on your own head."

Even with this threat, Mr. Anderson still stoutly maintained a resentful silence, glancing angrily the while on the little company around. But, ere Nigel had pronounced

the fatal number, the fear of instant death overcame him, and in a collapse of abject terror he mumbled the required words in disjointed sentences.

"That is well," said Nigel coolly, when he had concluded. "And now," he added, glancing towards the two men who lay bound in the corner of the cave, "it remains to decide what is to be done with you all."

The minister stared in blank horror, echoing the words with a terror which told how he had read the meaning.

"Mercy!" he cried, his knees shaking, his hands clasped together in entreaty. "Ech, sir! Ye'll no be murdering me after I've done your will, an' my wife an' bairnies——"

"Haud your gab, ye downert auld fule," struck in Donald. "Gin ye dinna want to taste cauld steel in airnest! It's no murderers we are, but honest men, I'd ha'e ye mind."

"Honest men!" echoed Mr. Anderson, and his tone was so droily dolorous that, in spite of his difficulty, Nigel could not forbear a smile.

"Nay!" he said, addressing the woe-begone pastor with kindly pity. "You have done your part, and, if not over graciously, you shall not go without your fee. But the question now is neither of that nor, as Donald truly says, of bloodshed. Could I trust you you should gladly go your way as I mine, but that is beyond possibility." And he looked again towards the recumbent figure of Dugald Grant.

Here was, indeed, something of a quandary. To leave these men, bound and helpless in a lonely cave, where the chances stood strongly in favour of their being starved to death ere discovered, were murder of the most cold-blooded nature; whereas to set them free might bring about their own destruction, for there was a glint in Dugald's eyes which told of the smouldering devil which lurked within.

"The cruiser will be waiting lang syne, sir," whispered Donald in his ear, casting a wistful glance towards a boat which lay, with shipped oars drawn up on the shingle, at the cave's mouth.

"We maun waste nae time wi' sic limber,"

and he stirred the sleeping Highlander with a contemptuous kick.

But Donald's expostulations and Nigel's hesitation were brought to a swifter issue than either expected, for, at that moment, rapid steps were heard descending the path behind the cave; the sound of slipping earth as it broke from the comer's hasty tread fell pitter, patter, on their startled ears, followed, almost instantaneously, by Guy Morris, who rushed in on them with wide eyes of anxiety and fear.

"Quick! Quick!" he shouted, seizing one of the torches and dashing it to the ground. "To the boat, sir! to the boat! The alarm has been given, and we are discovered—the foul fiend knows how!" and with all his might he pushed the boat towards the surf, just as the sound of voices came clamouring down from the path above.

A few mighty pushes from eager hands, and the little boat was launched.

In breathless excitement, the frightened girls were lifted in and the men had just sprung down beside them, seizing the oars in their hands as they pushed off from the

shore, when a crowd of people, hustling and jostling in their eagerness to be in time, came pouring down from the cliff path on to the beach.

A loud yell told of their disappointment, as, through the darkness, the sound of splashing oars spelt the mocking echo "too late."

Behind them, in the gloom of the now unlighted cave, came the voice of the minister upraised in loud lamentation of his own woes and earnest exhortations to his flock to pursue and hew down the enemy.

Some few ran along the shingle, hoping, indeed, to launch a boat and overtake the fugitives ere they reached the mouth of the bay; but the night was dark, the way rough, and long before the boats were reached pursuit was hopeless.

Not without some hesitation, the rest of the party advanced to the mouth of the cave, guided by the minister's still loudly-raised lamentations. A smouldering torch was rekindled, and, by its light, the three victims of the night's work discovered.

Eager hands swiftly cut the bonds which

bound the helpless trio, but, to the astonishment of all, no sooner was Dugald Grant set free than he sprang, with a smothered curse, towards the worthy minister, who, with deep sighs, was drinking restoration to his failing faculties from the proffered whisky flask of one of his brethren.

"You whining fool!" shouted Dugald, seizing the pastor by the throat, whilst he glared into his face with all the pent-up fury of his passion. "You white-livered coward of an idiot!"

"E-eh. Mon, is it mad ye've gone?"

"Mad!" screamed Dugald, shaking him savagely to and fro as a terrier shakes a rat. "Mad yoursel', ye blethering fule. If you had had the heart of a mouse and refused to do their bidding we would have had them all—you snivelling, cowardly cur."

"Ye're mad, mon," retorted the minister, wriggling himself free with no little difficulty from the unpleasantly tight grip Dugald had taken on his wind-pipe. "Deed, an' if I'd no' done their bidding it's a dead mon I'd ha'e been the day, an' me puir wife and bairnies——"

With a savage curse Dugald flung him aside and rushed from the cave, leaving the reverend gentleman to discourse in disjointed fashion to his tittering audience on the devil which had in some strange manner entered into the godly laird; and the sinfulness of such language used to a humble, but righteous preacher of the Gospel.

"Eh! but it was grand that," reflected Donald, as the sounds of clamour rose ever fainter from the fast receding shore. "Puir feckless loons. Did they think we were a' as blate as they were themsel's? But they may ding their clavers as loud as they like the noo. Eh, Jennie, me burd? We'll no be ganging back to the auld baudron's claws, which he thocht sae sonsily to grippin' into us."

"Evans must have sent a spy after us," said Nigel thoughtfully. "He was more wide awake than we gave him credit for, though his cunning this time saved us some trouble. Eh, Morris? We couldn't have left those fellows there to starve."

But Morris only rubbed his head thoughtfully, as his manner was, gazing stolidly

back to where the dim coast-line lay like a heavier shadow amongst other shadows of the night. After all, perhaps to him—the only stranger to her soil—the pang of leaving bonnie Scotland lay the keenest; for these, his companions, carried their hearts with them to a foreign land, whilst he left his far behind, to wander ghostlike amongst the shadows around a little farmhouse on a lone moorside where a girl's blue eyes looked wistfully out into the night.

"The prettiest maid I saw this side o' the Border," he muttered to himself as he watched the fast fading outlines of the distant shore. "The prettiest maid of all."

And he sighed as he looked away into the darkness ahead, where the twinkling lights of a cruiser told that the goal was reached—the goal that was to take him far from the side of bright-eyed Elsie McCulloch.

"Mary," whispered Nigel, as the boat passed swiftly between the great sentinel rocks which guarded the sheltering bay. "Mary, my wife—you do not regret?"

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And, though she did not reply, he read
in the eyes which sought his through the
darkness of the summer's night, that regret
finds no place where love abides.

THE END.



read
the
gret



