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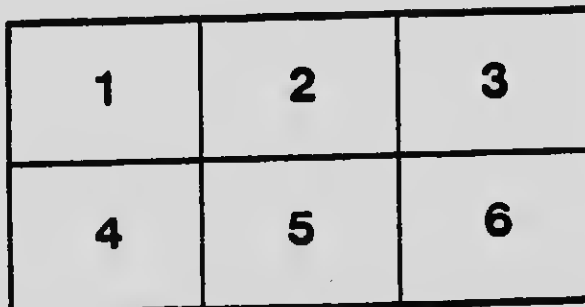
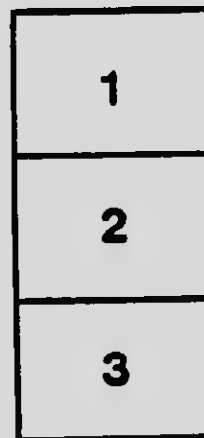
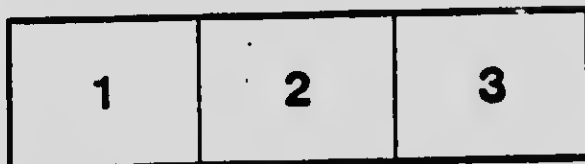
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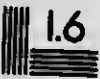
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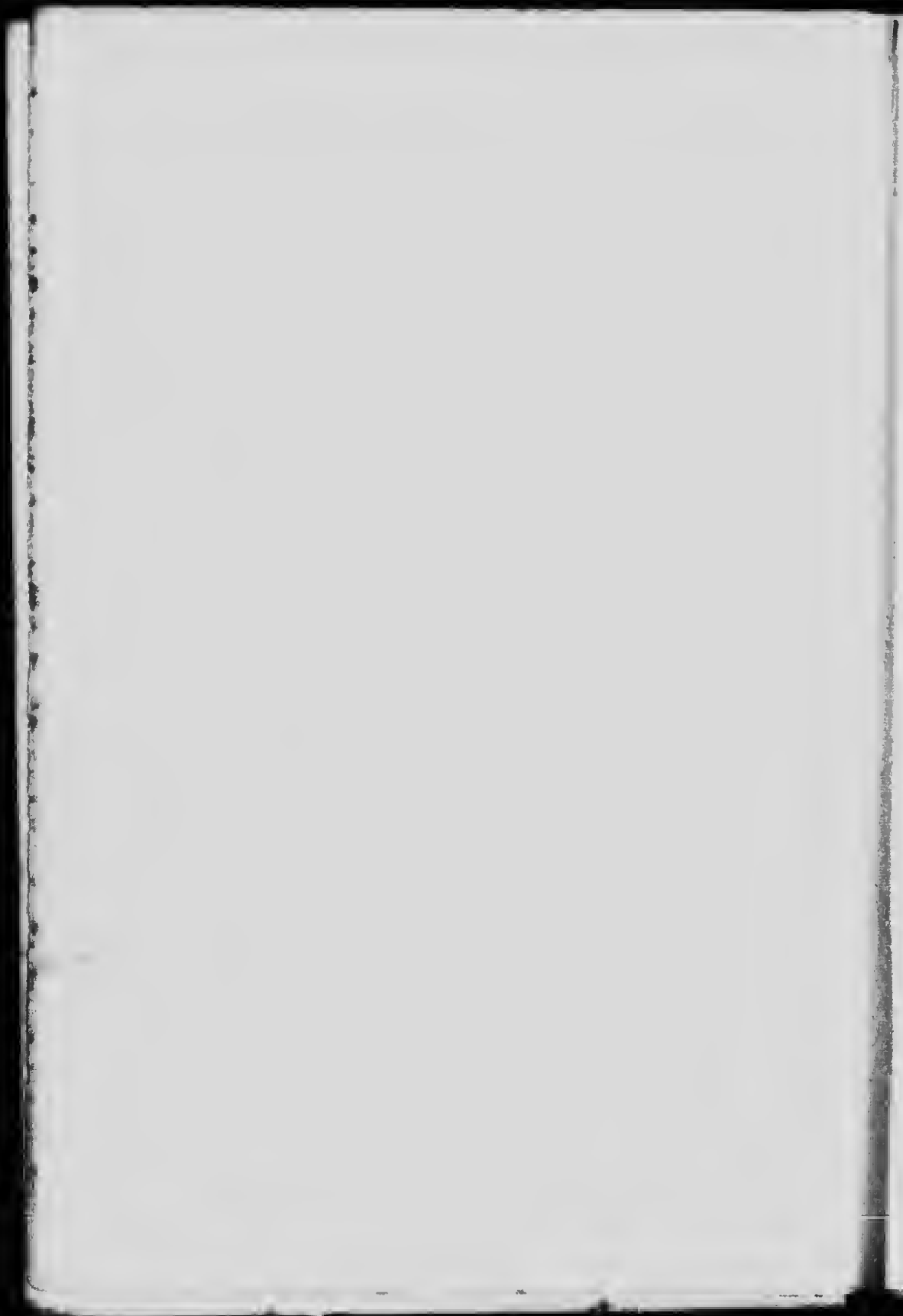


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# SHALLOWS



# SHALLOWS

BY  
FREDERICK WATSON

"There is a tide in the affairs of men  
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune ;  
Omitted, all the voyage of their life  
Is bound in shallows and in miseries."

*Julius Cæsar, Act iv, Scene 3*

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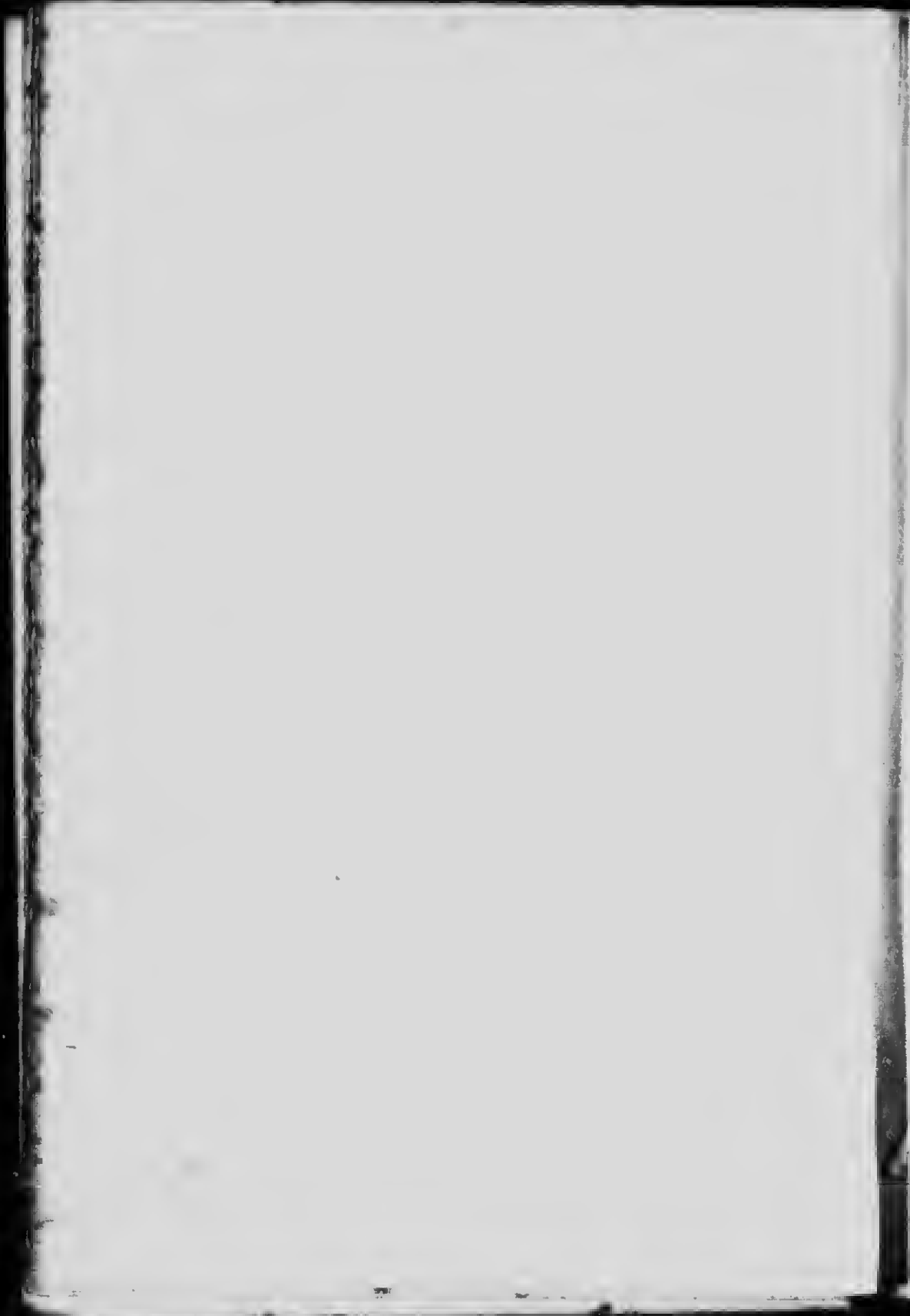
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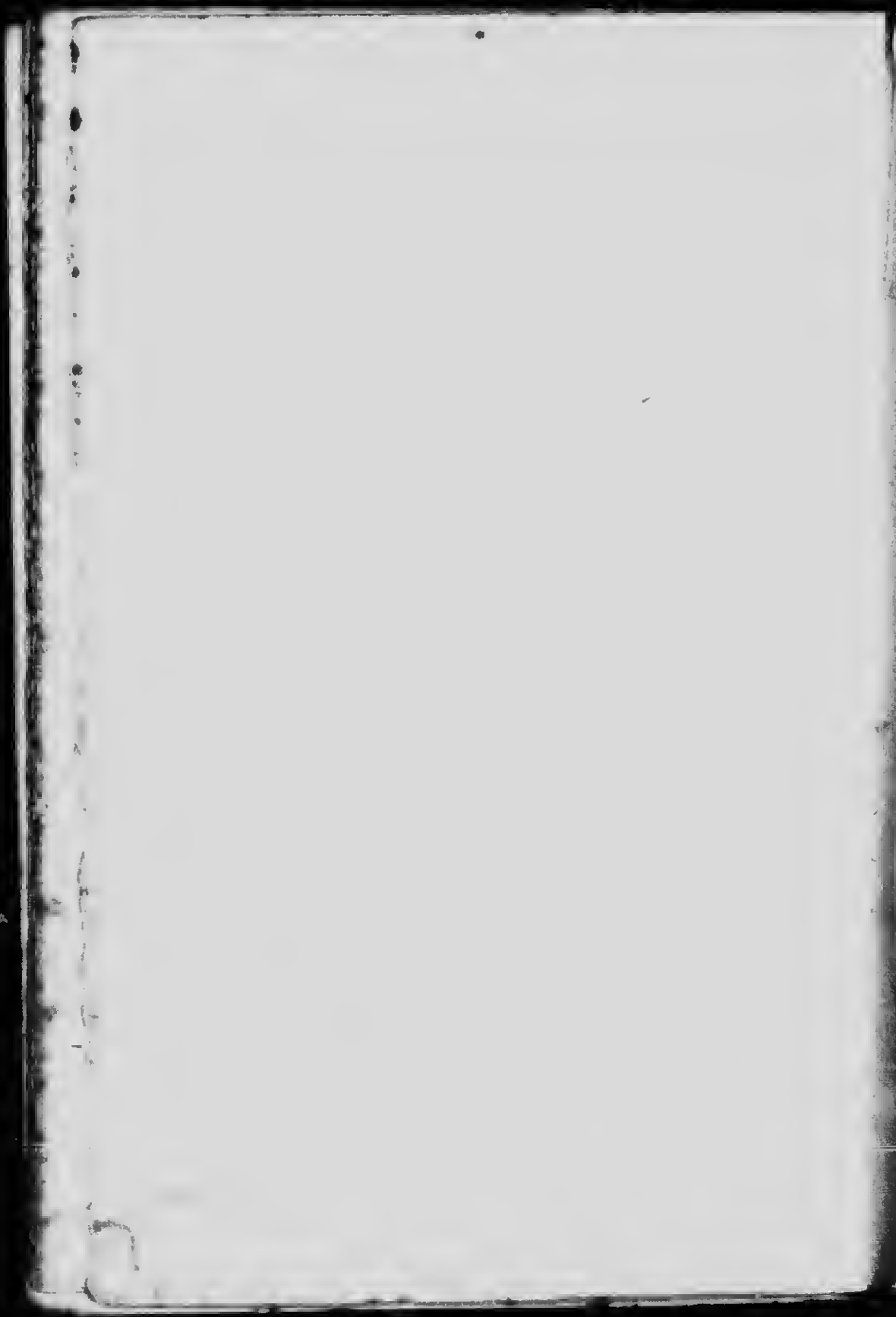
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TO  
MY WIFE



**BOOK**  
**THE SOUTH**



# SHALLOWS

## CHAPTER I

### I

THE summer of the year 1752 had dragged itself through all the weariness of August into the heart of September. Paris had welcomed it in June, had sickened beneath the July sun, had crept into the country in August, and was stealing back to welcome autumn. Paris, gayest of cities, ever youthful, aimless and brilliant as a butterfly dancing amongst blossoms, artificial and evil-hearted, playing at life and death as a kitten plays with bobbins.

The Convent of St. Joseph mounted its stark walls above a placid, wayfaring street, too homely for such sombre company. Country people rumbling past with their merchandise would nudge one another, whispering, "See—the convent," and bob at the crucifix above the door. Their betters, more reserved, less edified by such simple wonder, frowned or smiled or merely stared at the bleak, forbidding face of St. Joseph, with its preposterous windows, its heavy knocker, its air of rigid privacy. It seemed to regard Paris with an ever-open eye of condemnation. Perhaps it was wise in that; but whether or no, it irritated Paris in a vague, secret manner, as a ~~that~~ torments a traveller. So much so, that one fine

evening, as the clock tolled nine o'clock, a mob from the slums shouldered their way into the street opposite the convent, and flung all manner of unpleasantness, so that the clean greyness of St. Joseph was mottled with yellow and green, and the window-panes tumbled on to the pavement like showers of shivered ice.

Then, as none appeared to plead their forbearance, or even to shout defiance, they grew impatient of stones and such like, and climbing up upon each other's shoulders, ripped and tore at the crucifix, so that of a sudden it came away, and crashed down on the crowd below, killing Pierre Maux, a baker. The name is written in the annals of the convent for all to see.

After that the mob grew weary of such tame proceedings, and taking up Pierre they ran singing to his shop, and danced him backwards and forwards by the hands and feet, so that stout Madame Maux laughed from the top window till she was in danger of choking. The spectators laughed too, wondering how long she would think her husband only drunk or foolish. "Come down, Madame," they shouted. "Way for Madame Maux!" Waving her hand, she disappeared, and they awaited her, grinning at each other like dogs, until she stood in the open doorway. Suddenly the laughter died out of her eyes. For a second it clung to her mouth, twisting the lips grotesquely, then, with a startled cry, she had darted to the silent form now lying huddled on the road.

"Pierre!" she cried, shaking him, never heeding their roars of mirth. Then, since the evening had whetted their appetites, and seeing her busied with the dead, they stole into the house and flung new bread from hand to hand. A score of dirty fingers flung it house-high.

So shouting, cursing, laughing, they swept down the street, kicking loaves like footballs, gnawing the steaming

hunks, rushing and tossing like some foul stream into the night.

Madame Maux looked up just as the last rank was swallowed up in darkness.

She stood staring for a little, vacant-eyed, then with white lips she began to drag Pierre into the house.

True it is, however, that she was the first to subscribe towards the cost of a new crucifix, which is difficult to understand as she was not accounted a good woman. But was it not curious that it should have killed Pierre Maux, who was a spectator, unless he was the wickedest there? At least, so people said.

Within a week the Convent of St. Joseph was as before, very grey and square, mysteriously lifeless and equally alert, irritatingly austere and inflexibly stern. And yet behind this block of vigorous asceticism, hidden from the street, shielded from prying eyes, utterly quiet and secluded, lay a garden.

It faced the back of the convent, which, curiously enough, now it was out of the public gaze, took on itself certain worldly decorations and conceits such as creeper and ivy, which harboured birds amongst their twining branches and heavy leaves. The door opened upon a neat terrace of heavy paving-stones edged with red tiles. A little ledge divided this from the lawn, which was always neatly trimmed and carefully rolled, and in the centre of the lawn was a flower-bed cut in the shape of a heart. The Mother Superior loved this heart like a sacred relic, which in a manner of speaking it was. She it was who arranged the bulbs and seeds to be laid in its borders and centre. At Easter—the time of Passion—the heart was pure white with genuflecting lilies, and at Christmas there were snowdrops and violets—the snowdrops bunched together within. And once a year the heart was blood-



red, and at that season the Mother Superior looked frailer than usual, and when she bent tears fell upon the petals. At least so it was said by little Anna Rudolph, who came from Germany, and who watched people as a cat watches a mouse.

On the other side of the flower-bed, again, ran a thick hedge, higher than the one in front of the terrace, and this divided the garden into two equal halves. On the farther side few ever went except the Mother Superior and Condillac with his books, and Mademoiselle Ferrand, gentlest and most elusive of women. On the side nearest the convent the children walked and took the air, and whispered about the great times ahead when they would return home for good, and marry, it might be, a Prince or a Duke or even a common Viscount.

It was like a secret garden—a place breathing mystery and old memories—filled always with remote silence, be it broken ever so slightly by the tinkling, silver-toned fountain of scented water cast upwards by a stork standing leg-deep in bending ferns.

Overhead on a certain summer day the blue sky was hardly visible through the spreading branches of a single oak tree. A dull monotone of unseen, innumerable bees overhead made the place infinitely slumberous, and yet passionately alive. A place for old thoughts and old memories, indeed—a spot, too, suited for living projects whether of love or secret ways.

On the high wall opposite the oak fruit clustered thickly, and dropped upon the hot parched ground.

## II

Underneath the tree were seated two persons in conversation. One, a fragile and lovely woman under thirty, wistfully fair as pale gold, and as frail as a

rare piece of china, such was Mademoiselle Ferrand (whom some have known as Mademoiselle Luci).

Her companion, whose deep, resonant voice boomed and grumbled above the hidden noise of bees, was Étienne de Condillac, named "le philosophe," titular Abbé de Mureaux, whose age may be placed as lying close to forty, but who, through his stoutness and his enormous gravity, appeared still more. His sombre countenance, his profound, slow-moving eyes, his large, humorous mouth, his clumsy hands—those were the claims he made upon a stranger's memory; but behind and beyond all these was Condillac himself, self-contained, self-reliant, eternally calm, and indomitable, regarding with childlike but unflinching eyes a world he was anxious to understand.

Mademoiselle Ferrand was talking with a sheet of paper in her hand, at the top of which in the smallest and neatest of handwriting was written, "Traité des Sensations."

"So you have commenced," she said; "and now tell me, after this introductory statement of the relations of sense and thought, how will you conduct your argument?"

Condillac drew his chair a trifle nearer. For long he spoke in a slow, monotonous tone, appealing to her at intervals for her affirmation, then hastening on, and growing brisker, enforcing a point with a clenched fist driven into his other open palm, leaning forward, his eyes less childlike and more narrow, his mouth pursed a little, his brows contracted.

"I do not agree with you," said Mademoiselle Ferrand at last. At that he sat back, his eyes widened, his brows went up, the corners of his mouth shut downwards.

"No?" he echoed in a surprised voice.

"Certainly not," she replied.

Then wrapping a shawl about her shoulders, she went over his argument, ticking his points off upon her fingers, speaking in a whirl of words, her blue eyes flashing into his, growing more wondrously lovely as the colour leapt to her cheeks.

For long he listened moodily, as a man who will not be moved. Gradually, however, his face lit up. He nodded quickly when she paused, he drew a pencil from his pocket and wrote in haste upon some paper.

"It is only a suggestion," she said modestly, when she had finished.

"My dear lady," he replied, "this is your book, not mine. Have I not told Madame de Vassé so long since?"

"No! No!" she laughed, "it is you who are kind to say so. Here is your manuscript."

Condillac took it and, without a word, tore it into fragments.

"Now," said he, "will you believe me? That was my work and here is yours," and so saying he pushed the paper of notes inside his pocket.

She turned to the table on which were a decanter of wine, two glasses, and some cakes.

"Tell me the news," he said, smiling at her.

"You are as bad as Monsieur Douglas."

"But he is only pleased with the affairs of nations, whereas I hardly know who is on the throne."

She listened absently.

"I have no gossip," she replied at last, "life is very still here, just Madame de Vassé, the Mother Superior when she will be gracious unto us miserable sinners, the young ladies of the convent all as like one another as peas in a pod——" she hesitated. "But there is one girl," she said, and fell into silence.

"A girl—pooh!" sniffed Condillac, closing his eyes.

"Not an ordinary girl, I assure you."

"All the better for her," he added sleepily.

"She is worthy of your study, my good Abbé"—she always knew how to rouse him.

"I am not your good Abbé," he growled, thoroughly awake and nettled. "Why is she so interesting?" he asked sulkily.

"Because of her temperament. Emotion plays upon her mind like a musician upon the strings of a violoncello. She is not heavy, commonplace, uninspired as these other ones, but living and quivering with feeling, sensitive, easily wounded, but, *mon Dieu*, hard to kill—they are all that way."

"I grant you she interests me," he said, after a pause, sipping his wine noisily.

She glanced at him with affectionate eyes.

"But no more than people usually do," she murmured.

"Ah, now you are hard upon me," he cried in a soft, resonant voice. "I am a scholar, a bookworm—not a man of the world. I am interested not only for your sake, though that were an honour—but for my own. It takes me out of myself to study human character."

"Like beetles," she murmured again.

He looked at her sleepily. He had loved Mademoiselle Ferrand for years—so quietly that none suspected it, hovering about her with the tender, speechless adoration of a large St. Bernard dog. He watched the sunlight, filtering through the quivering leaves overhead, dance upon the wondrous coils of the hair heaped around her fragile face and turning here and there a strand to threads of gold. His eyes travelled slowly over her delicate features—met for an instant her large violet eyes

with the shadows lurking beneath them, then fell and rested on her feet in their dainty Parisian shoes.

Suddenly he stirred into a more comfortable position and raised his eyes again.

"I have a great respect for beetles," he remarked, smiling, "but if you press me like this I will admit that I often think about your latest protégée——"

"You mean Ethlenn Murdoch?"

He made a little grimace. "I think," he added, "that that may have been her name."

"It is good Scotch."

He waved a deprecating hand.

"So are all things hard and ill-sounding. Our friendship for Scotland, my dear Mademoiselle, only fills Paris with a host of long-nosed, moneyless vagabonds, possessing big pedigrees and small purses. Not that they have not a kind of rude intellect some of them—but no culture, Mademoiselle—all rock, and no moss to soften the contour——"

She laughed a little, sipping a glass of the red wine, answering him in a dreamy undertone.

"Well—well—what does it matter? Neither you nor I are Scotch. But this girl—I cannot tell you how she affects me, as do all these Jacobites more or less. I feel as though they own the key to fairyland and that we can enter for a moment a land where nothing matters but romance, and where the world stands still——"

Condillac's face saddened.

"It is a state of mind," he said, "from which the awakening is wondrous rude."

"But not for us."

"No, Mademoiselle—but for those to whom this is no fairyland, but a thing of deadly earnest—a sort of religion. How can we appreciate their state of mind,

we, who have no enthusiasms but those of study and . . . such an hour as this?" He mused, then went on:

"That is why I wish to see this girl who has so won your heart. Tell me about her, Mademoiselle, while I taste one of your excellent cakes."

His companion settled the cushions behind her head more comfortably. A stranger would have noticed how deadly the pallor of her skin was against the dark background—how large her eyes stood out in her pinched face. Noting that, he would have wondered. At which Mademoiselle Ferrand, gathering his thoughts at a glance, would have driven them afar by displaying that rare vitality of expression and gesture which seems to point to an equal bodily strength.

She was not one to surrender to appearances. None knew that better than her friend and fellow student-philosopher, the great Condillac, who, even now, watched, as it were, with sad, submissive gaze, the steady stream of her receding sands of life. Sometimes he strove to tell her that he had long guessed how weak she was—but always at the moment when he drove himself to break silence she had eluded him, slipped away by an aside, challenging him bravely with her wonderful eyes.

And so the days had passed into weeks, and sometimes Condillac had said in his heart, "She is better to-day," and hope had burned up to die again.

"You are asleep, Abbé," she said reprovingly. He loathed priests, and when she called him so she always did so provokingly, at which he sometimes scolded her for poking fun at an old man (for was he not close upon forty and stout?). But latterly he had smiled at her so wistfully that she almost ceased to use the word.

"I am all attention," he replied. "Pray begin your lecture, Mademoiselle, on the Highland refugees."

"You will not have forgotten the rebellion in the Highlands in the year 'forty-five?" she remarked.

"Forgotten!" cried Condillac. "While Monsieur Douglas lives I'll never have that joy."

"True. As you say, poor Monsieur Douglas is not above mentioning his experiences from time to time, but be charitable and remember that such as he are not accustomed to hide in caves for weeks at a time."

She paused and drew a flower towards her, not plucking it, but caressing the petal with her thin white fingers, and smelling it delicately.

"This girl's father," she went on, "was not actually concerned, though her brothers were, I believe, and to save her from such lawless surroundings he brought her over here in 'forty-six. She is now twenty-two, a grown girl, who will leave for Scotland shortly."

"Well?" said Condillac dryly.

"Patience, old friend. I must give you some particulars first."

"All life histories of the Highland families are the same," he grumbled good-humouredly. "They were 'out,' whatever that may mean—they lost what they had stolen from somebody else, and they arrived in Paris. Having arrived, they relate to the lazy and harmless Condillac exactly how they did it, and how expensive their lodgings are—I know them."

"Hush," she said. "What would you do——?"

"I—ah, surely you cannot see me running at complete strangers with a bat<sup>1</sup>-axe and being exiled to—*Edinburgh. Ah, mon Dieu——!*"

"No," she returned soberly, "nor can I see myself, but are we the poorer for that? It is self-denial, foolish, criminal, distorted—what you will, but noble for all that, and behind it driving them forward is courage—what,

Monsieur, can this world give us more than courage? This girl, Ethlenn Murdoch, would interest you."

"Why should she interest me? I am out of the world. I would desolate her. It is she who would not tolerate me."

"You are too modest," she said, laughing at his words.

"Have you spoken much with her?"

"Hardly at all, and yet——"

"She affects you so much?"

"How much I cannot say. Would you call me fanciful were I to say that I see her always as one moving in the shadows, speechless, timeless, seeking what can never be found, setting sail for a shore she may never reach?"

There was a deep silence. The wind cried for an instant among the leaves and fell again. Once—twice, Condillac nodded his head.

"Has she met Monsieur Douglas?"

"God forbid!"

"You think there is still danger in that quarter?"

"It would be like firing gunpowder."

"Does she suspect, then?"

"I cannot say."

"Perhaps her Jacobite father has warned her."

"He would not—besides, he cannot know."

"No, but if he did, are you so sure he would not be anxious to learn how Monsieur was—and more?"

She shook her head.

"He arrived with her at night—he was far away on the road to Dunkirk by dawn. There are some would have given much to have met the Master of Murdoch."

"What is he like, then—sinister—squint-eyed—mysterious, such a rogue as I have dreamt of—a boy?"

"No, a man so small and frail that you would take no



account of him, but so secret that he could rid your pockets of every coin while you spoke to him."

"Well, well," said Condillac pleasantly, "I have no fear of him on that score."

He gathered his clumsy hands together and leaned a little nearer her.

"I would advise," said he, "that you do not speak of this young lady to our friend up there" (and he shrugged one fat shoulder towards the convent). "He is in the last stages of ennui; even my library is losing its ancient thrill. His little dog and his 'cello—what sort of companions are those week after week for a man fresh from Court? It is not good. I was only saying to him yesterday that he should settle down."

"Did you impress him?"

"Not altogether. He swore at me for some time, and said he would not settle down till he was out of this damned world (his words, Mademoiselle). I could only remind him that his chances of settling down in the other promised to be infinitely more uncertain. I left him then."

The sun had sunk behind the convent, and grey shadows gathered in dark places—on the upper branches of the oak the afterglow still fell. Suddenly a voice called from behind the hedgerow:

"Mademoiselle Ferrand, are you there?"

Condillac's companion started forward and laid one hand on his arm.

"Ethlenn," she whispered meaningly; and then aloud, "Come here, child—we are under the tree."

They both leaned back, watching the break in the hedge.

Treading on noiseless feet a girl appeared before them in a dress of white, no covering upon her head, only the

faint rustle of her garments audible. The fading light fell upon her face. Condillac, from the blackness of the oak, stared full and long upon it. She was dark as night itself, tall and finely shaped, wonderfully lithe and slender, but strong and closely knit—one could see that in her perfect poise. Her skin was like pure ivory, tinged with the faintest warmth of colour, dusky, shadowy, changing from the coldness of marble to the faint flush of an autumn sun. Her eyes were as stars in her face, great haunting, wondrous eyes like living, quivering fires in a face of stone.

He heard her speak, and noted her passionate crimson lips, her small white rows of teeth.

Then sinking back a little he drew in his breath slowly, saying nothing.

"Come, Ethlenn," Mademoiselle Ferrand was saying. "Here is the Abbé Condillac, an old friend and fellow-worker of mine."

He scrambled to his feet, banging his head clumsily against the overhanging branches, and took her hand. It was cold as ice, but firm, almost manly. He felt the tapering fingers fold about his own soft palm, and quickly loosen. He smiled grimly at that. Many people had as good as told him his were not pleasant hands to shake.

They seated themselves—Ethlenn Murdoch upon the turf. He watched the expression of her face as she talked to his companion—he saw how small the features were—all but the eyes and mouth. There was a look of tragedy in both—an ocean of feeling, of pain, of ecstasy.

"You leave soon, Mademoiselle?" he blundered—for something to say. "You will be glad to return perhaps."

She looked into his face for a moment without replying. It was a habit of hers, as though she wished to reassure herself. "Of course," she replied in a clear, soft voice

as musical as a hidden stream. "I am going home. I love Paris, but Strathyre is all the world to me."

"And your father—is he——?"

"Alive—oh, yes," she said simply, as one stating a fact.

Condillac glanced swiftly at Mademoiselle Ferrand, but her eyes were upon the ground.

"You will not be lonely, I suppose, away in those great mountains?"

She smiled at his question, and a little network of tiny lines appeared at the corners of her eyes.

"There is nothing terrible in mountains, Monsieur."

"Nor in rain?"

She shook her head, still smiling at him.

"But what of falling snow, Mademoiselle, and the wind crying on a winter's night?"

"We build stout walls in the Highlands, Monsieur, and there are old tales to tell."

"Old tales," he repeated, with a sigh, "no one ever told me old tales."

The sun had fallen out of sight. Under the vast branches of the tree a great, soft-winged moth spun and whirled.

"I must go," said Ethlenn. "I wish you good night, Mademoiselle, and you, Monsieur."

"Good dreams, dear child," whispered Mademoiselle Ferrand lovingly—she, who was but six short years her senior. They watched her fade into the darkness—swift and silent—and become gathered into the shadows.

Condillac sighed again.

"Well?" said Mademoiselle Ferrand.

"Well?" he rejoined.

"What are you thinking, old friend?"

He was silent a moment.

"Think," he echoed, "what can one think—I am not

a wizard, Mademoiselle"—he hesitated. "Do you know what I call this garden?" he asked abruptly.

"What a question," she replied, with a puzzled laugh.

"No, what is it?"

"The Garden of Moths." He said it slowly, meaningly.

"It is pretty," she replied, "and it is true. It is a garden of dim half-lights, of hushed voices, of mystery, of twilight——"

He caught her up. "You have it," he cried, bending forward, "of twilight. She is a creature moving between the sunset and the dawn."

"Perhaps," whispered Mademoiselle Ferrand, "she is nearer to the dawn;" but he shook his head and rose to go.

"Twilight," he said, "is more beautiful than any other time. But it is brief, Mademoiselle—and the darkness comes soon. Good night to you."

He stumbled up the pathway, loomed hugely grotesque for an instant above the hedge, and was gone.

Perfectly motionless, Mademoiselle Ferrand leaned against the fountain, now silenced for the night. A moth fluttered blindly against her cheek. With a start she pushed it aside.

"Twilight," she repeated again, with a sigh. Then shivering a little, she too passed up the path.

## CHAPTER II

### I

**D**ESPITE its bleak exterior, the Convent of St. Joseph possessed a hospitable heart. It even dabbled in worldly affairs in a surprising manner, and under its roof sheltered more than select young ladies destined for the courts and *salons* of Europe.

Adjoining the convent proper were rooms frequented by ladies of fashion from time to time, personages who desired retreat, one fears not always from religious impulses, but too often from the pressure of public curiosity. Others, again, like Madame du Deffand, with her Monday night suppers, at which Hénault, Lord Bath, Bulkeley, and a host of others might be seen. Here, later, came Madame de Vassé, called by Charles Edward "La Grande Main," Madame de Talmond, and that same Mademoiselle Ferrand, most brilliant of all, whom Condillac revered above all women.

They came, held their brief, gay séances, and disappeared into eternity. Philosophers, conspirators, poets, diplomats, treading upon each other's heels on the quiet street of St. Dominique.

In a little room at the top of the convent, divided from the main building by a stairway, sat Monsieur Douglas. It was an odd little room, all corners and nooks, as though it had been forgotten in the plans and had been squeezed in at the last moment. A tiny window overhung with

creeper commanded the garden called by Condillac the "Garden of Moths."

A couch lay in front of the window, and on it Monsieur Douglas.

He was a man of a good height, inclined to stoutness for all his comparative youth and sinewy frame, and of a high colour. His face was an oval, and must have been vividly beautiful as a boy, with eyes of glowing brown and full red lips. His brow was high and broad, while above, in wild confusion, his curly chestnut hair was massed and all golden at the tips. He was lounging carelessly in a soiled dressing robe, which barely covered his nightgown. His expression, once bright and vivacious, was moody and somewhat sinister about the lips. The eyes, too, once so buoyant and confident, were screwed up behind the heavy lashes unblinking in a fixed, uncomprising stare. It was only when he rose that the easy grace of his carriage—the smooth, silent way he walked—showed how young he really was despite his sullen face. He moved like a deer on elastic feet, and as a captive deer wanders from one side of his cage to another so Monsieur Douglas walked aimlessly about his room, now staring vacantly out upon the garden, but usually looking upon the floor, his hands behind his back.

A King Charles spaniel lay curled up at his feet, and he stroked its silken coat from time to time, calling it pet names absently. Beside him was a violoncello, which he would play hour after hour until sometimes darkness fell, and still he played, his little dog whining at his knees. And always before he finished he would start, in a slow and melancholy manner, "Lochaber no More," and sometimes he would never finish, but would lay the instrument down, and brood in the deepening silence, his little dog upon his knees.

As Monsieur Douglas sat on the couch that morning, it was evident that he had breakfasted, for on the table lay the remains of food and a decanter of wine. Remnants, too, had fallen upon the cloth, an apple half eaten and some grapes.

On the wall hung a bookcase with half a dozen volumes, two upside down. On the floor beside him had fallen *Tom Jones*, which he had evidently been reading.

Suddenly he yawned wearily and peered out of the window. Then, rising, he stretched his arms, and going to the mirror above the mantelpiece stared for fully a minute at himself. With that a scowl began to brood upon his face, and an expression of utter ennui settled over it like a mask.

Had not another day dawned, no different from a hundred other weary, empty predecessors, bringing nothing, carrying away on its wings into the night only old and bitterer regrets? He had waited so long, too long. He knew when the sun would trace its course across the polished floor, when the clear voices below would follow the stroke of twelve in the convent clock, when the bats would begin to flitter past his window. Often he listened to those girlish voices. Sometimes he would smile at what they said, good-humouredly, his lips contracting again into a heavier melancholy.

He opened his window and drew in a breath of frosty air. Down in the garden all was very still. Then, drawing back, he shivered a little, for October was now nearly past, and his lifeless, uninterested eyes hovered around the room, noticing everything but heeding nothing. At last he rose and pulled the couch nearer to the fire.

Then leaning forward, his head sunk between his shoulder-blades, he spread his hands to the dull blaze,

sitting utterly motionless, hour after hour. So Monsieur Douglas might pass whole days, even weeks, until something within him clamoured out against it all—against the tiny room with its familiar furniture and dishes—against the window so absurdly, so cruelly small—but most of all against the silence of night, when all Paris was awake and stirring, and wine was flowing, red warm wine, gushing and tumbling into glistening glasses. A quiver would beat across his face at such a picture, seen so clearly in the firelight on a winter's night. His hands would tremble, the fingers contracting as though he would grasp something, and then unclasping as though he would let it go—if he could. Deeper grew the fire—more splendid and more gorgeous appeared the picture. Suddenly a drunken shout, a long, haunting, happy laugh might echo faintly from some reveller in the unseen streets, and Monsieur Douglas rising quickly would tear at the cupboard against the wall. At such moments he rarely spoke, but breathed rapidly, his eyes sparkling. Sometimes he would hesitate, the brandy flask in his hand, a cloud upon his countenance.

The wind would cry out in the night and sigh through his tragedy of silence, a great loneliness and emptiness would crash upon his brain, and then, seating himself, he would drink silently, morosely.

So, out of the chaos of his despair, a light would glimmer for a brief hour. In such moments he strode up and down the room, walking perfectly steadily, calling out strange words, uncouth foreign words, and wearing a flat bonnet upon his head. He would continue sometimes until the dawn, laughing to himself, and speaking affectionately to those who had long since left him in his isolation, toasting "a pair of black eyes" (but none other), and falling into a troubled sleep upon



the couch, where his little dog lay too, wearied out with trotting up and down at his master's heels.

So much for Monsieur Douglas.

On this October morning of which we speak he was unusually active, busied in mind if not in body.

He took up a curiously fashioned pipe, rammed tobacco into the bowl, and lit it, blowing a cloud of smoke into the air.

Then, throwing himself into a chair, he swept the dishes across the table with an impatient gesture, took up a quill and paper, and began to write. Varied emotions crossed and recrossed his countenance as the pen scraped over the page. He wrote with lips pursed up, a slow, tedious hand, gnawing the quill when a word failed him, spelling out the letters like a schoolboy.

"I am bitterly grieved," it ran; and at the word "grieved" he paused irresolutely. He spelt it "greeved," and stared at it solemnly. Then, rising, he stooped for the book upon the floor and hunted from page to page with a dirty hand. He stopped short when he came to "sore." "I am bitterly sore," he wrote, his face brightening for a moment, "that you will not trust me."

As he wrote, a dark flush crept into his cheeks. His hand began to move faster. He breathed quickly, muttering the words to himself.

At last, signing it with a flourish, he folded the paper and, taking up the decanter, splashed some wine into a horn mug, a yellow worthless thing he had kept for memory's sake.

Then, refilling his pipe, he lit it, and stalked about the room, three paces up, two across, and three back, his chin sunk upon his breast.

The little dog stirred and, dropping upon the floor from the couch, jumped about him, trying to reach his hand.

## II

Long after a soft knock came at the door. For an instant he paused in his stride, listening—then called "Come in," retreating a little so that the table lay before him.

The door opened quickly, and Mademoiselle Ferrand appeared, her hands laden with parcels.

"I thought you were never coming," grumbled Monsieur Douglas.

She shut the door and laid her packages upon the table.

"I was delayed," she said. "Here are the razors, the papers, and despatches new come from England. The mail was late. I waited."

Without a word he snatched up the correspondence and ripped it open. Hastily glancing through the letter in his hand, he cast it aside and tore at the next.

Suddenly his expression brightened. "Mademoiselle," he cried, "read that. They are awaiting me, you see." He stood looking over her shoulder pointing out the words. "See—there—no, lower down—'all is in readiness for the great undertaking in November. Madame de M. has arranged for your holiday on the coast till your house is ready for you.'"

Mademoiselle Ferrand wrinkled her brow. "Your holiday? your house?" she said.

"Substitute 'place of safety in England' for holiday, and 'London' for house, and see how it reads," he whispered excitedly.

She started violently.

"Oh, I am so glad!" she cried. "At last——"

"Please God, at last," he repeated solemnly.

For a few minutes neither spoke, then, as Monsieur Douglas caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror, he

laughed loudly. "This will never do, Mademoiselle," he cried in high good-humour. "I look like a vagabond. Sit down and tell me the news while I shave."

He took up the razors she had brought, tested their edges, and lathered himself, tearing a page out of his book.

"I like that book," he remarked, scraping away before the mirror. "It has made the time go less heavily. By the way, Mademoiselle, who is the dark girl who sometimes walks in the garden below—dark, and of a fine figure? She moves like a deer."

Mademoiselle Ferrand bit her lip. "Oh!" she said, with an assumption of gaiety. "There are so many of them, I fear you ask me too difficult a question. Is it agreed we meet to-morrow evening in my room?"

He nodded, scrutinizing her keenly.

"You have not answered my question," he said.

She made a gesture of impatience.

"How can I know one girl from another?" she replied. "You surely jest in pressing such a question."

He shrugged his shoulders none too pleasantly, and threw the razor with a clatter inside the drawer.

"I am your prisoner, Mademoiselle," he remarked in an ungracious voice. "I had no desire to offend you."

"Offend me?" she cried.

"It is not so difficult where your own sex are concerned."

She drew back, staring at him with puzzled eyes. It took her by surprise to see that he suspected her of jealousy. It was a notion which would convulse Condillac. But then again, perhaps, he would not laugh at all. Men were queer in some respects. Even Condillac baffled her sometimes.

Meanwhile he watched her curiously, awaiting her

reply. Should he suspect her of protecting Ethlenn Murdoch from him, he would strive with all his power to see her. The situation was one requiring careful handling. Her sense of humour drove laughter to her lips, and then her sense of pride rose uppermost.

"You forget you are my guest," she said, drawing herself up; "such words as 'prisoner' are ill-chosen. Had I not taken you in, you might have been in less comfortable surroundings even than this poor room."

"I shall not forget it," he replied, with a new tone of hauteur.

A sudden anger possessed her at his insolence.

"It is of no consequence to me," said she, "whether you remember it or no. Charity brings its own reward."

"Charity!" he repeated furiously, and turned his back on her. Nor did he move till he heard the bang of the door. Then the flush died from his cheeks.

"Mon Dieu—oh, mon Dieu," he whispered, "how my cursed head aches!"

He stumbled across to the door as though he would have called her back, then halted irresolutely, and finally sat down and stared upon the ground. The dreariness of his solitary vigil assailed him like a mist. It enveloped him, choked him, plunged his heavy mind into ever-deepening gloom. His inactivity poisoned his whole being, emphasizing trivial incidents until they grew to unpardonable insults—always insults, whether to his position or his rank—he would brood for days upon such an imaginary slight, drinking at such times in a sombre passion of resentment.

He had been treated like an underling by Mademoiselle—that was obvious. He was grateful to her, oh yes, he was grateful enough, but there were plenty of people who would have gone down on their knees to have sheltered

him at all. He recollected such people. At the very picture his eyes grew moist, and his lips twitched. And yet she must wrangle over a casual question, nothing more. It was not much to ask. A new feeling of righteous indignation surged over Monsieur Douglas. He would teach Mademoiselle Ferrand that he expected common courtesy. It was as though he had intentions on the girl. Probably she thought he had. There was nothing too bad for her to think of him. And so on, until he wore the look of a madman.

And all for the want of a gun, or a horse, or a rod and the running stream.

Suddenly he halted, listening intently. Surely some one called from the adjoining room. It must be Mademoiselle Ferrand returned to beg his pardon. He would be damned if he would grant it—at least not for a little. He stole across the room, and leant his head against the door.

"Mademoiselle Ferrand," called a clear voice, and then again, "Mademoiselle Ferrand."

And at that, with a hand that trembled until the handle shook faintly, Monsieur Douglas gently opened the door and slipped through.

In the next apartment—which was occupied by Mademoiselle Ferrand as a study—standing with her pale, mysterious face towards the light, was Ethlenn Murdoch. She started back when she saw him, then remained perfectly motionless, her dark, searching eyes upon his.

"A thousand pardons," he said, coming into the room, "it was not my wish to startle you. I thought Mademoiselle Ferrand was here."

"I came to seek her, too," Ethlenn replied.

"Then we are companions in distress."

"Perhaps I had better go and look for her, Monsieur."

"Useless, Mademoiselle, quite useless unless——" he paused, a new expression in his eyes, "unless she is in her garden. Let us look whether she is there. Come, Mademoiselle."

He spoke so pleasantly and bowed her into his room so naturally that Ethlenn had almost reached the tiny window before she drew back. What made her recoil she could not tell. Perhaps it was the wild confusion of the room, the empty flask upon the window-sill. More likely, she heard the hardly audible click of the door.

But when she turned she only met the smiling countenance of Monsieur Douglas.

"There is such a draught," he said, "and I have a touch of cold."

She was reassured to some extent.

"I hope it is not bad," she said, noting his moist eyes and heavy expression.

"There could be no cold in Mademoiselle's company," he replied.

"Oh," she said hurriedly, "can you see Mademoiselle in the garden?"

He drew near to her, and came so close that she caught a heavy odour of brandy and tobacco smoke, which turned her sick. But he hardly glanced without, watching her distress with devouring eyes.

His unblinking scrutiny terrified her. The suspicion that he was mad swept over her in a flood, paralysing her faculties.

Only when he commenced to stroke her hand did she fling away. She must gain time—time to think, time to act till help came.

"This is your room, Monsieur," she said, edging towards the door.

He nodded, following her leisurely.

" You play, Monsieur ? " she said, pointing towards the violoncello.

Again he nodded, this time smilingly, his eyes wandering from her face to her breast and back again.

" Will you not play something ? " she asked, seeking the handle of the door behind her back.

" Certainly," he replied, " but do you not sing ? "

" Yes, Monsieur," she said dully, for the door was locked. He seated himself on the couch, while she stood by the table helpless, desperate, yet as all the Murdochs ever were, absolutely calm.

" I will sing you a song of my country," said she, and from her parted lips, wistful, haunting words began to fall like drops of ice on to his heart.

His whole body had contracted, so that the cracking of his joints rang out at the first lines, and then his limbs hung loose again, and his head fell forward. Only his eyes from under his brows peered up at her, appealing, tragic, altogether pathetic. But she, who feared his violence, never knew of the agony he was enduring. She sang of Prince Charlie and the days of the '45, a simple ditty with an infinitely sad refrain. Tears stood in her eyes as she repeated the last words—of how brave the men would rise again at his coming. She had forgotten where she stood. Once again she saw the long solitary valley of Strathyre, with the sun setting upon Loch Lubnaig.

Sounds of hurried footsteps reached them from the other room. Voices called, but he did not heed them. At last he raised his face, and Ethlenn shrank back at the change. It had fallen deadly, horribly white. He staggered to his feet, and then flinging out his hands, and swinging about so that the merciless sun could fall on his disfigured countenance, he said in a voice so poignant that a cry burst from Ethlenn's lips :

*"I was Prince Charlie."*

The knocking grew furious at the locked door. He crossed the room with slow melancholy steps and flung it open. Into the room burst Mademoiselle Ferrand and Condillac.

"How dare you?" she cried.

Over her shoulder looked Condillac with an expression of granite.

The Prince answered nothing.

But Ethlenn, with a sob, knelt down and kissed his hands.

"Your Royal Highness," she whispered.

"Alas!" he said, raising her, "only a poor battered gentleman—but still a gentleman, thank God"—at which he met Mademoiselle Ferrand's eyes very squarely.



### CHAPTER III

CONDILLAC rose and took a book down from a shelf behind his chair. It was no uncommon occurrence. It was part and parcel of his life. A student of psychology would, from that simple action, have rested satisfied in his analysis of his character. More than that, however, his deductions would probably be quite correct. He rose laboriously, sighing in a shrill fashion, ruminating a little as he sought the page he wanted, stretching his arms like a man who has sat long and closely.

On his writing-table books and manuscripts were heaped like a barricade around the paper and pens. On the floor there was a cataract of books, eddying, falling, sometimes becoming congested, and rushing and flowing along again towards the doorway. There was little carpet to be seen in Condillac's study.

Bookshelves lined the walls to the ceiling. It was a sight to see him climb up the step-ladder for the Augustines on the top shelf. His groans and gasps were audible throughout the house.

The windows, diamond-paned, opened out upon a lawn, where he often used to walk, turning over in his mind the main sections of the chapter he was about to write. In summer the windows stood open day and night, for he worked late and rose early, and never suffered from the cold.

His library was a large, square room, low-ceilinged and with a great fire-place. Above the mantelpiece hung a solitary picture of the Madonna and Child, and above that again a large, beautifully carved ivory crucifix.

His room was a uniform brown, darkening into sombre black where the old oak carving stood out over the mantelpiece. It was redolent, sublimely scented with the fragrance of old bindings, a little musty perhaps to the unlettered, but to Condillac a rare and heavenly atmosphere charged with the microbes of seclusion and unfretted toil. Only one bright spot of colour in the prevailing russet tone this chill morning—one vivid splash of red like a flare of fire, and that a flower upon his desk.

Condillac often let his eyes rest upon that flower. From time to time he drew in its sweet scent lingeringly, his eyes half closed, then laying it down resumed his writing.

It was Mademoiselle Ferrand who had brought it, fresh plucked from her sweet garden, with a spot of vagrant fountain water still welled within its folds like a liquid eye. At last Condillac lay back and looked lazily around the room. There was nothing new there for him to regard, but it was in a manner always new to him. There was nothing to distract his eye. He could pursue his thoughts quite steadily, so steeped was his mind in the familiar aspect.

Mademoiselle Ferrand had once remarked that she detected a certain harmony in his library which was new to her. It was a favourite theory of hers that personality produced varying atmospheres in its favourite surroundings. Condillac smiled when he remembered she had compared the prevailing undertone of his study to the low moaning of a cathedral organ.

"And yours, Mademoiselle?" he had asked, humouring her whim.

"To a spinet," she had replied; "an old, sad-voiced spinet, with a note here and there a little faulty, and——" she had said no more.

He knew what was in her mind. He imagined her frail soul like that sweet, silver-clear music floating out on a summer's evening into the stillness of some starlit night.

"And Monsieur Douglas?" he had asked next, with a faint smile. She had hesitated at that.

"I do not know," she had replied after a little. "Perhaps a violin playing soft, melancholy music at a great distance and dying away like falling water. But then again—a mad, discordant joy, infinitely wild, yet infinitely pitiful.

"There is much in Monsieur Douglas," she had added, "which is akin to greatness." From that Condillac's thoughts dwelt for a little on Monsieur Douglas. He had long known him as Prince Charles Edward, that hero of romance who had captivated Paris after the '45 and had lost his head, his reputation, and his followers so swiftly and so recklessly. He knew that were it not for Mademoiselle Ferrand, this Monsieur Douglas would have been discovered and hounded out of Paris long since. In truth, the Convent of St. Joseph had kept its secret from all the sovereigns of Europe. It was not through Hanoverian spies that Charles was foiled at every step, but through the agency of those who used his trustful nature to their own dishonourable advantage.

For him Condillac had the affection of an older and deeply studious man for a high-spirited and reckless junior. He had little admiration for Charles. He re-

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garded him as mentally undeveloped, morally weak, but of a captivating, boyish disposition, easily influenced, frank and open-hearted if humoured, obstinate and dictatorial if opposed.

He pitied him too, and sometimes hinted that his compatriots and advisers were not as wise or as faithful as the exiled Prince believed. But at such words Charles was adamant. And then as a close student, and one who had never had an adventure in his life, Condillac, despite his sneers to Mademoiselle Ferrand, delighted in the hair-breadth adventures of Charles in the Highlands, gloried in his escapades over Europe, and having nothing but contempt for royalty wished him well in his future plans as an amused old gentleman wishes a boy good luck when he goes fishing.

He smiled, and taking up the flower looked tenderly at its delicate petals and peered inside to catch the glint of water shining like an opal in its heart.

A gentle knock came at the door.

Hastily placing the glass down Condillac looked up. It was Mademoiselle Ferrand herself.

"A thousand welcomes," he cried; "you have caught me idling. There is something in this autumn air which makes one pensive. All the morning I have wandered to and fro, watching the poor leaves whirling to the ground, and thinking how cold our friends the birds are. Has anything troubled you to-day, Mademoiselle? You are not worse in health?"

"No, no, old friend, my health will care for itself. It is the Prince and——"

"Ethlenn Murdoch?"

"Yes, Ethlenn Murdoch."

Condillac pursed his lips, and, pushing a chair forward, begged her to be seated.

"How did you suspect that she was there yesterday?" he asked.

"I did not—I saw her face at his window looking down upon the garden where we were sitting. I did not tell you for fear I was mistaken, and then you would have laughed at me."

"Laugh, Mademoiselle—after walking up three flights of stairs?"

"I would never have forgiven myself," she said, "had she come to any harm."

He made no reply for a moment, and then a slow smile parted his lips. "Poor young man," he murmured; "how do you know his intentions were not honourable?"

"The door was locked."

Condillac raised his eyebrows.

"So," he said, "I was too breathless to notice. How dramatic, Mademoiselle! And you, a tempest of indignation, burst it down, and confronted the culprits. But he is a wonder, our Monsieur Douglas. I would have been at—at a loss, shall we say, but I verily believe he appreciated the position. It called for resource, nerve—a niceness of intuition. There is a vast amount of stagecraft in our Monsieur Douglas."

"Be serious, I implore you. What is to be done now? He leaves for England to-morrow accompanied by Madame de Mézières, who has already promised Ethelenn that she will act as her escort. Prevent her departure we must, or else she will become entangled in Jacobite plots and intrigues to her own ruin. Besides, what of the Prince?"

"He will not harm her."

"You speak with conviction."

"I caught the expression in his eyes yesterday. Believe me, you need not fear the Prince."

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"It is but to fall out of one danger into another. The girl is romantic to her very soul. She is also passionate, determined, even reckless. If she sets her hand to the plough she will never draw back."

Condillac took to pacing the room. He watched the sparrows disputing a piece of bread upon the lawn—then said over his shoulder:

"Where is the plough?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, there is no cause to fight, no plots to hatch, no men to cry 'God speed you' to the Prince. Even I, who care not a crumb who sits upon the throne of England, know that whatever happens, that poor young man will never wear a crown."

"I wish you could convince her so."

"I see no difficulty. Surely reason will weigh with her. She is of the new generation, we of the old, the dying feudal race."

Mademoiselle Ferrand smiled.

"She is a woman," she replied.

He shook his head from side to side.

"Besides," she said, "there is a scheme——"

"There are always schemes. You—I—those sparrows can form schemes, conspiracies, intrigues. All we need is to meet where no one is likely to see us (and if they did, it would not really matter), and whisper that if such should occur, and such take place, all will be well."

"Listen," she broke in, "at this very hour two men are riding post-haste for Paris. One, Doctor Archibald Cameron, is new come from Prussia from interviewing Frederick. The other, Lochgarry, has news of the clans. London awaits the Prince, and there is a plot to capture King George in St. James's Palace——"

Condillac's face fell grave.

"Who informed you of all this?" he asked.

"The Prince himself—I saw the letters from London. To-night we shall hear whether Cameron has succeeded. If Prussia moves, then you cannot say this is all empty talk."

"Prussia will not move," he said.

"There is London."

"I have yet to learn that the English are a romantic and imaginative people. Believe me, in George they see one of themselves. He is stout, red-faced, drinks in a heavy fashion, and lacks all sense of humour."

"But the Prince——"

"Is handsome, therefore untrustworthy, a Stuart, therefore a Catholic, and a believer in the divine right of kings, therefore a tyrant. But most of all a Romanist. As they profess nothing themselves, they have strong convictions and a desire to celebrate them with beer and a shouting of 'No Popery' and processions, above all processions."

"You have hard words for the English, what then of the clans?"

"Since they were driven out like sheep for 'Tearlach,' as I have heard him called, is it likely that they will not stay at home now that their drovers are powerless?"

Mademoiselle Ferrand studied his face absently.

"You leave one factor out of consideration," she said.

"And that?"

"Blind unreasoning loyalty. It is not argument that conquers nations, nor reason that discovers continents, but courage and a blazing hope."

He regarded her with deep, expressionless eyes.

"Perhaps you are right," he said. "I am but a

theorist, as you know too well. Wait till we have seen your Cameron and your other hero, and believe me, dear lady, even you with your generous notions will perceive that a serpent lurks behind the flower."

"There is little serpent in the poor doctor," answered she; but he shook his head, smiling at her with satirical eyes.

"I hear a step on the stairs," said Mademoiselle Ferrand.

"I will see who comes," he replied, and moved heavily across the room. The footsteps grew clearly audible. He opened the door, and for a moment said nothing. Then quite quietly he remarked: "Come in, Mademoiselle," and bowed Ethlenn Murdoch into the room.

"What brings you here?" asked Mademoiselle Ferrand.

The girl started, and looked from Condillac to her in perplexity.

"It was Monsicur who asked me to come."

"Of course," said Condillac coolly.

It was now nearing sunset. The brief afternoon was drawing into twilight. The room was falling into shadow, and he hunted for a candle.

Ethlenn Murdoch had not spoken again. And Mademoiselle Ferrand sat looking into the fire.

Condillac lit the candles, and the light fell upon the girl's unturned face. He regarded her sombrely until she met his eyes, when he turned his head a little and pursed his lips. It was easy enough to speak reason to Mademoiselle Ferrand, but here was a living, breathing creature, filled to the lips with stormy passions and old feuds and hatreds. Often he had remarked to his fair companion in study, "the world is mad, only we are sane," but he knew it was empty comfort now. In brief,



he felt like a man suddenly asked to steer a vessel through tumultuous seas, to whom the tiller was a thing unknown. In the little harbour of his life no strange, storm-haunted vessels ever called. Only the little craft of ordinary life plied to and fro.

"Mademoiselle and I have been speaking together about your departure for Scotland," he said, speaking slowly. "We feel that it might be wise if you postponed your date of travel. We hear the roads are unusually heavy for this time of year, and there is a noted band of footpads." He laid considerable stress on the last words.

"Oh! Monsieur!" she cried, breathless.

"Do not be frightened—we can send an escort with you, but later, Mademoiselle, later. When the frost comes and a moon."

She checked her lips, trembling with unuttered laughter.

"Is this why you sent for me, Monsieur?" she asked.

Condillac shifted one leg and then the other. He had a strong aversion to point-blank questions.

"In a manner of speaking—yes," he replied.

"Then there are more than footpads?"

"Perhaps, but what we advise we think you will obey, Mademoiselle. We are older than you, certainly more experienced in the ways of the world. We have a duty towards you as your friends and well-wishers."

His tone was pained and admonishing, also the merest shade anxious.

For a minute Ethlenn Murdoch sat in silence; then in a low, clear voice she said:

"Has this anything to do with the Prince?"

Condillac rose in a flutter.

"Why should it?" he cried, towering over her. "Who even mentioned the Prince? Does he intend a journey north?"

"To-morrow, Monsieur. What better escort could I have against footpads?"

"Impossible," flouted Condillac, "ridiculous—" and then again "impossible."

"Mademoiselle de Mézières is accompanying us."

"Us, Mademoiselle—us, so it is all arranged, is it? What think you of that?" and he swung round upon the other. "Do you approve of such arrangements?"

"I do not," said Mademoiselle Ferrand very firmly. "It is not possible."

Ethlenn had ceased to smile. The faintest colour crept into her cheeks. Her little white teeth clicked once, and her eyes began to gleam like a cat's at nightfall.

"You say you are my friends," she said, still calm. "Tell me what is in your minds."

Condillac coughed and blew out his checks. He snuffed one candle very leisurely, and paused. He then snuffed the other.

"In our minds," he repeated, adopting an airy tone, "why, what do you think, Mademoiselle? Supposing you place yourself in our position. Imagine a charming and romantic young woman who has concluded her education in a convent, and is about to leave to join her father. Would you despatch her, for preference, with a certain lady suspected of grave political intrigues, and not very sane, accompanied by a young gentleman of royal blood, but of a reckless disposition and likely to endanger the lives and happiness of all who are in his company? That, briefly, is the situation, Mademoiselle. I flatter myself I

do not strive to put too bad a complexion on the business, nor to tarnish the reputation of either personages referred to——”

He blew out his cheeks, and looked down his nose at her.

“I am grateful to you both,” Ethlenn replied, “but did you know me better, you would not utter such words, which might fit the case of an English young lady, but hardly that of a Murdoch. I am not looking forward to a quiet, studious life such as you and Mademoiselle lead, nor to a position, nor, who knows, to happiness. My future was pledged long since, before even you, Monsieur, or you, Mademoiselle, saw me, before I left Scotland and breathed the air of Paris all these solitary years.”

“What can you mean by such talk?” broke out Condillac, baffled and perplexed.

“You would not understand, Monsieur,” she replied simply. “How should you? All these years I have pined for the mountains, and the fir trees, and the sun rising upon Strathyre. And then, behind all that, has been an ache and a memory, and again and again I have dreamed that a great day has come. Sometimes I have awakened in the middle, Monsieur, and when I have seen the moonlight over Paris I have nearly cried—but that would be foolish, would it not?”

“Foolish,” repeated Mademoiselle Ferrand, “have you never cried, Ethlenn?”

“My father would have thrashed me had I,” she replied; “only my mother ever cried in Murdoch Castle.”

“Some day, Ethlenn, you will speak more kindly of your mother.”

“Come now,” said Condillac, “let us not waste further

time. What great day is it you speak of?" and he turned his large expressionless eyes upon the girl.

"The day that welcomes the Stuarts," she said, with a glow in her cheeks.

Condillac, who had foreseen her reply, plunged like a war-horse into the fray. Had he not already convinced Mademoiselle Ferrand that the Stuart cause was dead and done with?

"My dear young lady," he said smoothly, "please listen to me. It is now six years since you left the Highlands. Six years is a long time in the span of human affairs. Fashions grow obsolete, habits alter, modes of thought change, even flaming causes burn out. In six years a monarchy may be forgotten, a nation may cease to exist, even a religion may be discredited."

It was all delivered in his best manner. He gleaned the admiration from Mademoiselle Ferrand's eyes, and rubbing his hands gently together, one palm upon the other, continued:

"You may say the cause will never die while the Prince lives, but, believe me, absence will cool the warmest ardour. Besides, there is no denying the change in the Prince himself. He is not the charming adventurer of the year 'forty-five. He is older, somewhat cynical, and his habits——"

"You mean he drinks too much?"

Condillac shook his head.

"I fear so," he replied.

"Is that all," she asked, "that you wished to say?"

"My dear Mademoiselle," he cried, out of patience, "there is much I could say; but are you not ready to be guided by your friends? We have no reason to persuade except your own advantage."

And then the girl blazed up so suddenly that they

both started back. It was as though a volcano had flung up its crimson flames from a snow-capped peak, and poured its molten lava down the frozen hill-side.

"What is it you want?" she cried. "Why do you bring me here to listen to such talk? You, Mademoiselle—you, Monsieur? Answer me. What are you to me or I to you?"

"My dear——" began Mademoiselle Ferrand, but was cut short.

"I thought you were my friends, and here I find you advising me to turn coward. You profess friendship for the Prince so that you can malign him. You speak of the cause. In God's name, Madame, what do you know of the cause, or you, Monsieur?"

They both gaped at her in silence.

"What you call a cause is a petty squabble in a barbaric country. I doubt not you think my fellow-countrymen very funny. Or else you think them mad. Very good: it is mad I am as well, and all my people."

She hurled out the last words in a hoarse undertone, and stood with a wildly tossing bosom before them.

Condillac glanced at her from the shadow. He struggled to regain neutral ground.

"A fine spirit," he said, like a man politely interested. "It is a pity that our friend, Monsieur Douglas, is not deserving of so ardent a supporter."

She laughed bitterly at his words.

"Is it in comparison with the Elector that he falls so short?" she asked. "Are there no other gentlemen who drink too heavily? It is not a Puritan we wish for King. Drink, Monsieur, of course he drinks—who in Scotland does not? Is that all?"

"No!" stormed Condillac petulantly, "it is not all. He is not a moral man. There is a woman——"

"Clementina Walkingshaw, you mean—but he is faithful to her, too faithful some say. Is there anyone else? You, Mademoiselle Ferrand, who have his confidence—tell us, is he a man who has no honour?"

"No," she replied, "it is because he is not sunk low enough for his enemies that they make much of such matters."

"Oh, la la," cried Condillac reproachfully, "you both make me think I must be going mad. To hear a young girl express such sentiments is horrible. What sort of country can nourish such wild thoughts?"

"A country barren of shelter, Monsieur, except amongst the storm-swept crags, a land where the eagle roams in the heavens and the stag upon the braes—a desolate, hard land, Monsieur, for man and beast, where the sun is seldom seen, and the mist falls like a shroud."

"Mon Dieu! And you leave Paris for that?"

"I leave Paris to-morrow—no! there is no use in speaking further—my mind is made up. I have sat here long enough, and I am prepared for whatever may befall."

For a moment she was silent, while Condillac listened like a man enchanted.

"I do not think that I am only a romantic girl," she went on, "I have long secluded from the world in this Convent St. Joseph; but you must remember that my father and I fled by night through the heather to get here—and as we left we saw our barns sending great tongues of flame to the skies. In the courtyard of our home I had caught my brother James in my arms, mortally shot by the English as he returned from Culloden. He was only twenty. I can still feel the blood gushing like tepid red water over my hands."

She held them out to them as though the stains were yet upon them. "My mother died before I could remember her. She was not happy in Strathyre.

"Poor child," whispered Mademoiselle Ferrand.

Ethlenn knelt beside her and took her hand.

"I know you wish me well," she said. "My life has not been as yours, perhaps it will never be. It is said we Murdochs have not long to avenge our wrongs. It will be a bitter day when it comes." The vindictive tone in which she uttered the last words sent a chill to Condillac's heart. Such an expression of savage resentment reverberated through his passive, cultured mind like a gunshot.

"You are young and excitable, Ethlenn," said Mademoiselle Ferrand soothingly. "You do not know what you say. I am sure your father would have the good sense not to support the Prince. See what misery he brought upon you before—is he not criminal to contemplate it again?"

"It is the crown of his fathers," she replied.

"Certainly! but is he better than his fathers? They lost their throne through pure incapacity. Surely your people did not admire his father?"

"I do not know," she answered. "I do not think they thought about him as a man."

Condillac rose stiffly to his feet.

"There is nothing more to be said," he murmured, and then again more heavily, "There is nothing more to be said. We are the children of circumstance, playing a game we can never understand. May your dreams bring you peace, Mademoiselle—in the end."

He turned and sighed, his hands behind his back.

"We meet to-night," said Mademoiselle Ferrand, "in my room. And to-morrow——"

## THE SOUTH

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"To-morrow," replied Ethlenn, "it is farewell."

She bowed her head to them both, moved into the outer darkness of the room, and was gone.

"How soon," said Condillac very sadly. "Will it be before twilight darkens into night?"



## CHAPTER IV

CONDILLAC sighed and laid down his pen. Outside, from the heart of Paris, a clock tolled ten vibrating melancholy notes. And then the wind rose again and rain lashed against the windows.

He shivered, and pushed back his chair. For a moment his eyes rested fondly upon the materials lying scattered on his desk, and then fumbling with the lamp he turned it out and stumbled to the door.

Down the stairs he went, and wrapping his cloak about him he opened the door. A great gust of air rushed into the house. From far away a door banged and a dismal wailing ascended into the upper gloom. Planting his hat firmly on his head, Condillac struggled up the street.

At the corner he charged into two men standing in the shadow.

One, a small, squarely-built fellow, started back with an exclamation.

"Scotch," said Condillac to himself grimly, and made up the street.

He reached the Convent of St. Joseph, and rapped loudly at the door.

Mademoiselle Ferrand was writing when he found her.

Hers was a great, high-ceilinged room, heavily carpeted and curtained. A book-case occupied the entire side nearest the door, and a writing-bureau stood before the window. It was not littered with papers, like Condillac's,

but covered with manuscripts neatly tied in bundles with ribbons red, black, and yellow.

He shut the door and crossed the room, standing beside her while she scattered sand upon the wet paper.

"Well," she said, "ripe for conspiracy?"

"I ran into two night-birds round the corner," he replied, rubbing his cold hands. "I'll swear they were Scotch—a man like a tower and another like a wine barrel."

"Lochgarry and Cameron," she said, laughing.

"I admire your knowledge of such scamps," he replied; "and who are these gentlemen?"

"My dear Abbé—their pedigrees are interminable, but both are my very good friends. The little one, Archibald Cameron, is brother to Lochiel and doctor, turned ardent Jacobite—the other is a large, moody personage of considerable influence in the F'ighlands. You will have the pleasure of becoming acquainted with them very shortly."

"I—not here, Mademoiselle?"

"Where better? Oh, my friend, you will see life to-night. My only fear is that you may go marching off to the wars and leave me to finish the book."

Condillac rose from warming his hands.

"Enough, Mademoiselle," he said, "let us be serious while we are alone. What does all this mean? Why are these men coming here to-night? Is it true that the Prince has something definite at last——?"

"I know no more than I have told you already. Everything will be settled here. That poor child Ethlenn has arranged with Madame de Mézières to accompany him to-morrow, as you know."

He shook his head sadly.

"Alas!" he said, "and yet——"

"You think it may turn out well?"

"Impossible—but it is sometimes better to bend one's head to the storm than fight against it."

He began to walk up and down the room. Suddenly he halted.

"Do you know what her young companions in the convent call her?" he asked.

Mademoiselle Ferrand shook her head.

"Ethlenn Mirthless—because she never laughs."

"I cannot imagine ordinary things amusing her," she said, "but I would like to hear her laugh. She has a beautiful mouth."

"Some day," said Condillac, "she will laugh. God forbid I should hear. It will not be a pretty sound."

"Hush!" whispered Mademoiselle Ferrand. "I caught the sound of footsteps."

A knock rang upon the door.

"Come in," she called, poking the fire.

A very tall, ruddy-faced man entered, his hat in his hand. Behind him came a shorter man with quick keen eyes and an expression of great good-will.

"Welcome, Mr. Macdonald," cried Mademoiselle Ferrand, "and you too, Dr. Cameron. Come to the fire. Let me introduce you to my old friend, Monsieur Condillac. He is strongly in sympathy with the business of to-night."

Both gentlemen bowed to Condillac. The face of Macdonald of Lochgarry was full and heavy, the face of a roysterous, brave-hearted gentleman, easily irritated and very ready to take offence as all his countrymen have ever been. No subtlety ever gleamed in his keen blue eyes. Hot anger sometimes, deep melancholy often, eyes seldom still and ever on the watch like the eagles of his native hills. A great man in stature, clumsy and heavy-footed, but with a heart of gold, open-handed, yet not foolishly

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so, good-tempered, yet very ready with his sword-arm. His companion, Archibald Cameron, brother to the "gentle Lochiel," was a curious intermingling of reckless abandon and innate cautiousness, while behind it all there dwelt like a citadel his indomitable faith, and with it his unreasoning, unquestioning loyalty to the House of Stuart. No man could crack a joke, or mend a leg, or face danger with smiling lips, like the doctor. In one coat-pocket he carried a copy of the Scriptures, and in the other a brandy flask, and so was guarded from all attacks upon the spirit or the flesh—at least for a time. He was of sturdy build, very broad between the shoulder-blades, and somewhat short in the leg. His customary expression was that of imperturbable good-humour, and when he laughed (which was not infrequent) he had a manner of throwing back his head and closing his eyes wonderfully conducive to mirth. For which he was greatly in demand, and his fund of anecdote was inexhaustible. He also sang songs, but the ones he chose for preference were haunting melodies, which sent the tears coursing down his cheeks, and brought a lump to many an exile's throat.

Both Scots were dressed in riding clothes drenched through, with top boots caked with mud. Lochgarry wore his hair long, a strong, ruddy thatch flaming above his choleric countenance. Cameron, the sprucer of the two, had a great bag-wig upon his head and, when he opened his cloak, displayed a handsome embroidered waist-coat worked in flowers. Both men were in the prime of life, weather-beaten and inured to all manner of hardship.

Condillac looked from one to the other with interested, meditative gaze. He felt as though a fresh breeze from an open heath had entered the room and was beating upon his face. The very atmosphere of the

room seemed suddenly charged with the breath of great adventure.

"Well, Mademoiselle," cried Cameron, in a voice Condillac recognized as that of the man at the street corner, "there'll be great doings before we meet again."

"You deserve success, Doctor," she said. "I often envy your high heart."

"Tuts," he replied, laughing, "there's puir comfort in a long face."

"Have you ever seen the Doctor low-spirited, Mr. Macdonald?" she asked, turning to the other.

He started like a man far down the road of other thoughts.

"Never," he said in a deep voice, "except when things were going well."

"I was always taugt," broke in Cameron, "that Providence is sorely tempted when anyone is growing over-satisfied."

"It is a pleasant doctrine," remarked Condillac. "I will await my judgment with what courage I can muster."

"The Prince is late," murmured Mademoiselle Ferrand; "it will be long after midnight ere all is arranged."

Even as she spoke the door opened quickly and Ethlenn Murdoch accompanied by Charles entered the room.

He closed the door and welcomed the two Highlanders with a bright smile, took both Mademoiselle Ferrand's hands in his, and nodded pleasantly to Condillac. It was obvious he was in high good-humour.

"We were out," he said, "calling upon Madame de Mézières. We take coach to-morrow, you know."

"Was your Royal Highness not disguised?" asked Cameron gravely.

"No, my cautious Doctor. I was simply Monsieur Douglas taking his last airing in Paris."

Ethlenn had stolen to Mademoiselle Ferrand.

"It is all arranged," she whispered; "and Madame de Mézières knew my mother and is so kind. She says she will arrange for my journey north from London. So where are your forebodings now, Mademoiselle?"

"I believe they are quite gone, my dear. I hope the Prince was not seen."

Ethlenn bent a little nearer.

"We encountered a man as we entered the lodgings of Madame de Mézières," she said, "a tall, slender man, but his face was hidden by his hat."

"Well?"

"When Madame de Mézières was discussing our departure I saw the handle of the door turn ever so slightly as though some one were trying to push it open a little to hear the better."

"And you?"

"I went softly across the room and tugged it thus. It came readily enough, but the passage was in darkness and I saw no one."

"Perhaps you were deceived, Ethlenn."

"No, Mademoiselle, there was some one beside me in the darkness quite close to me. I could have touched him had I wished——"

"Did you not give the alarm?"

She shook her head, saying nothing.

"Surely, for the Prince's sake, you should have crushed your own fears——"

"Fears, Mademoiselle——" she flung out the word contemptuously. "I have no fears. But I do not need eyes to know a Highlander in the darkness."

Mademoiselle Ferrand started.

"What do you mean?" she asked, now thoroughly perturbed.

"He had a tang of the hills," she answered slowly, "like the faintness of heather bells swallowed up in a cloud of peat. His clothes were no French clothes, but strong cloth from Lochaber way, smoking with moisture."

"Did you speak?" whispered the other, in a daze at the girl.

"I said, 'Were you not better in the glens than playing Judas?' and I heard his footsteps go into the night."

"And then, Ethlenn?"

"I re-lit the lamp in the passage."

"Had he heard aught of importance?"

"I fear perhaps he may, but to be forewarned makes one prepared for emergencies."

"Come—come, you two," cried the Prince, approaching them at that moment, "here have we been discussing the business ahead while you ladies are gossiping. What is it about—the latest confections of Grappè or the price of lace kerchiefs?"

"Neither, sir," replied Mademoiselle Ferrand. "Ethlenn was telling me all about your departure to-morrow."

"I only hope she will not be nervous. Madame de Mézières and I are old campaigners, you know."

He turned and beckoned to the two Highlanders, who were conferring in low tones near the window.

"Come, gentlemen," he called, "let us run over our plans. We are all good friends here, and we need not exercise caution."

At that Lochgarry whispered in Charles's ear. He appeared anxious and disturbed.

"Nonsense, man," returned the Prince, with a loud burst of laughter. "Miss Murdoch, let me present Lochgarry to you. Well you know his name and that of Dr.

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Cameron. Gentlemen, this is a Murdoch—can you doubt her discretion?"

Without a word they bowed, but said nothing, at which Charles frowned angrily and began speaking quickly about the English schemes, and the departure of Cameron and Lochgarry for the north.

"Time flies," he said, "and ere long all of us will be far from here. Tell me first, Cameron, what news do you bring from Prussia?"

"Frederick promises fifteen thousand men if all goes well."

"Excellent—you have done finely indeed. It takes more than idle rumour to move Frederick thus far." He looked from one to another with sparkling eyes. His pathetic faith in his destiny, so tragic, so terrible, was burning bright that night.

Lochgarry gave the faintest shrug of his shoulders. This the Prince, with the keen faculty of observance of the minutiae of life so common in people of superficial intellect, noted with a narrowing of the eyes, betraying no resentment at the moment.

"Would I had approached him long since instead of Louis," he went on. "Now that Murray has joined us and the scheme for taking the Elector is only awaiting my presence in England—the sooner the blow is struck the better. I wish you, Cameron and Lochgarry, to hasten north and prepare the clans. When I have won London, hold Scotland and the north, and send me forces in case Frederick should tarry."

"And the English," blurted out Lochgarry, his ruddy face impenetrable as granite.

Charles bit his lip. He had suspected trouble from Lochgarry. But such dry, inconsequent foreboding irritated him beyond endurance.



"Why in God's name should they fail?" he snapped.

"It is the nature of the fox to run to earth," retorted the Macdonald bluntly. It is hard to be civil after twelve hours in the saddle and hugging an empty stomach.

The Prince flushed crimson as though he had been struck on the mouth.

And then in a passion he flung out a monstrous insult.

"They beat you at Culloden," he said, "why should you speak so poorly of them now?"

The words fell like dull, merciless knocks of a hammer. They dropped into an absolute silence as stones into an abyss. Even as Charles ended the last syllable he started forward as though he would have snatched at the lingering echoes of his voice.

Only Condillac moved. Dimly understanding the savage cruelty and ingratitude of such a taunt—he made an involuntary movement of protection, of supplication, even of apology, like a man who would avert a disaster.

Then, meeting the calm eyes of Cameron, he let his hands drop to his sides.

Lochgarry said nothing at all. He raised his head so that it towered above that of Charles, and his mouth had grown grim and bitter, but no sound broke the oppressive silence, the very emptiness seemed thronged with unspoken words.

Ethlenn Murdoch had cowered back against Made-moiselle Ferrand. She sat intensely alert like a person blinded by lightning awaiting the sullen crash of thunder.

Then out of a great distance came the voice of Charles.

"Oh, *mon Dieu*," he was saying, "what have I said—what have I said?"

Lochgarry lowered his eyes. They rested mournfully on the Prince a moment.

"Your Royal Highness must forgive a man who holds the honour of his country dear," he remarked quietly.

The chevalier became for an instant the Prince Charlie of long ago.

"My loyal friend," he murmured, taking the other's hand, "forget what I said. Some devil prompts me to utter things which stab me more sharply than even those against whom they are aimed. Why is it we are the sport of circumstances? When has a Stuart ever been himself?"

Lochgarry moistened his lips.

"The hour is late, sir," he said, "and time presses."

The Prince conquered his emotion and regarded him with attention, nodding to him to continue.

"I carry painful tidings," he went on. "As the spokesman of the English party I am in a peculiar and unenviable position. You will remember that, I hope."

The Prince nodded again, his expression melancholy and heavy.

Lochgarry threw back his massive shoulders.

"Your Royal Highness will admit," he said, "that even brave men will not run their necks into unnecessary perils if they can avoid them, or into dangers from which there is no actual good to be procured."

Again Charles nodded, but this time as though he more than questioned the statement.

Lochgarry hesitated and glanced under his brows at Ethlenn and Mademoiselle Ferrand. Then stepping close to Charles, he made as though to whisper in his ear.

But hardly a word had passed his lips before the Prince started away, pushing him back.

"I tell you we are all friends here," he cried harshly. "Speak on, man—let us know the worst."

"It has come to their ears that a certain lady has

returned to your Royal Highness and is even now at Ghent. You will know best whether in the intricate state of your affairs that is either safe or politic."

The Prince suppressed his surprise and annoyance with an effort.

"You mean Miss Walkingshaw?" he asked in a vibrating voice.

"I do."

With a bitter laugh Charles replied:

"Am I to be guided even in my private life by questions of safety and politics? Is it my safety they consider? I'll warrant they'd treat that lightly enough."

"You may not understand, sir, that this lady's sister is in the service of the Dowager Princess in London."

For a moment there was a dreadful silence, then the torrent of the Prince's rage burst forth.

"Oh," he cried in a high, strangled voice, "this is too much! Not only my honour, but the honour of a lady dear to me is to be mouthed and smirched by every scheming, lying busybody. They treat me as a tool, as an indispensable pawn in the game, and are horrified when I live my own life. Loyalty or love for me they have none, but only greed of power and money and an infinite care for their own miserable necks."

He crossed the room once or twice with his head in the air, swearing under his breath all the while, and then returning, strove again to speak with calmness.

"Tell them," said he, "that I would not surrender my dog for such impudent meddlers, and as for deserting an unfortunate and misunderstood lady, I would sooner see a dozen thrones flung bodily into the depths of hell."

Lochgarry glanced at Cameron and shrugged his shoulders. It was the old story. When the Prince

thought he was in the right, all the reason in the world would not move him.

A sort of despair settled on the faces of them all. Even Ethlenn began dimly to understand how great an enemy a man can be to his own interest. The old days of the '45 had seen signs of an obstinate temper, but now there was a new note, querulous and pessimistic, which was absent then. He sulked in the '45, but his natural gaiety made him beloved, and misfortune only showed his incomparable powers of endurance and his unfailing spirit.

Now experience had taught him his particular lesson, which was to suspect the motives of even his nearest associates, and to see in the words of his supporters some private consideration rather than what was best for his cause.

But even as they waited in silence, the Prince spoke again in a voice deeply tremulous, addressing Lochgarry. "My heart is broken enough without that you should finish it. God forgive these people. I would not do the least harm to my greatest enemy—had I the power—much less to any who profess to be my friends."

He spoke so sadly, and yet with such determination, that they knew no words of theirs could move him, and that in his own heart he realized how little he could command esteem.

To Ethlenn, the scene before her was sad enough. Accustomed as she was to the violent temper of her Highland relatives, such an outburst did not distress her as it did Mademoiselle Ferrand. But romance had given way to pity as compelling in its way, that and a new desire to win back for this unfortunate Prince some share of the position and happiness for which his followers struggled, and which were in her eyes his divine right. The fairy

prince of her dreams had been succeeded by a prince of tragedy with something heroic still. But to Condillac and Mademoiselle Ferrand the conflict of words and the sordid character of the discussion came as a sickening revelation of the miserable plots and counter-plots upon which the Jacobite cause was nourished.

A great feeling of weariness and oppression fell like a gloom over Condillac. He had come to touch fingers with romance—and had encountered a brawl about a loose woman. He knew instinctively that Mademoiselle Ferrand was suffering as he was, and then with a dull foreboding he glanced at Ethlenn. She was sitting to his left, perfectly motionless, her face set like stone, her eyes upon the Prince.

She was apparently unmoved.

Condillac suddenly realized that he stood in a world he did not know—that philosophy did not rule the lives of ordinary men, but strong passions for good or ill, swaying individuals and nations as storms rock vessels on the sea. And finally he sighed, realizing how utterly futile were the brief tempests of a man's life.

At that moment Mademoiselle Ferrand rose and drew back the curtains, unclasping the shutters. A frail shaft of morning light fell upon their haggard faces. Gradually the room took on the greyness of the dawn.

She flung up the window, why, she did not know, and a cool morning breeze fluttered the curtains.

Outside, the rumbling of a market cart grew into a harsh thunder like artillery on the march, and died slowly away.

The Prince walked slowly to the window and raised his tired eyes to the sky.

"Gentlemen," said he, turning a little, with a hand still holding the curtains, "here comes another day, and

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one on which, if I mistake not, fortune will bid us take the road to victory. When I recall your service, your loyalty, your forbearance, above all the last, it makes me wish I had been a wiser and more worthy leader." He hesitated, his face working with emotion.

Cameron, who had pulled on his cloak, came forward with Lochgarry at his elbow.

"Sir," he said in a clear voice, "we are only two rough Highlanders and no fit for courts, but till ye come to your ain our swords will ay be at your service."

A sudden glad smile transformed the Prince's face.

"God reward you," he said simply, "for such words," and then accompanying them to the door he gave them a last injunction to have the clans in readiness and bade them farewell.

Re-entering the room, he approached Mademoiselle Ferrand. "How can I ever thank you," he said, "for all you have done for one unworthy of such solicitude! Never shall I forget you or cease to bless you, most true-hearted of women. When we meet again, who knows, I may be able to reward you after my most fervent wishes."

He kissed her hands passionately and smiled up into her face.

"God keep you," she whispered; "and if not this time, do not lose——" she hesitated.

"What, Mademoiselle?"

"Courage. There is nothing in life can harm us should we cling fast to that."

For a moment they looked searchingly into each other's eyes, and then, somewhat abruptly, Charles approached Ethlenn.

"Miss Murdoch," he said, "I fear things have been said to-night which must have hurt you."

"I have often begged of you to curb your anger," broke in Mademoiselle Ferrand softly.

"I know, I know," he cried bitterly, "it is the curse of my race, and sometimes I see myself deserted and alone, Mademoiselle, and cating out my heart and going down into black darkness. You would never go with the rest, would you? Heaven knows, they are going fast enough."

"No," she replied, her eyes full of tears. "You would always find me here—were I alive."

"Thank you," he said, "and now good-bye. Come, Miss Murdoch—Madame de Mézières will be awaiting us."

He bowed again to Mademoiselle Ferrand and shook hands with Condillac. Ethlenn fell on her knees beside Mademoiselle Ferrand's couch, gazing into her face with her great haunting eyes.

"What is it, Ethlenn?" she asked. "What is in your mind?"

But the girl kissed her again and again for answer, and looked for a moment into her face. To Condillac she bowed hurriedly and was gone.

The door closed again.

Condillac moved slowly to the window and breathed in the morning air laden with the breath of autumn frost.

"A queer business," he said, "for such as you and I, Mademoiselle. I shrank from it all, and yet I seemed to be treading new ground."

"In what way, old friend?"

"I had come to see men playing at dreams upon a living stage. I find, Mademoiselle, that it is we who are playing in the shadows—not they. For them life is a harsh, stern struggle, with a gibbet or an axe to sleep upon. For us solitude and the conclusions of some one

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as out of touch with reality as ourselves. I have a mind to walk to Rome and live in country inns and go to fairs and talk with vagabonds."

Mademoiselle Ferrand smiled sadly.

"Romance," she said, "is a quality sadly misunderstood. These good fellows, Cameron and Lochgarry, are not romantic, but their strange turgid lives make them appear so. As you have said, an axe is a crude piece of reality. But there was one dreamer in this room—Ethlenn Murdoch. The world has no place for such as she. When her day of trouble comes, as come it will, and that ere long, you will go to her, will you not? Promise me that——"

"But you—Mademoiselle?"

"Never mind me—you will go, old friend?"

He came and took her hand in his clumsy palm.

"I will do what I can," he said gravely.

Then seeing her eyes were closed, he trod on tip-toe to the door and so down the stairs.

The cold November sun, rising over the grey convent roof, shed its yellow rays upon Mademoiselle Ferrand's still face.

Down the street went Cameron and Lochgarry arm in arm.

"Ye'd mak' a gran' mourner, Lochgarry," said Cameron, noting the sombre countenance of his friend; "mind ye come to my funeral."

"Aye," retorted the other quickly. "It's like I'll be taking a leading part mysel'."

"Toots, man, that's no a nice insinuation——"

"It's that black wench, Archie. She's fair put the gloom on me. It's well enough for the Prince to say she's a Murdoch, but that's just exactly why I was upon my guard. Queer tales are told of old Murdoch, her



father. And there's a saying, Archie, that ' ill luck goes with a Murdoch,' and I once heard that——"

" Whisht, man," broke in Cameron, " ye'll hear enough old wives' havers to fill Loch Tay if ye'll only mind them."

Paris was awake and stirring. The rattle of carts fell clearly on the keen morning air.

The night was passed, and with the storm the foreboding of disaster. Lochgarry sniffed the clean air greedily.

" Man Archie," he cried, " we're bound for Scotland at last. Will it be for good or ill ? "

Cameron stopped very short and the sun glistened bravely on his buckled shoes.

" I grant ye," he said, " that Paris is safe as can be, but eh, Lochgarry, how my heart just aches for a keek at Lochaber and the bonny Highland hills." And blowing suddenly at his nose, he rammed his hat on his wig and faced the sun.

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## CHAPTER V

### I

**M**ADAME DE MÉZIÈRES, called "that mad woman" by the cautious, slow-witted James, father of Charles Edward, was perhaps the most astounding person in the annals of Jacobite history. Eleanor Oglethorpe, to give her maiden name, was born in 1684, and now at the age of sixty-eight was still an ardent, nay a dangerous conspirator whom Newcastle feared most thoroughly. Eleven years she had spent with her sister at the Court of James II, and had become so charged with the atmosphere of St. Germain's that she remained an undaunted Jacobite all her days. She it was whom Charles met in the Rue Tarane as full of excitement over the new exploit as though she had not embarked on a dozen such before.

Long before this Madame de Mézières had married the Marquis de Mézières, and had two daughters, the Princesses de Montauban and de Ligne, and was mother of that gallant young man, Jacobite to the core, the Chevalier de Mézières.

Madame de Mézières stopped at nothing. Culloden was unfortunate, but Charles was young. She urged him to turn Protestant. Even religion to her must bend to the necessities of the situation. She flew from place to place like a bird from branch to branch.

She was chatting gaily to the Prince when Ethlenn entered the room where they had arranged to meet, and

as she paused in the doorway the old lady said something to Charles at which he seemed vastly amused.

Her black eyes, twinkling in a face red as an apple, fell on Ethlenn at that moment, and she jumped to her feet with wonderful agility and came running towards her, a round, stout little woman in quaint, old-fashioned clothes.

"Here you are, my dear," she cried, kissing Ethlenn warmly. "Don't be shy, for I can't a-bear shyness. Was I ever shy, Sir?"

"Not to my knowledge, Madam."

"Fie, the naughty man means he's not old enough to say. I know him as I knew his father—till he wouldn't know me——" at which she laughed uproariously.

"Tell us, Madam," said Charles, smiling to Ethlenn, "how my father looked when last you saw him."

At that Madame de Mézières snatched up the Prince's hat and, pushing her silver hair under it, flung a cloak over her shoulders and looked as grim and sour as her face would permit her.

"I hope you may be forgiven, Madame de Mézières," she droned out in a grave, melancholy voice, "for the way you have influenced my poor misguided son."

"To the life," choked Charles, and laughed till the tears coursed down his cheeks, while the old lady giggled like a pleased girl, her keen eyes darting from one to the other ceaselessly.

Ethlenn remained silent, turning slow eyes from one to the other, unsmiling because she rarely smiled, and so still that Madame de Mézières stopped short and composed her features suddenly.

"Am I not a wicked old woman?" she said.

"Mademoiselle has lived in a convent," broke in the Prince, anxious to save the girl embarrassment. But

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there was little need, for Ethlenn was looking over Madame de Mézières' head, through the open window.

"Oh, lud!" screamed the old lady, "I knew I was not a proper person for her. Her poor little mother always seemed afeared of me."

"I have no fear, madam," said Ethlenn absently.

At that moment there was a knock at the door and a lackey announced the coach was ready.

"Come, then," said Charles, "our journey commences. But first a glass of wine. Here, fellow, a bottle of claret, the best in the house."

When their glasses were filled, the Prince raised his with a smile upon his lips. "My good friends and supporters," he said, "let us drink to the success of our journey."

Madame de Mézières took up her glass with a hand that trembled, and drank it without a word, Ethlenn barely touched hers. And then they hurried into the coach.

The Prince sat far back in his seat, so that his face was in the shadows, but Madame de Mézières looked this way and that, pointing out objects of interest to Ethlenn, wrapping her up in the carriage rugs, and employing a score of little devices to make the time hang less heavily. The four horses sped rapidly along, but it was dark before the first change came, and they had full twenty miles to reach Nonancourt, which lies some nineteen leagues from Paris.

The Prince had sunk into a deep silence, from which nothing could stir him, but Ethlenn allowed herself to be drawn into conversation with Madame de Mézières, and spoke of her home in Strathyre and her father, and how she longed to see the old place again—so that Nonancourt drew near far sooner than they imagined was possible.

They must have come within a quarter of a mile of the inn when one of the leaders in the coach stumbled badly

and fell, damaging a leg. The coach pulled up with a jerk, and Charles, who had been asleep, started to his feet and grasped his pistols, fearing an attack from highwaymen. The bright moon, however, showed him what had occurred, and leaping upon the road he ran to the horse's head and shouted to the driver to climb down and unloose the harness. In moments requiring activity and resource he was even yet remarkably adept, finding, one might suppose, in such distractions, a relief from brooding over his own misfortunes.

Ethlenn, who loved horses, examined the leg with tender hands.

"I fear it is broken, your Highness," she said, looking up at him as he sat upon the poor beast's head.

"Then there is only one thing to do," he replied. "We must shoot him and get help from the inn. I'll go forward, it cannot be more than a few minutes' walk, and return with help."

The girl sprang to her feet. "No, no," she cried. "You stay with Madam," and she started down the road on the instant.

"Come back," he called, starting up, and then as the horse struggled sat down again on its head, and when next he called she was out of hearing.

The lights of the inn showed already at the bottom of the hill. Onward she sped, revelling in the cool night air, which might have been that of Strathyre itself.

As she drew near she stopped a moment to regain her breath, and as she did so she noticed a man like an ostler stooping under the shadow of the hedge. Passing him, she approached the inn. Bright yellow light flooded the road from a window standing some eight feet above the ground. Under this window Ethlenn hesitated, beset by a vague foreboding of danger.

Even as she stopped, peering this way and that, the voice of a man above came floating down through the open window. He spoke low, but her ears were keen as a hare's.

"How late he is." It was uttered grumblingly. There followed a snigger.

"He travels in company, my friend. A pretty face is often to blame."

The voices died away.

Then Ethlenn stole back into the shadows.

## II

Indifference to danger is a matter of temperament. When Mademoiselle Ferrand had spoken to Ethlenn of her "fears" she had done so with no intent to wound. To her it was in the nature of every woman to fear. Protection she counted the right of her sex. Not so Ethlenn, who had turned on her like a tigress, much to the gentle lady's discomfiture.

To the girl lurking in the shadows, the present situation was exactly what she had foreseen. She was relieved; her long dread of a surprise attack was past; there are certain natures that welcome catastrophe with the sorry comfort that now the blow has fallen things cannot be worse.

The Murdochs were always regarded from time immemorial as a queer dour people, dangerously quiet. In her motionless figure amongst the wayside timber was represented the whole clan of Murdochs, slow-thinking, but calm as the waters of Loch Voil, inscrutable, remorseless—a solitary race.

While she pondered over the situation, and devised plans only to reject them as too dangerous or too difficult or too forlorn, she heard the sound of footsteps coming down the steps of the inn.

Like some velvet-footed creature she crept to the fringe of trees. Then, lying full length, she peered between the rank grass—her hat in her hand, her black hair fallen about her face.

Had the light fallen on her, one would have said she was an elf, or one of the silent folk who dance together when the moon is at the full.

Three men stepped out upon the middle of the roadway before the inn. They stared up the Paris road, and then drew on to the side where Ethlenn lay. She could have touched them with her hands.

"It's damned odd," said one. "Can they have taken another road?"

"Impossible—we passed them, you remember, at the last turning to the north."

And then the third man, who had not opened his mouth so far, began to speak in a soft Highland accent, strangely sweet and melodious.

"Who is that girl with him?" he asked. "For I am not liking the look of her. She has eyes like a witch. Maybe she is knowing everything——"

"Oh, damnation take you with your notions," broke out a short, coarse-voiced fellow beside him. "Here, let us ask that stable lout." He whistled three sharp notes and stepped out upon the road.

The man with the Highland accent fumbled in the pocket of his great-coat, and as he did so a strong scent, like wet sheep's wool, drifted down to Ethlenn's nostrils. She sniffed it in, and knew him for the eavesdropper at Madame de Mézières's lodging. He clicked something in his hand at that moment, and then Ethlenn received a sharp knock on her fingers, and closed them upon a smooth metal box which had flown from the man's hands above her. Quick as a cat leaps for safety, she slid

deeper into the undergrowth, and listened to his fumbling in the grass where she had just lain concealed.

Long and closely he searched, and at last, cursing roundly in Gaelic, he rejoined his companions, who were now questioning the ostler.

"Have you heard nothing?" asked the man with the harsh voice.

"Nothing as yet, Monsieur."

"And no one passed you?"

"Only a woman, Monsicur."

"A woman—young?"

"It was too dark to see, but she walked quickly."

"Which way did she go?"

"To the inn, Monsieur—at least, she turned the corner."

"I told you," broke out the Highlander excitedly; "did I not warn you? Let us ride back. Perhaps we can overtake them——"

"Easy—what ails you to-night? Just because a wench walks past the inn it does not signify she was sent to spy out the land. Come now—admit you've got out of your bearings."

Ethlenn breathed again at that.

They all conferred together, speaking in low tones which she could not catch, and then, "As you will," snapped the Highlander peevishly, and they re-ascended the steps of the inn, leaving the ostler swearing under his breath at them from the roadway.

The time to act had come. Even as the ostler slouched back to his post Ethlenn reached the inn. She must ascertain if it were possible to hear anything further, or in any way to delay the men within. She bit her lip with vexation when she realized how little chance the Prince would have against these armed men with fresh horses ready for the road. "Fresh horses"—why had she never



thought of that? She crept into the shadow of the inn door, anxious to catch a word of their conversation, and peered round the porch, and along the passage off which lay the room where they sat. The door of it was open, and a bar of light shone broad against the passage wall opposite, glinting on a brace of pistols slung to the wainscot.

For fully a minute she stared intently at those pistols. From the room came the clinking of glasses and the heavy sweet smell of tobacco. All was snug in there. Then, noiseless as a shadow, her eyes great with tension, she stole towards the open door. Once a stone flag rattled under her feet and she paused, rigid as a statue, and then on again, raising her skirt with one hand. Should they be facing the passage, she was doomed, that she realized, but it was her strength as it was her weakness to adhere unflinchingly to the road she trod. Only when she entered the bar of light did her hand tremble ever so slightly and her heart beat faster still. At that moment there rang out a great burst of laughter, and, darting her head forward, she saw the backs of the three men clustered round the fire. Turn they might at any minute. With desperate rapidity she gripped the pistols and lifted them from the wall. Then, her face like death, and her limbs shaking beneath her now it was all over, she tip-toed towards the door, and in an instant was swallowed up in the darkness. Outside she paused in case there was any movement within, but again the harsh laughter rang out, and turning she ran swiftly along the hedgeway until she saw the form of the waiting ostler black against the sky; and then, crouching double, she crept silently towards him, a pistol in each hand. His back was towards her, his head resting on his arms. Nearer she crept to him and yet nearer, stalking him as she had shadowed

a stag long ago. At last with a spring she rose from the ground beside him and rammed one pistol muzzle against his ear.

"A word, and I shoot," she whispered hoarsely.

The miserable creature gave a frightened noise in his throat and rolled on his back, his hands about his face.

"Get up," she commanded. "I'm not going to hurt you if you do as I bid you. Quick--time presses."

He struggled to his feet, watching her anxiously.

"To the stable," she ordered, "and if you make so much as a stumble I'll blow your brains upon the road."

Swift on his heels she followed, through the entrance to the inn and over the stable yard. They encountered no one. Inside the place she seated herself and had a good look at the man. He was under-sized, emaciated, with frightened, colourless eyes, a whimpering, under-fed creature. Apparently she was satisfied.

"The law is hard on footpads," said she, while he cringed before her.

"Oh, Mademoiselle--have pity--what have I done?"

"You are playing murder on the king's highway."

"In God's name, I am innocent," he stammered, on his knees before her.

"Silence!" she cried; "should the coach you watch for fall foul of your employers you'll swing for this." And at that his face turned the colour of chalk.

"Oh, lady," he sobbed, "I was always a fool from my birth, I was always 'Pauvre Jacques,' who cannot think. Mademoiselle, for the love of Heaven, spare me. I will do anything--anything."

Ethlenn sprang to her feet, and ran her eye down the stalls.

"Whose horses are these?" she demanded, pointing to three bays and a chestnut munching at their corn.

"The strangers', Mademoiselle, who came to-day. They leave to-night."

"Off with their rugs."

Together they began pulling them away, flinging them upon the filthy flags.

"Now cut strips—so, and as you cut I'll fasten them about their feet."

The ostler, glad of action, dragging a heavy knife from his pocket, did as he was bid, while she bolted the door in case of treachery and laid her pistols near her on the ground.

With straps of straw she tied the cloths about the horses' hocks, and then unfastening the door she peered out and turned at last to her companion.

"Remember," she whispered, "so much as a cough and you will betray peaceful travellers no more. Take the two leaders and walk them quietly towards the hill. I will bring the others."

The horses stepped with muffled feet into the yard. All was still. From the inn the light shone clearly on the road they had to cross, but fortunately the tap-room windows were on the front, not on the side. Once a horse whinnied, but Ethlenn clutched it above the nostrils and it quietened instantly, nuzzling her playfully.

At that moment, however, when all danger seemed safely overcome, the sound of footsteps beat briskly along the road, and she knew that she must be discovered. For a breath of time she hesitated whether to make a bolt for it, and then she halted her beasts, and the ostler immediately in front of her did the same.

The new-comer hesitated when he saw them motionless in the shadow of the entrance to the yard, and instead of entering the inn, approached them.

"Qui est là?" he called.

It was the Prince.

"Silence, for the love of Heaven!" hissed Ethlenn, from between the horses' heads.

"Pardieu!" he laughed back, "what is the meaning of this cavalcade?"

She dragged her beasts towards him.

"Back, for your life," she whispered; "take the leaders and watch the man with them. Here," and she shoved the butt of a pistol into his hands.

"But it is useless, Mademoiselle," he replied, tugging at the catch.

"Is it necessary to cry it on the house-tops?" she replied shortly, and pushed him on the shoulder.

It was not the moment for ceremony. He led the way without demur, and a moment later the agony of suspense was over. Immediately they were down the high road she called a halt.

"Now mount," she cried, "and ride for the coach."

"Is this miserable going with us," asked Charles, eyeing the ostler.

"My faith, that he is," returned Ethlenn, and so they all cantered down the road, the odd horse keeping with them.

Soon the lights of the coach shone out through the trees, and a minute later the voice of Madame de Mézières called out:

"Well, this is fine treatment to an old woman. Here have I been shivering and coughing for a good half-hour and——"

But Ethlenn broke in, addressing the Prince:

"Your life is in grave danger, your Highness," she said, leading him aside, "assassins await you at the inn. With their own horses we can out-distance them, but time flies, and they may suspect at any moment."

She began unharnessing the three horses in the coach,

and Charles, now alive to his danger, summoned his coachman and the ostler, and with frenzied hands they tore at the straps, pulled off the collars and traces, and ran two of the fresh beasts between the shafts. Ethlenn ran from side to side, instructing, loosening, fastening, and at last the pair stood ready for the road.

"Your Highness," she whispered, so that the men should not catch it, "will you chase our horses and these other two down the road and into the fields? Our enemies must not find them, tired though they be."

Without a word he began to drive them off into the night.

"Now," she said, facing the coachman with a pistol in her hand, "some one has played spy over this journey, and we are not running further risks."

"Mademoiselle," he cried, "how can you!" and suddenly ran in at her and plucked the pistol out of her cold hand. "Ha, ha!" he laughed, "now who holds the winning cards, *ma chérie*?" He leered at her, while the ostler drew near, watching them both furtively.

"Where's your brave Prince now? 'Your Highness'?" he mimicked, catching her roughly about the waist.

With a low cry of fury she broke away and, stooping, grasped the other pistol, which lay at her feet.

"Curse you, then, take it," he growled, and pulled the trigger. It gave a feeble click; and, before he could move, raising her arm, she brought the heavy butt of the weapon crashing on his forehead.

"Oh, lud," cried Madamc de Mézières from the coach, "what a girl!" and hobbled on to the road. "What a people you Highlanders must be," she said, shivering a little, "when the women are as dangerous as the men." And she peered curiously at the coachman's motionless form upon the road.

"Please get in," said Ethlenn; and to her surprise Madame de Mézières disappeared without a word.

"Now," she continued to the ostler, "bind this fellow with these cords and lay him against that tree there."

The ostler, who had long had a grudge against the coachman, entered into his task with enthusiasm. "Oh, Pierre," he murmured, "this is a strange night, Pierre—a strange, strange night when Jacques, whom you have kicked so often, trusses you up like a fowl. Lie quiet, Pierre—sleep sound under the trees." He kicked him spitefully and rejoined Ethlenn.

At that Charles returned, and when he heard of the coachman's treachery he cursed himself for a fool for leaving her.

"Besides," he said, "who can drive us now? These beasts are not broken to harness."

Ethlenn looked down the silent road. "I can manage the two," she replied quietly; "see, the moon is coming out. We will not require the lamps now, and we are safer without. Will your Royal Highness step inside and take this fellow with you?"

"Not—not this——" Words failed him.

"No other."

"Mort de ma vie," moaned the Prince, and crawled inside. "Madame," he said, speaking from within, "let me introduce you to a French nobleman in disguise, whose name you will never guess."

"I have heard it said by Mademoiselle Ferrand," remarked the old lady in a far-away voice, "that contact with the people lifts one above oneself."

"Then," rejoined the Prince, "you will be taken I know not how high to-night."

Ethlenn heard no more, for she had the reins in her hands and flung back the brake. The horses, unaccustomed to such procedure, crowded for a moment together, then

plunged wildly, and the coach jerked forward, throwing the unfortunate ostler into Madame de Mézières's arms.

"I never suspected you of being a democrat," chuckled the Prince.

"I think I am going to faint," wailed the old lady.

"You know," pursued Charles shrewdly, "you would never miss a moment of what is to come for such a very improbable cause."

The horses had broken into a canter, and suddenly kicking madly with tossing heads, began to gallop down the hill towards the inn, their muffled hoofs thudding dully on the highway. Then terror of the unaccustomed weight overcame them, as Ethlenn knew it would. Faster and faster they went, the girl on the box sitting like a statue, her hands forward, holding them together at the bend. Faster and yet faster. Now they were nearing the lights, and beyond the reflection from the windows lay the black belt again and the road to the coast. They were hardly laying feet to the ground. What if they should encounter anything in the road?

The horses flew into the bright patch of road before the inn, and still no sign of their enemies. A moment and the coach itself shot reeling out of the darkness with the solitary driver on the box lashing and lashing them with her whip as though possessed. And then came a wild commotion—a single frenzied shout and the smashing of glass as they passed—a shot rang out and then another; and away down the dim highway the horses raced, flying madly into the night, their ears laid back and heads down, straining and sawing at the reins until the girl on the box rocked forward on her seat. There was no use trying to stop them now. She prayed for a straight road and no obstacles, and sat with her teeth clenched and her eyes fixed upon the dim white track.

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The coach swung this way and that, bumping and swaying, never faltering, while the thunder of the horses' hoofs, long since loosed of their ill-fitting bandages, echoed through many a sleeping village that autumn night.

"What a girl!" groaned Madame de Mézières, while the ostler wept upon the floor.

"Would," returned the Prince, with his hands to his mouth, his feet wedged firmly into the ostler's back, "would I had many soldiers like her."

Madame de Mézières gave a faint scream as the side of the coach banged against a boulder.

"I am convinced," she screamed in his ear, "that a score of these Murdochs would conquer the world."

"Alas, she is the last!" he answered in a lull.

"Thank God," she replied fervently, but whether for a ditch avoided or for the dearth of Murdochs one cannot say.

And thus the dawn found them with two trembling, utterly exhausted horses, reeking with sweat, and a girl who swayed, with a face like death, upon the box.

Half-way up a hill the coach came to a standstill and Charles leapt out.

He climbed the wheel and lifted Ethlenn tenderly down, saying no word.

"Madame," he called, "you are wanted," and laid her on the bank.

The old lady crept stiffly out of the coach and fell on her knees beside the still form upon the grass.

The Prince turned his back, looking down the road they had come, while the horses stood with distended nostrils and heaving foam-grey flanks beside him.

It was as Madame de Mézières bent over her that Ethlenn opened her eyes and raised herself on her elbow.

"My brave child," began the old lady tenderly, and poured some brandy between her lips.



At last Ethlenn stirred and feebly raised herself ; as she did so from her coat pocket something slipped upon the ground.

She picked it up—Madame de Mézières watching her curiously.

“ You take snuff, Mademoiselle ? ” she asked, striving to win a smile to her tired face.

“ I?—no,” said Ethlenn. “ It belongs to one of our gentry of the inn. Look,” she added, “ there are his initials, ‘ S. C.,’ upon the top.”

Madame de Mézières’s face was a study of polite indifference.

“ And his name, Mademoiselle ? ”

Ethlenn regarded her gravely.

“ Some day, Madame,” she answered, “ I will answer you that question.”

Suddenly, from over a wooded hill before them, the sun swung up with a blaze of gold, while from the valley through which they had passed the mists of night eddied silently away.

. . . . .

It would delay the story overmuch were I to tell how the Prince with his companions reached English soil. In the mere narration of wearisome travelling there is little profit or interest. In those dark days it was a respite, one would suppose, from more perilous encounters. To-day it seems to us a tedium greater than could be borne. The mere mention of such monotonous wayfaring is to raise a picture of dusty roads, creaking backs, a fickle climate, and all the thousand and one discomforts which, heaped together, spell complete misery. Surely a chapter for this would be to insult the reader’s intelligence, and tax his patience overmuch.

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## CHAPTER VI

### I

CONDILLAC had not slept during the eventful night which saw Ethlenn Murdoch careering towards the coast with her unhappy passengers. He was a slow-thinking man, and not one to dream dreams—at least he was not reckoned such.

He was also over forty, and the days of idle fancies were past, fancies long since forgot. He was also a very lonely man, but he had never felt so before to-night. He boasted of being a solitary man, but loneliness was a different thing. He surrendered the hope that he would sleep, and, drawing on some clothes, began to walk to and fro in the black silence of his room. His mind reverted to the incidents of the day—to the scene in Mademoiselle Ferrand's room, to the rugged, weather-stained faces of Lochgarry and Cameron, to the dauntless courage shining in the eyes of Ethlenn Murdoch, to the forlorn figure of the Prince, and so to Mademoiselle Ferrand. . . . Through all the fleeting phantoms of his imagination he saw her face, and always the unclosed eyes.

So she had been when he had left her, looking frailer, hardly parting her lips to breathe, as though her life were ebbing like a flower at dusk, very gently, leaving only a fragrance as a memory.

Condillac paused at the thought, and tightening his hands plodded on.

Dimly, then with fearful vividness, he began to see. He stared back through the past years with agonized, wondering eyes. In work his mind had become chilled, blinded, utterly engrossed. And all the time she had helped him, read to him, sat at his side within hand's grasp.

But he had never seen anything. At last something had awakened within him. The world had lain asleep so long. The strange scene of last night with its breath of passion had shaken his sleeping soul like a gale. He loved her—he had loved her always—only he had never known. It was out now, nothing could keep it back now, and never again would he imprison it. He began to tremble, and had to sit down to steady himself.

Then, out of the blaze of glorious light, came a blot of darkness like the menacing figure of a hawk against the sublimity of heaven. She had looked so frail. Again he saw like a picture her closed eyes with the shadows beneath them—her bosom faintly rising and falling, rising and falling, as though it might quietly cease to rise at all.

With a low cry he bent his head upon his hand. Oh, fool! fool! That he had never seen until it was too late! And yet, who could say it was too late? New hope rushed through his veins like wine. He started to his feet. But it was dark and the dawn far distant.

Such nights are rarely spent by those who attain to forty and over, not that they are the easier for that. Bitter regret chastised him all those weary hours, and fierce, impatient longing for the day made the ticking of the clock unbearable, so that he snatched it up and threw it into the garden, where it lay, now voiceless as death, with its vacant face upturned to the stars.

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## II

The evening sunlight shed its short-lived rays upon the Garden of Moths, and turned the tinkling fountain water into showers of silver and gold.

On a couch, with her face turned towards the west, lay Mademoiselle Ferrand. Beside her was Condillac, striving to tell her this two hours and more what was in his heart. He watched the change creeping over her face with anguished, helpless eyes.

"I am so glad you are here," she whispered, turning her head a little, "so very glad."

"Oh, you poor child!" he cried.

"Will you miss me much, old friend?" she asked softly. "You'll think of your fellow-student sometimes, will you not?"

"Gracious God, never as that again——!"

She started and trembled at the tone in his voice.

"Tell me," she whispered gently—"before it is too late."

"Too late!" Condillac bent his great head until his face was almost touching her. She looked into his swimming eyes with wistful tenderness.

"Oh, my little flower," he whispered brokenly, "how could I speak to anyone of love—least of all to you? I am so awkward—so much older—so slow, and you—oh, my darling——"

He let his head drop on his hands, and his whole body shook with sobs.

Mademoiselle Ferrand stroked his hair with her hand.

Some tears trickled slowly down her grey cheeks.

"I never dared to hope for this joy, Étienne," she said.

"Joy—not joy, Lucille, dear Lucille!"

He raised his face, and a sudden expression of anxious wonderment shone from his eyes.

" You do not mean that you—— ? "

" Yes, old friend—for years past."

" And I never imagined until last night."

She smiled ever so sadly.

" Alas," she said, " in love one must ! "

The sun was sinking behind the convent roof when she opened her eyes again and looked long into its heart of flame. Then, with a sudden shiver, she crept a little nearer to him.

" Tell me, beloved, do you love me so very much ? "

" The world holds nothing but you——"

" Your work, Étienne ? "

He shook his head.

" It serves," he said, and nothing more.

He touched her cold hands.

" May I hold you in my arms, poor child ? "

" How good you are—now I feel——"

" Yes ? "

" As though I could fall asleep."

He drew her closer, unable to speak.

" The sun is sinking, is it not, beloved?—I cannot see now, but I feel the chill of night. Hold me tightly, won't you? I cannot see your dear, loving eyes, but I can feel the pressure of your hand. How tired I am—so very tired——"

The shadows began to creep about the garden. In the distance a church clock far away began to strike the hour of five.

As the last note dropped into silence she commenced to tremble, and moaned.

" There is a great darkness falling over me now, dear heart, and I hear the sound of a sea. You are holding my hand, are you not ? "

" I am, my darling."

"I am afraid—how foolish it is to be afraid. Could you—could you kiss me, do you think?"

"Courage," he whispered, "there is nothing to fear."

He kissed her cold lips, her head upon his breast.

"My love," she breathed, then lay very still.

Long after she stirred again and opened her eyes.

"You once said," she whispered slowly, "that after the night there breaks the dawn. Keep fast my hand, beloved, for I am floating into the night. You are holding me?"

"Against my heart."

"Oh, I am leaving you——"

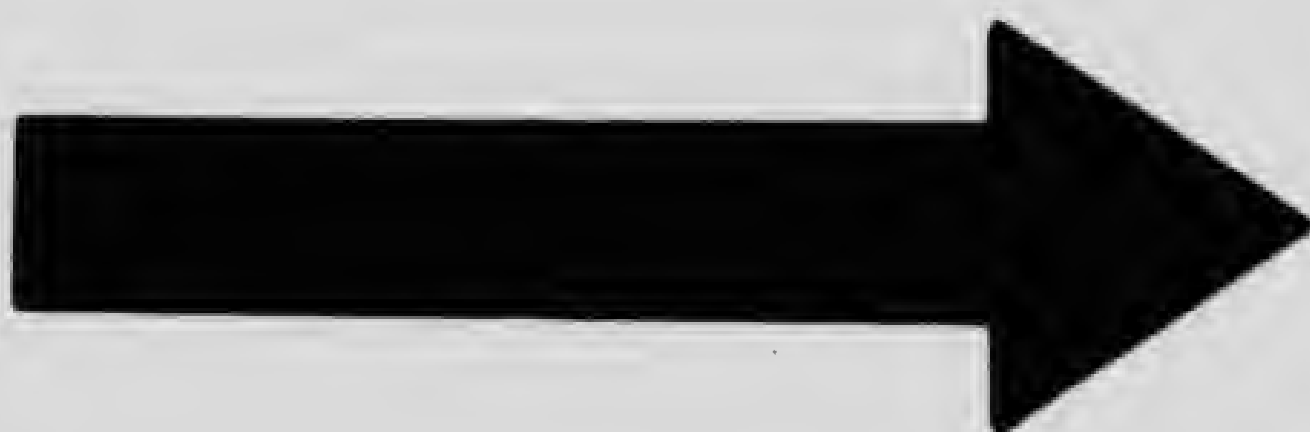
She gave a little shudder and lay very still.

For long Condillac sat perfectly motionless, staring into the black darkness that had fallen upon him. Then the flood of his anguish swept over him. Kissing the cold face passionately, he broke into a fit of weeping, pressing the little hands to his lips in turn.

This passed as suddenly, and wrapping his great-coat about her, he gathered her altogether into his arms, still holding her hands closely in his.

The night dragged on, but he never moved.

Slowly the stars waned and disappeared—the pearl-grey of morning tinged the cold sky—an eddy of wind sent the dead leaves whispering at his feet. In the east the dawn was breaking. Then, white as death itself, walking like a very old man—he lifted the body of Mademoiselle Ferrand and stumbled blindly up the path.



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## CHAPTER VII

### I

THE autumn leaves dropped silently to the damp earth. In the air, windless, keenly alert, was the breath of winter, and on the fringes of the brook a sheet of ice was smoothed by a dark current of flowing water. The trees, tattered with the ravages of October, stood gaunt against the evening sky, spectres waiting for the night. Over the Surrey hills the sun had fallen two hours before, leaving no trail of softening tints, rather a sudden collapse of warming radiance before a catastrophe of cold. The mists rose in lingering wreaths from sodden places, the shadows fell abruptly in masses obliterating the landscape as lights put off in rotation cast a room into overwhelming darkness. The road, the great high road to Portsmouth, grown greyer with black depths on either side, became vague and mysterious, peopled by new terrors unrecognized by day.

Backed by a timbered hill stands Westbrook Place, grey and massive, square and strong, a house lost in memories, just off the Portsmouth road.

At nine o'clock on that chill November night a post-chaise came lumbering up the road from the coast, and rattled through the sleeping village of Godalming. So clear and still was the night, and so frosty the air, that the sound of wheels could be heard a good half-mile. Of a sudden, when the rattle of the chaise and the

thud of horses' hoofs came thus distinctly, a light flickered in the dark hall of Westbrook Place, and the great lamp from the ceiling cast out its yellow glow upon the steps.

There was no opening of doors—no other sign of preparation, but only that solitary, dazzling bar of colour piercing the mists and shining through the foliage of the drive. Nearer and nearer came the wheels. The heavy breathing of tired horses was heard, and the crack of a whip.

Amongst the trees a man stood concealed by a bush of holly. He had turned when the lamp was lighted, and, pressing his hat tight upon his head, crossed his arms and faced the road again. As the chaise drew near he bent a little at the knees and peered through the branches.

The door of the carriage opened and the Prince, wrapped in a heavy coat and muffled about the face, jumped quickly down and gave his hand to Madame de Mézières and then again to Ethlenn. They all stood together under the chaise lamplight, and at that the man in the trees drew himself suddenly to his full height and slowly raised his arm. In his hand, black against the twilight, was a long-barrelled pistol.

As he stood so, his hand as steady as a rock, the girl made an unexpected movement behind the Prince, covering his back completely. The driver of the chaise, pocketing his change, bade them a gruff good night and made off at a rough canter towards Godalming to put up for the night, while the three in the road began to pace up the drive towards the house.

The man in the trees crept along beside them, cursing under his breath, and then halted again, for the voice of Madame de Mézières suddenly said :

"Your Royal Highness must now accept my poor hospitality."

"I will return the pleasure ere long," and Charles took her hand and kissed it.

He stood apart in doing so, and swiftly the man in the trees raised his hand, but again, as though some secret force compelled her, the girl stepped forward, and for the second time the pistol dropped ere it was too late. A moment and the three had passed within, and the heavy door shut out the night.

From the corner of the wood the man in the shadows watched them silently enough. Then, without a word, he disappeared in the undergrowth.

The moon shone peacefully down upon the sleeping pasture land before the house, upon the copper-coloured foliage gathered like a cloak upon its back, and waned at last, until like the solitary light in Westbrook Place it vanished altogether, and the black silence of the autumn night enveloped everything. It was one of those chill autumn nights when the only sound is the crack of frozen timber or the dull thud of an apple in the orchard, when the stars shine faintly in the haze of heaven and a moon may cast pathetic rays towards the approach of dawn.

In the night no movement about Westbrook Place. He who had watched had gone as though he had never been. Inside and out, heavy sleep seemed to hold the very world in its grasp against the morrow. God knows, the rest for some was none too long.

## II

Westbrook Place was the property of General Oglethorpe, brother of Madame de Mézières, the famous philanthropist and soldier of whom Pope wrote in the couplet :

"One driven by strong benevolence of soul  
Shall fly like Oglethorpe from Pole to Pole."

It had long lain empty, and presented a melancholy appearance. The drive was thick with weeds, the lawn in front of the house was little better than a field, the walled gardens to the rear were wild and deserted.

Between Westbrook Place and the road to London lay the little village of Godalming and the ancient parish church. The traffic to the coast and to the north was considerable, but few realized that hidden amongst the trees and overshadowed by a wooded hill was buried this great, grey house.

It was indeed a spot well chosen to give sanctuary to Charles Edward Stuart.

Ethlenn awoke to find the sunlight streaming in upon her face.

She yawned wearily, stretching her slender white arms above her head, her lustrous hair rippling about her shoulders as she sat up in bed.

The full flood of memory rushing in upon her mind gripped her powerfully. A shiver of expectation mingled with shrinking passed through her. For was this not the day which would go down in history as the time when Charles Stuart came into his own by the capture of the Royal Family and the fall of London? Her eyes glowed with the picture of it. A faint flush rose to her cheeks like the caress of the morning sun on hills of snow. How she had prayed for such a day! She thought of the Prince, and her face saddened and grew a little wistful. She had seen much of him the last few days, had watched him when he was off his guard, as he often was, poor young man, wondering when fortune would throw him a winning card. She had been ready to fall at his feet one minute because he spoke of her people with tears in his eyes and an expression on his face she could never forget. And then, only a few hours later, she almost hated him for

some selfish, autocratic mood which soured his countenance and sent a hard, cynical gleam into his eyes. But what she could never erase from her memory was the night at the inn at Dunkirk, where he had met Lord Clancarty and sat late about the fire. She had occasion to enter the room for a wrap and had seen him, slack-mouthed and vacant-eyed, clinking glasses with the drunken one-eyed lord, whose coarse epithets and profanation found echoing rejoinders in the Prince's speech. While she stood, too disgusted to move, he had swayed in his chair and seen her. For a second he looked down, and the liquor ran from his glass upon his knee. Then Lord Clancarty, more hardened by age and experience, advanced towards her, leering wickedly, with his arms outstretched. She had called with indignation to Charles, her Prince of romance, to aid her while she flew for the door, but she only heard his glass shiver upon the flags. Lord Clancarty had touched her, caught her arm with his hot hand, when Madame de Mézières suddenly appeared and faced him.

"Have I ever met your lordship sober?" she had said quietly, stepping between them.

She remembered how the drunken lord had stuttered, and how Charles had risen to his feet, and how his expression was like that of a dissolute old man, bleary-eyed and sodden. But Madame de Mézières had never so much as glanced in his direction.

Avoiding Lord Clancarty with uplifted skirts, she had turned her back upon the room.

That scene Ethlenn knew she could never forget. Let Charles be King of Great Britain and dominions beyond the seas or a wanderer on the face of the earth—she would be loyal, for such was her duty as she saw it, but never again those sweet, idyllic dreams, that girlish

romance, no more tears shed simply for the beautiful sadness of it all, but rather tears dropping from the heart of tragedy itself.

On the gravel walk beneath her window Ethlenn heard the sound of footsteps. Rising quickly she crossed the room and glanced downwards. Immediately below stood the Prince, humming to himself and staring towards the high road, his elbows resting on the terrace wall. He was dressed magnificently in royal purple slashed with gold, and wore upon his feet new buckled shoes. A rapier tilted the skirt of his coat, and his waistcoat with the flowing lace from his throat was of brocaded primrose, and with pearl buttons. A diamond pin fastened his jabot, and his white peruke set off the whole. A faint perfume reached her, a very fragrant, delicate scent like crushed violets.

As he turned to continue his walk, she saw the Star of St. George upon his breast.

She watched him till he disappeared towards the garden and sighed a little, wondering how it would all end.

Then dressing, she came downstairs, and passed through the hall on to the terrace.

"Bon jour, Mademoiselle," said a voice she had come to know so well.

"I hope your Highness is in good health," returned she.

"The very best—you see, I am ready," he added, smiling like a boy and eyeing his new clothes.

"I trust the weather will hold."

"The weather——" he shrugged his shoulders. "It is Murray I think of more than the clouds, Mademoiselle."

She pondered, looking at him with puckered mouth.

"Your Highness told me that he was desperate for

the cause since his imprisonment, and that four hundred Highlanders were to rise under Glengarry in London."

"Tush, girl. I know he could not go back really, and Glengarry is a tower of strength. Only it all seems so impossible after so much catching at straws."

"Do the Government suspect anything?"

The Prince fingered at his jabot.

"Nothing," said he. "How can they? They would make out that there is a certain source of information which you heard of at Mademoiselle Ferrand's, but that is a piece of scoundrelly falsehood. Miss . . . the lady referred to, has my interests next her heart."

She said nothing, her eyes like stone.

"I see you do not believe it," he cried, banging the hilt of his sword. "It's little use asking one woman to think fair of another." He paused, but still she said nothing.

"After all," said he, more to himself than aloud, "what does it signify? Listen, girl, for you will know in any case ere long. *I have not told Miss Walkingshaw a word of this scheme, nor does she suspect that I am not in France.*"

"Then she knows nothing?"

"Absolutely nothing. Have I got the name of one who chatters into every ear that's turned in my direction?"

Ethlenn glanced into his face, and not a shadow of doubt remained in her mind.

"Then why did you not relieve those poor men's minds, sir?"

Charles stirred impatiently.

"You mean Cameron and Lochgarry," he said, and hesitated, then continued with a little frown upon his

face: "Because they treat me as a child," he snapped. "Because they would like to have me under lock and key and will not even give me, their Prince, respectful hearing, much less the least obedience. Let them learn to-day how much they have misjudged this unfortunate lady."

"It will be a time of triumph for her, your Highness, a reward for her faithfulness to you."

He eyed her sharply.

"I fear I do not understand," said he, a trifle coldly.

For long her unfathomable eyes rested on his half-averted face. A sudden flush rushed to her cheeks and died away. The quick tightening of her hands left them in a moment loose and limp.

"Of course," she said in a voice like ice, "that would be too much to expect."

He gnawed at his lip, then broke away.

"Gad, Mademoiselle," he cried in a passion, "you have served me well, and I would be sadly ungrateful were I to cause you pain, but you have a damned awkward way of looking at things."

"It is the manner of a woman," she said quietly.

He fidgeted a second, and then swung abruptly off the subject as was his habit.

"Enough of this," he cried peevishly. "Can I not enjoy at least one day in peace? Is my conscience the property of all the world to prick and stab whenever they be so disposed?"

Without a word she left him, moving swiftly towards the house.

"Mademoiselle," he called after her.

She turned, her hand upon the door. But he only shook his head at her and turned away.

It was after breakfast that he invited her to walk



with him in the sheltered path between the copper-leaved foliage behind the house.

Madame de Mézières was tired. She looked ill and worn, with anxious, strained eyes. She moved about the dusty draped rooms without ceasing, and yet when they begged her to come into the garden she pleaded for quiet.

She bade them go—and wandered from the hall to the drawing-room listening, always listening.

The Prince teased her for her glum looks, and stepped lightly through the French windows which opened on to the back gardens. Ethlenn, with a curious anticipation of disaster, met the troubled eyes of Madame de Mézières for an instant and followed him.

In silence they trod the velvet turf of the avenue, for long called "The Lovers' Walk," the Prince musing with a vacant, moody expression—pulling leaves from the branches and crushing them between the palms of his hands.

"How far is London?" he asked abruptly.

"Some thirty-two miles, I believe," answered Ethlenn.

He pulled out his watch and stood for a moment, his lips pursed together.

"Twelve o'clock," he murmured; "we should receive word by two at latest."

He sauntered on.

"Shall I make a good king, think you?" he asked suddenly. "I would like to," he added like a boy, quite frankly.

"But your father—would he not be king?"

He gave a short, contemptuous laugh.

"Old Monsieur Melancholy?—oh, good lud, no—they don't want him. Let him chant his psalms into the ear of the Pope, and sigh his prayers to my brother Francis. I've not seen him since 'forty-four, nor want to. Besides, he's a Papist."

Ethlenn regarded him curiously.

"But your Highness is a Cat'olic."

"My dear young lady," he returned blandly, "since the year 'orty-nine I have learned what you, no doubt, will learn as well, that the less one's heart is concerned in things, the better."

"Such words are unworthy of you," she said boldly, "and unfit for your supporters in the north."

He bowed ironically.

"It is my fortune to be censured by my friends," he remarked, his face growing red; "but never mind that. It is my supporters who have converted me to the Anglican Church. I espoused their faith and became an Anglican in the year 'fifty. What more can I do to satisfy them?"

She did not reply, and he paced fretfully ahead.

"Miss Murdoch," he said abruptly, "the world is not as we think it is at twenty. I learned that when I turned back from Derby long ago. I was a cat's-paw—the sport of scheming, quarrelling blusterers, and the unwitting betrayer of brave ignorant men I had come to lead to victory. It was only by laying my signature to quite exorbitant and impossible demands that I carried my arms so far. Since then I have tried to model myself on my associates. What would you do if all your friends advised a score of varied courses for you to take? If some, who had no religion at all, piously pressed the claims of one particular Church which best served their interests? If others, whose private lives were notorious, raised hands of horror because you were a man with passions like themselves? If the rest said nothing, but showed their displeasure in their sour visage? A king upon his throne is not to be envied, but God pity an exiled prince——"

Ethlenn met his sombre eyes with a look of intense compassion. She realized, as in vivid picture, all the intolerable hopes and despairs which had beset him so many weary years—the constant perils which drove him from one hiding-place to another—above all, the tragic loneliness of his position.

Then, without a word, they walked back to the house.

## III

The afternoon dragged on, and still no news to break the ghastly silence of their vigil. Vigil it was, and nothing less, for in the sound of horses' hoofs lay dreams of throne and kingdom or chains of imprisonment and death.

Outside the autumn sun shone feebly on the desolate country-side. Scarce a sound reached their ears, only the faint barking of a dog and the harsh cough of a sheep in the meadow.

The Prince invited them to a game of cards, and played for a time with some assumption of enjoyment. He even rallied Madame upon her poor hand and quoted, "Lucky in cards, unlucky in love." But it was sad enough fooling. Ethlenn sat without a word, feeling that she was taking part in a sort of death-masque and waiting for the crash of doom.

Only Madame de Mézières was now indifferent to the hours, or appeared so. She laughed and joked and hung over the card-table as though there was nothing else of moment in the whole world. Ethlenn watched her gravely. There was a strange clashing of temperaments that day.

Long after when the light was failing there came a pause in the game.

"Your Royal Highness to play," said Madame, after a long silence.

The Prince started, and then threw the cards upon the table.

"Let us end this mumming," he cried, with something perilously near a sob in his voice. "Why should we play-act to each other when our hearts are all crying out against this fatal delay?"

"Courage, sir," said the old lady, patting his arm. "Had you lived as long as I, you would know that the only way to kill despair is to deny it. Here have I been Jacobite for fifty years and more; long before you were born I was living in this very house playing the same game—thinking the same thoughts. Do I appear dejected? I have sons and daughters to carry on the work." She paused, smiling into his troubled face.

"God bless you, dear lady," he murmured. "Would there were many like you. You and Mademoiselle Ferrand—what should I be without you?"

"And Miss Walkingshaw?"

He started, and a shade of colour passed over his cheeks.

"Of course," he returned briefly; "but that is different."

The wintry sun had slipped behind the Surrey hills, and again the greyness of mist began to rise. A chill wind moaned through the old house like an evil memory.

"How late it grows," whispered the Prince, raising his gloomy eyes to the sky. "Would Murray were here. What if they have failed? I told them that no harm must come to the Elector and his family. God forgive them if any has, for I never shall. How years of waiting such as this have killed my nerves! I am shivering, Madame, like a frightened child. I cannot go to London in a faint. Wine, Madame, for the love of Heaven, wine!"

Ethlenn moved a little in the dimness of the room and moistened her dry lips. She had nearly broken silence.

But Madame spoke. "Your Royal Highness," she said, "I am an old woman, old enough to be your mother. Forgive me if I appear impertinent, but can you not master yourself without?"

He shook his head dismally enough. "I am not what I was," he said in a low, pathetic tone, and sinking into a chair, buried his head in his hand.

Madame de Mézières beckoned to Ethlenn, and together they slipped from the room.

Once outside, the face of the old woman changed to one of acute anxiety.

"I fear there is something gravely amiss," she whispered, "and if the thing has been discovered, it is only a question of time before troops will ride post-haste for this house. What can two women do to avert such a catastrophe?" Her lips quivered and her eyes sought Ethlenn's imploringly.

The girl pondered deeply, looking over Madame's little silver head into the recesses of the hall.

"Stay here," she said quietly. "I will go watch the London road. The night is clear and still. Should I hear many horses' hoofs I'll come back with all speed. Have you any place of concealment here?"

"A vault," answered the old lady. "A damp, miserable place, but safe enough."

"'Tis better than a scaffold," returned the girl.

Madame de Mézières shrank suddenly from her.

"Mother of God," she gulped, "they would not dare!"

"They have dared before," she answered, taking up her coat. "They know too well it is the dead only who do not return."

"Alas!"

And a minute later Madame de Mézières was alone.

Ethlenn ran swiftly down the drive and out upon

the still highway. Then, turning the corner, she sped through Godalming High Street to the London road.

No sound reached her but the murmur of the river Wey, swollen with autumn floods. A hare lopped past her, rustling the withered leaves, and startled her into a faint cry.

"Oh, fool—fool!" she gasped, and hurried on to where the road winds sinuously to the north.

There she halted, shivering with the cold, a dead melancholy in her heart. It was indeed an evening full of brooding disaster, and ripe for tragedy. Clouds hurried past with a forlorn wind on their trail. Moisture dropped from dripping, empty branches, falling dully on the sodden carpet of decaying leaves.

Suddenly, far, far away, she thought there came the thud of a horse at the gallop. Then no sound at all. She tore away the cloak at her neck to hear the better, and listened, her lips apart.

Then again. But only one horse. A rapid train of thought swirled in her brain. One horse. Could it be true, then, that Charles was King? Nearer and nearer crept the noise of rattling feet upon the hard highway, never flagging, uphill and downhill—a rider of life or death.

"He rides too fast," she murmured; and then when she thought of London waiting she would have said, "He rides too slow," but knew in her heart that was untrue.

Down the road towards her flew the dark mass of horse and man, sparks flying between hoof and flint, and spume from a bleeding mouth.

"Halt!" she shouted, holding the centre of the way.

With a cry, he pulled up his exhausted beast before it was upon her, leaning over the withers amid a cloud of smoke from lathered shoulders and flanks.

"Let me pass," he gasped, his hand on his holsters.

"Do you seek Westbrook Place?" she cried, still gripping his bridle reins.

"And if I do?" he returned more mildly, seeing he dealt with a woman.

"Are you friend or foe?"

He laughed mirthlessly.

"God's truth," he answered, "do foes come by dead of night alone on such a ploy as this? Let me pass, girl—time presses."

"One word," said she, her voice trembling. "Is all well?"

He gave his bridle reins a shake. "Let me on, mistress," he replied shortly; "we waste precious time."

In silence they passed through Godalming and up the dark drive of Westbrook Place, Ethlenn running at his stirrup iron.

At the door he swung from the saddle, a tall man, wonderfully lean, and flung the reins over a post beside the steps.

"Now," said he, "who are you and what do you here? You are not, by any chance, the lady the Prince——"

"No," she flung back at him, "that I am not."

"'Tis well for you," he replied, but in a preoccupied voice, striding ahead.

Through the empty hall they passed, and in the lamp-light she glanced searchingly at his face, but read nothing in his light-coloured, restless eyes, his round, blunt nose set high above a thin, irresolute mouth.

"Whom shall I announce?" she asked, but he cut her short.

"My business," said he, biting at his nails, "is my best introduction," and blinked at her all the while,

shifting from foot to foot like a man eaten up with impatience.

Without more delay she opened the door, and as she did so she heard the clatter of a glass upon the table, and saw Charles, flushed of face, his wig aslant, spring forward in his seat before the fire.

"Who comes?" he called thickly, while the wine ran slopping on to the polished floor.

"A visitor from London," said Ethlenn, and waited for him to pass.

The Prince sprang up, his eyes unnaturally bright, a red glow upon each cheek. "Welcome, my lord," he cried gladly, and then with quick alarm, "Has aught gone wrong?"

The stranger glanced quickly about and fumbled with his hat.

"Your Royal Highness," said he, breathing hard, "all is lost."

Madame de Mézières entered the room at that moment and stood as still as stone in the doorway. But not more still than the two before the fire. Only the wine dripped slower and more slow, and then ceased altogether.

"Lord Wol——" broke out the old lady, in a voice so terrible that Ethlenn shivered. The stranger whisked about.

"Enough of names to-night," he whispered, looking from one to the other with agitated eyes.

And all the time Charles never moved.

The others drew together, standing in a little group, watching him furtively. Even Ethlenn shook from head to foot at such a spectacle of tragedy. If he would only cry out, or laugh, or curse! But he never moved; his head sunk upon his breast, his fingers gripping the edges of the table, with the knuckles white as ivory above the sombre oak.



"Your Highness," wailed Madame de Mézières, and stepped towards him, then stopped.

He looked at her strangely, as though he had heard a voice in a dream.

"Who spoke?" he asked, so low that they barely caught it.

Lord Wolbourne, the stranger who guarded his name so dear, stepped forward awkwardly enough. "Your Royal Highness," he said, "you are not well. You do not understand. We never imagined you had crossed, or we would have told you long since. Murray is even now in Paris."

That stirred the Prince like a blow in the face.

"In Paris?" he cried. "In Paris?"

"He crossed last night. Word reached us that the Government had their suspicions aroused. We held a meeting in Pall Mall. Westmoreland, Wynn, a score of others were there, and it was decided to abandon all for a space—only for a space."

Charles struggled for breath. "Who is there to inform the Government?" he asked, leaning heavily against the mantelpiece—then muttered, "For a space," and uttered a solitary inhuman laugh.

There was no reply.

A dark flush near purple crept up the Prince's cheek.

"By God, I'll make you answer!" he screamed, his sword half drawn.

The other shrank back a little and looked from one to another of them with rising fear blazing in his eyes.

"They say," he began, and moistened his lips, "they say Miss Walkingshaw."

For a moment Charles battled with his passion, and then of a sudden his face fell very white and he sank back deep into the chair, his head hanging down and his hands

quite listless by his side. At that Madame de Mézières stepping quickly forward touched Lord Wolbourne upon the arm.

"Go," said she; "for the love of Heaven, get yourself quickly out of here. See what a pretty work you and your fellow-triflers have made of that unfortunate young man."

He attempted an assertion of his dignity.

"Triflers, Madame?"

"Yes, skulkers and triflers—men who love conspiracy, but fly at a whisper of danger, and who foist their empty fears upon their Prince's shoulders."

He compressed his thin lips and an evil glint showed in his narrow eyes.

Then, without another word, turning his back upon them all, he stalked from the room, and a minute later his horse's hoofs were heard thundering madly up the drive towards the Godalming road.

"What do you think of him?" asked Madame bitterly, as silence fell.

Ethlenn started as from a reverie.

"I was not thinking of him at all," she answered; "such men do not seem to me to live, but only to move with the wind hither and thither. Where are there men but in the north?"

"And I," added Madame de Mézières, "am thinking only of the Prince."

He still sat there, breathing fitfully in a sort of swoon, but as they waited he slowly lifted his face, and the last few minutes had so marred it that they both came to his assistance. His eyes had fallen in and lost all lustre, his cheeks were livid and pinched, and his mouth hung slack and vacant; yet somewhere behind all this lurked such a presence of pathos and tragedy that it cut them to the very heart.

Pressing the brandy flask to his ashen lips, they raised him to his feet, his clothes all crumpled and his Star of St. George upon the floor.

"Your Royal Highness must fly to France," said the old lady, tending him gently. "Old John, the caretaker, will see you to the coast. Courage, dear lad; there is hope yet."

"No, no," he whispered; "all is lost." And then again, "All is lost."

It came from his lips like the knell of a bell.

Madame de Mézières hurried from the room, and once when Ethlenn spoke to try and cheer him he stared at her, but showed no signs of having heard.

And so in utter silence they remained until the sound of wheels echoed on the drive and the noise of a horse pulling up.

"It is time, sir," said Madame de Mézières, supporting him on one side, while Ethlenn took his arm upon the other. He walked through the hall without a word, and only when the cold night air struck his face did he hesitate a moment.

"If ~~there~~ is a God, Madame," he said in a very tired voice, "He will bless you and reward you as I hoped I could, but now I know I never shall."

"Some day," said the old lady, struggling to the last not to break down.

"Alas—never now," he returned in the same utterly exhausted voice.

They all went slowly down the steps, while John held open the door, his hat in his hand, and a moment later the Prince had fallen back into the shadow.

The old man climbed upon the box and took up the reins.

"Your Royal Highness," said Ethlenn softly, "I pray you go to Mademoiselle Ferrand. She will understand."

"Thank you, Mademoiselle," came the reply, as though from a great distance; "if it were not for her I do not know what would happen to me now."

The chaise started on its journey to Portsmouth, while they stood upon the steps bravely ready to wave if need be. But no sign of a farewell greeting came to them from the empty window. Far back in the shadows, now a wanderer for all time, lay Charles Edward Stuart, in whose breast the fire of a great hope had burned at last to the ashes of an overwhelming despair.

The wheels died out into the night. For a second they heard a dull rumble at the bend of the road and then absolute silence.

Madame de Mézières was crying quietly Ethlenn stood for a moment motionless. Then, hand in hand, they re-entered the house.

The moon rose wearily over the scattered trees beside the lawn. It shone feebly down upon the silent pastures and the still white road and flung the tragic greyness of Westbrook Place into sudden relief.



**BOOK II**  
**THE NORTH**

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## CHAPTER I

### I

**T**HE coach jolted and clattered along the Great North Road. It was nearly ten days since that night at Godalming when all was so irretrievably lost in the south. In the front seat sat Ethlenn Murdoch, calm countenanced, looking neither to right nor left, never shrinking when they passed a gibbet with its creaking burden, never speaking, but always engrossed in her own thoughts as the Murdochs had ever been. The South had failed—but the North remained. When had the North refused the call? From those desolate mountains she could see the heather alive with men. From every lonely glen they would stream, fearless, invincible, roused to new passion by their wrongs. Every mile carried her nearer, every village through which they rattled was another village behind her. And before her like a land of promise lay the north, the silent, austere, wind-driven north for which her heart had throbbed all those weary years in the south.

No shadow of fear disturbed her, no faintest whisper of what might await her in that silent terrible north. And so far away it crouched like a thing eternally patient, infinitely pitiless, and sleepless as Death through all the ages of the little race of men.

At last Ethlenn Murdoch neared the grey heights of Edinburgh. Madame de Mézières had presented her with a letter of introduction to Mrs. Cameron, wife of



Doctor Archibald Cameron, and indeed forewarned that lady of her arrival.

Edinburgh lay before her with all its beauty unfolded in the fading sunlight, its rugged Castle outlined in bleak grandeur against the cold sky, its blue-grey buildings massed together in haze, tall spires piercing the drift of smoke—Edinburgh serenely majestic, eternally proud.

To Ethlenn, a Paris and London, this lofty wind-driven city with its long historic High Street meant home. She caught at the homely accent of the people below them as a thirsty wayfarer catches water from a spring in the rock. On through the streets they thundered, the horn blowing lustily, the tired horses pricking their ears, the boys in the mud below running alongside for pennies. They drew up at the White Horse Inn.

As Ethlenn looked quickly about her a little uncertain what to do—a comely middle-aged woman approached, and for a moment she encountered a pair of singularly beautiful brown eyes looking into her own.

“Miss Murdoch,” said the stranger questioningly.

Ethlenn nodded and smiled.

“Are you Mrs. Cameron?” she asked; at which the lady drew her aside quickly and cast an anxious glance around her.

“Have a care,” she whispered; and then in her natural voice: “Where is your luggage, Miss Murdoch? I will see that it is conveyed to the house.”

Ethlenn, somewhat mystified by her manner, pointed out her portmanteau, and instantly half a dozen dirty porters (or “caddies,” to give them their correct name) swarmed around it, fighting and screaming in Gaelic, wild-eyed, shaggy men who had drifted into Edinburgh from the Highlands. After the '45 and the end of the clan system more and more Highlanders sought work in the

south. They formed the City Guard—they served as linkmen and caddies—they carried water and provisions up the steep stairs of the great "lands"<sup>1</sup> which overlooked the High Street.

"Canny, there," called Mrs. Cameron, "canny, ye red-haired deevil."

Two men were pulling at the same bag, snarling at each other like wild cats.

Suddenly, as they reached the centre of the roadway, a shrill cry of "Gardez loo" was flung from an upper window, and without delay Mrs. Cameron dragged Ethlenn to the shelter of the wall.

And not a moment too soon, for a splash of dirty water nearly reached them, a good ten feet away, flung from an upper window upon the street.

In the roadway the masses of filth lumped high along the edges of the gutter. Here and there, despite the steep incline, pools of stagnant water had formed, sending up a foul odour heavenwards. It was truly said that on a warm day the proximity of Edinburgh could be felt for miles around. Nor were the habits of the people, even the best people, any more cleanly. "The clartier the cosier" was a saying which throws considerable light on the surrounding conditions of a time when cleanliness of person was regarded as eccentric, when speech was rude and oaths were heard as frequently as hiccoughs, when fire-irons in the aristocratic houses were fastened down in case of chance brawling, and when the proprieties of life were as little regarded as they are in the slums to-day.

Hard, brutal times, with here and there a brave sentiment to shine out of the darkness or a great sacrifice to colour with bright gold the uniform grey.

<sup>1</sup> Houses.

## II

Ethlenn and Mrs. Cameron followed the Highland porters up the wynd, and after a few minutes' walk they turned down a narrow alley or "close" and began to ascend a slippery and winding staircase. As these stairs were common property no one tended them, and the accumulated refuse of years lay heavy on their sloping surface.

It was pitch dark inside, and Ethlenn was terrified that one of their uncouth guides would pick their pockets of belongings or cut open the baggage.

But in that she misjudged them. Like all the caddies of that period in Edinburgh, they knew perfectly well who Mrs. Cameron was—and the fact that she had returned would be widespread within the next hour. It was difficult for any stranger to pass within the city walls and conceal his presence or his identity. For a resident it was impossible.

When they were in the house—and Mrs. Cameron was opening her purse—the older porter of the two shuffled a little nearer.

"Go out, Donald," he said in Gaelic to his companion.

The other fellow retired without a word.

"Mrs. Cameron," the man said in a low voice, "this is no time for the Doctor to be coming to Scotland at all."

She searched his face anxiously.

"What do you mean?" she asked, while Ethlenn drew closer to her, watching the man's face.

He fumbled in his tattered clothes and drew out a piece of paper.

"Two nights ago," he went on, "he and Lochgarry were in the 'White Horse' having a glass. He gave me that, and said he was well."

"Thank you, Malcolm," she said quietly. "Did he say where he would be staying?"

"He said that he would be letting you know."

"I see. Malcolm, this is Miss Murdoch of Murdoch—ye ken her——"

The man barely heeded the words.

"Oh, aye," he said dryly, "we all ken the Murdochs."

Ethlenn flushed at the implied insolence of his tone, but at that moment Mrs. Cameron broke in with:

"Is that all the news, Malcolm?"

"Last night," he said gravely, "that old turncoat, James More, escaped from the Castle."

"James Macgregor——"

"That same. A bonny fuss they made after he had slipped into open country. The shutting of the gates was a great ploy—when the bird was flown—hee-hee. Half Edinburgh knew he was gone—he did it that clumsily, and they were feared he would be too drunk to move far and they'd be forced to cart him back." Again he flung back his tangled head and emitted a shrill contemptuous laugh.

"Do you think, Malcolm——?"

He retreated to the door.

"I'm saying nothing," he said, "but that it's no time for the Doctor to be back when James More is set on the trail. More than that, who do you think passed through to-day, hot-foot for the north, newly come from France?"

Mrs. Cameron clasped and unclasped her hands.

"Oh, dear—dear—who, Malcolm?"

He came swiftly to her and whispered a name in her ear at which she started and her face whitened suddenly.

"Merciful God," she cried, "not him!"

The man nodded.

"He was disguised and never halted for drop or meat,

but there's no mistakin' the likes o' him at all," he said, speaking in stilted English for the first time.

She looked about the room with hunted, miserable eyes—then thrusting some coins into the man's hand she pushed him towards the door. "Haste ye," she said, "or folk will suspect."

He spat on the silver and disappeared, shutting the door noiselessly.

Mrs. Cameron's face worked piteously, then:

"Wae's me," she sobbed abruptly, and dropped on her knees beside the table, her face buried in her hands.

"What is it?" whispered Ethlenn. "Can I not help you?"

But she only shook her head. Then after a little, wiping her eyes, she rose to her feet and unfolded the paper.

"Is that man to be trusted?" asked Ethlenn.

"Malcolm—puir body—oh, yes, my dear. He's a wandering, sour-worded creature, but a Cameron, and as secret and suspicious as a crow with a bawbee."

She replied drearily, unfolding the paper in her hand.

She read it through in silence, and then kissed the soiled writing passionately, and as suddenly straightened it out and handed it to Ethlenn.

"There's something of interest for you there," she said. Ethlenn took it gently.

"Dearest Lass," it ran, "just a word to say that L. and I are well, and can no get enough peat reek into our lungs after all our weary travelings abroad. Tell E. M., should you see her as I suggested to Madame de M., that I will send her word by a wee lad kent to me Balquhiddy way so that we can have a crack together. Maybe those that suspect will keep an eye on you, my bonnie sweet, so we must be brave and canny, for it would be sair should my

ain folk show the road to my taking. I suppose you have no word of the London business. So far it's like blowing dead cinders to speak of coming events. But there must be a glow somewhere could we but whistle loud enough.

"Kiss all the bairns for me.

"Your loving,

ARCHIE.

"P.S.—This by Malcolm. Give him some siller, as he's a faithful cratur."

Ethlenn handed it back, then walked over to the window and looked over the city, now golden in the rays of the setting sun.

Greyness there was everywhere—in the old stones, in the smoke swirling over the roof, in the stretch of distant hills.

Quickly the sun dropped out of sight and greyness crept into her heart.

### III

Long after a great knocking rang on the door.

With a glad cry Mrs. Cameron rushed across the room and lifted the latch.

"Bairns—bairns," she cried.

There was a chorus of fresh young voices and a stampeding of feet. In a moment a couple of rosy-faced children were hanging to her neck and a third was in her arms.

In the doorway stood a pleasant-faced, elderly woman.

"There they are, safe and sound, Mrs. Cameron," she said. "I must gang back now, but I'll call in later," and she was gone before the other could speak.

Something in Ethlenn cried out suddenly at the sight of these little hands and feet in Mrs. Cameron's arms.

She watched them all very wistfully from the shadowy window corner. Then turning slowly she looked down again upon the city, where the greyness had gradually deepened into the sombre intensity of night.

## CHAPTER II

**M**MURDOCH CASTLE, utterly grey and forlorn, stood cold and silent awaiting the night. Inside was no sound of human soul. Through the empty hall the wind sang drearily, and sighed in the vacant passages.

In the square turret a solitary light gleamed steadily. It shed its yellow rays upon a square, sombre room, where the master of Murdoch spent his days. It was a vast, dismal place, tapestried, book-lined along one side, with two very small windows, and a keek-hole in the corner to command the valley.

In the huge grate a fire was burning in a red glow. On the mantelshelf four silver candlesticks gleamed softly, and over them, with crossed blades, two claymores hung with heavy basket hilts, and between them a silver targe lavishly ornamented.

A small square window, diamond-paned, lay to the right of the fire-place, upon which, when wind blew up the hill, the ivy rustled and tapped. On the other side of the window a little round-topped door gave egress to the ramparts, and at its foot, to keep out the draught, lay a heavy rug.

Before the fire stood a massive, high-backed chair, heavily carved and cushioned. A table occupied the centre of the room, covered with books and papers in the greatest disorder.

Seated in the chair was Reuben Murdoch, father of

Ethlenn and owner of Castle Murdoch, a man near eighty, shrunk and wrinkled like a dried apple, withered to the colour of parchment, and yet with the flaming vitality of a snake in his piercing black eyes. So diminutive was he that one might have thought a child sat huddled between the arms of the chair—that is, until one caught a glimpse of his face. Frail of body he was indeed, but the wisdom of centuries seemed centred in that great, square head—and gleamed in his half-lidded inscrutable eyes. His was a face to haunt the memory, deadly white with the parchment tinge of the studious or very aged, thin-lipped and sinister, crafty-eyed like a hawk, and in repose somewhat saddened, almost wistful, as though the profound melancholy which hung like a mist about the house of Murdoch had cast its shroud about him.

On each arm of the chair, extended to their full length, lay his arms, and from the broad cuffs drooped his shapely hands, blue-veined and slender as a girl's, with the fingers clasped like claws upon the black knobs of wood.

He crouched back in his chair, his legs encased in worsted stockings flung out to the blaze, with the fire-light glinting on the great buckles on his shoes. His coat, waistcoat, and breeches were all of a dull brown cloth. He wore no wig and no cravat.

He sat utterly still, like a statue of Meditation or (some would have said) Cunning, wrought in marble.

Reuben Murdoch had been born in Murdoch, and had lived there, beyond rare visits to Edinburgh and London, all his days. It was an old tale since the Murdochs had come fleeing south, and settled in Strathyre. They were a fierce, wild clan then headed by Murdoch Mor, great-grandfather to Reuben, and the feuds they fought are recorded for those who care about such things.

But wars and clan hatred and the Risings had played



their part, and now the clan were as scattered dust, and there were none called Murdoch but Reuben, a very old man, and Ethlenn his daughter.

Such reflections may have crossed his mind, for he raised his head and stared long at the claymores on the wall. Not a muscle of his face moved, not a word escaped his lips; it was impossible to say what Reuben Murdoch thought on that or any other subject.

On the floor, beside his chair, lay a heavy oak stick with a large knob to its handle, smooth and round as a marble. This he grasped firmly, and then making a variety of faces he struggled to his feet.

Standing, Murdoch appeared more diminutive than ever. Even his stick seemed to dwarf him. Had not his great head, with its long snow-white hair tied in a large black ribbon at his neck, commanded instant attention, he would have seemed a pitiful enough creature. But though many hated Murdoch, no one pitied him. There was something in his eyes and in the lines of his cruel mouth, with the satirical twist of the lips, that was more apt to cause fear than compassion or contempt.

Murdoch leaned upon the stick when he stood, for he was lame. Born with one leg shorter than the other, he had lived to curse the day when he had first breathed. Mocked in his boyhood for his incapacity physically, he had outwitted his brothers with his agile mind. Where they had fought with fists and broadswords, he had won his victories in ways more subtle. Deformity had made him reserved, suspicious, ill-tempered. Ridicule—and those were not gentle days—had sent him, like a wounded animal to its lair, to brood in solitude upon his wrongs. He had outwitted and outlived them all—sometimes he thought of that with a flicker of a smile. James, who had nicknamed him "The Crab"—Duncan,

who had jeered at his love for Agnes Campbell—where were they now? For forty years lifeless clay beneath a plot of rank grasses. And she—she had laughed the loudest at him, being a Campbell to the very heart of her. As Murdoch had come to manhood, he had discovered that in a savage country ruled by the strongest hand there is a stronger force than the sword. Scheming came to him readily enough. He was careless as to the pain or trouble caused, or the comedies he swiftly turned to tragedies. He played with men, rude, unlearned men who scorned him, as a man moves figures on a chess-board. A word here—a word there, a rumour, a shrug of the shoulders, and the thing was done. Some one once said that Murdoch would stir up strife between two flies upon the window-pane.

The November evening drew rapidly towards the falling of night, and the river Balvaig grew colder in the twilight. A slight shiver passed over the old man, and then, sighing between his colourless lips, he turned slowly from the window, and took to pacing up and down the great room, his stick tapping monotonously as he went.

Suddenly he halted, his head cocked to the side like a listening bird's. Then, going to the door, he drew it a little open and called, "Janet—Janet," in a high, thin voice.

The sound of footsteps shuffling up the stone stairway reached him after a spell, and a stout woman, his house-keeper Janet Souter, rounded the corner with noisy breathing, and stared up at him with shrewd, kindly eyes.

"Come in, Janet," he said. "I wish a word with you."

Returning to his chair, he motioned her to a stool beside the fire-place. "Sit down," said he, and fell into a reverie.

Outside, the wind moaned about the turret, and sent the tapestry flapping upon the wall.

"Janet," he began, "to-night Miss Ethlenn returns."

He let his eye fall upon her for an instant, then stared into the fire.

"It is six years since she left," he went on, "and six years is a long time when one is young. We must make her comfortable, Janet—have you a fire in her room? We must not grudge a fire her first night."

"This hour past."

"And some supper in preparation?—the dinner hour is long past."

"The muir fowl Mr. Ferguson sent, and a pasty."

He nodded his head.

"Draw some claret—the best, Janet, and put it beside the fire. By the by, while I remember, there is a gentleman coming to-morrow to visit us—it will be company for Miss Ethlenn."

She waited, saying nothing.

"He is a Mr. Carmichael," he said, "from Stirling way."

"The gentleman who called last Tuesday night?" she asked.

"Eh!" he replied sharply; "what made you think that——"

"I met a gentleman in the hall. I did not know how he got in. I asked him his name——"

The old man stirred irritably, but seemed, if possible, even colder and more disinterested.

"I let him in," he said. "Kindly forget you have seen him before—do you hear?"

"Aye, Murdoch."

He watched her keenly and in silence, then let the lids drop over his eyes.

"Now go," he said, and lay back.

Janet rose and left the room. Suddenly Murdoch laughed.

"Damn her," he cried, "for a meddling old badger," and, scrambling to his feet, he opened a box under the table and drew out a set of bagpipes. The ribbons were faded and the tartan bag stained and shabby, while the ivory on the drones was dull yellow with age. But a new spirit seemed to animate him at the very handling of them. He let his stick fall upon the floor, where it rolled under the table. Then, throwing the drones over his left shoulder, he laid the bag under his arm.

A breath, and it trembled. Another, and it expanded above his hand. Again, and his hand fell away, the bag swung under his oxter, and the chanter cried out one shrill, clear note, while the drones thundered and screamed discordantly, unpausing, like a river in flood.

Then with his right hand he began to finger the drones, screwing them up and down, blending them to the chanter's note and to each other, softening them into the steady accompaniment which drums as a skep of bees in summer.

At last, breaking into a marching tune, he limped briskly up and down the empty space—nine steps up, four to the turn, and back again, his head erect, a splash of colour in his cheeks, while the place resounded to the clangour. Suddenly he stopped in the far corner of the room, where the yellow firelight flickered on the wall, and burst into a rallying call, strident, compelling, with the gathering of men in its sounding prolonged notes, and the storm of wind amongst the corries in its surging tumult. A little tuning and his fingers held for a moment on the bass notes to fling up into "Cumha na Cloinne," "The Lament for the Children," which is sad hearing at the best of times, for in it are told the mysteries of youth

and sudden death, and the old, old weariness of life. The fire seemed to fall lower, and the wind out in the watching night to hang upon its wings. Downstairs old Donald the gardener raised his head and stole into the hall, leaving Janet alone. He stood swaying to the beat of the sombre melody, his chin upon his breast like that of a mourner.

The Master of Murdoch up above was playing the "taor-luath," then the "crun-luath," and of a sudden the last slow notes fell into silence, and he let the bag sink slack under his arm. Tears coursed wearily down his withered cheek. He shivered a little as though darkness had fallen upon his soul.

The shadows crept all about him, wrapping the Castle in grey obscurity as they had folded it for centuries of days.

Shaking his head, he turned towards the table, moving slowly. In the room the great fire was crackling and blazing, but he shook like a man bitterly cold.

Then, taking up his stick, he limped heavily across the room and, raising his face to the window-frame, stared into the gathering gloom.

"Mo chridhe!" he wailed in a weak, tired voice, and remained like a thing of stone, his sunken eyes lost in the heart of the night.

## CHAPTER III

### I

IT was a day of sullen rain and wind when Ethlenn kissed Mrs. Cameron good-bye and stepped into the post-chaise which was to convey her to Stirling.

"Could your father no have met ye?" asked Mrs. Cameron, with motherly concern.

"No," answered Ethlenn, "he is an old man, and never leaves Murdoch now."

"And is there nobody else, lassie?"

"No—nobody else. We have no relatives and fewer friends."

The good lady shook her head dubiously at that, and approaching the postilion spoke earnestly to him for some time.

"He is a decent man," she whispered to Ethlenn, "and second cousin to a Macdonald with whom I am acquainted; and at Stirling, I suppose, you will be met by friends."

Ethlenn smiled kindly at her.

"How good you are," she replied. "Yes, at Stirling I will be met by Chuckie Stane and the ponies."

"Chuckie Stane—what sort of daft name is that?"

"He is a little boy who tends the cattle and does odd trokes—the last male retainer of the house of Murdoch save Donald, the gardener, but with all the assurance of a clan."

"Well—well, God keep you, lassie, and bring you happiness, and" (drawing her aside) "when ye see

Archie tell him that Robin has won a prize for Latin and him only ten, and that Jeannie has blue eyes like hissel'."

The tears rose to her eyes as she whispered the last words, and with a swift embrace she began bustling Ethlenn into the chaise and wrapping a plaid about her knees. And then, with a clatter of hoofs, the conveyance started, and rattled along the High Street for the road to the north.

The morning was dark and the streets deserted. As Ethlenn lay back in the gloom of the chaise she heard a clock toll seven.

Some six hours later they drew up in Stirling, and dismissing the chaise Ethlenn took some refreshment, and then threading her way through the crowded streets, for it was market day, she halted on the lowest slopes of the Castle Hill. Before her stretched the fertile fields, with Bannockburn on her left hand and Bridge of Allan on her right. But her eyes lay to the north-west, where the shadowy hills mounted guard over the Highland line. Of a sudden the rattle of a horse's bit arrested her attention, and turning her head she saw, some hundred yards away, a diminutive boy leading two sturdy ponies towards her.

"Chuckie Stane," she cried joyfully.

They approached her rapidly. Chuckie Stane was as unkempt as the ponies he led. Covering a mass of long, black, straggling hair lay an ancient Highland bonnet. His feet and legs were bare to the knees. About his waist was a cloth kilt much torn and stained, and the shirt of a full-grown man, with the sleeves turned back upon his lean brown arms, completed his attire.

He was well under five feet, but active as a roe deer.

Ethlenn ran to meet him.

"Chuckie Stane," she cried, "dear Chuckie Stane," and caught the disreputable-looking creature in her arms.

"Ye have not forgotten me, Chuckie Stane?" she asked, holding him at arm's length. "It is six years since I left. How old are you now?"

The boy wrinkled his brow.

"Fifteen," he answered. His great blue eyes were fixed upon her with solemn interest.

Suddenly Ethlenn let him go.

"Six years," she said, "how could you remember? But when I saw your face, Chuckie Stane, it all came back."

At that he broke into a vehement burst of Gaelic.

"But I do remember, Miss Ethlenn, for all that I was only nine. What else have I had to be dreaming upon? And old Janet has read me your letters. But it is a grand lady you are now, Miss Ethlenn."

She shook her head wistfully at him.

"Never that," she said.

Chuckie Stane fingered with his ancient garments for a moment. His honest blue eyes met Ethlenn's for an instant with puzzled uncertainty.

"Well?" said she, smiling.

"I must ask pardon for my clothes," he remarked, in a sort of despair.

Ethlenn checked the laugh on her lips.

"Who put this notion into your head?" she asked softly.

"It was Janet. She is making me English clothes, Miss Ethlenn, but it is an ungrateful vagabond I am, and I was to be telling you that——"

"Chuckie Stane!"

"Aye—and no good will come to me at all——"

"But what did you do with them?"

"I put them on Hector, the bull calf, and it has taken three days to catch him. He was not happy at all."

Ethlenn remembered the old contest which had always waged between Janet and Chuckie Stane. Neither would



express anything but contempt and hatred of the other. Even when Chuckie Stane was eight he had entered into bodily combat and been worsted and chastised. His methods being Highland were guerilla, whereas the attack of Janet was that of a civilized power in the broad daylight, and with drums beating and a declaration of war. Ethlenn regarded Chuckie Stane's face for a moment. It had not altered. Still the quaint, droll expression in the clear eyes—the true northern cast of feature and oval head—the perfect, strong, even teeth, and the rich sombre colouring as autumnal as the bracken on the hills.

"Let us go," she said suddenly, and mounted the biggest pony.

Chuckie Stane vaulted on to the other beast, and they made their way down the slope and on to the road, heading for Callander, some fifteen miles distant.

Ethlenn rode in silence for some time.

"Is there any news?" she asked suddenly.

Her small companion reined in his pony beside hers.

"Ronald, the old hill pony, is dead," he said, with due gravity.

"What talk is this?" cried she, between vexation and amusement. "I mean news of further trouble. Or wait—how is my father?"

"Well enough," replied the boy, "but hardly stirring out. He's spoken of your coming this month past, and little else."

"Has he?" A soft flush sprang into her cheeks. She had not looked for that.

"The district is quiet, I suppose?"

He stared at her with blank amazement.

"Quiet, Miss Ethlenn—what is it that you mean?"

"Six years," she murmured to herself, "six years." And then aloud: "It was not so six years ago."

"Oh," he returned lightly, "I was not understanding, but that was long since. I am not knowing anything about that."

"Go ahead," she said almost sharply. "I would like to ride alone."

He threw a pathetic glance at her, but cantered away without a word.

Only when they drew rein at Kilmahog did he approach her with timidity.

"Miss Ethlenn," he said in a low voice, "I am only Chuckie Stane and not worth a thought, but I see it's troubled you are over something, and I shall always be at your call——"

She took one of his rough little hands in hers.

"Chuckie Stane," she replied, "when did you come to Murdoch?"

He thought a moment.

"When I was seven."

"Why did you come?"

"Because my father was dead."

"And you remember how?"

"He was shot by a Campbell."

She drew him nearer.

"Shot—and why?"

He shook his head.

"They were always killing then," he said, a little wearily.

"But would you not like to avenge your father, Chuckie Stane?"

A flicker of a smile passed over his face.

"He gave me a great beating that very morn," he said, "but if it were to please you, Miss Ethlenn."

"Thank you," she replied, and passed within the inn door.

## II

The road from Kilmahog to Strathyre was utterly dark until the moon rose. They were riding along the shores of Loch Lubnaig when the first grey gleams of light flickered through the trees, and by the time they reached the end of the loch where the river Balvaig flows placidly, the whole valley of Strathyre lay stretched before them, and upon the opposite hill-side between its low banks shone the lights of Murdoch Castle. Then quite suddenly, as they neared the clachan of Strathyre, a black belt of cloud hid the face of the moon and blotted out the landscape.

To Ethlenn the road from Kilmahog had brought back many memories. Although she could scarce see the trees outlined against the wintry sky, she recognized every bend of the way, each incline and hill, the long quiet stretch and the corner where the murmur of the river could be heard in the valley below. Here she had played robbers with James, who always was her favourite brother. It was in that steep place she had watched the red-coated soldiers coming to harry Strathyre.

Memories sad and trivial, bringing smiles and wistfulness—such a jumble of petty chronicles as make up the sweetness and the travail of forgotten days.

The utter stillness of the night, the occasional familiar sounds of sighing wind and running water, the prolonged calling of owls hawking their prey—all these meant home to Ethlenn, and the end of strange faces and stranger happenings. What the last fortnight had been to her she would never forget. The great adventure which had terminated in the forlorn tragedy, the scene in Mademoiselle Ferrand's rooms, when she first met the Prince, the mad ride north, the terrible vigil at Godalming, and the final ignominy when Madame de Mézières and she

were arrested. But she could not but smile when she remembered the old lady receiving the emissary of Newcastle in the hall and yawning a little when she heard his errand.

"I shelter the Prince?" she had said, blinking up at him. "I knew your master was foolish, even for a Prime Minister, but this is mad enough for the Elector himself."

To which he had answered gruffly that both of them were under arrest on suspicion, and that the house was to be searched.

"So long as I can finish my claret," replied the old lady, "you can climb on the roof if it so please his lordship."

The representative of law and order departed soon, however, and, finding that Madame de Mézières possessed a passport which covered them both sufficiently, if not satisfactorily, he left them free.

On the next day Madame de Mézières had sought her sister in Bath, much to the latter's embarrassment, while Ethlenn, posting to London, had travelled north.

It all seemed a wild dream to her now, and almost as though she had never left Strathyre. There were the lights of Castle Murdoch. She trembled at the thought of meeting her father, and her lip quivered.

Her thoughts returned again and again to Murdoch, that mysterious old man she had always seemed to watch rather than love. There was something repellent about him. Reserved they all were, and it was a common word that the secrets of the Murdochs were as numerous and as tongueless as pebbles on Lochearnside. She who had hardly known a mother's affection had seldom if ever confided even to James, unless it were the nest of a plover or the lie of a trout under the banks of Balvaig. Her father she had always feared, and once when he had tried to kiss her she had hidden her face under a cushion, which

angered him fiercely, so that he had ranted against her until she flew sobbing from the room.

He was as frail and dry as a pinch of snuff, and a cripple, but she knew, with a sort of pride, that he was feared like none other in Strathyre—that, though clanless in the ordinary acceptance of the term, he could raise men to his whistle like Macgregor himself. There had once been a raid on Murdoch, when she was a child of six, and she had a memory of her father at the top of the stairway, with a rapier in his hand, and the curses and groans of baffled men. And then he had turned in her direction, singing to himself a lilting song of the Isles, stooping like a dwarf to ease his lameness, and at the mad look in his eyes she had screamed and dashed into her bedroom, to bury herself beneath the clothes.

It would be different now that her brothers were dead—how great a difference she could not contemplate. Would she live and die in Strathyre, with only her father and old Janet as company? It was a dismal picture, and yet she knew in her heart that nowhere else on earth could she be quite happy. Or would she marry? Then it must be near her home, for the place was stamped on her memory ineradicably, and surged in her very blood. She had often felt that she was fated in some way to encounter the meaning of Murdoch. That her life might be monotonous she never imagined. Behind all probability, somewhere in the background of her mind lay an inherent belief that she was as an actor waiting for his cue, ready to speak words of which she had no present knowledge. That Murdoch meant something was to her indisputable. Murdoch had always spelt mystery. People who visited the Castle were dimly cognisant of an atmosphere unlike that of commonplace surroundings. Some scoffed at it openly, others remained silent.

Who could explain the meaning of Murdoch any more than the lull before the storm, or the softness of evening-time after rain ?

To Ethlenn, the Castle was keeping watch, grey-faced and sombre, for the coming of the Stuarts and better days. And that her own fate was intermingled with its old shattered walls she was convinced ; that she had learned long since from Seumas Stewart, now dead, he who foretold the killing of James and the wailing of widows in Strathyre. Once more she would deck the crumbling walls with tartan, once again would the old hall ring to the sound of dancing feet and laughing voices. What else could link her future with Murdoch ?

Again she peered ahead towards her home. As she looked she shivered suddenly. How cold the moon's rays fell now upon the black river and the sleeping glen.

They entered the village of Strathyre, and passed through its silence without halt or greeting. Ethlenn had hoped some one would come out to cry a welcome, but none came. She knew how sorely her father had treated them, and the wholesome fear they bore him, but she had never had a quarrel with Strathyre.

Once a head peered through a doorway and instantly disappeared.

But at the end of the road where the bridge crosses Balvaig she looked back, and in the faint gleam of firelight on the road she saw a group of figures, staring after her like a menace of coming evil.

Quickly they rode over the river and into black darkness again.

Suddenly, like a yellow eye *blinking* cheerily in the rugged face of Murdoch, she saw the light of the hall lamp. The ponies' weary feet plodded up the last stretch of road. A minute and Ethlenn sprang off her beast and

wondered for an instant why the grass grew so long about her feet. But all else was forgotten a moment later, when the door flew back and Janet ran down to meet her.

"My bairn!" she cried. "My puir, cauld bairn! Come awa in. Ye'll be glad to be back, I'm thinking."

"Oh, Janet, so glad! You look not a day older, Janet——"

"Tuts, havers, Miss Ethlenn," rejoined the other, beaming expansively.

"And father—does he know I'm come?"

"He's been keekin' out of the window for hours, I can assure you, and he's waiting upstairs for ye. He said he'd rather greet you by himsel'. He's queer, ye ken, that way."

Ethlenn smiled.

"I'll run up," she said. "He's been well, I suppose?"

Janet pursed her lips.

"Oh, aye, he's been well—but fashed about siller, and walkin' more than sleepin' o' nights. He sometimes sits for days together just sighing to himsel', and yet I daurna mention it, for he turns on me like a bubbly jock and fair chases me skirlin' frae the room. I'm glad ye're back, Miss Ethlenn. It's no place this for a solitary woman."

Ethlenn ran quickly upstairs and opened the sitting-room door. The fire was roaring up the chimney, and as she entered her father limped towards her, his arms outstretched. She saw how frail he looked, and then she caught him to her breast.

"Welcome home, Ethlenn," he cried, pulling her face down to his. He kissed her warmly, then stepped back a pace and looked at her, leaning with both hands upon his stick.

"Dear child," he said softly, "it might have been your mother coming in."

## CHAPTER IV

**I**N the old dining-hall of Murdoch Castle father and daughter sat facing each other across the table, now cleared of dishes. Only a decanter of claret remained glowing warmly upon the oak, reflecting the twinkling candle rays in its deep red body.

Old Murdoch toyed with his glass absently, his carefully tended fingers coiling and uncoiling about the stem. The candles in their silver sconces shed a yellow light over all, softening into pink shades where they met the crimson of the fire. It was a gaunt, dark room, with walls of naked stone, high-roofed and polished-floored, bare and gloomy by day or night.

Outside, the valley lay spell-bound under the cold moon, windless, utterly still.

Inside, father and daughter faced each other after six years, speechless yet anxious to break silence: he somewhat overcome by this self-possessed young woman before him; she curious about him, but as tongue-tied as a stranger.

With a quick gesture he snuffed a candle and leaned forward, his eyes upon the fire.

"Ethlenn," said he, "it seems but yesterday since I left you at the Convent of St. Joseph, and here you are a grown woman, strong enough, I'd wager, to carry me up Ben Ledi."

The ice was broken. She smiled back at him.



"It seems but yesterday," she said, "and yet it seems, oh, so long ago—so very long ago."

"You enjoyed it, Ethlenn?" He looked at her quickly.

"Enjoyed it?" she echoed. "But does one go to a convent for that?"

Her father gave one of his noiseless laughs.

"Your mother always told me that those were the happiest days in her life."

"My mother—was she in a convent, father?"

"She was—before I married her. She was French, you know, and never took to these Highland hills, poor soul. It's an ill business, Ethlenn, when the dove nests with the eagle."

He mused a moment, his white head fallen back on the chair, his eyes nearly hidden by the lids.

"I loved your mother, Ethlenn, and yet——"

She waited, intent on his words.

"And yet she always seemed to fear me. When I would have taken her in my arms, she more often than not shrank from me, and sometimes I was angered, and then she would cry. It was better she died, poor thing—it was no time for such as she when the hills were echoing to the rallying cries of a score of clans."

The girl made a momentary gesture of her arms towards him. He looked so old and frail, so utterly forlorn.

"Father," she said softly.

He started and glanced at her sharply.

Without a word her hands fell back upon her lap.

"I've given ye a grand schooling," he began again in a thin, disagreeable voice; "there's been no money stinted, Ethlenn—ye can't say I've done badly by you, and siller's rare these days."

"I shall not forget it," she replied, more stiffly than she meant.

"That's kind o' ye," he retorted. "It's fine learning that a daughter will not overlook her father's good deeds."

She caught the sneer in his voice.

Her face hardened a little. His eyes fell before her steady gaze.

"Tuts," he said, a trifle ashamed. "I'm a havering old doitard, Ethlenn, and no used to such grand feeding. Janet must answer for my tantrums. An old man, Ethlenn—an old broken man."

He limped from his chair and began poking at the fire. Then, whisking round, he stood with his hands under his coat-tails, his lean legs apart, and the firelight blinking on his buckled shoes.

"What has happened since I left?" she asked.

A frown fell on his face.

"The devil's work," he said, "and we're no through with it yet, I'm thinking. It was bad enough hounding a herd of feckless bodies to Culloden, poor ignorant creatures with no understanding of the cause they fought for, driven along by adventurers who had all to gain and nothing to lose——"

"But, father—your own sons."

"Aye, silly lads—and what did they gain for their gay tramp? Only muckle gashes and a secret grave. In my opinion, Ethlenn, and I'm an old man who has seen three risings, there were not half a dozen honest men amongst all the leaders of that damnable affair."

Ethlenn said no word. She watched him steadily, her face like stone.

Murdoch seemed to have an inkling of her thoughts. For a moment he hesitated, then:

"A cold-blooded business," said he, "have no doubts

on that score, Ethlenn. To you it may seem a fine thing to follow a forlorn cause to the death. But who wants the Stuarts back? Only a dozen scheming Highlanders playing a losing game. He was a pawn to keep the old times running. It was either that or the end of their petty tyrannies. They played for the sword and the power, Ethlenn, and they lost. Lochiel and Murray, Lochgarry maybe, and one or two others were honest men, but what of the rag-tag of that bickering crew and their wretched people? I would not be surprised if in a hundred years all Scotland is daft enough to regard the 'forty-five as a page of national romance." He sniffed. "Romance? There's little o' that will satisfy a Highlander."

"How can you speak like that, father? Are you no better than a Whig?"

"Maybe—there's worse than Whigs—there's some I'm hearing who'd actually raise the clans again."

Ethlenn sprang to her feet.

"I hope to God there are!" she cried passionately. "And say what you will, the Highlands would rise to a man."

Murdoch stood with his snuff-box in his hand.

"Havers," he snapped, "sheer nonsensical havers. They're ay busy quarrelling over the Prince's gold and who can snatch a lot of land to think about risings. They ken now who wants a rising."

"What do you mean?"

"The fox who's lost his tail is verra persuasive to his neighbours who are mair fortunate."

"You let my brothers go out," she said, turning the subject.

He drenched his nose with snuff, and crept up to her. His white hair barely touched her shoulder.

"After all," said he, tapping her with a finger and smiling cannily, "after all, there's no saying, and if the French had landed——" He paused and winked.

She wrenched herself away.

"I hate such talk," she replied, "you make me feel——"

"Well, child?"

"That—that we would be a fine people were we not so mean."

"Mean?"

"Aye, mean in heart and soul—a race eaten up with caution and for ever weighing one thing with another—silent because we wish to give nothing away—serious because we hoard up our time against mirth."

He straightened himself a little.

"We are not so foolish as the English," he said.

Ethlenn smiled faintly.

"But in the end the English will drive the Celt to the wall unless—unless——"

"Another rising," he put in mockingly; "and that, should it succeed, will put us back two hundred years."

"It were no great harm even if it were true," she said.

He laughed softly.

"Oh, you women," he said; "you would rather have muckle dreams than a bag o' siller."

"And why not? For there's a quick end to siller, but it's a weary life has no dreams."

He wagged his head at her.

"So," he murmured. "But why can women no be satisfied when dreams are safe? They love romance, but it must be living, daily ploys, such as loving or scheming, or looking for what never comes. It's the memories of old days that are the best, Ethlenn. A bit tune and I can hardly keep back the tears."

"They were no better, really, father. The old days have always seemed the best days since the world began."

For a few moments neither spoke. Ethlenn was stunned by her father's words, and was only anxious to get out of the room and think over the situation.

Her father, however, had another mind.

"You came back sooner than I had expected," he remarked slowly, fiddling with his snuff-box.

"Six years is a long time," she rejoined, "and I was tired of Paris."

He patted her hand.

"Ye'll no weary of your father, Ethlenn?" He looked up wistfully.

A sudden gush of love seemed to thunder through her body. Without a word she caught him to her and crushed him to her breast until he cried to her to have done.

"Weary," she cried, her eyes glistening, while he straightened his collar. "Weary—I feel to-night that the world is new. All these things I love—the old room, the noise of the owls—the smell of Strathyre. Oh, I can't tell you what I feel." She paused. "You're all that's left to me now," she said suddenly, looking into his face with grave eyes.

"Aye," he returned, "and no muckle to boast of, Ethlenn—just an old broken man. But I hope, child—I hope I'll no leave ye penniless. I canna just tell ye, but I've plans, rare plans, Ethlenn, which may mak' ye the lady of a place less like a cow byre than Murdoch."

She thought him wandering, and only smiled. Then fondly kissing him, she lit her candle and went upstairs.

He watched her going, and closed the door gently after her.

Then, tip-toeing to the fire place, he glanced up the

chimney and softly extracted a brick from above the dying embers. In the hollow lay a dirty linen bag, which he drew out and laid upon the table.

Untying the strings, he opened the mouth of it and slid a quantity of golden coins on the table.

His eyes blazed into fire as he handled them.

"A grander place than Murdoch," he whispered, chuckling to himself, "and there's mair coming. But no a word—no a word. She's got her heid full of queer notions. Aye, she'll hev her tocher. A grander place—" he raised his head suddenly, keenly alert.

In the window a shadow seemed to slide swiftly into the night.

Murdoch hastily gathered the coins into the bag, breathing quickly. Creeping to the door, he pulled it open and stared into the darkness.

He paused a moment, frowning to himself ; then, blowing out the candles, climbed the creaking stairway to his room.

Out in the night a dark figure crawled through the bracken until it reached the cover of the trees.

For an instant it stood upright, watching the castle ; then, bending almost double, went running like a shadow towards Balquhiddy.

## CHAPTER V

### I

MURDOCH CASTLE stood on a promontory on the slopes of Beinn-an-Shithein, overlooking Strathyre across the slow-moving Balvaig and midway between Loch Lubnaig and Loch Voil. Below its rugged grey walls grew a little clump of firs, through which ran a track bridle-path to Balquhidder. From this track some pretence of an entrance drive broke out at the end of the trees and wound up the slope to the great shattered gates of Murdoch. The front of the extreme end of the Castle was thus facing Balquhidder, the back windows commanding the top of Loch Lubnaig and the road to the south, with the pleasant green valley between.

Murdoch Castle had been an imposing pile in the old days, and despite its mouldered, tottering walls and rusted, crooked gates, it still presented a rugged and massive front.

Inside the fallen remnants of its outer walls lay the garden and precincts of the place. Before the front door was the old courtyard with large cobble stones half buried in weeds.

The Castle itself was stark and square, covering some fifty square yards—turreted, rudely fashioned, but strongly constructed, and with a few barred and shuttered windows commanding each of its bleak sides. Ivy had climbed up the sides clinging to the falling masonry, and

on top, upon the moss-grown ledges, wild grasses and such-like fluttered in the breeze. All manner of birds nested in crannies and holes, and on the topmost stones, where a great block of cobbles had become dislodged, owls reared their young, shrieking and whistling around the desolate, night-ridden tower.

The hills were now ruddy with autumn bracken. The change was also come upon the foliage, which varied from copper and gold to splashes of deep scarlet like a fresh stab in the heart of the wood.

In the haze of early morning, distances were veiled in diaphanous blueness like the soft indisguisable colour of peat smoke far away blending into the pearl-grey of a November sky.

The harsh calling of muir fowl came sharply from the faded heather, and from the low-lying straths a cow lowed incessantly. Far away moved a dark speck approaching from Loch Lubnaig. As it drew nearer, the slow-flying wings of a heron broke out of the mist. Passing to the west of Murdoch he uttered one solitary, rasping cry, and was lost to sight in swirling vapour above Balvaig.

The dawn was breaking, and the Castle stood out slowly against the sky-line cold and tragic, indescribably grim.

The morning broke grey and storm-tossed, with Ben Ledi shrouded in swirling mist. Ethlenn found her father seated at breakfast when she came down. He was gulping up his porridge with a yellow horn spoon, and splashing milk into the plate from a brown jug beside him.

Hastily wiping his mouth, he sprang up and greeted her warmly. The cold light fell upon his face, dead-white and wrinkled with deep crows' feet around the eyes. She took him in at a glance—his slovenly stock, his soiled coat and breeches, his loose woollen hose. He



had not shaved, and a grey stubble grated on her cheek like the scrape of a file.

Without a word she sat down, helping herself to porridge.

He pushed the brown jug towards her.

"It's a good thing ye were no later," said he, and tittered at his pleasantry.

The meal proceeded in silence.

Janet came in with a dish of boiled salmon and a plate of cold grouse.

When she had left the room Murdoch raised his eyes from his plate.

"There's a visitor the day, Ethlenn," he said.

"Coming to stay, father?"

"Aye—for a few days. You'll be kind to him, Ethlenn, won't you?"

"A man——?"

"Aye—they're no sich a novelty, are they?"

There was a moment's pause.

"His name's Samuel Carmichael," he continued, helping himself to the grouse with his knife, "and he's a well-to-do chiel frae Stirling way, I think. I've a matter o' business wi' him. He's a handsome young man, Ethlenn, and he's seen foreign parts."

"Is he married?" she asked.

"Ye cunning hussie," he returned, gleefully reading her words to his own mind. "Ye baggage—it's an early start ye'll be makin', I perceive."

She flushed crimson at the blatant vulgarity of his words.

"What's he coming for?"

Her father ceased his tittering.

"Business," said he shortly; "just business. No for a lassie to meddle with. He'll stay for a few days, a week, maybe, so I wish ye to show him the country and

fit him up for a bit fishing. He'll be here any time now, and mind that we're dependent to some extent on him."

"Dependent, father?"

"Oh—I never said we're fashed about siller frae him for our maintenance, but wheels within wheels, Ethlenn. When you're older ye'll ken there's a lot can be done wi' a little deeplomacy," and he squinted his eyes at her like a man vastly amused at something.

She pondered on his words a moment, then rose and left the room, closing the door behind her.

## II

The front door was open, and the sound of the river below the Castle came calling up to her on the breath of the wind.

"Well, Miss Ethlenn," said Janet, suddenly appearing in the hall, where she had just had a passage-of-arms with Chuckie Stane and retired under a shower of taunts.

"You must not spoil that boy, Janet," she said laughingly, as Chuckie Stane flung himself over the garden wall.

"Spoil him, Miss Ethlenn! My certy, I'd warm him mair like, could I just get a firm grip o' the graceless loon."

Singing, Ethlenn ran down the steps which led out of doors.

"Come away," she said, "and show me the garden. It must have grown out of all recognition since I was here. Just think of it, Janet! Six whole years. They make a difference in a girl."

"They've made a rare change in you, Miss Ethlenn. Ye left here a thin, lang-leggit, black-e'ed bairn, as wild as a hill calf, and noo ye are just like yir puir mither, except——"

"Not so good-looking, Janet."

"Oh, she was no patch on you, dearie, though mair gentle-looking, ye ken, meaning nae offence—but eh! she lacked gumption, that woman. She pit up nae mair fight to that bit creature indoors than a rabbit does to a weasel."

"Your comparisons are hardly complimentary to my parents," murmured Ethlenn.

"I dinna understand ye," continued Janet, "but he daur na try ony o' thae tricks wi' me. Ma certy, I'd like tae catch him at it."

"Poor father," said Ethlenn, smiling. "You mustn't be hard on him, Janet. He's an old man."

"Aye, so he's always saying, but that's nae excuse for his queer goings-on. There's muckle nights he's no in bed at all, but playing hide-and-seek among the braes o' Balquhidder."

"Not in at night?"

"That same, and if he's sae auld he shouldna behave like ane o' thae red-haired Macgregors, evil-smellin' deevils."

To Ethlenn her words brought a vague unrest. What took her father out at night? There was something behind all this.

"Has he company at times?" she asked casually, her eyes on the swirling foam-flecked river under the bridge.

Janet shook her head.

"Nae soul ever crosses the door," she said; "it's a hoose o' evil, Murdoch Castle, mind my words. There are sayings o' a curse which hangs on Murdoch, though I must admit as a decent Presbyterian body that in my opeenion it's nae the curse sae muckle as the folk who do its errand that fulfil prophecy."

"What do you mean, Janet?"

"Tuts, lassie, dinna look sae scared. There's tales whispered about Murdoch, but there's nothing wrong in the hoose if we don't let the gloom o' it sink in. It's the manner of place ye bide in mak's ye ripe for good or ill."

They passed through the kitchen-garden, now run to waste and with the surrounding wall all hung with wild entangled creeper.

"My father tells me he expects a visitor to-day, Janet."

"Aye, so I was hearing, Miss Ethlenn—frae Stirling way?"

"So he said. Do you know him, Janet—a Mr. Carmichael?"

She hesitated.

"No. I dinna ken ony o' that name save our auld candlestick-maker. He was a Carmichael and had a neb like fire. Ma faither had rare cracks over his neb. He used to mak' as though to warm his hands—but no, that couldna be the one."

"Perhaps his son," suggested Ethlenn, with a serious face.

"He had nae son," commented Janet, "though he had ten bonny lassies."

Janet was about to continue when a thin scream came from the rampart.

"Janet, ye auld runt, hoo lang are ye to stand there like a cow waiting the milk-pail? I pay ye good wages and I expect good service."

"I'm comin', laird," answered Janet, breathing hard.

"Run, woman—I canna blow on my fingers till sunset."

At that Janet broke into a shuffling movement and entered the shelter of the doorway. But once there she

straightened herself and, shaking her fist up the stairs, cried in a low voice, loud enough for Ethlenn's benefit, "I'll mak' ye run, ye spindle-shanked old scarecrow," and vanished within.

Ethlenn smiled and walked towards the bridge which linked Murdoch Castle with the high road.

On the road, walking at a great pace, a man approached her, his arms swinging, his head wagging, all his body keeping up a sort of dance very comical to those who were in the mood for idle laughter. He was very tall and strongly built, with long arms, great shoulders, and enormous hairy hands. His face, which was thatched with red hair as closely as a cattle beast's, was bent upon the ground, while on his head a bonnet sat clumsily, scragged down over his brows.

Ethlenn watched him with a curious smile, half amusement, half pleasure.

"Donald," she called softly, as he came driving towards her, looking nowhere. He halted at the sound of her voice, and still waved his arms a little, staring without comprehension at her.

"Donald," she said again. "Donald of the Isles, it is your old comrade Ethlenn—you called her Maiden of Sorrows once because she was so dark."

His arms had come to a stop. Something fluttered into his eyes like the beating of a blind bird's wings against a cage.

"Oh, why is it," he cried, "that you have come back?"

She gave a puzzled laugh.

"This is a poor welcome, Donald," said she. "Is this not my home—are you not glad to see me?"

He shook his head in a melancholy fashion.

"Then I shall go elsewhere!" she cried. He came a little closer. "What is it, Donald," she asked, touching

his rough hand—"what is it that you are seeing in your mind?"

"I am not called Donald of the Isles for naught," he answered, but never looking at her, "and what I am hearing is the sound of the sea with the spray upon the wind. I have not heard it these many years——"

"I do not understand, Donald," she replied. "What does it signify if you hear the sea?"

He regarded her face for the first time.

"Is it only one sea that you know?" he said. "I tell you there are a thousand different tales that the sea can tell, but only we who are of the Isles can hear them."

"What manner of sea is this, Donald?"

"It is a grey, forlorn sea and a rising tide and night falling."

He dragged his bonnet still lower, and, falling instantly into his stride, passed up the hill.

For long Ethlenn stood with her eyes upon his grotesque figure, but now she smiled no more. Instead, she looked about her where nothing living was, as though she feared that something lurked among the shadows.

Then walking down the track she reached the river Balvaig, and leaning upon the crumbling wall peered into the amber water below her. How often had she and her brothers marked a trout there and dropped a worm to entice it just where the current runs around the great black rock near the bank! And then if it swallowed it, what a wild dash there was and how hard it became to keep their prisoner from breaking the line at the bottom. It all came back to her. The absolute silence seemed to tell her that those days were all gone, irretrievably lost to her. She was a child no longer. The river went on busily as ever drumming and singing night and day, hurrying along on its great adventure to the sea. And

so would unborn people (perhaps in Murdoch) be succeeded by far-distant men and women thinking these same thoughts in their brief sojourn, watching the eddying river flowing to the south.

While she let her mind run absently on such thoughts a horseman came riding slowly up the road from Strathyre. His horse was lame, and to ease its limping he guided it along the grass which grew beside the roadway. So softly did its feet fall that Ethlenn did not raise her head till the sharp clink of the bit brought her suddenly erect.

"Oh!" she cried, for almost alongside of her was a fair young man smiling in a friendly fashion with his hat in his hand.

For a moment neither spoke. He looked long at her, his dark blue eyes full of quiet amusement and growing interest, his tired horse standing with lowered head.

"Do I address Mistress Murdoch?" said he, in a full musical Highland voice.

Ethlenn eyed him with curiosity.

"You do," she said, "and you, I take it, are Mr. Carmichael?"

He swung his leg over the horse's withers and slid to the ground.

"Samuel Carmichael of Allan House, at your service," said he, bowing low above her hand.

He was above the average height, fair-haired, fair-skinned, with eyes like pansies when they fade from blue to sombre purple. He was very elegantly attired, with slender hands and feet—a splendid youthful figure, overflowing with good spirits and laughter.

Behind his saddle was fastened a square bag, and on the horse's withers lay a coat which the warmth of the day had caused him to fling off.

Ethlenn patted the horse. She was confused more than she knew by this stranger's dancing eyes.

"My poor horse," he cried, with his teeth flashing under his curly moustache, "he has no sense of humour—my horse. I thought that road would have delighted any beast, but no, he wept—believe me, he actually wept. I saw great sad tears rolling down his dolorous countenance. And then, after miles of groaning and snorting, and doing all that a horse can do to cry 'stop,' he lost heart and went lame."

"Poor horse!" murmured Ethlenn, leading him gently over the bridge. "What do you call him, Mr. Carmichael?"

"The Old Pretender—because he isn't really as tired as he looks."

Ethlenn smiled against her will. Even Charles Edward had not respected his unfortunate father.

She took to wondering what the business of this young man might be. She had a vague intuition that she had met him long ago. Perhaps he had known her brother.

They reached the Castle and set about stabling the horse. Ethlenn watched her companion pull off the saddle and bridle, throw his bag down, and see to his beast with critical eyes. She was passionately fond of horses as of all animals, and nothing won her esteem like the sight of a man busied over his animal's comfort before he sought his own.

Of a sudden he stopped, and looked at her comically.

"This stable," quoth he, "must have been a grand comfortable place when the Stuarts came to the throne."

"And will be so again," she added quickly.

"Then I hope," he went on, "that Mr. Murdoch will patch up yon hole in celebration."



"And what if he were not so glad?"

He smiled merrily at her, wagging his head.

"We're all glad," said he, "to greet a new king—so long as he does not lose his head."

"Oh!"

"Why, yes—a new crown maketh the heart glad—and generous sometimes, mistress. Even the Stuarts are generous."

"Why even?"

"Oh, lud—I don't know. I never could answer questions. I care not a jot for either—so here's to both——"

"I fear you are no better than a time-server."

He shook his head at her from under the horse's belly.

"Nay, a diplomat is the politer term."

"That is what my father calls himself."

"And you—mistress—what of you? Surely you guide the opinions of this house?"

"Would I could, Mr. Carmichael—would I could! But I am lately from France, and no lover of the Government."

He stood upright, a bunch of hay in his hand.

"Lately from France, eh?" He paused, his blue eyes contracted.

"That same. Is there anything so strange in that? Perhaps you thought I had never left Murdoch except to go to Stirling?"

"No, no," said he, laughing a little, and then again:

"I know France too," as though to break the silence.

"We must speak about that. I lived in Paris, and you——?"

He fumbled about the horse's head. "I—oh, I was here, there, and everywhere, mistress—like a lost bird."

"I sometimes felt a lost bird too." She hesitated. "Did you know many in Paris, Mr. Carmichael?"

"Just Scotsmen," he replied slowly. "One knocks up against compatriots."

"I seem to remember your face—or is it your voice?—something which tells me you are no stranger to me."

He seemed to leave the shadow of the stall reluctantly.

"What better fortune for me, mistress," he said, but like a man on his guard.

"Was it with Dr. Cameron—or——"

"Whist—whist—for God's sake be careful of such names. They might lead you into trouble—any of us might suffer."

She stood up, facing him.

"Havers," she replied shortly.

He eyed her steadily, pulling at his small moustache.

"Was it?" she asked.

"He is not unknown to me," he replied cautiously.

"I thought so—then let us be good friends, Mr. Carmichael."

Again the radiant smile flashed over his face. He took her hand and raised it to his lips. "I am honoured above all men," he murmured.

"Braw words, Mr. Carmichael—ye dinna tak' lang wi' your pretty speeches."

These words, flung harshly through the open door, made them turn swiftly, to see old Murdoch standing with a grim smile upon his rugged features.

"Come awa, sir," he cried, "and you too, Ethlenn. It's long since I saw ye, Carmichael. Where hae ye hid yersel' ? Nowhere good, I'll be bound."

The young man flushed and hurriedly broke in, "Abroad, Mr. Murdoch, on business," and went on to tell of Stirling news until they reached the house, where

he was taken to his room. They did not meet again until five that afternoon, when dinner was served.

"Well, Janet," Ethlenn cried, "the visitor's ready for a meal, I'm sure."

"Aye—maybe," she replied; "he's a bird o' fine plumage."

"Too grand, Janet, for us simple folk."

"Bonny birds mak' poor feeding," she retorted.

Carmichael entered the room at that moment followed by her father. The candlelight fell full upon his face, and she encountered his eyes with their steady scrutiny centred on her. Her father watched her too, but less covertly, while Janet compressed her lips in a rigid silence.

She sat at the end of the table, a faint flush upon her delicate cheeks, so silent that her father glowered at her, fearing Carmichael was not at his ease. There was something compelling in her attitude, something remote, as though the others were all part of a scene in which she played chief part, or the setting of a picture whereof she was the portrait. Beside each man upon the floor stood two bottles of claret. Murdoch drank in silence, brooding over his plate; but the visitor after a few glasses conversed gaily enough, and was at times so merry that Ethlenn smiled sweetly at him, with the tantalizing dimples in her cheeks. A peculiar sense of foreboding, or, better still, of tension, remained for all that until she rose and, bowing slightly to them both, went gently from the room.

Then, saying no word, the two men at the table looked each other in the eyes.

## CHAPTER VI

**M**MURDOCH was the first to speak. "Come upstairs, Sam," he said, "and let us discuss this business."

He went to a cupboard and took down a bottle of French brandy, then motioned the young man to precede him, and together they ascended the stairs until Murdoch's room in the turret was reached.

There, the old man drew in a chair for his guest, and seating himself in his own drank off a quaich of brandy and fell into silence.

Carmichael fidgeted uneasily for a little.

"May I smoke?" he asked.

"A filthy, new-fangled habit," snarled Murdoch, "but if it brings you any pleasure do so, by all means."

Carmichael laughed pleasantly, and drew a pipe from his pocket.

"It is a consolation to old campaigners," he said.

"And those who prowl at night," jeered Murdoch.

"Have done," returned the other, without loss of temper. "A cat is as good as a dog."

"Aye, Sam, and better, for he has nine lives to lose."

"In that case, my limit must be nearly reached, Murdoch."

"There's many would like to see your neck thravn, Sam."

"Dozens. There are two most hated men in Perthshire to-night, and I am one——"

"And the other——"

"The Master of Murdoch."

The old man chuckled, then rubbed his shrivelled hands together musingly.

"Maybe, Sam," he said, "and have you ever sought the reason——"

"I have no time for mysteries."

"It is no mystery, Sam. Why do the sheep hate the dog? Just because he's ay yapping at their heels, and pointing them to a road they do not like. This is a country of the blind, Sam, and it sets them swearing like devils to get a bit prod out of the dark."

Carmichael blew a great stream of smoke into the air.

"I saw Small to-day," he said, leaning forward and lowering his voice; "he says that trouble is brewing, and that our worthy Archibald is here and there like a hen in search of chickens. Lochgarry, too, and those dear relatives of mine who have almost run their course."

"Ye don't say, Sam—do ye think——"

"I do—there's little doubt in my mind that within six months Lochaber will be swept of all its scheming crew, and there are others can take their place——" at which he winked very slyly, and sucked at his pipe again.

Murdoch chuckled again in the depths of his chair.

"Hark ye, Sam," he said, "if that comes true, I hold to the bargain, mind ye——"

Carmichael eyed him sharply.

"It is a very different man I will be then," he said, with a touch of hauteur.

Murdoch shot one glance at him and closed his eyes. Not a muscle of his face moved. He might have been asleep.

The utter stillness penetrated to Carmichael's busy mind. No words could have revealed the meaning of that intense silence more stridently. And yet Murdoch was apparently asleep.

Carmichael pulled at his moustache, watching the old man's expressionless countenance.

Suddenly, from between the motionless lips, came a far-away voice.

"Since when have the Murdochs been reckoned less than your people?"

Carmichael bit his lip.

"I never said a word against them," he replied. "I was thinking only of my position——"

"You lie," murmured Murdoch. "I do not need to open my eyes to see that."

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"What is the house of Murdoch," he said, "but a crumbling ruin?"

The old man stared at him under half-closed eyes.

"So," he said softly, "and that's how the wind blows—you're slow at coming to the point, Sam."

"You make it difficult, Murdoch."

"And so it should be—there's better men than you, Sam, will come knocking at the door on the same errand."

Carmichael took to walking up and down the room.

"I'm none so well off," said he abruptly.

"It is a common complaint." He rose to his feet as he spoke. "Your arm, Sam," he said, "and let us get this business over. If all goes well, and you come into what is in your mind, then you shall have her, and with her my fortune, such as it is—will that content ye?"

"None better—but there is Miss Murdoch to be considered. Will she agree, think ye?"

Murdoch wagged his head knowingly at him.

"Sam—Sam," he said, "I doubt ye'll see to that," at which they both laughed.

And so they passed out together, and parted at the head of the stairs in very friendly fashion.

In his room Carmichael slowly undressed. Then taking up a sheet of paper, he balanced the candle on the bed and addressed a letter to a certain Ensign Small in Edinburgh.

"The way lies clear," he wrote, "and the old fox has opened wide the door to his earth. I'll learn all that can be learned and acquaint ye at the 'White Horse.' This plain living is killing your friend S. C.

"P.S.—Do you know anything of a lad they call Chuckie Stane, who travelled with our quarry from Stirling?"

Then, blowing out the candle, he slipped between the sheets and was soon asleep.

Far into the night Murdoch gloomed before the dying fire. And then, as the clock struck three, he rose stiffly, and limping down the passage halted irresolutely before Carmichael's door.

He never lifted his hand, however, and came slowly back again.

"Too late," he murmured, "and yet, who knows? Oh, my dear—my dear—would to God I were not so cursed old——"

A door opened at that moment beside him, and Ethlenn came quickly to him.

"Father," she said, "are you ill?"

"No, my dear, only very old."

She looked at him with puzzled eyes.

"Too old," he said, "to care for you much longer," and taking her strong, warm hands between his own, he kissed them almost fiercely. Then, bending his head, he turned abruptly and passed out of sight.

Ethlenn hesitated, but something held her back from following him. Had she done so, who can tell what might have come about?

From the far distance came the soft shutting of a door.

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## CHAPTER VII

### I

**L**ONG before Murdoch and his guest had sat down at table, the sun had sunk behind the rugged front of Ben Lui, sending the shadows speeding along the eastern slopes and the mist rising from Glen Falloch far below. It was an autumn night, still and cold, the air with the scent of frost in it, and the moon sailing in a solitary sky. Winter was in the breath of noiseless woods, winter sat brooding upon the topmost peaks, snow-covered, of Ben Lui. Down in the valley the river Dochart ran black and cold between its mossy banks, ready with the first winter spate to fling itself into the adjoining pasture, and creep up to the very inn itself.

The inn of Crianlarich stood near the junction of the roads to Loch Lomond and Tyndrum, but on the latter, backed by the lower slopes of Ben Lui, and facing the Dochart. Its walls were unusually thick and strong, and its situation close to the Macgregor country and the road to Glasgow made it a rendezvous of wild Highland caterans, men as yet beyond reach of law, and occasional peaceful travellers passing south.

The inn stood low against the hill so as to be barely discernible from the other side, its thatch on a level with the bracken. From the road it was more imposing, but a wretched place at the best, as all accommodation was in the Highlands. It was composed of two rooms leading



one from the other. In the larger, a fire burned brightly upon the floor in the centre of the room, the smoke curling outwards through a hole in the thatch above. Over the fire hung a great pot, fixed by chains to a beam in the ceiling, into which an old woman thrust a stick at intervals, and dropped in lumps of raw venison with her wrinkled brown hands. The floor was covered with dried bracken, and dank with refuse, smelling most evilly. Round the wall, barely curtained off, were three box-beds, in one of which a man lay apparently asleep, covered to his chin in a plaid.

About the smoking fire, sitting on stools or tussocks of heather, were some half-dozen men, watching the old woman struggle with the pot, and drinking whisky out of horn cups, slopping it now and again upon the sodden floor. From the next room, moisture, and often more, oozed down from under the wretched door, behind which the cows and hens stood high upon the uncleaned floor. Now and again a sharp rattle clattered on the dividing partition as a cow banged her horns in turning or sunk upon the soft layers of filth under her feet.

From the fireside the men eyed the old woman impatiently. They were clothed in odd pieces of tartan patched into a semblance of trousers, or in some cases—for this was the country of broken men—in the Highland dress itself. All wore bonnets, under which their long and dirty hair protruded like that of one of their own cattle beasts, uniting itself with their bearded faces, peat-smoked and wind-tanned to the colour of dull mahogany.

They chatted together in shrill Gaelic with the greatest zest, taking no heed of the sleeping man beside them, nor he of them, and though the Disarming Act had long been in practice there was hardly one there but carried either dirk or pistol.

At last the old woman lifted the pot from over the fire,

and dealt out a portion of meat and coarse oat-cake to each, which they held for the most part in their hands, slicing the meat with a skian dhu and gnawing at the cake between times. The black bottle of whisky went round again, and this time the old woman helped herself from the spout, coughing a great deal afterwards and cursing her tormentors round the fire for their laughter in a high, shrill voice.

"Aye, 'tis old you'll be soon, Coll Macnaughten," she screamed, "but not so old as I am—no, not by a long road."

The man Macnaughten whom she addressed laughed hoarsely as though she had made a great jest.

"Is it so old you are, Mother?" he asked, wiping his mouth on his bonnet.

"Old," she crooned, "old—I'm older than the eagles on Ben Lui, and that's a long tale. Oh, I could tell—I could tell——"

They laid their legs to the fire, flinging the remnants of their supper on the floor.

"Teli us," they cried eagerly; "it wants two hours to the dawn."

"I was white-haired when Rob Roy fought his way out through that very door."

"I heard it from my father," cried a Macgregor of Balquhidder way.

"Curse the soul of him," growled the man in the bed, blinking a little, and watching them.

The old woman glanced at the speaker in a sort of daze. He was a young man dressed in Highland clothes, a slightly built, pock-marked man, shifty-eyed and restless.

"He was your father, Robin Oig," rasped the old woman, and at her words the man upon the bed opened his eyes and stared full at the face of the Macgregor.

He was that same Robin Oig who murdered Maclaren

at the ploughing, brother to James More, and abductor of Jean Key, a man in danger of his life, and suspected of playing spy for whoever paid him readiest. "He was your father," she said again, as though she had forgotten something, "and it's soon you'll travel the same long road, Robin Oig."

A sudden silence fell upon them all, and the man she addressed snatched the black bottle from her hand and gulped from its narrow throat.

"You old hag!" he cried, flushed with the hot spirit. "You doited old hag!"

But she never moved.

"I've seen," she said in her old, far-off voice, "the days when the heather ran blood and the cry of a score of clans on the march set the ravens clacking their beaks upon Ben Chabhair—that was a weary time ago, before the Murdochs came to Strathyre."

"What brought that old fox and his people to Strathyre, cailleach?" asked the man Macnaughten, taking snuff.

"It's an old tale that I heard from my mother, who came from Lochearn, who heard it from her grandfather, who was at the building of Murdoch."

She sucked at the bottle, her eyes vacant and overcast, so that Robin Oig nudged his neighbour.

"She has the sight coming," whispered he in an awe.

"They came from Lochaber way, travelling by night, the old man's great-grandfather flying hot of foot from the Macleods of the Isles, and bringing two score of his people with him. He had murdered, so they say, the father of the girl his son brought with him, and carried a curse to be a dowry."

"A curse, old woman—what curse?"

"It was said long since, before any here were born, or

their fathers for that matter, that children of the Murdochs would never die in their beds."

In the room no one spoke. But the man on the bed sat up on his elbow, listening keenly.

"The curse!" whispered Robin Oig. "Is there no way of ending it?"

She rocked herself wearily, her eyes distended.

"Every Murdoch would give all he has to find it," she mumbled. "For whatever a Murdoch supports is sure to fail. Every Murdoch, save only the present old one, has died by sudden death. From a great clan they are brought down to two, and the curse is on them and on all they do. The Macleod's vengeance never sleeps. Oh, ho-ho!"—she chuckled like a raven—"there's great times in store ere the curse be dead and their cold bodies leave the house of Murdoch without a name."

There was an awed silence after these words, only broken by the snores of the man on the bed.

"What of the girl, old hag?" asked Robin Oig abruptly.

"She is the last," crooned the woman. "I know no more."

"She is in France," broke in Robin Oig. "At least, I heard so from one who has crossed a little since."

"There's some," continued the old woman, "are coming from France who will never return. It's an ill time to live in, and for those who have the sight it's filled with death."

She suddenly raised her watery eyes towards the door.

"Dhia gleidh sinn," she wailed in a high, thin voice.

"I hear doom knocking at the door."

The men about the fire, none of whom were free from superstition, stared over their shoulders, open-mouthed, but nothing happened, no sound broke the stillness of the night.

## II

But at that moment, riding down the road from Tyndrum, came a man feeling his way under the weak rays of the moon. His horse trod carefully on the miserable track, lifting its feet and snorting suddenly at the sight of the inn. The rider urged it forward, and, reaching over the withers, gave a loud rat-tat at the door.

From inside came instant commotion, and he thought he caught a woman's scream. Again he knocked, and at that the door burst open and a shock-headed fellow, one who did not wear the Highland dress, peered up at him in no friendly manner.

The stranger regarded him thoughtfully and seemed half inclined to turn his horse's head.

"Is this an inn?" he asked, speaking in Gaelic.

The man in the doorway grunted for answer.

"My friend," remarked the man on the horse, still speaking in Gaelic, "no one could resist your warm welcome. See—I alight. Now, stable my horse, and I'll come and see him fed."

He sprang to the ground as he spoke, and as he stood with his horse's reins in his hand, the firelight from the room fell upon his face and clothes. He was a tall man, very powerful about the chest and shoulders and slight towards the legs, as becomes a horseman. He wore the uniform of an English officer of the line, but also a heavy riding-cloak, so that for a moment or two they took him for a private gentleman. His face was clean-shaven and naturally imperious, though from time to time his mouth softened at the corners and dropped drolly, while his blue eyes twinkled with infinite humour. A man accustomed to command, that was evident, but also a man ready to

accept hard knocks in good part. Such a one rode into Crianlarich out of the night.

The doorway was now full of curious faces, suspicious, prying eyes glaring up at the stranger from under bushy brows.

"The horse," he said shortly. "I said take the horse and stable it. Did you not hear?"

The man he had addressed shifted on his bare feet. He was a Fergusson from Balquhiddar, a mean-spirited creature of Robin Oig's.

"I'm no gillie," he mumbled, "to do a servant's work."

The stranger swept the group of menacing faces with his eyes.

"I suppose ye are all gentlemen here," he remarked, with cold contempt, and slinging his horse's reins over his arm he unlatched the adjoining door and sniffed at the stench inside.

"Maybe that'll not be good enough for the beast," sneered Fergusson, taking courage.

The stranger shut the door with a bang.

"My horse is over-sensitive," he replied quietly; "and besides, where would you sleep, my friend?"

"You English swine," screamed Fergusson, and diving at his dirk sprang at him.

The other waited coolly enough, soothing his horse with a whispered word, and suddenly launching out his fist caught the Highlander on the chin and sent him cursing on the stones.

"That for calling me 'Englishman,'" said he in a dangerous, quiet voice, and led his beast towards an outhouse.

An instant commotion arose when his back was turned. Several men bent over Fergusson, one ran for the black bottle, the rest, and in particular Robin Oig, strutted up and down, all speaking at once and fingering their weapons.

But when the new-comer returned a grim silence fell again. They stood like wolves waiting for a sign to spring. But he never so much as looked at them or hesitated in his gait, passing through them humming a tune, and a moment later disappeared inside the inn. At that, Robin Oig tapped his dirk, eyeing his companions meaningly, and they slouched into the firelight once again.

The stranger by this time was seated before the fire, his hat and cloak beside him, his hands extended to the fire, his red uniform blazing at them to tell them what he was. The old woman was stirring the pot, crooning to herself, but with her sunken eyes fixed steadily upon his face.

The man on the bed was apparently asleep.

In silence the Highlanders stole back to their places, Robin Oig next the stranger, saying nothing, like men waiting a signal.

The atmosphere of the room seemed charged with danger, but still the stranger never moved, never raised his eyes, even loosening his tight military jacket and unstrapping his sword.

And then, quite casually, he pulled out a cutty pipe, and as he did so a heavy purse fell upon the soft floor and the clink of gold rang out in the ominous quiet. Without an upward glance he bent to grasp it, and as he did so Robin Oig raised his knife and flung forward with his arm, aiming for the neck.

But even as his blade flashed in the firelight, a sudden cry of warning rang out, and the stranger with a quick twist of his body avoided the blow, and catching a flaming peat from the fire hurled it full in the Macgregor's face.

Before he could do more the men about the fire sprang together like a pack of hounds, snarling in Gaelic, hitting upward with their ugly little knives to reach his throat as he scrambled wildly back for safety.

The stranger never uttered a word, but whipped out his sword, and, kneeling with his back to the fire, began parrying the desperate thrusts until he could regain his feet. His rapier shot hither and thither, piercing and pricking, carving a circle of safety around him, flashing like a bar of yellow light in the dancing rays of the fire.

He was aware of a second contest, but did not know the cause of it, nor had he time to look. But ever and again he heard a man's voice shouting encouragement to him, and caught like music the shrill whistle of steel upon steel. At last, for an instant, he beat his opponents back and sprang to his feet, the perspiration streaming down his face and his legs trembling with the fight on bended knees, and as he did so there was a sudden hoarse yell and the fire disappeared in a wild scattering of ashes.

Now it was the door or death, and only pausing an instant to fling his cloak at the ring of panting men before him he ran like a hare for the passage. Half-way he stumbled violently against some one in equal haste, and never halting, rushed through the entrance, the other man at his heels. Only when he reached the moonlit yard did he swing round, his sword in his hand.

"Quick!" cried the other, who was a little man, very strongly built. "They'll be out, and it's poor fighting in the Macgregor country where dirks are common as peewees. Yon white-faced devil, Robin Oig, will shoot us from the window."

Even as he spoke a sharp report rang from the inn and knocked the stranger's hat upon the ground.

He picked it up with a steady hand, dusted it, and faced his companion.

"I thank you," said he, "for your kindly assistance to a traveller. Will you take my horse? It is at your service."



The other, who was the man who had lain in the bed, looked at him comically.

"We canna baith ride a tired horse," said he.

The stranger examined him with thoughtful eyes.

"Do yc think," remarked he, "I'm the sort of man to be chased by a drove of landless loons, with nothing to commend them but their evil odour?" and he advanced again towards the inn, his sword flashing in the moonlight.

"Where are ye going?" cried the other in a queer voice.

"To get my purse," replied the stranger.

The little man who stood in the yard laughed under his breath.

"Stop," cried he, as a second shot flew wild above his head, "I have a rckoning with one of them mysel'."

And so, shoulder against shoulder, they entered the dark passage, and shut the door behind them.

No sound reached their ears. Inside the room was no whisper of danger waiting bare of blade and half a score of hands tight upon dirk or pistol.

"Can you hold the door," whispered the stranger, "if I clear the room?"

"God in heaven," returned the other, "would you massacre them?"

"I've sheathed my sword," he whispered back, "but I can do fine with my naked fists."

For a few minutes there was a great silence, and then came a shrill scream and a tumult like the rush of cattle in a panic.

"Where is he?" shouted a voice like that of Robin Oig.

But no one answered.

Several times the man in the doorway swept his sword around him, and three times he repulsed a rush. And then began a sort of game inside the room, with the stranger

playing hide-and-peek after his own grim fashion. He sped here and there in the darkness and none knew who struck them, only shrill cries and groans followed his passage; and at last men took to fighting together and a sort of madness seized them, during which the stranger stole to the doorway and whispered to his companion, who lowered his sword.

"They have started," said he in pants of breath; "hear how they rate each other."

"The old woman?" asked the other.

"I could not find her."

The noise grew deafening inside the room. Men rushing against each other struck wildly in the blackness, cutting and screaming in a madness.

And whenever they neared the door they were met by the steel. At last exhaustion overcame their terror. Gradually their shrill voices died away. Only groans and gasps broke the silence.

The stranger jumped the purse up and down in his hand, and touched his companion on the arm.

"Come," he whispered, "nothing need keep us now."

Together they stole down the passage and reached the yard, shutting the door behind them.

"Nobly done, sir," said the stranger, looking at the other with serious eyes.

"But, man," chuckled he, "what kind of fighting do ye call that?"

"It is the English way, but none the worse for that," answered the stranger, and unhitched his horse.

"It is a strong beast," he said, "and can carry us both."

A sound of running feet came from the inn, and the voice of Robin Oig rallying his men.

"Up, man," cried the stranger, and in a moment they leaped for the horse's back. It staggered under the

double burden, and then, gathering its legs under it, sprang clear of the outhouse and down the road.

A bullet hummed past their heads, and, turning, the little man waved his hat with mock politeness.

The moon burst through a belt of cloud at that moment, and standing before them on the roadway was the old woman. How she came to be there none can say. Her face was hidden in her plaid, but one shrivelled arm was raised as though to turn them back. With a great plunge the horse avoided her, and snorted wildly. She never tried to stop them, but only raised a terrible cry, a wailing, lamentable note, long-drawn, filled with unutterable foreboding.

It rang in their ears, turning their blood to ice, and striking to their souls like a presage of doom. Then a few moments later and they had rounded the bend of the hill and heard nothing but the clattering of the horse's hoofs.

In this manner they travelled till they reached the foot of Glen Falloch, when the dawn began to colour the topmost peaks of the hills.

There they halted and came to the ground, while the horse blew great bursts of steam from his nostrils, hanging his head.

"Well, sir," said the stranger, "I am much in your debt for this night's work."

The little man shrugged his shoulders.

"'Twas an incident," he said, "nothing more. You will pardon me if I haste upon my ways. See, the sun is rising."

The mists drove past them over the trees. Far below the river glistened like silver and the dull thunder of the waterfall was borne up on the cold, fresh breeze. The stranger held out his shapely, white hand.

"I have not the honour of knowing your name, sir."

There was an instant's silence.

"Oh," said the other, "that's easily told. It's just James Pettigrew from Glasgow way. And yours, sir?"

"Is Roderick Campbell at your service, of His Majesty's forces?"

The little man started, scrutinizing him with an inscrutable expression.

"You're far from the Campbell country," said he.

"I'm bound for Inversnaid Garrison."

There was a pause, and the sun burst gloriously over the hills upon their faces.

Then, shaking hands without a word, they parted, Campbell riding slowly down the hill and he who went by the name of James Pettigrew watching him till he had passed out of sight.

But when the sound of horse's hoofs had died away, he winked at the sun for company and tilted his hat with a comical expression.

"It's a braw night," he said, "which sees me rescuing Campbells and saving the garrison of Inversnaid."

Then diving amongst the underbrush, he too was lost to sight.

## CHAPTER VIII

### I

**T**HE state of the Highlands in the second half of the eighteenth century was one of chaos mingled with the first glimmering of education and industry. When Wade planned his roads he was laying the way of civilization, and when the jurisdiction of the chiefs was crushed for ever at Culloden, the second great step was taken towards the freedom of the people.

To the romantic writer, the '45, with all its colour and poetry, has proved an inexhaustible field to draw upon. To the historian, the last Jacobite rising is the last struggle of the clan system against the irresistible march of civilization. It was a final fling for the claymore and the foray, and organized by the central clans of the Highlands, for the most part turbulent, lawless men whose frequent raids and bickerings were a danger to all Scotland.

The clans who had progressed in education or the art of farming stood out. For them the claymore had been replaced by the plough.

The power of the chief prior to the '45 was absolute, and the more retainers he could command, the better was he pleased. In time of war the people who held land under him were in duty bound to follow his lead. For refusal meant death or at least eviction. It was common for the chief to be much abroad, and to be acquainted with Paris as well as Edinburgh. To suppose that the

leaders of the rising were simple, uncultured men who were carried away by romance would be a reflection on their intelligence. Realizing that under Hanoverian rule their jurisdiction was threatened, they counted up the odds in their favour, the clans whom they could urge into the field, the promise of French help, the English Jacobites. Of these latter considerations only the first answered their hopes. Their poor loyal people, ill-clad, ignorant, matchless in bravery, followed them as they had followed their fathers, winning their unrecognized enfranchisement in their own defeat.

The leaders of the expedition fled hither and thither, reckless, proud, gallant gentlemen. In the taverns of Paris, in the drinking houses of Amsterdam and Dunkirk, all along the coastline they sheltered, waiting the great day which was to come. It was always coming, that great day, and as time passed on they grew older and some made their peace, and others died in exile until their names were revered in a new generation as men whose loyalty had better graced a more worthy cause.

For despite such considerations as have come under our notice, despite opportunists and professional conspirators, among whom the English held an unrivalled and solitary position, there were men such as Cameron of Lochiel, Oliphant of Gask, and half a dozen more, whose devotion to a cause *makes* one of the most gallant pages in Scottish history.

Donald, the gardener, was brushing away fallen leaves when Ethlenn awoke the morning after Carmichael's arrival. She listened for a long time to the "seruff, scruff" of his brush, and then rising she leaned out of the window and drew in deep breaths of the frosty air.

Donald Mackinnon had come from Skye twenty years before this. He had asked a night's shelter from old Murdoch, and from that day had remained, sleeping in the village and speaking to no one. Why he remained none could say, since Murdoch gave him little encouragement, and Janet always spoke to him as "Donald puir man," thus leaving no doubt how she regarded him. Once only had he spoken to Ethlenn of the day he would watch the sea again in his own country of the west.

It was a hot summer day and the wind had sung in the branches of the trees like the moaning of water on a beach. He spoke a queer, low Gaelic she could hardly understand, and his words were like a poem that had no beginning and no end, but was full of wonderful cadences, of the wind in the grass, and the running stream in the night, but mostly of the sea when the moon was up and the white birds drove screaming above the waves.

But though he had spoken of the day when he would return, he had said nothing for certain, but had wandered until she had fallen asleep in the sun.

Ethlenn watched him for a few moments, and listened to his placid "scruff, scruff," then, dressing, she ran downstairs and into the cobbled courtyard.

"I'm going a morning ride, Donald," she said.

He stopped his brushing and wriggled his arms and head.

"I would go Balquhiddy way," said he.

"I want to see the folk in the village," she replied.

"Not that they will remember me."

"No," he said, "they will not be remembering you, rest assured of that."

He said it so meaningly that she hesitated.

"Is there aught the matter between Murdoch and Strathyre?" she asked.

He spat upon the ground and drew his enormous hand down his long tangled beard.

"Murdoch is a chief without a clan," he said, "and of the Isles, an old cry now, but the blood is there. It is not good for an Islesman to live amongst hillmen. You do not find the eagle with the foxes—oh, no!"

"Has my father treated them harshly, Donald? They should remember he is an old man, and not strong."

"He took his stick only yesterday to Malcolm Buchanan, and they are all speaking as though it were not an honour for the Master to notice such a miserable creature as a Buchanan."

Then, spitting lugubriously, he took up his brush, and bending his twitching body drove the crumpled leaves before him.

Ethlenn went slowly to the stables, and taking out her pony she saddled him and walked down the drive. For a moment she hesitated at the roadway. Then, flicking his quarters, she cantered through the cold morning air Balquhadder way.

Carmichael pleaded that he must write letters all the day and only appeared at dinner-time. Murdoch was more than usually communicative that night, and after Ethlenn had gone to the drawing-room, where she had her spinet, drank deeply, leaving four empty bottles beside his chair. Carmichael was no poor second, and it was with flushed faces that they rose at last to go to the other room. Such was not the custom in those days, but Carmichael had pleaded for some music and kept sober for that purpose.

He was easily persuaded to sing, and Ethlenn accompanied him. He possessed a sweet tenor voice, and used it to considerable advantage in some soft love melodies of the south. Then Ethlenn sang one or two Gaelic



songs, which he warmly applauded, while her father, strangely affected as he ever was by Highland music, sat hunched up before the fire, his face wistful and pathetic, with all the bitterness clean gone. When she stopped he switched round in his chair and pled for just one more, always for one more.

## III

In the week following Ethlenn and Carmichael saw much of each other. To a girl of her frank, innocent nature friendship was easily won, and her loneliness in Murdoch and the neighbourhood made him a welcome companion in her rambles on the hills and lochside. To Carmichael the week passed rapidly enough, and as he excelled in riding and fishing and all outdoor exercises and sports, he won her approbation.

And then one night, in an instant, as is the manner of such things—Ethlenn met his eyes and dropped her own. They had sung together at the spinet, and when she said good night he had held her fingers for a space within his own. When she had started and raised her eyes she had looked into his, and in a tremble hastily looked upon the ground. It had all happened in a moment, and yet everything seemed changed. It was a rude awakening, and yet none so rude after all. Duty she saw suddenly since duty she had forgotten, and it was neither agreeable nor nice.

The strong, enduring character invariably chooses the stoniest path. Her experience of life was practically negligible—her knowledge of love was only awakening, like some tender flower unfolding its sensitive petals to the sun. Her deep-rooted reticence shrank from facing such complications as the emotions evolve in every human life. Her extreme delicacy of mind lay unsuspected beyond her grave, steadfast demeanour, just as some

lovely mountain tarn lies hidden in the bosom of a lofty hill.

When she reached her room she blew out the light and undressed in the dark. She did not know why she did so. But she could not sleep. After an hour of troubled tossing she rose again, and leaning out of her window stared into the night.

The moon was creeping over the brow of Ben Ledi and flooding the valley beneath her with soft, silvery light indescribably beautiful. Her thoughts flew hither and thither, but always returning to the stranger—lingering there. Why had he come? and what business could he have with her father? Surely he had not turned matchmaker so soon? No, that was incredible! She endeavoured to argue the matter in her own cool manner, but was surprised and troubled to find her mind swirling like Balvaig far beneath her in the valley. She paced slowly up and down, her long, black hair fallen about her bare shoulders to her waist—her face and neck purest white against the ebony background.

Who can portray the inner mind of a woman, so sensitive, so stirred by sentiments as elusive as they are mysterious? To Ethlenn herself, her present mood was conflicting in its very unreasonableness. A mere little pressure of the fingers to bring such torment!

She stirred impatiently.

"It is a small fire sometimes makes the most smoke," she whispered to herself.

She thought of Cameron and Lochgarry skulking she knew not where, but relying upon her. She remembered poor Charles Stuart and Madame de Mézières. Her duty was clear. Until she had played her part for them she must not give her mind to other things.

She remembered the days spent in his company—in

fishing, riding, and talking. More and more had she endeavoured to send her father away with him. But old Murdoch had a cold or business, or was not inclined.

They had been happy days—only clouded over by the shadows of her intuitions—and now she felt as though she had been awakened roughly from a pleasant dream. And so she sighed, remembering Carmichael's eyes as he had pressed her hand.

Thus she spent two whole hours turning this way and that, Murdoch wrestling with Murdoch in her blood, but her woman's heart against them all.

Suddenly she started violently.

From the moonlit garden came a sound of singing, infinitely tender, as the falling of water far away.

She crept to the window. Nearer it came. He was singing an old Scotch love song—walking noiselessly along the turf, his eyes on the ground. The night seemed to stand still at the gentle flow of melody—passionately lovely and yet indescribably sad. She leaned over the sill to catch the merest whisper of his voice.

Now she could catch the words :

"The ewe-buchtin's bonnie, baith ev'ning and morn,  
When our blithe shepherds play on the bogreed and horn ;  
While we're milking they're liting baith pleasant and clear,  
But my heart's like to break when I think on my dear."

A long coil of her hair slid over her white shoulder and rippled down the rough grey wall.

"O the shepherds take pleasure to blow on the horn——"

Of a sudden he stopped and, raising his face, looked straight into her eyes.

She never moved. Only her heart gave one single violent throb.

Without a word he passed on, and then, like an echo

infinitely touching borne on the whispering night wind, came the last words falling into silence :

“ On the pleasant green banks they feed pleasant and free,  
But alas, my dear heart, all my sighing's for thee.”

At the wane of the moon she started like a sleeper newly roused, and, shivering a little, crept beneath the clothes.

Out in the night the wind cried forlornly before the breaking of the dawn.

## IV

Ethlenn was up early the next morning, and was surprised to find Carmichael already roaming up and down the garden, his curly hair all glistening with drops of moisture where his head had brushed against the wet ivy on the Castle wall.

“ It would be easy to climb up that, Mistress Ethlenn,” he said, pointing to the heavy clumps.

“ Not so easy as it looks, Mr. Carmichael. But there—the days of foray are over ; we live in dull days,” and she sighed.

“ What were the old days like, do you think ? All dancing and merriment and sport ? ”

Ethlenn plucked a blade of grass and chewed it between her small white teeth.

“ Not all, I suppose,” she replied. “ My father says the old days were best, but then he loves to dream. If he lived a hundred years back he'd still say the same.”

Carmichael cyed her thoughtfully.

“ It was all very pleasant for the big people,” said he, “ but have you no pity for the poor, who starved so that they bled the kine, and who were sworn body and soul to a chief who only reckoned them as claymores ? ”

“ And are still,” she added. “ I grant you they suffer,

Mr. Carmichael, but we have always been a frugal race. Look at our hard country. Save for a few crops of barley and oats, and the breeding of cattle, we know no farming."

"It is a race of usquebaugh and brochan," said Carmichael.

He smiled at her, watching her furtively.

She was leaning upon the garden wall, with the sunlight playing upon her wavy, lustrous hair, and her hands under her chin.

"Mistress Ethlenn," he said, "I would like to see a Highland village with you to show me its wonders."

She turned round, facing him.

"You mock me, Mr. Carmichael; you know as well as I do it has no wonders—only contented, patient lives."

"Pardon, mistress, if I annoyed you—but could not these people be happier? I ask it as an inquirer."

"Every one could be happier, I suppose," said Ethlenn, "but only for a time. Prosperity brings momentary joy, and education the gnawing of dissatisfaction. All these will come sooner or later. For the present, their greatest ills are those of famine, or the tyranny of the Government. We can go this morning," she added abruptly.

Carmichael flashed a smile at her. He was growing weary of such serious discussion, and sprang at the opportunity to change the conversation.

"I shall be charmed," said he. "Do we go mounted or on foot?"

"On horseback," Ethlenn replied, "that is, if the 'Old Pretender' feels equal to the journey. It is but two miles or so."

"With you, mistress—he would go a hundred."

She blushed and turned aside. "There's my father," she said hastily—"see, upon the rampart. He always plays the pipes before breakfast."

"Oh, lud," groaned Carmichael, "and I had such an appetite. Will it take long, Mistress Ethlenn?"

"It all depends," she replied, as a shrill scream rose from above them. "If he is in the mood he may play 'The Sunrise,' a pibroch of his own making, which lasts fifteen minutes or more."

"Deus volens," murmured Carmichael, watching the rampart in a simulation of agony.

Old Murdoch had begun to play. After a few notes Ethlenn whispered "'The Sunrise'" to her companion, and they stood together, she with her face alight with the music, he noting the delicate cream of her cheek, her tiny pink ears nearly hid by her abundance of hair, the slim, lithe figure outlined against the old grey wall. To the pipes he never gave a thought.

It was not the first time Samuel Carmichael had listened to bagpipe strains.

When it was finished Ethlenn hurried indoors, intent on domestic duties, and Carmichael, with a swift backward glance, swung about in the opposite direction and, jumping the low garden wall, entered the wood.

On a fallen tree trunk sat Chuckie Stane, and by his side, glistening in the cold sunlight, half a dozen yellow trout.

"Good boy," said Carmichael, smiling down at him. "So you got them, did you?"

Chuckie Stane nodded.

Carmichael, with a very knowing face, began to fumble in his pockets, finally clinking some coins in his hand.

"We must not forget that the labourer is worthy of his hire, Chuckie Stane," said he. "You will have learned that from the minister, I doubt not."

"Aye," said Chuckie Stane, without enthusiasm.

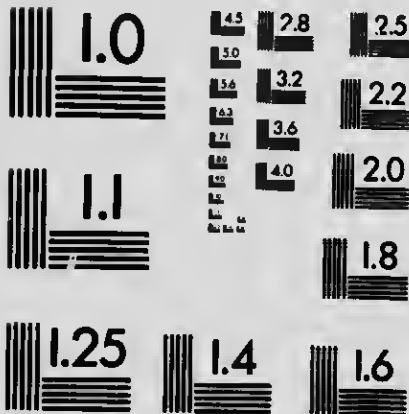
"Who is your minister?"

"Mr. Ferguson, of Balquhidder."



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"Oh, indeed! And so you know Balquhidder well, I take it."

"Aye."

Carmichael seated himself in a leisurely way beside him and looked reflectively upon the ground.

"Coming back is a melancholy business, Chuckie Stane," he said, with a heavy sigh. "It's all strange faces, and no a 'God keep ye' from morn till night."

"Ye came from these parts, maybe?" asked Chuckie Stane, dimly interested.

"Long, long ago," replied Carmichael, with a touch of pathos. "So long that I doubt if many are alive that used to guddle for trout with me in that very burn."

A sparkle actually gleamed in the sombre eyes of Chuckie Stane.

"And some," added Carmichael, looking fearfully over his shoulder, "and some canna come for reasons best kept mum." And at that he fixed the boy with a stern and solemn countenance.

"Canna they?" said Chuckie Stane vaguely.

Carmichael cursed him in his heart for a fool.

"I'd give more than I give ye now, Chuckie Stane," said he in the same mysterious voice, "if ye could bring me word that an auld friend of mine, a fellow-soldier in France, was in these parts."

"Wha will he be like?" asked the boy slowly.

"A short, square man, red-faced and douce-looking——"

"Aye, I ken him——"

"With ruddy hair."

"The very same."

Carmichael pressed another coin into his hand.

"Chuckie Stane," said he, "that's only a taste of what's to follow. Ken ye what they call this man?"

Chuckie Stane carefully pocketed the coin and moved a little farther along the log.

"Angus Mucklegrumph," said he. "He's butcher in Kilmahog."

"Damnation," burst out Carmichael, and as quickly laughed it off. "Come," said he, "give me the fish for Miss Ethlenn. I trust ye, Chuckie Stane," he added confidently, "and dinna say a word of this, as there's many would like to do a harm to the man I speak of and myself."

With this bond of secrecy to link them he turned and disappeared. And then Chuckie Stane rolled in the grass, his face convulsed, his ragged person quivering in an abandonment of joy.

"Ye're late, ye dirty wastrel," said Janet, a quarter of an hour later, as Chuckie Stane came in for his porridge, his face like a mask.

"I was speaking to yon Carmichael," he replied. "Eh, Janet, he's a bonny leear!"

## v

Ethlenn and Carmichael saddled the horses and took the road to Balquhidder. Carmichael was in the merriest of humours, and so infectious was his mood that even Ethlenn, who was not given to mirth, rivalled his good spirits, and even raced him, winning easily by half a dozen lengths.

He made fun at her continuously, even when she frowned at him, though smiling at him underneath it all. And so they passed up the road to the left and saw Balquhidder lying at the foot of Loch Voil with its peat reek rising blue into the breathless air. Alongside the track they rode were thatched cottages, low-lying, black

and untidy. From within shrill voices were suddenly hushed, and inquisitive peat-blackened faces peered out through empty window-holes, while children stood open-mouthed before the doors.

"They are all Macgregors and Maclarens here," said Ethlenn, "a broken people and suspicious of strange faces. But they will know me even after the years I have been abroad."

At that moment a tall man dressed in the Lowland dress, but with a plaid about his shoulders, came striding down the road and greeted Ethlenn in Gaelic. She apparently explained that Carmichael knew no Gaelic, for he addressed her again in English, which he spoke with a soft, musical accent.

"It is good to be seeing you back again," he said, "and looking so well."

"Thank you, Mr. Maclaren. This is my friend, Mr. Carmichael."

The two men glanced at each other. Maclaren's keen blue eyes rested on the other a fraction of a second, then sped back to Ethlenn.

"Are things quiet now?" she asked, leaning a hand on her pony's withers.

He shrugged his shoulders. "There will be trouble yet, I'm thinking," he said. "That was a peety about James Stewart, and now that old rascal James More has escaped."

"So I heard. It was not difficult, I'm told."

"So it is said. His daughter was there to help him. But it would take a score of daughters to get out of Edinburgh Castle unless——"

"You mean——?"

"It's the haverer I am," said Maclaren, with a keen glance at Carmichael, who was listening with obvious interest.

"Will they catch him?" asked Ethlenn, who knew Macgregor for what he was.

Maclaren took a pinch of snuff and winked.

"I'm thinking not," he said, "and I hear they have spread a story that he has made for England. But I am hearing he is in Arran with his son, who has told that his father's name is not Drummond at all."

Ethlenn laughed.

"How you hate the Macgregors, Mr. Maclaren."

"Aye—the treacherous red-haired scum—I've no love for them. Did they not kill my father—decent body—at the plough-stilts?"

"You have not avenged yourself for that, Maclaren."

Maclaren took a glance over his shoulder at the neighbouring cottages.

"They say," he whispered, "that his murderer, Robin Oig, is back again skulking here, and mixed up with new plots. His brother Ronald told me he prayed God that was not so. A pock-pitted, knock-kneed, poor-looking creature—and to think he killed my father. Oh, Mistress Ethlenn, if it had been a *man*—*ay* yon—"

"You are not turning Hanoverian, Mr. Maclaren, are you?"

"I—no, no—but if you had rolled down the Devil's Beef Tub and then lived dressed as a woman for a year, you'd take care you did not run unnecessary risks," and he laughed softly, pulling at his golden beard.

"We are going to see the village," said Ethlenn. "Mr. Carmichael thinks we are an unhappy people."

"We're all that," returned Maclaren, looking towards the clachan, "but there's more interest in cows and bairns up there than in all the kings in Europe, and all their targes cover buttermilk barrels now. Make no mistake of that." Glancing keenly at Carmichael and

laughing again, he swept down the road, a great man in stature, giving even to his Lowland dress much of the dignity of his northern blood.

Ethlenn watched him thoughtfully.

"It's Maclaren against Macgregor," she said to herself, "even though the Prince himself were to ride up Balquhidder."

They trotted on in silence, then, halting at the kirk, they hitched their horses to a tree below the gate.

The people flocked out to watch them, brown-faced, uncouth-looking men and women, most of them in some semblance to the proscribed Highland dress, many stunted, poor-looking creatures, watching them from under matted, tangled hair and bushy brows.

Ethlenn stepped forward and they gave way a little before her.

"Do not fear," she cried out in Gaelic, "I am Ethlenn Murdoch of Strathyre—you remember me."

There was an instant shrill chattering in Gaelic and they greeted her with broad smiles and kindly words.

"Come in, Mr. Carmichael," she called, and entered the low door of the cottage in front of him.

Carmichael, sniffing audibly, followed her, and a moment later stood erect in a single-roomed cottage so dimly lighted that had it not been for the peat fire he could not have seen at all.

The floor was sodden underfoot and laid with dried bracken. In the centre of the room a kettle swung upon chains fixed to the roof, and the smoke streamed out of a hole above. Round the sides of the room were heaps of heather for bedding, and here and there were one or two low stools.

In the thatch of the roof above he caught the bright glint of something like steel, and shifted his eyes instantly,

knowing that curiosity was an unwise faculty. They had little to offer, but were anxious to make much of the visitors, and Ethlenn was quite at home with the children all about her and the women eyeing her garments with intense curiosity veiled by their innate courtesy.

Carmichael watched Ethlenn, fascinated by every new phase he saw of her. He disliked the place, the people, the smell, but he was happy wherever Ethlenn was; he felt he could endure anything for her sweet presence.

They mounted their horses again and rode down the glen towards Loch Earn. Suddenly a short, ill-fashioned-looking man sprang up in the heather alongside the road. Ethlenn started violently, for he was dressed in a kilt and plaid, red waistcoat and huge blue bonnet, and the silver butt-end of a pistol glittered in his belt. He said nothing, but his face wore a certain insolent devilment. He was red-haired, clean-shaven, with close-set eyes and heavily pock-marked. It was the ravages of this disease that made Ethlenn whisper, "Robin Oig!" He indeed it was, brother to James More, and murderer of Maclaren's father, who watched them from the hill-side.

Carmichael reined in his horse, cursing softly under his breath.

"Shall I ride at the fellow?" he asked coolly enough, but like a man strangely concerned about her answer.

Ethlenn still looked at him and shivered.

"No," she said, "let us on," and put spurs to her beast.

But Robin Oig stood for long staring after them, motionless, his lean, cruel face stuck forward, till they had passed out of sight.

Then, raising his head, he uttered a short, harsh laugh, like the bark of a hill fox—ininitely mirthless—charged with some secret derision.

## CHAPTER IX

### I

**M**ILE after mile passed and Ethlenn rode in silence, guiding her beast along the rough track by the force of habit, her thoughts far from her present company. Turning to the left when they had passed out of Balquhiddy, they made for Loch Earn, cantering across the wide sweep of open moorland which lies between the two. Still she said no word, and Carmichael had all his time occupied in pressing the "Old Pretender" to greater activities to keep her within speaking distance.

At last, when they caught the first blue glint of the loch, she reined in and slipped from the saddle.

"Let us rest awhile," she said. "I doubt not your beast will need a breather."

"Gad, that he will," answered Carmichael, leading his horse after her.

Ethlenn hitched her pony to a tree and stepped lightly upon the silver strand beside the water's edge.

"That is a rare view, Mr. Carmichael," she called. "I want nothing better than a horse to ride and these wild hills to live amongst."

He stepped beside her.

"With you," he said, in a low voice, "such a life were——"

"Enough of such words," she broke in sharply. "I think they are ill-chosen at such a time."

He lowered his eyes before her frank gaze.

"I swear on my heart I spoke them without thinking," he replied. "Mistress Ethlenn, forgive a man overcome by—by——" he stammered for words.

"I thank you," she replied in the same even voice, "for what you mean, but such words are better left unsaid. Have you ever thrown chuckie stones, Mr. Carmichael?"

He started at the swift change of her mood.

"I—no—I do not understand."

She stooped and lifted a stone in her fingers. As she bent he thought how like a deer she was for poise of limb, then she stood erect, her fine lithe figure was outlined against the water, her wind-blown hair in flying wisps about her face and neck.

"See, you take a smooth flat pebble as this one here. Handle it so and spin it along the water's face like this." She flung the stone whirling through the air and watched it leap along the mirrored loch, jumping five times before it finally disappeared.

"Wonderful," he cried, his eyes full of mischief and laughing like a happy boy.

"There, I've found one too." He threw it clumsily, and with a flop it was gone.

He was about to fling another while she directed his arm, her face all rosy, her breast rising and falling with the vigour of it, when unseen to them a man reined in his horse upon the bank above. He made no further movement, only sat with grave eyes, a great, melancholy looking man, in whose face one might have seen all the elements which make up tragedy. His eyes rested on Ethlenn, sad, grey eyes, cold as granite, set in a firmly chiselled, bronzed face.

Carmichael laughed again, his soft, somewhat foolish



laughter, and with a slight momentary frown the stranger gently pulled back his horse and disappeared from sight.

"I had three," cried Carmichael.

Standing aside Ethlenn took to watching him with her quiet, unfathomable eyes. He seemed so young to her, so like a boy who enters into a game and forgets all else. She had only known her brother James, and that was long ago. But James was so strong and overbearing. She had never been able to look after him until she held him dying in her arms. How bitter-sweet had that terrible moment been. He was so helpless—like a child.

"You look sad, mistress," said Carmichael, panting at her with his red lips apart.

"I—I was thinking," she replied. "I am often sad."

"You—sad—impossible, mistress. I am older than you—I am near thirty, but I am never sad. Youth is never sad, mistress. Gad, I don't know what I'd do if I began to wear a melancholy countenance, take to drink or suicide, I suppose."

"We are a mirthless race, Mr. Carmichael—my father never laughs and rarely smiles. There is little to laugh about in the Highlands."

"You should come south, mistress, to Edinburgh and London. There we do nothing but seek pleasure. Leave these dreary hills and come with me——"

"I—Mr. Carmichael—how could I come with you?"

She faced him with cold inquiry in her eyes, and then she saw her error and blushed from her neck upwards.

He watched her with eager, adoring eyes—standing downcast within reach of his arms.

For an instant he hesitated, his heart beating like a hammer, and then with a gulp he caught her by her hands and drew her to him.

Without a word she raised her great soft eyes and looked into his.

"Let me go, please."

He hardly caught the words from her trembling lips.

"Your pardon," he whispered hoarsely, and stood with his head bent before her, only his quick breath betraying his emotion.

"Come," she said, and walked before him up the strand.

They approached their beasts, and as she unhitched her bridle reins there sounded a faint whistle above them.

Without a pause she went on quietly untying the thongs, her eyes fixed on Carmichael's face. He, to all appearance, had heard nothing. Then "Oh," she said, and stood as though in doubt.

"What is it?" asked Carmichael, his horse nosing his coat.

"I forgot—I want to call at a cottage above here. Will you wait a minute? I will be back immediately."

She sprang on to her pony and urged him upward.

Carmichael stood without moving, a slight frown upon his face. A moment later the crackling of twigs had died away. She was gone. He stood chewing his lip an instant, then hastily fastening his horse more securely to a branch he leapt softly up the bank and disappeared. It did not take him long to come within hearing distance of Ethlenn, and crouching double he crept after her, testing every step he took.

She left the trees and stood upon a promontory overlooking some pasture land, and suddenly raised a long, shrill whistle. It was answered instantly, and a moment later a ragged boy stood up in the bracken and ran towards her. Carmichael wormed his way closer, but could not hear a word they said. But the boy he recognized in an instant as Chuckie Stane.

The latter dragged a piece of paper from his pocket and held it up to her. This she took quickly, as though it were of grave importance, and thrust into her bosom. Then the conversation continued, she questioning for the most part, the boy holding on to her stirrup-iron to catch her words the better. Of a sudden, breaking off abruptly, she turned her horse's head, and the boy vanished again among the bracken.

So swiftly did she return that Carmichael needed all his speed of foot to get back without being seen.

A few minutes later she reined up beside him again.

"You look comfortable, Mr. Carmichael. I trust I have not kept you over long."

He blinked up at her like a man newly roused.

"I am always at your service, mistress," said he. "Shall we proceed?"

"If you please," she replied, and led the way.

Slowly they trotted home. Carmichael spoke of what they would do on the morrow. Was it to be fishing, or shooting on the hills? She answered him at random, starting from a reverie, and speaking as little as possible.

So they reached Murdoch Castle and stabled their beasts.

In the garden they were surprised to see a stranger walking to and fro with her father, a great, broad-shouldered gentleman, dressed in an English uniform, with a three-cornered hat and white peruke. They both turned as Ethlenn and Carmichael approached, and her father took a step forward, his face working like a man somewhat put about at something.

"Come awa, Ethlenn," he cried, with assumed heartiness, "here's Captain Campbell of Inversnaid come to see us—my daughter, Captain Campbell."

The stranger bowed stiffly before her and for a moment his grey eyes looked into hers.

Ethlenn said no word. She only glanced at the stranger and then flung a look of scorn at her father.

"Mr. Carmichael," broke in her father "Captain Campbell."

"At your service," said Carmichael, smiling brightly. The soldier bowed distantly and remained silent.

"Where have ye been, Carmichael?" asked Murdoch, to save the situation.

"Up to Balquhiddy and then to Loch Earn side."

"Ye did not meet Captain Campbell? You came that road, did ye no, Captain?"

The stranger stood erect and for a second did not answer.

"Yes," he replied, in a deep voice. "I came that way. But all I saw was a riderless horse alone by the beach."

Carmichael started violently, and then, with a sudden smile:

"I fear it was my horse, sir," he said, "the day was hot and the bracken thick, I don't wonder you did not see me."

"It was remarkable," returned Campbell, "for I went down to ease the poor beast's head."

Slowly Ethlenn raised her head and stared full at Carmichael. It struck her like a blow how small and mean his mouth was. Then for a breath of time she looked searchingly into Campbell's steady eyes.

## II

To tell of the part the great Clan Campbell took in the '45 and afterwards would be a commonplace. Every one knows how Argyll stood for the Government and gave his aid to the suppression of the Jacobite cause. It was more than a case of Highlander against Highlander, it was one of Protestant against the old religion, order against disorder, the reasonable against the romantic. Hated the

Clan Campbell had been before—it was now execrated even amongst those clans who had taken the field for the Prince. There was that about Argyll and his people which made their name reek in the nostrils of the Highlands far into the eighteenth century.

The attention of the Government at this time was centred on the secret activities of the more lawless Jacobites. With the aid of the Campbells and such-like, suspicious tenants were replaced by fellow-clansmen or sworn Hanoverians. Men of greater influence were arrested on various charges which warranted sufficient imprisonment to hinder their conspiracies if any, and in some cases, such as that of Stewart of Appin, when Argyll perpetrated a judicial murder upon an innocent man, suspicious persons were removed.

To Ethlenn, then, the name of Campbell was one to be detested above all others, and to be forced to speak to a member of the clan who had fought against her brothers, a man arrayed in the hated English uniform, was a situation she could ill sustain.

Her father kept out of her way as long as possible, but she confronted him at last when he had left the two men smoking in the garden.

"What is it, child?" he asked uneasily, as she led the way to the library and shut the door.

She motioned him to a chair. "Sit down," she said, her face set and her eyes glowing with anger, "sit down and tell me what this means."

Murdoch looked her up and down.

"I prefer to stand," said he, very cold and straight.

"You seem to forget yourself strangely, Ethlenn."

"Why has this man come," she burst out, "this Whig with his English uniform and his red Campbell face?"

"Hoots, toots, girl, you're crazed, surely. Can I no

ask a neighbour in for a time without your ridiculous prejudices creeping out? I'm ashamed o' ye."

"Ashamed, are you? Are you turning doitard, that you betray our hospitality to yon? How long does he stay?"

"Till morning. He has come on business about the district. He is, in a manner of speaking, in charge of the peace in these parts, and you would not have me act the empty fool by shutting the door in his face?"

"No," she said slowly. "No—that would not help us. But oh, father, it went like a stab to my heart to see Murdoch so close with a Campbell."

The old man patted her cheek with one transparent white hand.

"There, there," he murmured in Gaelic. "You are too impetuous, girl. Do not ruin all my hopes for you by carrying these notions of yours too far. That is all in the past. Sometimes lately I have felt as though you were shadowed by old dead dreams. Shake them from you, child. The only road to happiness is the old broad way of ordinary things. Ye live too much in your imagination. Take an old man's advice, and do as I bid. I have such plans for you, Ethlenn. Only a little patience and your future is assured."

"Whatever do you mean, father?"

He dropped the Gaelic, which he rarely used with her.

"A secret, Ethlenn," he whispered, "a grand, bonny secret." He paused, a faint smile upon his lips. "You like Carmichael, eh?"

"I hardly know him," she replied, on her guard; "has he aught to do with the secret?"

"Carmichael? What put that in your head, child?" He paused, then changed the subject. "It would be well to keep Donald to-night," he said; "our guest has all the appearance of a braw drinker."

Ethlenn nodded, filled with unutterable repulsion. It was not strange to her that her father's friends and contemporaries rarely spent a sober evening, for such was the habit of the times, but that a Campbell should grow tipsy in Murdoch seemed an unbearable disgrace.

The sound of voices came from downstairs and he tip-toed towards her.

"Mind ye talk friendly to Captain Campbell," he whispered, "he's in command o' the garrison o' Inver-  
naid, and it would be the very deevil to anger him."

Then, taking her arm affectionately, he led her downstairs, where Janet had laid the evening meal.

Carmichael was standing with his back to the fire as they entered, and a dark flush lay heavy on his face.

"Where is Captain Campbell?" asked Murdoch quickly.

"How do I know?" he snapped back. "Do you expect me to tolerate a man like that?"

"Eh—what has happened?"

"He has insulted me," said Carmichael shortly.

A sudden silence fell upon them all. Ethlenn looked to her father and back to Carmichael. Her eyes wore a strained, anxious stare.

At that moment into the dark room walked Campbell, humming a tune.

Of Carmichael he took no notice, but approached Ethlenn and her father.

"I admire your old grey castle," said he pleasantly. "I suppose it holds a family ghost or two."

Murdoch laughed in a sort of mirthless cackle. "Ghosts, Captain—not to my knowledge. There are tales, of course. Some say there is lost treasure too. Would I could lay hands upon it."

"Lost treasure—why, I shall not sleep to-night."

"You can carry it from here should you lay hands upon it. It is called Murdoch's Curse—a pretty treasure which exacts a ransom in misfortune. Not that I credit the tale. There might be a curse on every house in the Highlands were that so."

"Except the house of MacCailein Mor," broke in Ethlenn softly.

Campbell smiled grimly in the darkness.

"That is too bad of you, Miss Murdoch," said he. "I have no doubt the Duke of Argyll has a parcel of troubles we have no knowledge of."

"My daughter is a partisan of all unfortunate causes and people," said old Murdoch smoothly. "Now, gentlemen, let us to the table."

Janet lit the candles and they all seated themselves, the two visitors facing each other and Murdoch and Ethlenn at either end.

"Have you lived all your life in Scotland, Captain Campbell?" inquired Murdoch, pushing the claret towards him.

"No—I have served much abroad, and am hardly a Highlander except by birth and name. Would I were in the Low Countries again instead of shut up in Inversnaid at the beck and call of every prating busybody in Perthshire."

"Fine sentiments, sir," said Murdoch, "but the Highlands are sair crushed, Captain?" He kept his eyes on his plate, but Ethlenn saw his tense expression.

"None so sair," rejoined Campbell.

"What, sir," cried Murdoch, "you surprise me. You must know I am a recluse, and seldom see onybody. Div ye mean, Captain, that there is still trouble brewing?"

The soldier gave him one penetrating glance and dropped his eyes.



"Perhaps Mr. Carmichael can tell us," he said quietly.

"What do you mean?" broke out Carmichael.  
"How should I know? Beware, sir, I am not a patient man, and you insinuate——"

"Hoots—he insinuates naething," interrupted Murdoch, relishing it all.

"I think Captain Campbell should be more explicit," said Ethlenn coldly.

"I once had the honour of meeting Mr. Carmichael in Paris," replied Campbell, helping himself to bread.

"In Paris!" Carmichael's face was a picture.

"He said in Paris," murmured Murdoch, hugging himself at them all. "You have been in Paris, hev ye no?"

"I have."

"Well?"

"I can only say I think Captain Campbell is mistaken."

"And if he was not," said Ethlenn, "there are a host of honourable gentlemen in Paris at this moment for a reason I need not mention."

Campbell raised his face and let his sad grey eyes rest upon her.

"Too true," he said, "many friends dear to me and, if I mistake not, to you also."

He sat fumbling with his bread in silence, an expression of melancholy on his face.

Nobody spoke after those words. Only Carmichael exchanged glances with Ethlenn, and a terrible fear crept over her that perhaps Campbell was playing with him, and then that he was here to arrest Carmichael and take him to Inversnaid. She grew to hate this great, mysterious man, so self-possessed, so unwelcome, yet so quietly at his ease. Of her father she made nothing. Few succeeded in reading Murdoch's thoughts, and as he

sat at the foot of the table over his claret it was impossible to tell whether he thought at all. His face was expressionless, his eyes on his glass, his tangled white hair against his high-backed chair.

It was a relief to them all when the meal was finished, and they filed into the hall, where a great fire was laid, and a table laid with brandy and a jug of steaming water.

Ethlenn tried to catch Carmichael's eye, but failed. Then without a word she caught up a shawl and walked in a leisurely manner towards the garden. It was a clear autumn night with a promise of a moon ere long. As she passed the kitchen she had heard Donald's voice.

She had not long to wait before a quick step approached her, and Carmichael appeared, his face agitated and alarmed.

"Where is he?" she asked.

"Speaking to your father before the fire."

"Then come to the bridge. We can talk there."

Without a word they hurried down to the gate and out to the crumbling wall.

"Now," began Ethlenn, her brain like fire, "listen to me. That man in there is playing with you."

"I swear I——"

"Listen," she broke in, with a quick gesture, "he knows you for what you are. He is just waiting his time, and to-morrow he will arrest you like a score of others about here, should he get the chance."

He started at her words, and seemed more than once about to speak.

"The cruelty of it," she went on passionately, "to show you how well he knew you. Can it be—can it be he means you to escape? That were impossible for one of his name."

Still he did not speak.

"Alas," she murmured, "you do not know what to do. Let me think what is best for you. Make for Maclaren of Balquhiddel. He is a good man and true as steel. Lie hid there till I hear from friends I know of. I will see them soon." She paused, breathless, staring into his white face.

"No," he cried in a strange, harsh voice. "No, I can't—you do not understand——"

"I do so well," she said softly, all her motherhood awakened by such a picture of helplessness. "Now, not another word, but make ready. I will entertain him till you have stolen away."

"No," he cried again, "before God I cannot. Ethlenn—Ethlenn, how can I now?"

"Now?" she echoed.

For a moment he struggled with some inner emotion, and then spoke again in a faint, unsteady voice.

"I will not go," he said. "I will stay. May I be cursed for ever if I go."

"How strangely you speak," she said; "why will you not go?"

"For a reason I cannot tell and—because I will not leave you."

She swayed a little nearer him, her face upraised to his. Suddenly bending his head he kissed her full upon the lips, with passionate abandon of grief, like a man going to the scaffold. Then as quickly, with a sort of sob, he turned and leaned over the bridge, his hands covering his face.

"Go," she heard him whisper, "for the love of Heaven—go."

Ethlenn went slowly up the path and into the house. The force of the caress stung her lips and clung there, filling her with ecstasy.

In the hail Campbell raised his eyes to hers and watched her till she had turned the corner of the stairway.

Two hours later Carmichael passed up the stairs like a man in a dream, saying no word.

## III

Campbell and Murdoch sat long over the dying fire. The old man brewed his hot brandy and pressed the bottle on his visitor all to no purpose.

Campbell shared glass with glass, but remained always courteously obscure, silently on the alert.

At last Murdoch rose to his feet.

"It is near midnight," said he, and laid down his glass.

"It has been an interesting evening, Captain Campbell."

By which he signified that it had been little else.

Campbell bowed and, wishing him "good night," went slowly up the stairway, the candle-light dancing on his set face—while Murdoch stood staring at him cannily, ready to whisk away should the other turn his head.

"The close-tongued devil," he muttered, and yet not without a grudging respect. "The suspicious, hard-drinkin' gomeril," he added, tilting up the brandy bottle and eyeing the diminished contents with a rueful countenance.

The tall sombre figure of Donald suddenly confronted him.

"Am I wanted, Murdoch?" he asked, looking about the floor.

Murdoch regarded him with a wry smile.

"Would to God you were," he snapped.

Then he too stumbled, wheezing a little, up to bed.

Campbell stood in his room, his hands behind his back, so still that a mouse ran out upon the floor.

The candle, which he laid upon the bed-clothes, flung a gigantic, menacing shadow on the wall, like a huge figure brooding eternally.

His eyes, empty of expression, rested for a moment on the mouse. He watched it absently. For a minute he felt a vague interest in the little creature, so aimlessly happy with its small affairs, and then he saw his shadow on the wall and shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

Throwing off his wig, he sat upon the bed and pondered once again on the incidents of the day. First, the brief sight of Ethlenn on the shore of Loch Earn, all radiant with life and happiness. And then—and here he frowned—Ethlenn plunging past him through the wood, anxious-eyed; and hard on her trail—Carmichael.

His thoughts flew back four years, and he was in Paris again on pleasure bound, anxious to make himself perfect in French. He had seen Carmichael, and had not forgotten, nor the company he kept. What would he not give to warn this household—this old man and his sweet daughter? But it was none of his business. Besides, he had said enough already.

"Heigho," he yawned, coming slowly to his feet, "it's a queer business, and interferers often have their fingers burnt and no thanks for it."

The night wind blew upon his face from the open window, and rising, he walked across the room and leaned upon the sill. The moon was at the full and the garden beneath him as clear as day. He was not tired, and his mind surged with the incidents of the day. He knew why it was tormented, and yet he feared to tell himself.

"I am not a boy," he said in his heart again and again, and tried to dismiss the thing altogether. But there it stayed like a voice calling to him on the wind, refusing denial.

Sometimes he was again at supper, and sometimes watching the empty staircase.

But like a recurrent but ever-present picture before him he saw Ethlenn on the shore, pink-cheeked, with dancing eyes, throwing pebbles on Loch Earn's smooth surface.

He shook himself irritably and began to turn from the window, tugging at the buttons of his coat, when something in the garden below made him hesitate, his head erect. Was it a footstep?

Swiftly he blew out the candle and stole back to the window. The garden was as empty as before. Under the moon's pale light everything was utterly still. Then again a faint sound reached him. He peered cautiously out.

Suddenly, immediately below, shrouded in a hooded cloak and moving with stealthy steps, passed Ethlenn. She looked back once, one small white hand upon the Castle wall, and then disappeared from his sight.

To Campbell something in her secret departure signified danger. He knew too well the unrest of the country, the lawless wanderers whom she might meet on such a night. All this passed through his mind in a flash. Of her mission he gave no thought. That was no affair of his.

Hastily snatching up his cloak, he softly hurried from the room and stood upon the landing with his boots in his hand. From the room beside him he heard Murdoch snore, and passed quietly to the next, where Carmichael slept. No sign of a light here. But suddenly a faint moan reached him, then another, and the sound of a man tossing in a troubled sleep. Quickly he sped downstairs, and, dragging on his boots, stole into the moonlit garden.

## CHAPTER X

### I

**E**THLENN let her pony out of the stable, and with one swift, backward glance at the sleeping Castle leapt into the saddle and urged her beast along the road to Balquhidder. The moon was sailing in a cloudless sky. Down the track she galloped, only pausing at the bend of the road which hides Balquhidder from Murdoch. There she sat for a moment scanning the way she had come, and then with a sigh of relief she turned the corner and cantered down the hill. Crossing the Balvaig where it leaves Loch Voil she made for the other side, skirting the kirk and village on her right. And then she never paused, but galloped steadily up the shore of the silver loch, and, passing the ancient burial-place of the Macgregors, rode onward until the head of Loch Doine was reached and the lights of a house shone brightly to her left. Then fording the river she threaded her way across the stubble field, and drew rein where the little stream of Invernenty divided the two dwellings of that name.

The house of Western Invernenty was occupied by Mac-laren, son of that James Maclaren who was murdered by Robin Oig. It was a two-storied building set on a mound, square and prominent, with its gardens on the hill-side, and its byres beside the Invernenty burn. To the west lay Inverlochlarig, where Rob Roy died; and the thatched cottages of the Macgregors clustered along the burn-

side as thick as blackberries on a bush. Hereabouts Mac-laren had prowled for a year, disguised as a woman, after the '45 and his escape on the road to Carlisle, and it was, from its isolated position in the heart of the Macgregor country, well chosen as a meeting-place for the supporters of a forlorn cause. Even as Ethlenn alighted a ragged Highlander rose from a quern beside the house, on which he had been sitting (it is there still for any who care about such things), and asked her in shrill Gaelic what was her business.

"He is not at home," he said, jabbing a thumb over his shoulder towards Invernenty. Ethlenn laughed softly.

"I have not ridden from Strathyre for pleasure," she said.

He seemed suddenly convinced at that, but, bidding her wait, trotted up to the front door and disappeared within.

Meanwhile Ethlenn led her pony into the byre, and, putting a halter on him, dragged a bundle of hay into his stall and returned.

On the mound above her stood Archibald Cameron.

"Come awa, Miss Murdoch," he cried. "Angus is over careful. Maclaren is within, and glad to see you."

Ethlenn ascended the path up to the doorway and shook the Doctor by the hand. Then, without further word, he led the way into the house and opened a door to their right.

There was a great clamour of voices as the door swung back, and the acrid smell of peat smoke and whisky intermingled. There were a dozen men in the room, seated for the most part around the fire, gaunt, bearded men, speaking in strident Highland voices.

One man rose on the instant and shook hands with her. It was Lochgarry, grown deep red in the face with the hill wind.



Maclaren, too, greeted her kindly though absently, she thought, like a man whose thoughts are elsewhere.

Of the remainder she knew none.

All this time no one spoke, and she thought she saw uneasiness in many faces about her, and in some the dawning of terror. Only Cameron and Lochgarry seemed bright and cheerful.

"I was kept," said Ethlenn; "a visitor is staying the night—a Capt'n Campbell."

A short, dark man beside her uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"Of Inversnaid?" he asked.

"I left him deep in his glass," she replied, but wished she had held her tongue. She saw Lochgarry frowning to himself in a corner, and Cameron fidgeting about from one to another whispering and laughing, but all in an agitated, unnatural manner, as though he feared to show his proper disposition.

Presently he led her aside, while a tall, powerfully built man with a quantity of black, curly hair spoke to the gathering in Gaelic.

"Sergeant Mohr Cameron," whispered he, "he'll rouse them if any can. It's been a stiff time since we said good-bye to you in Paris. Lochgarry and I have been hunted like deer, but there's warm hearts in the Highlands for such as we, and I'm inclined to think we'll prove their equals yet."

"I got your message, Doctor."

He smiled to himself.

"A pretty business it was to reach you, too. Yon wee laddie has waited ever since we heard ye had arrived. Now tell me, for we have only heard rumours—how goes the Prince in England?"

Ethlenn started away from him.

"Have you not heard?" said she. "Surely you cannot imagine——"

"Eh—tell me—what is't?"

"Oh," she murmured, lest any should hear her, "could they play so low as not to warn you?"

Cameron gave one keen glance round the room and drew her against the wall, where they were in the shadow.

"Tell me," he said, "I am old in the Cause. Tell me, is all lost?"

She nodded. Her tongue refused to move.

He looked at her musingly for a moment, and she saw beads of perspiration suddenly stand out on his brow. Otherwise she might have thought he had not heard.

"The Prince?" he asked.

"Is safe in France."

"Thank God for that. Was it discovered?"

"No—the English blundered and lost heart."

He shook his head dismally and pursed his lips.

"This is ill news for such as these," said he, exiting the room.

"Had you not better tell them to wait till better times?" she said.

"Too late," he answered, in a sort of despair, "too late by years. The 'forty-five is an old story now. In five years it will be easier to raise the beggars of Edinburgh than the Highland clans."

Of a sudden a queer expression crept into his eyes.

"Who warned the Government?" he asked abruptly.

"No one knows. Naturally, they suppose——" she hesitated.

"You mean Miss Walkingshaw—and why not?"

"Because the Prince kept her in the dark."

"Did he say so?"

"He told me on the day we awaited news from London."

"There's treachery somewhere," he muttered; "things leak out and leak out, until soon there'll be naething worth the keeping."

Lochgarry came across the room at that moment.

"They wish you to speak, Archie," he whispered, "they're all ready to bolt at an owl's hoot. Tell them we'll hae news frae Edinburgh the morn."

"Good God, Lochgarry—we've news now that will send them scurrying home like a parcel o' field mice."

"Ye canna mean——"

"Aye, it's good-bye to a rising for the meantime. It's Paris again for us, my mannie—that is, if the coast is clear."

"Damnation!" growled Lochgarry.

Cameron cleared his throat and stood before the fireplace, looking very square and short in that assemblage of great, bearded men, and tweaking his nose till silence fell.

"Gentlemen," said he, "I have word that we must lie low for the present."

At that there arose a sudden clamour of voices, and a thin-faced man who clutched his claymore hilt between his knees cried out that they had gone too far.

"Mind James Stewart," shouted another; "and it will be one of us next, I'm thinking."

"Shame on ye," cried Cameron, "for miserable weathercocks—you, Maclaren, cannot agree with such sentiments."

Maclaren rose and an instant silence fell. He was respected as a man of sound judgment and not landless as Cameron or Lochgarry.

"I am advising a dispersal to our homes," he said. "Should we act rashly we will be beaten, and I know what it is like to be a prisoner, and what are one's thoughts then. I would suggest that Doctor Cameron

and Lochgarry sound other quarters and let us meet again."

"And what will be the meaning of this change?" asked a thin, anxious-looking man with a great nose set in a wrinkled haggard face. "I tell you that we must strike now or never. A rising will spread like the heather on fire. It will be far more determined than the 'forty-five, for now we are all sufferers, and before that we were all free men."

There was a dead silence at that, only a low murmuring of voices which died away.

And then Ronald Macgregor rose to his feet, a middle-sized, foxy-faced man with ruddy hair.

"You will all be knowing who I am," he said in a deep voice, "and who my father was; and some of you will be remembering that when the garrison at Balquhiddy had burnt our homes down the loch-side that the Macgregors were for slaughtering the redcoats out of hand. But I advised for peace, and I am asking you if I was right."

There was a general assent.

"And now," he continued, "I would advise that we keep this meeting to ourselves and that it goes no further. How many claymores could we all command? Two thousand at most, and what is two thousand against England? Some time God will defend the right, but I am for watching France as well."

He uttered the last words cannily, and since his father's death he had carried weight.

Speaker followed speaker. Some spoke vehemently, protesting their zeal, but blaming Cameron and Lochgarry for calling a meeting on such poor grounds. Others, and these the very young men, were all for the Fiery Cross, and Ethlenn knew that such is the manner of hot blood and signifies nothing in the morning.

And then suddenly she sprang to her feet, and a flood of words poured from her dry lips.

"What sort of talk is this," she cried, "for loyal men? Shame on you, Maclaren, and you, Stewart and Macgregor! Have six years made you old women? Think of the clans writhing under injustice, armless, landless, utterly destitute. Think of those exiles known to you all who are eating their hearts out in foreign parts. You will have much to answer for, gentlemen, if your comfortable talk crushes their most ardent hopes. Think of that poor Prince whose proud spirit is already shadowed with the gloom of disappointment. Who knows but in five years' time the clans will be leaving the land of their fathers, the exiles will have fallen on other fields of battle, and the Prince, God save us, who can say what will have overtaken that unhappy gentleman?"

"But it is too late, Miss Murdoch," broke in Ronald Macgregor smoothly.

She stared at him, her breast heaving, the light dying suddenly out of her eyes.

"Too late!" she repeated. "Too late. It is never too late until you make it so in your own hearts."

A deep silence followed those whispered words, and then a man opened the door, and, falling into a chair, she buried her head in her arms. She was suddenly sick at heart of the whole business. This was a different scene to the one she had imagined in her dreams. There was no show of impatience and clashing of arms here—only dour looks and scared faces. Had it not been for Cameron and Lochgarry, she wondered how long it would take before the flame of Jacobitism would flicker and go out. Sergeant Mohr Cameron was an outlaw, anyway, and under the eye of the law. How could three men and one woman lead back the Stuarts to the English crown?

She shivered, staring wild-eyed about her. Was it all a dream? Was her life a passing dream too? She watched the men filing away into the darkness. They seemed like shadows of men, so silently did they disappear.

With a sob she dropped her head upon the table, and so remained while all around her passed out, the last remnant of revolt, looking more like condemned criminals than hot-blooded partisans.

At last the place was empty, and Lochgarry was shaking hands with Maclaren at the door.

"Come to me if aught go wrong," said the latter. "I know a place in the hill-side," and the voices died away.

Ethlenn raised her head with the tears heavy upon her lashes.

Standing in the doorway was Cameron, his face like death and such a misery in his eyes that her own grief passed into empty nothingness.

Stumbling into the room, he fell upon a chair beside her.

"I have seen—oh, God, God——"

"What is it?" she whispered, looking vacantly about.

"I have seen a rope," he whispered—"oh, my poor wife and bairns—a rope dangling before my eyes."

"Doctor Cameron," she said firmly, a Murdoch again, "you are overstrained."

He sat shivering a moment, then shook himself like a dog.

"It's the nerves," he said; "as a physician, I can prescribe for myself—and that's a peg of whisky."

Still white of face he drained a quaich full, and a stream of colour wound back into his cheeks.

"That's better," he cried, "but eh, yon was a dreary sight. They'd do it fast enough."

"Not they, Doctor. They'd have all Scotland ablaze with indignation."

"Maybe," he said dryly, "but that would not be of muckle interest to me, ye ken."

So saying, he dangled his legs and tried to smile at her.

But she knew where his mind lay.

"I must go back," she said, rising, "it is near dawn."

"It is," he replied, "and now we must say good-bye for the present. Things may be stirring in two months or no', but I'll tell ye how I'm progressing at this address. I will send you word where to meet me next, God willing."

"I will come wherever you are, if I can prove of any help," she replied quietly.

"See here," he said, scribbling on a bit of paper; "this will find me if aught turns up before; and keep it by ye, mind, or it would fare ill with Archie Cameron."

"It shall never leave me," she replied, pushing it into the bosom of her dress.

"Well," he said, "farewell, Mistress Ethlenn, for the meantime, and dinna lose heart. You're a braw Jacobite, worth a hundred o' thae poor cattle to-night. So Captain Campbell is with ye—a fine man and a bonny fechter."

She made no comment, and opening the door she untied her pony.

"Good-bye," she whispered.

The moon fell upon his upturned face.

"Till we meet," he said, smiling kindly at her, and then stared about him in the darkness with a hand at his throat.

And so she left him. When they met again Destiny had played his part, which even then was speeding on its course against whose decree the fortunes of men are as a handful of scattered dust.

## II

When Lochgarry returned from speaking on the brae with Maclaren he found Cameron standing bareheaded in the night.

"Come awa, man," he said; "it's far we must be by morning."

He paused in buttoning his great-coat.

"Has yon girl gone?" he inquired.

Cameron started, and eyed him keenly.

"Just this minute," he said. "Why do you ask?"

"There's some one in the ken, Archie," answered Lochgarry meaningly.

"Dinna tell me ye suspect a Murdoch?"

Lochgarry clipped the last button without replying. But when they had come into the moonlight he tapped Cameron on the shoulder and jerked his head heavenwards.

"Even the Almighty could not rely upon a woman," said he, and led the way across the burn without another word.

Behind, the lights of Invermenty blinked out and disappeared. A cold mist rose from the marshy land under their feet.

Then, skirting Inverlochlarig, they trudged along the road to the west.

For an hour neither spoke again. Of a sudden Lochgarry turned impatiently upon his companion.

"Damn it, Archie, have ye no a whistle in you?"

"A whistle, is it? Man, were I to whistle this night I would greet like a bairn."

Lochgarry snorted in the utter silence.

"It's greeting ye've been this hour and more," said he.



## CHAPTER XI

**E**THLENN rode loose-reined along Loch Voil side, while in the white stillness of the autumn night her pony's hoof-fall rang clacking far and wide.

When she had ridden a mile or so towards Balquhiddy she drew rein and slid off her beast. Then, leading him with her, she walked down upon the shore and seated herself upon a great moss-clustered stone, resting her chin upon her hand. The pony with its hanging head and dew-drenched coat stood behind her, nosing the pebbles with his muzzle, but otherwise perfectly motionless. In the bleak dimness of approaching dawn they might have been a carving of desolation wrought in stone.

The mist hung over the face of the loch in thick, choking blackness. From the hills along the shore side came the occasional stealthy fall of a leaf, or the swift rustle of some animal hunting his prey. Once a rabbit drummed in the frosty grass at the edge of the wood, while for long a hind watched the figures on the shore with troubled inquisitive eyes before slipping like a ghost between the gloom of the trees.

Still Ethlenn sat.

Her mind was stunned and yet searching blindly for consciousness, overwhelmed and yet struggling bravely. Wherever she looked she read disaster—always that. Who save Cameron and Lochgarry, gallant, reckless adventurers, could think otherwise? The tragic futility of it all, the pitiful clutching at the hands of the clock!

Tears ran slowly down her cold cheeks as she pictured that room again, with Cameron running from man to man, cheering, arguing, heartening all for a cause that was dead and done with.

Her face sank slowly lower and suddenly, without a cry, dropped between her hands and lay there. The pony sniffed at her hair and whinnied a little in his nostrils—then fell to wandering aimlessly about the water's edge.

Long after Ethlenn raised her face.

It was haggard and grey, but perfectly calm. In her eyes shone new courage and new determination. The past had fallen from her like a cloak. She would think no more than was possible of that. The future lay like an open road, a hard, weary, thankless road, but the only road.

With a heavy sigh she walked to the loch side and bathed her face with the cold water.

Then, catching her pony, she prepared to mount and continue her journey. The dawn was a full hour away.

Suddenly she raised her eyes and looked long in the direction of Invernenty.

"Good-bye," she whispered: "good-bye for ever."

Then, leaping with blind haste upon her pony, she cantered into the blackness of the trees and was gone. Now that her resolve was taken, her heart began to fail her again. She tore on like a mad thing, heeding nothing.

Suddenly a sharp cry was flung up out of the darkness at her very feet, and as the pony shied violently and reared she lost her saddle and fell heavily to the ground. For long she lay like a dead thing, while Campbell, for he it was, held her tenderly in his arms and bathed her head with brandy.

The pony, utterly terrified, had galloped into the night, and his thudding feet soon died into silence.

"Alas, my poor child," murmured Campbell. He took

off his great-coat and wrapped her in it, loosening her dress at the neck and pouring a little of the spirit between her clenched teeth.

Her breath began to come with quick gasps. A low moan slipped through her lips, and then, with a sharp cry, she raised her head and struggled in his arms.

"Who are you?" she cried, peering at him wildly.

"There, there!" he said. "You're quite safe. It is I, Roderick Campbell. You have had an accident. Lie quietly, Miss Murdoch."

"I thought you were in Donald's hands," she said, speaking in a daze.

"I do not understand you—who is Donald?" he asked, trying to soothe her.

She frowned to herself in the darkness, striving to remember. In a flash she realized it all. It was a cowardly trick to search her. Terror suddenly overmastered her.

"Let me up," she cried. "Take back your coat." She reached her feet before he could stop her.

"And now," she said, clutching the tree beside her, "what does Captain Campbell in Balquhiddy at this hour?"

"Oh——" he began, then fell dumb.

She waited, her breast heaving, and her eyes wild with fever and bitter rage.

"I see," she said in a sneering voice; "and so that's your errand, is it? I knew in my heart no Campbell ever came on an honest business. What will Balquhiddy say to this, think you, when I raise a call? They will come, Captain Campbell, rest assured of that, and they are not a gentle people."

"Well," he answered quietly.

She laid a hand against her burning temple.

"Perhaps—perhaps you have some explanation," she said in a dull voice.

For a moment his grey eyes rested tenderly on her, but it was too dark for her to see. Then he stiffened from head to heel.

"Explanation?" he said coldly. "I am not in the custom of offering explanations."

"You were not here for nothing," she said in the same weary voice. "Or were you following me?" She became suddenly alert. "You have more sense of honour than that, Captain Campbell."

In the darkness the rush of hot blood to his cheeks was unseen.

"Since you ask, Miss Murdoch, I did follow you."

After that there was no word spoken. Ethlenn had taken one swift step forward, and then paused irresolute. The worst was come. In her vigil she had reckoned without this. Already it seemed that her swiftest action could not avert complete ruin. He had followed her. No doubt he had seen all, heard all, had watched her by the loch, had seen her weep, had finally waylaid her. For what purpose? He surely did not deem her so low as to try and force her speech? She clutched at her dress about her neck in her agitation and her fingers fell upon her bared neck.

Instantly the thing was clear as day. She had been robbed of Cameron's address. That was why he had caused her to fall. And now she was helpless, and the life of the man who had trusted her was virtually lost, unless she could warn him in time.

The dawn was beginning to break. Over the smooth face of the loch a ripple flew swiftly. Down the glen stole a cold wind.

She saw him gradually grow out of the darkness and stand watching her, bare-headed, coatless, with tired eyes.

Stealthily she fastened the laces about her throat. He must never suspect she knew.

"At least you are frank, Captain Campbell."

He smiled at her.

"Does that surprise you, Miss Murdoch?"

She did not reply, forcing back the storm of her anger. Campbell regarded her with a puzzled expression.

"Miss Murdoch," he said in a low voice, "I fear I have offended you——"

"Why so, Captain Campbell?"

"Because you seem to suspect me of other motives except those of interest in your welfare."

Ethlenn became alarmed at that.

"Suspect! What sort of word is that, Captain Campbell? Of what could I suspect you?"

"I have no idea, but your manner——"

"Has never changed." She watched him anxiously.

"No," he answered in a melancholy voice; "has never changed. And now I suppose you will hate me, Miss Murdoch."

She began to fence with him.

"Why should I hate you?"

"For frightening you so to-night. But, on my honour, I did it for the best. I never heard the beast till it was upon me, and then I thought it had bolted. It was going madly, Miss Murdoch."

"Yes, Captain Campbell. At night a woman is not safe at the hands of some men."

He did not flinch, but nodded his head in quick agreement.

"It was on that score I took the liberty of following you," he said; "only I lost you and was cursing myself for a blunderer, Miss Murdoch, when you came flying through the trees."

Ethlenn grew suddenly utterly weary of it all. For an instant she wondered if she should throw herself on his mercy, plead for the safety of Cameron, and, if the worst befell, call on the people of Balquhidder to aid her. She raised her eyes and for a moment looked into his. They faced her openly, mournfully. At another time she would have read their honesty at once. And then she saw his ruddy Campbell hair, with the wind playing amongst its curls, and she started away.

"Let us go," she said, and halted abruptly, her eyes upon the wood above them.

From far up the hill came a sharp crack of a broken branch, and then deep silence.

"What was that?" whispered Campbell, looking intently upward.

He remembered with a tightening of the lips that he was alone in the heart of the country of broken men.

Ethlenn dropped her eyes.

"A hind," she said, "coming to drink."

She hid her troubled face from him. She had only caught a glimpse of tartan in the shadow of the trees, but it was deep red, like fresh blood—the tartan of the Macgregors.

"Come," she said again, and climbed up upon the road. For a second her eyes searched the soft mud before her. She saw where the pony had cut up the track with the swerve of his hind feet. She looked for the flattened patch where she had fallen. But there was more for the gleaning.

In the thin grass beside the road was the impress of a Highland brogue, clear and deep like that of a man suddenly startled and springing violently away.

Then side by side, without a word spoken, they fell to walking toward Balquhidder.

## CHAPTER XII

**I**T was an hour before dawn when Carmichael flung off his bed-clothes and walked wearily back and forwards across his room.

Outside was the absolute stillness of an autumn night, with the faint murmur of Balvaig in the distance.

He had not slept more than an hour, and in the night his face had aged.

He peered into the night and shivered.

"By God," he cried in a low, vibrating voice, "I cannot bear it! I cannot go on."

He resumed his fretful pacing up and down the room, clasp and unclasp his hands, speaking all the time to himself under his breath.

"It is all over and done with," he repeated, like a man anxious to convince himself, "and so here's to the new road and good-bye to the old. Would to Heaven I had told her sooner!"

With that he fell into silence, tapping with his knuckles on the window-sill and watching the mist swirling past above the river and up the glen.

"The dawn has come," he murmured in a sort of awe. "What will the day hold for me?" And so saying he took up a tiny scrap of kerchief, faintly perfumed, and kissed it in a sudden frenzy.

"Oh, Ethlenn!" he whispered, his lips trembling, "will you ever know—will you ever know?"

Then, sighing, he ran his hands through his wondrous

hair and let his head droop, his eyes upon the floor.

Suddenly from the garden below came a faint whistle repeated three times, a peculiar, twisted whistle with a lilt not easily forgotten.

Carmichael flung up his head on the instant.

His eyes widened, a frown crossed his brow. Some unpleasant memory seemed to flit across his countenance and become merged in an expression of puzzled annoyance.

Again the ripple of sound floated up to him—this time more insistent.

With an imprecation Carmichael tip-toed to the window and looked down.

The dawn had fairly come and the sunlight was pouring on to the frosty grass and dew-spangled ivy. And underneath the window, looking intently upward from under shaggy red brows, stood Robin Oig Macgregor.

"Damnation!" swore Carmichael, and stared at him without a word.

The Macgregor seemed in no way disconcerted by his cold reception, but leered up at Carmichael and took a pinch of snuff with some composure. For all his demeanour, however, Carmichael detected unusual excitement in his eyes, and a certain air of importance which was as unmistakable as it was grotesque. He also noticed that he had evidently come fast and far, and wondered with a sudden dread what news he bore. He stared at the tarnished silver buttons upon Robin Oig's red waistcoat with growing disgust.

"Well," he said coldly, speaking in Gaelic, "and is it to watch you taking snuff I am brought out of my warm bed?"

Robin Oig grinned up at him.



"Let down a plaid," he replied; "it is talking to you I must be, and at once."

There was no mistaking the tone of his voice. The man had come on important business—that was clear enough. Carmichael briefly reviewed the situation in his mind. He had had dealings with Robin Oig before. He had first met him in France, when Robin had fallen prisoner to the French. He had also had dealings with James, his brother. James had not offended his niceness of taste like Robin. There was a certain presence and dignity about him which Robin lacked. James contrived at conspiracy and crime in a grand manner and, like his father, Rob Roy, made it appear less sordid. But Robin had always done murder with his bare hands, and grew drunk like a common gillie. Carmichael was fastidious, and had seen the life of courts. Vice he designated fashion, and greater evils he termed political intrigue.

There was that in Robin Oig which stripped both of their comfortable coverings in a manner irritating and unsavoury.

And yet he could not afford to throw off his mask with the fellow. Well he knew the dangers which an imprudent action might reveal. The danger of letting a fugitive from the law like Robin Oig into the Castle never crossed his mind. That was a minor risk, and there were great issues at stake. Without a word he knotted his plaid and let it fall to within eight feet of the ground. At that, Robin Oig sprang upon a ledge of rock and, clutching the tartan, swarmed nimbly up and wormed his slender body through the narrow window.

"Phew!" he gasped. "It's not often I have been the guest of Murdoch, Sam."

"Curse you, don't call me that," snarled Carmichael, sitting on his bed with a sullen anger in his face.

A faint smile hovered for an instant about the thin lips of Robin Oig, a furtive, sly twist of the mouth like a man secretly amused at something best left unspoken.

Carmichael bit his lip when he saw it come and go like a flicker of wind upon a pool.

"Well," he said, "time presses. In an hour the place will be stirring, and there's one under this roof would play hell with such as you."

Robin Oig scowled viciously.

"Have a care upon your words," he snapped in a shrill voice. "It is the first time I am hearing that a son of Rob Roy is not a person to be considered."

Carmichael moved impatiently.

"It all depends upon what you are meaning by considered, Robin Oig. A court of law would like fine to consider you as they would have your father."

"And what of that, Mr. Carmichael?—since you prefer that name. A court of law has always been ready to sit upon any Highland gentleman of a pretty spirit." He rose to his feet at that and struck an attitude more ludicrous than impressive, shooting out his mean face and tapping with one foot upon the floor.

Carmichael viewed his rising anger with some alarm.

"There, there," he said, as though he spoke to a child; "we cannot afford to quarrel, Robin. All I was meaning is this. Under this roof is a Captain Campbell of Inversnaid Garrison. God knows why he is here, but it is not to our interests, you'll agree."

Robin Oig spat upon the floor.

"That for your Campbell," said he. "He's no more under this roof than the Argyll himself."

Carmichael drew in his breath ever so slightly. His expression was so schooled it hardly altered.

"Oh?" he said. "And where will he be, Robin Oig?"

"That in good time," answered the other. "I have not run from Balquhiddy way to discuss a Campbell, or the whole cursed crew of them, for that matter."

Carmichael softly stole to the door and slipped on to the landing. All was quiet, and only the ticking of the hall clock reached his waiting ears. Back he came and drew the Macgregor into the farthest corner.

"Speak on," he said, and looked into the other's face with inscrutable eyes.

Robin Oig shifted back like a man who has a good thing to tell, but cannot make up his mind to share it—then leaned forward and tapped at a button on Carmichael's coat with a skinny finger.

"What of Archibald Cameron?" said he.

Carmichael never blinked.

"Well," he answered, suppressing a yawn, "what of him?"

He noted with quiet satisfaction Robin Oig's chagrin at his cool manner.

"Hech, sir!" broke out the Macgregor, "you take it mighty smoothly. There are those who would give much for news of Archibald Cameron, and, what is more, you know it——"

"Is he in Scotland?"

Without a word Robin Oig squinted up at Carmichael with a sudden hardening of his mouth and eyes. He snorted once or twice in a manner of his when indignant and then dropped his eyes and crumpled a fold of his kilt in his hand. As he did so the red hairs stood erect upon the tanned flesh and the knuckles bunched out under the thin freckled skin.

Carmichael waited in silence. He knew now exactly what Robin Oig had come to tell him. Yesterday he would have jumped at such a chance. He would have

had to share the reward for the capture of Cameron with the Macgregor, but what of that? There would have been plenty over. He wondered what Robin Oig would say when he refused to meddle in the business. It was few that Robin Oig could go to without endangering both his liberty and his chances of the reward.

He studied the puzzled expression of the other's face with smileless amusement. Robin Oig naturally thought he wished to find out Cameron's hiding-place under an assumption of indifference and then cheat him out of the money.

Of a sudden the Macgregor's patience forsook him. He was not clear-headed at the best of times, and certainly no match for a skilled intriguer like Carmichael.

With a vile oath he sprang to his feet.

"Don't sit there grinning at me, curse you!" he cried shrilly, his lips flecked with moisture.

"I was not grinning," returned Carmichael softly, still speaking in Gaelic. "I was only waiting for you to continue. You have only said, 'What of Archibald Cameron?' I am filled with impatience." He muffled a yawn and settled himself again.

Robin Oig regarded him with ferret's eyes, wavering, treacherous, and yet servile. He feared Carmichael intensely.

He brought his mouth close to Carmichael's ear.

"I can be showing you where he lies hid," he whispered, "and now what will you be saying to that?"

Carmichael looked at him sleepily.

"I'll say, let him bide," he returned. "The poor devil is not harming anybody."

A flame of colour turned the Macgregor's face to scarlet.

"These are mad words, surely," he screamed. "What has come over you to-day?"

Carmichael shook his head.

"Aye, what indeed? Had you but come yesterday—  
But then, thank God, you did not."

"Can a day turn a man mad?"

"A night such as I have passed, Robin Oig, would send a clan raving."

The other shook his red shock head.

"I am not understanding," he murmured. "You came to Scotland for——"

"Yes, yes, I know; but I have changed. Cannot you imagine a man feeling differently?"

"Not where there is money."

"Yes, even where there is money."

At that Robin Oig burst into a passion of anger, foaming at the lips and screaming between exposed teeth.

"Hell take you, you wild cat!" cried Carmichael, gripping him by the throat and flinging him back upon the bed. "Will you raise the girl?"

The madness in Robin Oig's eyes faded slowly into a gleam of cunning.

"Let me be," he whispered hoarsely, fingering his lean throat; "the girl will not be hearing. She is better occupied——" He sneered over the last words so that a flush crept into Carmichael's pale cheeks.

"What do you mean?" he said in a dangerously quiet voice.

Robin Oig leered at him openly. The thing was nothing to him.

"She is on Loch Voil side with your precious Campbell."

Still he refused to believe the insinuation. With an effort he controlled his features.

"Tuts—a morning stroll," he said, looking out of the window.

"A fine-bodied man, that Campbell," went on Robin Oig, "and it's a march he's stolen on you, Sam."

This time he let the name pass.

"Out with it," he said, quivering with rage. "I see your dirty meaning. How long have they been there?"

At his outburst the Macgregor slipped his hand to his dirk with quick alarm.

"Keep off," he snarled. "I've stood more than enough of you to-night."

"Answer me," returned Carmichael, "or, by God, I'll bang your skull till the crows won't trouble to meddle it."

"All right," replied Robin Oig, and blinked his narrow eyes with a flicker of a grin on his lips.

Suddenly Carmichael laughed—a low, harsh, unmusical sound like a raven breaking silence.

"That was a fine notion, Robin," he remarked easily, but deadly white. "But I'm an old fox not easily trapped. You cannot fetch me to heel as easily as that."

Robin Oig stared at him blankly.

"I am not knowing what you mean. You are saying that I lied to you?"

Carmichael was silent, his heart drumming against his ribs.

"Then I will be telling you," cried the Macgregor in an aggrieved voice, "that I am not caring if she was with fifty Campbells, but that she was with this man last night I will swear on the dirk, and more than that I cannot do, nor any gentleman, for that matter. I passed them at the breaking of the dawn, and he was in his shirt——"

"Stop, you hell-hound!" burst out Carmichael: "I'll hear no more. Let me see if what you say is true."

"What would you do?" asked Robin Oig curiously.

"I will knock and wait her answer."

He was on his way to the door when the other clutched his arm.

"There will be no need," he said. "Look ; there they are. Did I lie ? Answer me that."

Carmichael strode to the window and looked down the glen towards Balquhiddy. Coming up the road, with the bright sunlight upon their faces, walked Ethlenn and Campbell.

"See how far apart they are," whispered Robin Oig. "It is ashamed they are."

"God rot your tongue," groaned Carmichael, in an agony.

In silence then they watched them as in silence they approached and passed out of sight. With a sudden tearing sob Carmichael laid his head upon his arm against the wall, and his shoulders trembled with the passion of his grief.

Robin Oig meanwhile fidgeted uneasily at his side.

At last he clambered through the window and began to let himself down the plaid.

But even as he did so he halted irresolutely, and then, drawing himself up to the window-sill again, he said in a low voice :

"I shall wait your answer till to-morrow." And with that the plaid fell slack, and in a moment the garden was empty as before.

Long after Carmichael raised his stricken face and stumbled across the room to the bed.

"It is not true—it is not true," he moaned, and, going again to the window, dragged in the tartan plaid.

In the garden below a bird raised a thin ripple of wintry melody, and of a sudden Carmichael straightened his shoulders.

"Thank God that is past," he said, and threw the plaid upon the bed.

## CHAPTER XIII

### I

THE Master of Murdoch looked from one to the other of his guests as they sat over the breakfast table that morning. It would have taken less sharp eyes than his to detect that something was amiss. Murdoch scented mystery, and to him mystery lay somewhere near the heart of pure happiness.

"Did ye sleep well, Captain Campbell?" he asked suddenly.

The soldier started and frowned at him absently.

"Sleep—yes, I thank you, but I require little of that."

"So it appears," remarked Murdoch tartly.

"Eh—what can you mean, sir?"

"My poor garden did not put that mud upon your boots," he rejoined, "nor cover your coat with moss and leaves. No, sir—it's mair like the heather. Oh, I ken ye, you dog." He watched him keenly for a sign of confusion.

But Campbell showed no trace of discomposure, never so much as raising his eyes from his plate.

The old man fiddled a moment with his plate, and then suddenly popped his head beneath the table.

"Heh, Carmichael," he cried, "so it's we two are the roosters! A fine, quiet young man is Carmichael," he said, winking to Campbell, "and has mair care to his complexion than you campaigners, though it's not muckle to boast of the morn."



Carmichael bit his lip with irritation at his foolishness, and was about to reply when Ethlenn entered the room.

"Well, miss," cried her father, "wha's ghost hev ye seen?"

"I don't know what you mean," she replied dully.

At that he slid from his chair and eyed her quizzingly.

"Have you been to bed?" he asked, with a glance at the other two to stir their humour.

"What do you mean?" she demanded, her face hardening.

"Curse me, that's what you all say!" he cried, "and all I ask is, 'Have you been to bed?' It sounds simple enough."

"Of course," she replied, and made to pass him.

"And not——" he paused, staring at her coat. On her sleeve was a splash of fresh mud.

"Come—come," he broke out, and there was little humour in his tones now, "there's something queer about you all this morning. What is it? I smell it, I tell ye. I smelt mysteries whenever I entered yon door."

There was a painful pause, and then Carmichael rose lightly to his feet.

"The mystery is this, sir," he said, with a swift glance at Campbell. "Your daughter took a wager with me that she could run faster than Captain Campbell here. I was ungallant enough to back her opponent——"

"And did ye win?" asked Murdoch eagerly, "did ye win?"

"No," laughed Carmichael. "I lost."

"Lost, eh—that's bad—how much did ye lose, eh?"

"Only a guinea, sir."

"Well—well, a guinea's a guinea."

Ethlenn had stood perfectly motionless during this

unlooked-for interruption. Now she gave Carmichael a swift glance of gratitude and seated herself at the table.

A few minutes later her father left the room intent on some trivial business of his own. Campbell sat with his head upon his breast, saying nothing. His attitude of sombre melancholy sent a thrill of pain to Carmichael's heart. It was the whole appearance of a man disgraced.

He turned to Ethlenn and saw her dejected attitude—her untasted food, the heavy melancholy of her face.

It was more than he could stand. With a muttered word or two he rose to leave them together.

"Mr. Carmichael," called Ethlenn.

He turned half-way to the door. Campbell still sat motionless like a man asleep.

"Mr. Carmichael." It was fainter.

"Yes," said he.

"Why do you leave us? I had something to tell you."

He bowed and returned.

Campbell had started at her words, and looked from one to the other with sudden interrogation.

"Let me explain, Miss Murdoch," he said.

"Thank you, Captain Campbell, but I do not know of what you speak."

"Mr. Carmichael has acted generously towards us—I think we owe it to him——"

No words could have been better chosen to rouse her anger. That Campbell should take on himself to link his actions with hers made her gasp at the man's audacity.

"Mr. Carmichael," she broke in stiffly, "is my very good friend. What you owe to him, Captain Campbell, is your affair. What I wish to speak to him about can best be said in private."

He could not have recoiled more had he been struck across the face.

"So be it," he answered, with equal coldness. "I will relieve you of my presence at once. My portmanteau is already packed, and I can only beg of you to accept my thanks for your hospitality."

Carmichael stepped towards the window and turned his back upon them. The thing had passed his comprehension. The swift agitation displayed in Ethlenn's face he took for dismay at the effect of her rash words to the man she loved.

To Ethlenn the situation was almost unbearable. Stay he must, for this night at any rate, of that she knew there was no question. For in a blinding, sickening flash had come the realization that she had no knowledge of Cameron's address, had never read the paper he had handed her, and without which she could no more hope to warn him than the eagles of Ben Ledi.

At last Campbell stirred impatiently. With an effort she controlled her voice.

"No, no," she said, "you mistake me, Captain Campbell. Put it down to my head—it aches sorely. You are hurt at my harsh words—forget them, and forgive me. Were you to leave us now, at this brief notice, my father would feel it deeply."

"And you, Miss Murdoch?"

She turned a little away from him.

"You will stay, will you not?" she asked.

Campbell looked at her with puzzled eyes.

"Since you ask it," he replied, "I will," and, bowing again, slowly left the room.

## II

Carmichael passed through the empty room, through the silent hall, and out into the garden towards the wood. He wished to think the matter out in solitude. What did

Ethlenn want to say to him, and why had she treated Campbell in such a fashion? If it was acting to put him off the scent, it was superb acting. And yet Campbell was not a secretive man. No, there was some mystery behind all this. If they had really quarrelled, the way lay clear for him. Robin Oig was not to be trusted. The more he thought over the incident of last night, the more he felt that a trap had been laid for him. Had he betrayed Archibald Cameron there was an end of his love for Ethlenn as far as she was concerned. He halted suddenly in his silent pacing to and fro. There were other uses for Cameron. He dwelt on these pitilessly, indifferent to all but his own ends. He smiled more than once, a hovering, sinister smile, which disappeared as swiftly as it had come.

Suddenly the Master of Murdoch appeared before him.

"At your meditations, Sam?" said he.

"A young man must be permitted his dreams," answered Carmichael, smiling handsomely.

"True," returned Murdoch, "but dreams must precede action, Sam, or they are poor enough stuff. 'Faint heart—' ye ken——" He watched for the effect of his words, rubbing his hands together.

"There is always the lady to be considered," Carmichael replied, still smiling.

"Havers," broke in Murdoch. He peered about, then led him to a sheltered place in the heart of the wood.

"I've been waiting a chance for a crack with you," said he, "but that red-headed Campbell has clung to my skirts like a hornet. It was a rare move having him, Sam."

Carmichael raised his eyebrows.

"He seems an agreeable young man," he said.

"Agreeable be damned," retorted Murdoch; "there's trouble afoot, man, and who knows what may come of it. I am not taking risks this time. It's the wise man has a foot on either side of the dyke."

Carmichael's eyes flickered.

"Trouble?" he echoed.

Murdoch tittered gleefully.

"And you so deep in politics. Oh, man, man, do you need an old runt like me to show ye what's smouldering under your very nose?"

"What have you heard?" he asked bluntly.

Between these two there was a certain frankness.

"Ye mean, who whispered the news—then I'll tell ye. It was the stones—the heather—the scent on the wind——" He laughed noiselessly, noting the interest die out of Carmichael's eyes.

"Whatever happens, the fish will fall into my net, Sam, and it's a pleasant place, Murdoch. When you're rich, a few pounds will set it up as it was in the old days. Ye would spare me a corner and a pinch o' snuff, Sam?"

"Not so fast," broke in Carmichael. "You run on like a river in spate. I'm well enough off, but there's more to be considered——"

"Aye, I know fine, and little respect I'd have for you if you did not say such words, but I've told ye I've money, Sam, hidden away——"

"Keep your damned money," cried Carmichael in a burst of anger. "I don't want it. What I mean is, what about——" he hesitated.

"Ethlenn, ye mean—oh, she's easily reckoned with—just a bit girl who will do her father's will——"

"But will she?"

"Will she no?" He puckered up his brows suddenly. "Hev ye asked her?"

"No."

"Man," said Murdoch, "ye're no like to catch fish on the high road."

And with that he left him, stepping nimbly through the trees, wagging his head from side to side, and twiddling his hands at his sides.

Carmichael regarded him with mingled feelings, and was about to retrace his footsteps when Ethlenn came towards him, wrapped in a heavy cloak. Her face was very white and tired, and her eyes were wild and restless. He noticed, too, that her hands twitched in a manner faintly resembling her father's as she walked.

Suddenly she saw him.

"Mr. Carmichael," she began hurriedly, "I wish a word with you on a matter of vital importance. Where can we speak with the least chance of interruption?"

He led her to the very spot on which her father had stood, and, dragging her cloak about her, she slid down upon a rock and motioned him to sit beside her.

"Mr. Carmichael," she said, "can I look upon you as my friend?"

He was a little taken aback, but the tragic note in her voice impelled him to answer.

"Yes," he said steadily, and met her eyes without flinching.

Apparently satisfied, she began to speak in a rapid undertone.

"I am about to ask you to do a thing for me which I would only ask of the most trusted and intimate friend, and in doing so I am a woman throwing herself on the chivalry of a man she hardly knows——"

Carmichael could hardly believe his ears. She was evidently about to confess to him the affair of last night. Probably she wished him to challenge Campbell for

indignities offered to her. Well, he was not a coward, and such services had their obvious rewards.

"Tell me," he cried eagerly; "everything I can do I will, for your sake."

"Thank you," she replied, and the dreadful anxiety died for an instant out of her eyes.

She shivered a little and pulled the cloak about her.

"You are cold, Miss Murdoch," he said tenderly.

"Yes," she answered. "I am not well. I thought it wise to bring out my cloak. Could you pull it about my neck?"

He bent over her, adjusting it carefully, and as he shook it to open the folds something tinkled indistinctly in the pocket. Absently Ethlenn put her hand to the spot. Still more absently she drew it out and held up a silver box to the light.

Carmichael started.

"How has my old snuff-box found its way there?" he said, with a laugh, and stopped short. The words had fallen from his lips unconsciously. The laugh died cold on his lips.

A terrible silence seemed to sweep over the wood and haunt the shadows. For an instant he prayed she would not remember, and then, reading her eyes, he bowed his head.

"Don't—don't look at me like that," he pleaded once, and after that he uttered no word.

### III

Long after he knew she had risen to her feet. He seemed to feel her gaze eating into his very soul.

"So this is your snuff-box," she said slowly, and dropped it upon the ground. It lay in the soft cone dust, with the S. C. gleaming upward. It all came back to her:

the long ride with the Prince—the affair at the inn—the man with the Highland accent. She felt stunned, that was all, and very tired. She hoped he would not make a scene, would not weary her more now with protestations. She could have thanked him for his silence.

Very slowly she moved away, and still he did not raise his eyes. Gradually her slim, stooping figure was lost in the shadows, and his head was still sunk upon his breast. Only his body swayed a little. At last it toppled forward and lay amongst the fir cones, the clenched hands wide apart.



## CHAPTER XIV

### I

"TURN round, you cateran," cried Janet, jerking at Chuckie Stane's faded coat. With many protestations of disgust she concluded an inspection of certain repairs newly finished.

"There," she said. "I canna say ye're respectable, but ye're no actually indecent."

Chuckie Stane shook himself free and grinned up at her.

"Indecent yersel'," he remarked brightly.

"Haud yer tongue, ye ungrateful toad—it's Miss Ethlenn I'll be telling—mind my words."

"I'll no mind your words—no more than——"

"Than who, ye evil vagabond?"

"Than auld Murdoch."

"Enough of that—impident—what way is that to speak o' the Master."

She made a futile grab at him, but he dodged behind a table.

"Dinna jump about, Janet—ye're ower fat for that." He put his dirty fingers to his nose. "Who called the Master 'skinny-shanked deevil'?" he whispered, wagging them at her.

"Whisht, wull ye!" cried Janet, "ye sneakin', listenin' ferret."

"Ho, ferret is it——" he broke off, looking at the door.

In the distance of the passage a shuffling, halting step was audible. They glanced at each other with mutual interrogation.

The steps drew nearer.

Suddenly Ethlenn filled the doorway, a hand on either side.

"Miss Ethlenn," cried Janet, "are you ill?"

She started and shook her head.

"No," she replied, "I am not ill."

Janet drew Chuckie Stane to her.

"Go," she whispered; "away with ye, laddie."

He nodded, and made to slip past Ethlenn. But she saw him, and laid a hand upon his arm.

"Chuckie Stane," she murmured, and then again, "Chuckie Stane."

He stared into her face with frightened eyes.

"I must go, Miss Ethlenn," he said.

"Go, Chuckie Stane?—oh no, not yet—I want you soon—to-night—you promised me, Chuckie Stane, long ago—was it not long ago?"

He cleared his throat.

"No so long," he replied.

"To me it seems an eternity."

Janet took her gently by the arm.

"Sit down, my dear," she said, and closed the door.

Ethlenn sank into a chair, and leaning her chin upon her hands stared into the fire. Her attitude was so strangely, tragically set, that Janet moved around on tip-toe, too alarmed to break silence, ready to minister to her slightest want.

"Has Chuckie Stane gone?" she asked at last.

"Yes, Miss Ethlenn—did you want him?"

"No—not yet. I suppose he is honest?"

"Honest as the day."

She let her deep eyes rest on Janet, then dropped the lids.

"I am bitterly tired," she said, and began to weep.

Janet was instantly solicitous, warmly comforting; but Ethlenn pushed her away.

"What book is that?" she asked, pointing to a dark-coloured volume on the mantelshelf.

The abruptness of her question puzzled Janet. She slowly let her hands fall to her sides again.

"That is my Bible," she replied. "It was given me by your poor mother."

"Let me see it—why do you call her my 'poor' mother? Was she so unhappy?"

"Aye—that she was. She drooped, and often enough she used to sigh and just cry to hersel'."

"Let me see the book, Janet."

"Wait till I dust it, Miss Ethlenn. There—it always opens at that page——"

"Why does it open there, Janet?"

"I don't rightly know, but maybe it is because your mother read that passage mair than a' the rest."

"Read it, Janet."

"Oh, I couldna—I am no scholar, ye ken, but only an auld woman."

"For the love of God, read," she cried, suddenly overcome. "I—I cannot bear silence——"

"Poor bairn," murmured Janet, "your mother was often taken that way."

"What way, Janet?—I do not understand."

"Sometimes she would sit for days alone saying no word, and then of a sudden she would run in here and cling to me, puir lass, and talk and talk——"

"I understand. I begin to love my mother. Before,

I only pitied her. Now read, Janet. Who knows, I may learn more about her in these words than anywhere else."

Janet held the great book very close to her face and began the immortal lines.

"By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.

"We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.

"For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.'"

"Alas!" moaned Ethlenn, "my poor mother."

She sat perfectly silent, hearing the concluding words.

"O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us.'"

When Janet had finished tears were running down her cheeks. But Ethlenn's eyes were dry.

"Her revenge is coming, Janet," said she; "there is a curse upon this house and me."

"On *you*, Miss Ethlenn."

But she paid no heed.

"How she hated Strathyre," she said dreamily. "I, too," she murmured. "I, too——" and passed into the passage.

Janet watched her woefully.

"God protect her," she said, "for there's nae guid in this hoose."

## II

It was late afternoon when Captain Campbell trod the river bank in the last rays of sunlight. His face was stern and set, his eyes upon the ground. Behind his

broad back his hands were joined. Towards him, over the dead leaves, came Carmichael walking with unequal steps, his fingers fidgeting now at his mouth, and now at a button on his coat.

At six feet distance they both stopped and started back.

"Captain Campbell," stammered Carmichael.

"The same."

"I—I thought you were gone."

"I regret, for your sake, that you are mistaken."

"For my sake? Oh, I am not interested whether you stay or not. But I have little doubt there are others who desire it."

"I do not take your meaning, Mr. Carmichael." He spoke slowly, but there was a dangerous quality in the tone of his voice.

Carmichael uttered a short laugh.

"You are mighty grave and polite, Captain Campbell," he jeered, "but then you do things in a great way. Some men would hesitate at what you take in your stride."

Campbell mused a moment in silence. Then approaching the other, he squared his shoulders and narrowed his grey eyes.

"Mr. Carmichael," he said, "you are speaking in riddles to me, but I detect an impertinence in your remarks. I know that it is not on account of my name, for reasons unnecessary to mention now. That it is founded on a private spite, I am convinced. Unhappily, I am ignorant of the cause of your annoyance."

Carmichael was a little taken aback at the calm, admonishing note in Campbell's words. He pretended to be half convinced, considering in his mind the best line to adopt. To quarrel openly with Campbell was desirable from personal motives, but to kill Campbell

would be ruinous. Would not Ethlenn drive him out of her sight for ever? Besides that, Scotland would become too warm for one who killed a Campbell.

"I await your answer," remarked the other steadily.

"Captain Campbell," said Carmichael, with a certain nobility, "God knows I judge no man, and I do not take the responsibility of your actions."

"Actions, sir—what actions?"

"Search your mind, Captain Campbell—do you recall nothing that rises up to cry shame on you?"

A deep, red colour swam in the other's cheeks.

"Shame—that is queer talk for the mouth of Samuel Cameron."

"Hush, sir, that name is none of mine——"

"Since when, might I ask?"

"If you are interested, since yesterday."

The grave dignity of Carmichael's words made Campbell's eyes drop.

"As you will," he said ungraciously; "that is your affair, and the less of it the better. Come, sir, the night is on us. Whose quarrel are you shouldering? for I have done you no injury. Though knowing who and what you are, no word has passed my lips."

Carmichael hesitated.

"Are you afraid?" asked Campbell, with needless impatience.

The colour died out of Carmichael's cheeks. He had been tried too far.

"Afraid, you Campbell fox," he cried in a strange, vibrating voice. "No man has ever accused me of fear, least of all such as you—but there are things even I would dread to do——"

Campbell started.

"Go on," he said.

"What of last night?"

Campbell gave a sudden gasp and raised his right arm. Then, of a sudden, it fell and rested by his side.

"What of last night?" he repeated. "I do not take your meaning."

"Surely my meaning is clear—I need not mention names?"

"No," he said dumbly.

Carmichael sickened at his silence. A dull rage swirled into his brain. He had lost Ethlenn, why should he not at least avenge her? Or did she wish to be avenged? Women had odd notions about such matters.

Campbell had taken to walking up and down the dank grass. Suddenly he stopped, with a slight, indescribable extension of the hands.

"Mr. Carmichael," he said, "I think I understand. But, believe me, what I did was from no dishonourable motive. It was an action such as you would have done in my place——"

"Never," cried Carmichael hotly.

"As you will," rejoined Campbell, curbing his anger, "but remember, I am not a patient man, and you try me over far. My conscience is clear on what has happened, and I will thank you to accept what I say more graciously."

"And what if I don't?" sneered Carmichael.

"Then," said Campbell quietly, "I must leave you to learn better manners."

"I see—so the bark is worse than the bite."

"Sir, I have good reasons for not crossing swords with you—let that satisfy you."

Carmichael stirred fretfully in the gathering mist.

"Might I ask your reason?" he inquired.

"I cannot tell you. I can only give you my word of

honour as a gentleman that I would do an irreparable injury were I to kill you——”

“Then, sir,” cried Carmichael, striking him on the face with his open hand, “let me tell you that you are a coward as well as a blackguard, and what answer have you for that?”

Campbell never moved at the blow. He remained perfectly silent for a moment, like a man weighing one matter with another. Suddenly he straightened himself.

“Come, sir,” he said, and led the way to the road.

There the last gleams of parting day fell upon the open track. Carmichael followed him tardily enough. Now that the step was taken a curious remorse stung his senses. Could he have run he would have done so. What if he had wronged Campbell? More painful thought, what if he had by his rash action cast a slur on Ethlenn’s name? The situation was grotesque. He had no quarrel with the man, only the nameless hatred of his clan and the jealousy which he had endeavoured to conceal.

Campbell, now that the matter had passed beyond his hands, saw that one course alone lay open to him. That Ethlenn, whom he loved, should suffer by any action of his was unthinkable. He had borne much from Carmichael for her sake, but for her sake he would also bear the greatest sacrifice a man can offer.

“You have a pistol?” he said.

Standing in the middle of the road, Carmichael assented in a low voice. Then in silence they measured out twenty paces and took up their stand.

Campbell hesitated.

“What signal shall we take for firing?” he asked.

“I do not know,” answered Carmichael carelessly.

“Will you count three?”



"Sir," responded Campbell, "in that I might have the advantage. As you are the younger I shall take it as a favour if you give the word."

"That I cannot do," answered Carmichael. "Come, sir, the night falls—hark to that owl. At its third call let us fire."

"Certainly," said Campbell; and out of the gloom of trees the owl hooted forlornly.

"One," said Carmichael softly.

Again, a moment later, came a second call.

"Two," said Carmichael, in the same disinterested voice, and instantly followed the third note like an echo.

"Three," cried Carmichael, and fired. A blaze of fire shot out of the darkness opposite him. Overhead he heard the shot whistle amongst the trees.

"You shoot high, Captain Campbell," he remarked.

"And you, sir, seem no shot at all."

"Let us load and fire," said Campbell. "It gives pace to the business."

Rapidly they both fell on their powder-flasks, watching each other covertly meantime.

Then, raising their pistols, two reports rang out, and out of the smoke two motionless figures still stood gravely regarding each other.

At that instant a figure sprang upon the road between them.

"Gentlemen," cried a woman's voice, "what does this shooting mean?"

"Miss Murdoch," cried Campbell, "get you indoors—this is no place for you."

Ethlenn looked from one to the other.

"Why do you fight?" she asked; and then, as neither answered, "Captain Campbell, will you kindly answer?"

Campbell lowered his head and remained speechless.

Carmichael stirred like one aroused from sleep.

"Miss Murdoch," he said, "I forced Captain Campbell to fight."

"And for what reason?"

"Because——" He hesitated to tell her. What right had he to fight her battles now?

At that Campbell stepped forward.

"Because, Miss Murdoch, Mr. Carmichael feared I had done you a harm last night. In that he acted as a gentleman should, mistaken though he is. Miss Murdoch, what is my word in a case like this? But you—you can say whether I did you an injury last night or no."

He waited, prepared for her calm denial.

But Ethlenn did not reply.

Carmichael crept a little nearer.

"Miss Murdoch," he said, "you do not answer. Is this fair to Captain Campbell?" He carefully avoided his own claim.

"How can I answer?" she moaned, looking straight in front of her.

"Did he lie to me, then?" cried Carmichael, aglow with suspicion.

Ethlenn turned at his voice.

"Lie to you? I do not know. Why should he lie to you?"

"Come, come, Miss Murdoch," broke in Campbell, "where a man's honour is at stake a woman should not hesitate. Apart from causing your accident, did I act unworthily?"

She shrank back at the fierce onslaught of his words.

"I cannot say," she replied wildly. "Please do not press my answer. Ask me to-morrow. It is dark and I am tired and—and——" her voice dropped away.

Carmichael stepped swiftly to Campbell's side.

"You have fooled me," he said, under his breath. "But, by God, sir, we shall settle it to-morrow, and I shall not miss as easily as to-night."

"When you will," answered Campbell wearily. "Take her to the house, Mr. Carmichael. You risk her death while you vapour out here."

"Come, Miss Murdoch," said Carmichael, "permit me to escort you to the Castle."

Ethlenn drew back.

"No," she said more steadily; "I thank you, no."

In the darkness Campbell wondered at her refusal, and a moment later the two men were alone again.

Then, without a word, they parted, and the shafts of moonlight driving upward through a sea of mist fell softly on the empty road.

## CHAPTER XV

**T**HE Master of Murdoch sat in his room alone. Outside, the wind cried up the valley and haunted the crags about the Castle. Inside, the fire spluttered and sang and peat smoke drove in on every gust.

The old man was dressed in sombre black, his white hands behind his back, silver buckles gleaming on his shoes. The flickering light played on the ivory whiteness of his glooming countenance. Backwards and forwards trod the Master of Murdoch softly as a cat and frail as a ghost.

Suddenly the door opened and Ethlenn stood looking at him in silence.

"Well," she said at last.

He paused, smiling up at her.

"There you are," he cried, "come away and close the door. Hark to the gale. It will surely bring down the old fir beside the gate. All things come to the ground at last, Ethlenn, even a poor old stick like myself is not forgotten."

Ethlenn passed him slowly and seated herself by the fire. She noticed that her father was agitated, also that he spoke to her in Gaelic, a language he seldom used in conversation.

"You sent for me," she said.

He drew in his chair beside her and laid a hand upon her shoulder.

"I see little of you," he began. "Do you not care for me?"

"I do not know. I feel as though I had ceased to care for anyone."

"Hoots, that's silly talk, but I know how far age and youth lie apart. I am old, Ethlenn, and what is more, I FEEL old. When the leaves begin to fall and the wind cries, God bless me, tears course down my cheeks. Dotage maybe, I don't know—but there it is. To me the world is weary, and yet I love it——" he ceased speaking, staring into the fire. "What do you say to that?" asked he, stirring abruptly.

Ethlenn moved nearer the glow.

"Nothing," she said; "nothing at all."

The wind moaned down the chimney and rattled at the window. Out in the night came the spatter of rain.

"Why did you send for me?" she asked again.

A quiver passed over his pallid face and disappeared.

He did not reply, and she lifted her eyes to his. Then, with a gesture infinitely tender, she took his hand.

"Oh," she cried mournfully, "I have hurt you."

"To be hurt easily is one of the penalties of old age," he said lightly, "and to wound is likewise one of the privileges of youth."

"I am sorry," she murmured. "I am not myself to-day."

"Nor I, Ethlenn. Oh, this old house plays upon me like an instrument. It has whispered in my ear all day. Something will happen to-night—mark my words. I am not frightened, not I. When the storm rages I could dance up there on the ramparts and screech like a wild cat. We come from the Isles, girl—you, Donald, and I. It takes more than four generations to drown the calling of

the sea. But what queer talk is this ? ” He sat silent for a moment, then :

“ Ethlenn,” he began, “ I can no more say what is in my heart than I could jump from Ben Vane to Ben Ledi. I never could—it is not a Highland virtue to wag an agile tongue. But you are the last of us, Ethlenn, and the house of Murdoch rests in your hands. Sixty years since I was one of ten brothers. Where are they now ? Ten years ago you had two brothers——”

“ Yes, yes,” she said quickly.

“ And you are the last of the Murdochs.” He uttered the last words in a whisper and lay back in his chair.

“ Can we not speak of this again, father ? ”

“ No—it may be too late.”

After a long silence she raised her eyes.

“ What is it you wish me to do ? ”

“ It is time you were married.”

“ No, no, that I could never do.”

Murdoch glanced at her through narrowed eyes.

“ Eh ? ” he said. “ And why ? ”

“ I cannot tell you—you would not understand. Let us talk of this again.”

“ No,” he cried shrilly ; “ you would put me off. I am an old man, but not so weak as that. Is the house of Murdoch nothing to you ? ”

“ No,” she replied in a tired voice ; “ less than nothing.”

“ Oh ! ” he cried again, as though he were struck, and, trembling with anger, staggered to his feet and lowered above her with a scowl upon his face.

“ Listen,” he gasped. “ There is a young man under this roof whom you have played fast and loose with—silence, girl, and hear me out. Ye know whom I mean. He is a fine match, and of a good family——”

" You refer to Mr. Carmichael ? "

" I do. He and I spoke about the matter this very day."

He watched her curiously.

" Well ? " he said. " What have you to say ? "

Slowly she rose to her feet and lifted her proud face until her eyes rested on the candlesticks above her.

" I would rather die than marry a spy."

Murdoch opened his mouth once—twice, but no words came. He was like a man stunned by an invisible hand.

" What do you mean ? " he demanded at last, to gain time.

" Simply this—he is a spy of the Government, paid to betray his fellow-countrymen."

" Who told you this ridiculous fairy tale ? " he asked, with a poor attempt at a smile.

" It is no fairy tale," she answered monotonously, " but the truth. In France he would have killed the Prince. What does he here ? "

" Aye," returned her father, " what indeed ? There are no princes in Murdoch."

Ethlenn drew near to him.

" Look at me," she cried suddenly in a determined voice.

Her father's restless eyes flickered for a moment, then met her own.

The storm was rising to its height. In the awful silence which followed her words the Castle seemed to quiver with the hurricane of wind and moan like a thing in pain. She waited a moment for him to speak, but nothing passed his lips. A wave of pity came over her, and, stooping, she tried to take his hand.

" Father," she whispered tenderly. But he shook his head.

" You would not have it so, would you ? Poor father, it has hurt you as it hurt me. Speak to me, father—only tell me you understand."

He shrank away from her, shaking his head ; but she drew him back tenderly.

" Dear heart," she whispered, " you fear I am angry, but I am not. You could not know what he was, any more than I. Kiss me, father, for who are there now but you and I ? "

But still he avoided her, an agony in his eyes.

" Go," he whispered hoarsely. " I am not well. Come to me later, Ethlenn."

She released him and moved towards the door. When she had moved half-way across the room he made a sudden gesture towards her with his arms, infinitely pathetic. But her back was turned, and when she looked again at the shutting of the door he was hidden in his chair.



## CHAPTER XVI

### I

THE tragedy of the day had shadowed into the ominous darkness of the night. The evening meal had passed forlornly, with sudden starts of conversation and preoccupied asides, while long silences fell and were broken and fell again. Murdoch sat speechless, with a white, stricken face. Ethlenn, opposite him, hardly lifted her eyes. It fell to Campbell and Carmichael to save the situation as best they could. That they spoke at all struck Ethlenn as inconceivable. Filling her glass with claret, she drank deeply. The day was passed, but the night lay before her, with all its dangers. Cameron's address she must recover at whatever cost. She wondered where Campbell had concealed it. A spot of colour rose to her cheeks and stayed there. Only her eyes remained lifeless and sombre.

They all rose abruptly when the meal was over. It was like the breaking of a spell. Murdoch hurried away to his room. Campbell wandered out to see his horse was ready for an early start. Carmichael pleaded fatigue and went up to pace his bed-chamber with aimless, distracted steps, and Ethlenn waited—waited, listening to the clock's laboured tick-tack.

The night outside was black and tempestuous. A stream of water rushed across the courtyard and down the hill. Slowly the hours crept on. Campbell had come in long since and gone to bed. She had crouched in the

shadow, in case he saw her watching him. Then, with haunted eyes, Ethlenn stole upstairs to her room.

At eleven o'clock the storm was at its height, and no sound that she could make would be audible above the roar of wind. It was fit night for such an undertaking as hers.

With tightly clenched lips she opened her door and passed along the landing to Campbell's room. Then, softly turning the handle, she passed within.

A lull fell at that moment, and, stealing to the bedside, she detected the sound of heavy, regular breathing.

Reassured, she laid hands on the bundle of clothes at the foot of the bed and began her search. Fully twenty minutes she examined every fold of clothing, and then, with a fainting heart, she realized that the slip of paper was not there. There was only one place it could be. It was not likely Campbell would risk leaving it in his pocket. Probably it was beneath his pillow. Again she approached the bedside and slipped her fingers along the sheet.

Campbell stirred in his sleep and moaned. Instantly she was still as death, and then, with infinite care, she continued, hardly daring to breathe.

There was no paper there.

She had never dared to foresee such a catastrophe as that. All fear left her now—all power of movement deserted her as well.

At last with faltering steps she reached the door, too overcome to think of anything at all.

It was only when a bright light blinded her eyes that she started back, a scream on her lips.

For, opposite her, with a candle in his hand, stood Carmichael. She stood transfixed, her hand still gripping the handle of Campbell's door, saying no word.

Then Carmichael, with bowed head, passed on, and,

entering his own room, closed the door, leaving her in black darkness.

Once in his room, he threw the candle on the bed and raised his hands to his eyes as though he would shut some awful sight for ever from his soul.

"Oh, my God!" he repeated again and again.

And then his passion passed and he wiped the moisture from his finger-tips and lifted the fallen candle upon the bed. He took to idling about the room, examining trivial articles of furniture, but oddly and with a look in the back of his eyes which flitted hither and thither on a blind quest. Suddenly it rested on the tartan plaid, and there it remained. With a mirthless laugh he caught it up and flung it down again.

"Yes, yes," he muttered, staring out into the darkness, "I begin to see what Rob meant—oh, it all comes clear as day. It cannot be too late." He ran to the window, dragging the plaid with him. "What a night! And yet just such a night as I would have it be."

He tied the plaid to the end of the bed and flung it out into the darkness.

Then, with frantic hands, he lowered himself down and was gone.

## II

An hour later Carmichael pulled up his pony on Loch Voil side, and tying it to a tree, he approached a small thatched cottage and rapped upon the door. He was drenched to the skin, but a fever had turned his veins to fire and madness gleamed in his eyes.

Again and again he rapped, and still there was no reply. At last, with a curse, he broke the bar with a kick and walked inside.

In the room the fire was a mass of glowing embers, and

beside it, on a bed of rushes and wrapped in his plaid, sat Robin Oig. He had a pistol pointed at the door and on his lap lay a bare claymore.

"Mallachd ort," he screamed, still blinking with sleep, "and what does this mean?"

He threw down his weapons on seeing who it was, but frowned savagely with his blinking colourless eyes. Then, grumbling under his breath, he threw more peats upon the smouldering fire and pulling a pipe out of his pocket commenced to smoke.

Carmichael shut the door and threw his dripping great-coat on a stool.

"I was afraid you might be with your brother Ronald," he said.

The man by the fire kicked at the embers spitefully.

"Not I," he snapped. "Times are too warm for brother Ronald. He was ever cautious. Now that James is out, he's chattering like a monkey. He's a dour devil, James——"

"That Edinbelly business was a sair muddle, Rob," said Carmichael absently.

"James again, Sam. He's as full of schemes as a dog o' fleas. He just canna let us make our peace like other folk—he must ay be showing the road to the making of our fortunes. A poor daft lassie, Sam, with no mind of her own. And now that James has slipped through their fingers they'll no forget me, Sam, unless——"

"Unless what, Rob?"

"You can speak a word to your grand Edinburgh friends."

Carmichael shivered, dropping his eyes.

"Maybe I can," he said.

"Ye say so!" cried the Macgregor. "Oh, Sam, I believe ye would. Things are closing in—there's hardly a friendly

nod in Balquhiddel now for Robin Oig. Once it was different, but times change, and who heads it but that fat hypocrite Ronald. He'll be an elder in the kirk, Sam, before he dies."

"What do you mean when you say things are closing in?"

Macgregor lowered his voice and a frightened look crept into his eyes.

"I feel it," he said, "and yet I cannot say. There's a net falling, Sam, and no escape. Nobody kens just who are his friends to-day, and the Highlands are no what they were."

He knocked out the ashes of his pipe.

"Listen, Sam. There is word going about that James o' the Glen asked me to shoot Glenure——"

"Who better?" said Carmichael grimly, mindful of Maclaren's death.

"But it's a lie, Sam," whined Robin Oig, "a damned lie to throw the guilt on James or me; and well it has worked. Not that I am caring how many Stewarts they hang, devil take them!"

"And so——"

"The Stewarts would give their hands to see me snug in Edinburgh where James was. I dare not leave Balquhiddel, Sam. Would to God I could get safe to France!" He paused, and the detestable whine crept into his tones again. "Can you no arrange that, Sam? Mind ye, I would prove useful abroad. There's trouble brewing——"

"Enough!" cried Carmichael suddenly. "I ride on other business to-night."

He felt suddenly loath to speak.

"Have you any brandy?" he asked.

Rob Macgregor drew a bottle from under his bed of rushes.

"I cannot offer you much," he said gloomily, "for I live like a fox, but the stuff's good enough," and drawing out the stopper with his teeth, he handed the bottle to Carmichael, who drank deeply. Then, leaning forward with a dark flush in his cheeks, he spoke.

"Where is Cameron?" said he sombrely.

"Oho!" broke out Robin Oig, "so that's where the wind lies, Sam!" Slowly he sucked at the bottle, his narrow eyes on Carmichael. "You've heard what I said, Sam?"

"I'll do my best—I cannot promise more. If all else fails I'll try and smuggle you out of the country myself. James is in Dunkirk, they tell me, and hot on the trail of Allan Breck. It is like setting dog to catch dog."

"Sam," whispered Robin Oig, "Sam, could you give me that in writing? Just for form, Sam—just for form."

Carmichael started violently and then checked himself.

"Such ploys," he said shortly, "are better kept off paper. Were it known that the Government are far from easy about the North, it would set fire to the Highlands. The net is closing, as ye say, and there are muckle fish who must not suspect that they are seen."

"That's no what's in your mind, Sam. Out with it. All the governments in hell would not trouble you if they stood in your way."

Carmichael frowned.

"As you will," he said. "Then the reason is just this. I am not wanting it known who gave the information that led to Cameron's death——"

"Death, Sam!"

"Aye—death, you fool. That was settled months ago; but so far he's slipped away like a trout among stones. He's played fast and loose too long——" And then, seeing Robin Oig's face, he checked himself.

"At least, maybe it will be death," he added.

"I am not liking it, Sam, at all. Were it known that I was concerned, what chance would I have in the Highlands at all?"

"Great God, man, what chance have you now?"

The words fell cold and dangerous, so that the sweat rose to the Macgregor's brow.

"Whisht!" he cried, swerving his ground, "don't speak so, Sam. What has come over you? Nothing followed the Maclaren affair at Inverenty—or the 'forty-five troubles, and this little stir about Jean Key will die down. But I hardly like this other business, Sam." He paused. "It's like fouling one's ain nest."

"How do you mean? Cameron is nothing to you."

"He was in Balquhiddel only last night to my sure knowledge."

"In Balquhiddel, was he? Then why did you not tell me before this?"

"I did not know. I heard to-day from John Ferguson, who was told by Angus Stewart that is a servant at the Kirkton to Ronald my brother."

"In Balquhiddel! Then he is near by."

A swift gleam of cunning burned in Robin Oig's eyes.

"That's as may be," he answered.

Carmichael's face grew hard.

"Give me his address," he said sharply, stepping forward.

In an instant the Macgregor had sprung away and cocked his pistol.

"Back!" he cried.

But Carmichael had not moved.

"Listen to me," he said quietly, "and drop that thing. If you do not hand over his address, I will either kill you and take it for myself, or hand you over to the military."

"You dare not," screamed Robin Oig, beside himself with terror and rage.

"And why?"

"Because your precious Murdoch wench would break with you for ever."

Carmichael looked at him fixedly.

"Too late," he said bitterly; "you are too late."

"You would be spurned by all your clan," went on the other. "They would hound you to death."

"Let them—I do not fear them. I play for higher stakes than the life of Archibald Cameron."

The firelight played upon their faces—upon the cold, regular features of Carmichael with the small, mean mouth and thin, taut lips, and upon the red, frantic face of Robin Oig terribly afraid, like a wild cat cornered in a cave.

"Your name will be degraded——"

Carmichael smiled.

"Fine talk for a son of Rob Roy!" he said. "For a murderer—for a turncoat—for the abductor of helpless women."

With an oath Robin Oig sprang forward, striving to brain him with the butt-end of his pistol. But the scuffle was over in a minute, and again Carmichael was sitting before the fire, while the Macgregor cursed and mumbled to himself upon the floor.

"Give me the address," repeated Carmichael, and waited.

"I want your promise on paper, Sam," whined Robin Oig. "Only a word, just to say that I acted under instructions and that I am a true friend to the Crown——"

"I tell you I'd sooner drown first. No pen shall ever tell of this night's work. You have my word—when have I gone back on that?"



" Yes, yes, Sam—how you shout !—and you will not say who it was mentioned the matter in the beginning ? "

" No, there will be no need. Now, where does he lie ? "

Robin Oig drew a piece of crumpled paper from his coat, and threw it over.

For long Carmichael sat in silence, his eyes upon the writing.

" Who carried this ? " he asked abruptly.

" Who but——" Robin Oig hesitated.

Carmichael of a sudden understood.

" Say no more," he broke in. " I understand." And then he laughed and thrust the paper savagely inside his coat.

" You will hear from me," he said, rising to his feet, " and what I can do I will. This place," he remarked, tapping his coat where the paper lay hid—" this place is near Inversnaid, is it not ? "

" It is."

Again the laugh rose to Carmichael's lips, and this time rang out harshly.

" Oh, very good," he said, and turned to the door.

" What is ? " inquired Robin Oig, at a loss.

Carmichael fronted him for an instant.

" That Inversnaid lies so near," he replied, and opening the door, was gone into the night.

CHAPTER XVII

I

**R**ODERICK CAMPBELL stepped into the garden. The storm had passed away, leaving the ground strewn with copper-coloured leaves and broken twigs. Far below, running like a deathless messenger between Loch Voil and Lubnaig, raced Balvaig, swollen with the autumn floods.

The pale blue sky was flecked with pearl-grey clouds. Over the ridge of hills the sun began to pierce the bleak morning air. Down by the wood the giant fir was down, a gaping void where its ancient roots had lain. In its sullen crashing fall it had flung a slender pine to the hillside, breaking it off six feet from the ground.

In the wood was a profound stillness. To Campbell it seemed as though a thousand eyes were upon him. He trod softly like a man in a house of death.

He had purposely risen early that Carmichael might have the meeting he desired. He did not understand what it was all about. He only wished that it were well over. He examined the fallen tree with meditative eyes—then, growing impatient, climbed up the slope to the courtyard and so to the stables.

As he entered there was one thing he noticed at once. Out of the three stalls which had been occupied last night one was empty. Carmichael's horse had gone.

Campbell gnawed his lip in the doorway. Why had he gone, was the first thought which presented itself. Apparently to avoid a conflict. But that was hardly probable. Carmichael was no coward. Or was he only out for a morning ride? Campbell took three swift steps into the stall and examined the halter. It had been cut. Evidently Carmichael had left in a hurry. He remembered that the door had been open when he came. Another sign of haste.

He returned to the courtyard, closing the stable door securely behind him.

As he walked slowly towards the Castle Ethlenn came swiftly across the courtyard.

"I would speak to you before you go, Captain Campbell," she said.

He bowed.

"At your convenience," he replied

She glanced at him with anxious eyes, then thanked him, and turning again made towards the door.

"My father is not up," she said; "let us go to his library."

When they had entered the room she closed the door and stood with her back against it.

"Captain Campbell," she said, grown suddenly pale, "I must ask you to surrender that paper——"

He looked into her face with frank astonishment.

"Pardon me," he began, but she cut him short.

"First hear me out," she broke in, "and then, if you have any heart at all, you will understand. When I returned to Scotland I was foolish enough to suppose that things had not changed since 'forty-six. I am implicated, as you are no doubt aware, in plans to restore the House of Stuart."

He started, and then nodded his head.

"But not I alone—there are others whose loyalty has outrun their wisdom—it is for them I would plead. Think what it means, Captain Campbell, for the loved ones of these poor men were they caught and executed—have you no kindness in your heart that you would track misguided gentlemen to their deaths?"

At that he took a step forward, flinging out his hands in an appeal for a hearing.

"Listen," she cried, her cheeks flushed with her passion of emotion, "if it is zeal that impels you, remember the Stuart cause is dead and done with—if it is clan hatred, be merciful to men who have never harmed you or yours—if it is something else that prompts you, Captain Campbell, I can make good your loss—" and with a gesture she drew a cloth bag from under her cloak and flung it jingling upon the table.

"It is my father's," she said dully, "and all we have," and stood with her glowing eyes upon him.

Campbell took it up gently and handed it back to her.

"My poor child," he said in a broken voice, and turned his face to the window. For a minute she waited, then when he did not speak Ethlenn knew in her heart that all was lost. Leaving the door she crossed the room and, falling into the great chair before the empty grate, burst into a terrible weeping.

At the first strangled sob Campbell shivered and half turned—then, with a pitiful agony in his eyes, he stared into the mists that floated up the valley.

After a long while, through the ebb of her distress, came a broken, timid voice.

"Captain Campbell."

He was at her side in a moment.

"Speak to me," she whispered. "Have I wronged you so much?"

He shook his head.

"There is some horrible mistake," he replied. "Tell me, of what paper do you speak?"

"The paper you—I mean I lost the night we returned from Balquhiddar——"

His face grew sterner.

"I see—and why did you not tell me?"

"Because you are a Campbell."

"Was that all?"

"And a Hanoverian."

"Was that all?"

"And you had followed me."

"I see."

He rose to his feet and began walking up and down the room. Suddenly he halted beside her.

"It is unnecessary for me now to say that I never had the paper?" he asked.

She nodded her head, never raising her eyes, and again he began walking the room.

"There is one question I must ask," he said. "Was this paper of great importance? Would it be useful to anybody—well, to any man in touch with the Government?"

"It would be little better than a death warrant. Oh, Captain Campbell, forgive me, if you can; but whether you can or not, give me your aid——"

"Miss Murdoch," he said, looking down into her eyes, "you can trust me to help you. You do trust me, do you not?"

She flushed a little.

"Yes," she said in a whisper, and looked for an instant into his face.

Campbell dragged a chair near her own.

"Might I ask," he said gravely, "why you have not employed the help of Mr. Carmichael?"

A sudden convulsion shook her whole body.

"Do not speak of that man to me. I thought you knew what he was——"

"I did."

"And why did you remain silent? Was that fair?—was it honest?"

He became a trifle confused at her attack.

"It was none of my business, Miss Murdoch," he replied sadly. "I thought you and he——"

"And yet——"

"It was no business of mine," he repeated again.

"The ways of a man are queer," she remarked scornfully.

He bowed his head.

She grew alert again.

"Will you do me a service?" she asked.

"A thousand, Miss Murdoch."

"Thank you. Listen, then—who do you think stole the paper that night——?"

"I would say the man who left his footmark in the mud."

"So you noticed that?"

"I have not fought abroad for nothing."

She shook her head dismally.

"Oh, fool, fool," she sighed, "if I had only known."

Campbell watched her with eager eyes.

"Perhaps it is not yet too late," he said.

"Who do you think the man was?"

"I do not know."

"Who but Robin Oig?"

"How do you know?"

"He wore the tartan, and the tartan is prohibited—only he dare wear it."

"Robin Oig," he murmured; "there is a charge against him."

She gripped the sides of the chair.

"Can you take him," she whispered, "and search him before it is too late?"

"I fear the mischief will be done by now. Can you not warn these friends of yours?"

"How can I?—I never saw that address, and though I have despatched a lad to find them if it is possible, there is only a chance that he will——"

"It is strange that Robin Oig should have followed you." He paused. "Carmichael has gone," said he meaningly; "he left in the night."

"No—no," she replied hurriedly, "there was another cause," and she looked so frail and sad he longed to take her in his arms.

"I must go," he said abruptly; "my leave expires to-day."

She gave no sign of having heard.

"Miss Murdoch," he went on, "you do not hate me now, do you?"

"No—no," she replied quickly.

"And you will let me help you if I can?"

"You are too good, Captain Campbell, after all I have said."

"Indeed, it has given me courage to ask of you one favour in return."

"And that?"

"That I may come again in happier days."

She smiled sweetly up at him.

"That you may," she returned. "Meanwhile, do what you can to help me——"

"Would I could think of anything, but if I can—I will. Do not disturb yourself, Miss Murdoch—everything will come right."

"Pray God it will."

They walked across the room, and through the window the sunlight fell upon their faces. Suddenly she looked up and caught his eyes bent fondly upon her. At that she flushed faintly, her pathetic face softly radiant.

He took her hands gently in his and kissed them.

"In your service," he said, and opened the door.

Long after old Murdoch entered the room, and seeing the bag of gold upon the table, he uttered a faint screech and pounced upon it. Every coin he counted with trembling fingers—then let the bag swing loose in his hand.

Of a sudden his face hardened, and limping to the window he peered over the sill.

From down in the courtyard came Campbell's voice bidding Ethlenn farewell.

## II

Ethlenn found her father standing thus, his head upon his breast, leaning on his stick, while between his feet the leathern bag lay in a crumpled heap.

He did not look up, but, bending, grasped the thong and laid it upon the table.

Then, leaning with one wrinkled parchment hand beside it, he surveyed her darkly.

"What is the meaning of this?" he asked. "Who carried this here?"

"I did, father."

"For what purpose?"

"I would rather not say."

Murdoch's face showed neither anger nor surprise. Instead, he let the lids droop over the coldness of his eyes.

"How did you know where it lay stored?" he asked, almost indifferently.

She hesitated.

"Perhaps that also is a secret," he sneered.



"Chuckie Stane showed it me," she replied. "He meant no harm. He watched you hide the gold."

A sudden flame of colour burned in Murdoch's eyes—then disappeared.

"I mind the night well," said he.

But he was still at a complete loss, and it irritated him. It piqued his vanity to be spied upon by a lad and kept in the dark by a mere girl.

"Has Campbell gone?" he asked sharply.

"Yes, and Carmichael too."

The old man started, despite himself.

"Carmichael!" he echoed.

"In the middle of the night."

He pursed his lips, trying to read her thoughts.

"Ethlenn," he said, after a moment, "ye did not quarrel with him?"

"I told you what he is."

"Yes—yes," he went on hurriedly, "and so you gave him the go-by."

She nodded her head slowly.

"I thought you understood," she said in a quivering voice. "You cannot have altered your mind since I spoke to you of this."

"Softly, lassie," he said, waving a finger at her in the air; "when you get as old as I am you'll take such things less seriously. He is an agreeable young man——"

"I will not speak of him, father."

"As you will—as you will—and so Campbell has gone, eh? There's no loss there. His red Campbell face will not be missed——"

"He is a brave gentleman," she broke in spiritedly.

"They are your own words," he answered, having gained his purpose.

At that moment a horse clattered into the courtyard.

Old Murdoch raised his keen face, like a hound scenting the trail.

"See who rides so fast," he said. But Ethlenn was already at the window. Below her a soldier was leading his sweating horse towards the door.

"It is a soldier," she said in a whisper.

"A soldier." He stood for a moment with a finger at his lip, then limping to a chest he flung back the lid and dropped the bag within.

"Is he alone?" he asked.

"He is, and from the state of his horse has ridden far."

He shut to the lid and dropped into his chair.

"Send him up," he said, and then came swiftly towards her. "No," he added, "no, I'll go myself," and passing her he hobbled down the stairs.

Ethlenn hurried after him too late.

In another minute the two men were closeted together in the dining-room, and the door was shut in her face.

Murdoch drew the man to the far corner of the room and poured him out a glass of wine.

"You have come far," he said.

"From Stirling, sir."

"For Captain Campbell, I presume?"

"That same."

The old man paused, sipping his wine.

"The captain told me there was much afoot," he said in a knowing voice, and, catching a look in the other's eye, winked meaningly like a man who shares a secret.

"There's a bonny bird will be caged before nightfall," chuckled the soldier, completely disarmed.

"I knew—I knew," tittered Murdoch, refilling the other's glass, "and I doubt not his initials are A. C."

"That would be telling, sir," sniggered the other.

Murdoch let his eyes rest upon the floor. The situation was clearing rapidly. So Campbell, who was so close with Ethlenn, would have the arresting of Cameron. Oh, that was fine hearing, and what would Ethlenn say then? And Carmichael, who had thought himself so brave a schemer, was out of it altogether. Well, Carmichael had muddled his business, and he must suffer for that. It would be a fine story to tell him later.

"Captain Campbell has taken the road," he said; "he will be five miles away by now."

"Then I must be stepping, sir."

"I will not detain you from your duty—but not a word of this to any on the road, not even in this house—ye mind that?"

"No, sir," replied the soldier, somewhat taken aback.

"Not even to my daughter, or I'll report ye"; and he laughed with serious eyes, so that the man shivered and longed to be gone.

"I'll watch ye from the window," cried Murdoch, as though that were the climax of a huge joke.

Down below he saw Ethlenn hold the horse for the man to mount, watched her lean forward to speak to him, saw him shake his head, an eye to the window, and then canter down the hill.

Meanwhile Ethlenn stood perfectly motionless in the courtyard, a hand on her breast—her face towards the road that Campbell had travelled and that the soldier was thundering swiftly down.

That her father noted with a blaze of anger in his eyes and his lips drawn back from his teeth.

A minute later he heard her running wildly up the stairs. Hastily drawing back from the window he awaited her coming without a trace of anger in his face.

She burst in upon him like a rush of winter tempest.

"What errand has brought that man?" she cried.

He did not reply for a moment, then in a soft, smooth voice replied: "How should I know, or, if I do, why should I wish to say?"

She seemed suddenly to sway over him, as though she would strike him to the floor.

"You do not understand," she said, "this is a matter of life and death."

"How could I know," he replied coolly, "when I do not share your secrets?"

"I see," she returned in a bitter tone. "May you be forgiven for this day's work"; and, with no further word, left him in the empty room.

Far away he caught a sound of sobbing, and then a door shut dully, and there fell a tragic stillness. A vague horror seemed to assail him, as though unseen hands touched his clothes and gripped him by the throat. The gloom of the room became suddenly appalling—the terrible, accusing silence was more dreadful than he could bear. He saw his stick upon the table, but with a moan of terror he shuffled past it and stumbled in a panic down the stairs.

Only at the open door did he recover himself, and there he stood and drew a shaking hand across his face.

Janet encountered him there and started visibly.

"Mercy on us, are ye ill, Murdoch?" she asked.

"No," he replied huskily, "no——" and then, for something to say, "Where's Chuckie Stane the day?"

"Ye may well ask that, for I canna tell ye—he's been gone this twelve hours and more."

Murdoch let his hand drop to his side.

"Gone—where has he gone?"

"How can I know, who isna his mither, and would be ashamed——"

"Oh, it is the blind fool I am, tell me—which way did he go?"

But she shook her head.

"He's mair like a rabbit than a laddie," she replied, "an' if he had taken the road to Stirling, which I'm no saying he did, it would just be to rouse my curiosity."

"Look," cried Murdoch, pointing towards the wood, "has not the old fir fallen?"

Janet nodded.

"The storm of last night," she said, and passed along to the kitchen.

The old man took a faltering step or two into the garden, and climbed upon a stone to see over the broken wall. He squinted down at the rude upheaval beneath him, at the discoloured soil, the rugged chasm, and then with a shudder at the wild confusion of dismembered roots like a cluster of tentacles beating the vacant air.

But there was something else. Beneath all that wreckage of broken timber and dying foliage there was something that moved and squirmed and beat with helpless hands upon the ground. He detected the colour of auburn amongst the green. Peering closer he saw Donald crushed and mangled, but conscious, watching him with sane and tragic eyes.

"Donald," he said faintly, "you are not dead, poor man?"

"My back is broken," he replied, "and I am going fast. It was the wind in the trees that made me mad. It was like the roar of the sea on the shores of Skye. And then——" he closed his eyes.

Murdoch crept nearer him.

"Why have you stayed at Murdoch so long?" said he curiously.

Donald replied without opening his eyes.

"It was we two," he replied in a whisper, "in a strange country."

Murdoch bit at his finger-nails in great perplexity. He was suddenly faced by what had never existed in his mind or life—blind, unreasoning devotion. And as he puzzled and frowned and stared at the dying man, Donald groaned, and, saying a few words which he did not hear, became suddenly rigid and then as quickly limp.

The great silence after the storm—the watching wood—the grim, waiting hills—all seemed leagued against him. It was as though they waited for him to shout, or weep, or tell them what are the secret thoughts of a man.

And the dead face of Donald was waiting, expectant too, with one arm lying upon the leaves beside his head, as though he were pushing them back to hear the better.

A wave of terror sent him trembling towards the house.

"Oh, I cannot look," he cried, like a little child. "What would I see were I to look? My God, what will happen to us now?—the old fir—they say—they say——" He entered the hall again and began climbing the dark stairway to his room.

For a moment he hovered in the doorway. Inside the room the sunlight penetrated no longer. It was perfectly noiseless—sombre—menacing—with the awful silence of a vault.

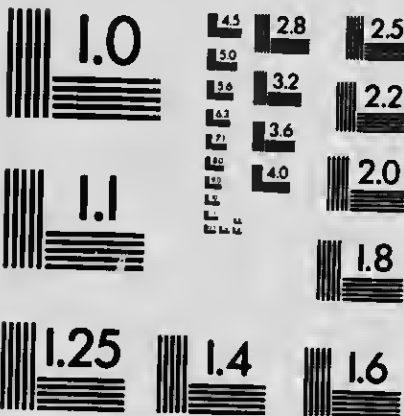
"Ethlenn!" he screamed suddenly in a thin, terrible voice. "Ethlenn!"

The frenzied cry re-echoed through the place, but no response came, no friendly, soothing hand was outstretched to his, no human voice dismissed his tragic loneliness. He might as well have been dead, like Donald or the old fir tree—he might as well have never lived at all.



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## CHAPTER XVIII

### I

**I**N a thatched cottage in the district of Glenbucket sat Dr. Archibald Cameron beside the bed of a little child. A huge watch lay on the sheet. His lips were pursed, the fingers of his right hand upon the little fevered wrist.

Behind him stood the father and mother, silently watching.

Through a hole in the wall a ray of wintry sunshine fell upon the greyness of their faces.

The Doctor had removed his coat and rolled up his sleeves. On the floor beside him was a bucket of water and a case of instruments. For two hours he had never moved. Only once had he nodded in the direction of the fire, and the woman, a Cameron of Lochaber, had softly laid a peat upon the glow.

At last his lips relaxed and a smile twinkled in his kindly blue eyes.

"She'll do," he whispered, and, rising stiffly, he drew them out of doors.

"Look you, John," he said to the man, "that's been a close business, and we're no out of the wood yet. I'll send physic with a laddie I know of in an hour, and I'll look in this afternoon."

The man seemed unable to reply, but his wife caught at his hand and kissed it.

"Oh, it's grateful we are, sir," she sobbed, speaking in Gaelic, "and you brother to poor Lochiel himself."

"Yes, God rest his soul."

"But it is delaying you. Were you not to start to-day for the south?"

Cameron patted her hand.

"There, there," he said; "I've bairns of my own. What would Mrs. Cameron say were I to leave little Vola so? It's a piece of her tongue I would be having, Mrs. Colquhoun."

Then, putting on his coat and thrusting his great watch into a pocket, he took himself off, while they stood in silence till he was lost to sight.

It was as they turned back to the cottage that their eyes fell upon a ragged boy standing near the door.

"What is it you want?" cried the woman suspiciously.

He eyed her shrewdly.

"I cannot be speaking where all the world may hear," he said.

They both regarded him with sudden apprehension.

"Come in," said the man gruffly, speaking for the first time. "Come in and have your fill."

But he lingered at the door.

"Who is that who was here?" he asked.

"Who but the doctor," answered the woman.

The boy seemed satisfied with her reply.

But over his porridge he spoke again.

"I hear there are strangers in Glenbucket," he remarked.

"Then you hear lies," cried the man with sudden violence.

The boy said nothing further, and after finishing he asked that he might sleep for an hour. They pointed out a bed of dried bracken, and falling down upon it he was instantly in a dead sleep.

"He has travelled by night," said the woman in a whisper.

Her husband scowled.

"The longer he sleeps the better," he said. "I am not liking his looks at all."

And so an hour passed, and another, and the boy slept on.

## II

Cameron walked briskly along for all his night's watch and melancholy thoughts. Melancholy they had become of late, for all his hopes had fallen into nothingness, since the cause which ranked next to religion in his heart was to all others rapidly fading from reality into idle sentiment.

Ascending a brae, he struck across a stream, and a few minutes later reached a cottage set low on the hill-side in the heart of a wood, like a nest on a bank.

The sound of voices reached him from the interior, and opening the door he stepped inside.

Around the breakfast table were seated two men: one Lochgarry, and the other a man somewhat taller than Cameron, but with a strong likeness in feature. John Cameron of Fassifern was a full-bodied man, grave with the gravity of a city burgess (which he was), shrewd with the shrewdness of a commercial training won in Glasgow. Brother to Lochiel as to Archibald Cameron, he was now nominal chief of the Camerons, and in 1754 that was no enviable position.

In 1751 he had been arrested over the Cluny Treasure. But as nothing could be proved against him he was released, and as Lochiel's representative he made it his business to set the affairs of the estate in order. In this his desire to aid the unhappy Camerons had laid him open to the charge of active Jacobitism, and the Government was only too ready to find a pretext for his confinement in Edinburgh Castle.

"Come awa, Archie," he said briskly; "we must all be stirring in an hour."

His brother shook his head.

"I will follow," he said. "I cannot leave that sick bairn yet awhile. To-night, perhaps."

Fassifern raised his eyebrows and glanced at Lochgarry, who was about to speak.

"Dinna waste your breath," he said, "for it will only heat you. I ken Archie. If he gets a notion into his head no power in heaven will drive it out. And if the bairn takes a turn for the worse——?" he inquired, with pretended gravity. "It's too bad of ye, Archie," he cried, "and yet, oh, man, man!" and he clapped him warmly on the back, blowing his nose somewhat noisily, the very picture of a brave soft-hearted gentleman.

"Come, come," cried Fassifern, seating himself again, "let us to business. It's maybe long till we meet again, Archie. Sit ye down and fill your pipe. I take it that you and Lochgarry go south again?"

"I fear so."

"Well, well, better times may come. Meanwhile, there's the devil to pay in Lochaber, and never a day passes but I expect a score of redcoats at my door. They're working up trouble against me, Archie, and even Glenure's murder is being laid at my door."

"What next?" cried Lochgarry.

"Aye, but they say I tampered with some scoundrels to do the business, and that's a hanging matter, Lochgarry, just as sure as James Stewart."

The face of Archibald Cameron grew sad as he listened.

"Trust in God, John," he said in a solemn voice, "for we are all in His hands."

Fassifern glanced moodily from one to the other, then,

knocking the ashes out of his pipe, he rose heavily to his feet.

"Come, Lochgarry," he said, "we must be stepping. I tell you frankly, Archie, that I'd rather the bairn died than that you risked your life like this."

"God forbid, John! Besides, there's no danger."

"There's danger enough, I'm telling you. News has reached me that one Ensign Small is hawking the Highlands for news of ye both. And who else div ye think?"

Archibald Cameron met his eyes quickly.

"Not Samuel——" he stammered.

"That same, and fair itching to lay his dirty hands upon you."

A curious look of dread rose to the Doctor's face.

"I've felt it," he said in a low voice, "like a footstep out in the night. But no one kens we're here, John—at least, only friends."

"Friends! What friends can we claim in these days? Ever since the Prince's treasure we've trusted no one, but every man has looked at his fellow like a dog with a hidden bone."

"Just Ethlenn Murdoch, John—a true-hearted girl."

"What!" shouted Fassifern. "Don't say a daughter of Murdoch of Strathyre, Archie!"

"Who else, John?" He had risen to his feet, blinking a little with weary eyes.

His brother took to walking swiftly up and down the room, his hands at his head.

Only Lochgarry sat motionless, as though he had not heard.

"Oh, Archie, Archie!" cried Fassifern in an agitated, plaintive voice. "Oh, what's to be done? What's to be done?"

"Done?" returned his brother. "I do not understand."

"Oh, this is the end," he went on, without stopping. "Why did I not know of this before?" He halted by the window and peered about in the same restless manner. "There is not a moment to be lost!" he cried; and then impatiently: "Why do you sit there, Lochgarry? Did ye not hear what he said?"

"I did," said Lochgarry, "but it was no news to me."

"Heaven preserve us all!" cried Fassifern. "Is the world gone staring mad? Would you trust your neck in Murdoch's keeping?"

"I know nothing of him," said the Doctor stiffly.

"But I do, Archie—enough to make me curse the day when I stepped out of Lochaber. I tell ye that Murray of Broughton is an honest gentleman compared to yon old fox——"

"Ye mean——?"

"I mean, if he is in the ken, this glen will soon be as full of soldiers as a skep of bees."

Lochgarry nodded his head.

"But maybe," he said, "he does not know."

"Aye," broke in Archibald, like a man who sees light at last. "Why should he? That girl could keep a secret like the grave."

But Fassifern brooded with his hands behind his back.

"It's all up, I doubt, Archie," he said. "The kites are gathering. A message reached me but yesterday that Samuel is at Murdoch."

At those ominous words, delivered slowly and in the deadly quiet, the two men uttered a cry of alarm.

"Why did you not say this before?" asked Lochgarry quickly.

"How could I ken that Murdoch was known to you? The country is hotching with spies."

Archibald Cameron ran a hand across his brow. Then, smiling in a pathetic way at his brother, he took his arm and that of Lochgarry.

"Go," he said; "there may yet be time. I will come to-night. If they had meant to take us, they would have come long since."

"Don't be a fool, Archie," returned Fassifern. "We cannot leave you here."

Cameron drew himself up.

"I am a doctor," he said quietly. "And now will you go?"

"No, no!" cried Lochgarry. "Were anything to happen to you I would never forgive myself."

"Nor I," added Fassifern.

"Gentlemen," said Cameron, "we have all our duties to perform. You, Fassifern, have charge of our unhappy people, and some day you must answer to God for that. You, Lochgarry, have the affairs of kings in your keeping, and must give answer to His Royal Highness, whom Heaven preserve!"

He opened the door as he spoke, and the bright autumnal sunlight glittered upon a thousand sparkling leaves outside. The air was absolutely still. Not a sound of man or beast reached their ears.

Then, shaking hands and without a word, Lochgarry and Fassifern stepped out upon the dewy grass and disappeared among the trees. Cameron watched them go with a heavy heart. Once far up the hill he saw their heads for an instant, and knew they were safe out of the glen, and with a sigh he re-entered the silent house. Then lying down upon the bed he fell into a troubled sleep.

## CHAPTER XIX

### I

**T**O Campbell riding steadily south-west to Inversnaid the morning had never looked fairer. The storm had vanished as though it had never been, and under the warm sunlight the frosty grass gleamed with myriad lights. Above him on the hill-side grey crags glinted amid the golden brown of bracken, and little sparkling streams sang merrily towards the valley. Overhead the soft blue of the autumn sky faded into pearl-grey in the east. He drew rein once and looked back with steady, lingering gaze. In that solitary castle flung high on the skyline dwelt all his thoughts, all his dearest aspirations.

Then, touching his horse with the spur, he trotted on with a smile upon his lips.

The life of Roderick Campbell had been too full of action for the love episodes common to his associates in age and training. A distant connection of the Duke of Argyll's, he had been soundly educated, with a view to adopting the legal profession. This, however, was hardly suited to his tastes, and though soberly inclined he had sufficient enterprise to board a trading vessel on a dark winter day, conceal himself in the hold, and thus be carried out to sea. When discovered he displayed so little humility or apprehension that the captain resorted to a rope's end. This Campbell, being a sturdy lad, dragged



from his grasp and very gravely laid about the captain's own shoulders. A truce was called, and no further trouble overcame him until they fell in with a band of Moroccan pirates off the coast of Africa. This misadventure resulted in a sea fight, much to young Campbell's liking, though little to that of the crew, who were unaccustomed to firearms and cutlasses, and after an hour's scrambling conflict they were forced to surrender and were chained to the pirates' galley as oarsmen. Campbell was seated next to the unfortunate captain, who cursed him roundly for a Jonah. And thus a month passed, and the story of how he filed through his chains and swam to a neighbouring island is yet to be chronicled. Eventually he reached France, and then wandered to the Low Countries, where he fought until the '45 brought him back to Scotland.

Perhaps such memories ran in his mind as he rode towards the dreary solitude of Inversnaid. And suddenly his expression brightened. How different it would be soon should Ethlenn bear him company.

From far away came the thud of a horse's hoofs.

He halted and looked back. In the valley below, where the track wound about the skirts of the hill and the rude bridge hid the rushing silver of the burn from sight, a single horseman came. The sunlight flashed upon his scabbard and accoutrements. Campbell knew in an instant on what errand he rode so fast. His face fell back into its accustomed gravity. The light died from his eyes, leaving them cold and calm.

The soldier came clattering up the hill, his horse snorting and labouring in the heavy ground, the foam streaming from his mouth upon his steaming quarters.

Then, pulling up, the man saluted and handed him a package, which Campbell took in silence.

He held it a moment in his hand with a heavy brow. Then, lifting his eyes, he let them wander over the tired horse and so up the soldier to his red perspiring face, where they remained.

"You have ridden fast, my man."

The soldier grinned foolishly and then, catching no response in Campbell's countenance, fell abruptly silent.

"Where are you from?" asked Campbell.

"From Stirling, sir."

"Who sent you?"

"Colonel Graham, sir."

"Did you draw rein on the way?"

"I did, at Murdoch Castle."

"Did you see the Master?"

The man hesitated, but Campbell never lifted his cold stare.

"Answer me."

"Why yes, sir."

Turning aside, Campbell dismounted and, leading his horse to a little distance, undid the despatch and read it with an expressionless face. It stated briefly that word had come from an indisputable source that the Jacobite intriguer and rebel, Archibald Cameron, was concealed in Glenbucket, and that he must be captured at all costs.

Very slowly Campbell folded it up, and turning his back upon the solitary figure behind him stared with unseeing eyes into the far distance. So the thing had come to pass after all, and Ethlenn, whom he loved, must bear this last bitter catastrophe. But not at his hand—that could not be; some one else must go. There was Lieutenant Douglas at Inversnaid—it would mean promotion perhaps for him. He smiled grimly at the idea. Promotion for hunting the man Ethlenn had begged him to protect. It would break her heart. His

head fell forward on his breast, the nails of his two hands were driven steadily into the soft palms. Could he not warn Cameron?—that was what crept back and back, until it was like to overwhelm him. Possibly Ethlenn knew, had guessed the man's errand. Or her father?

With quick steps he returned.

"You saw the Master?" he asked sharply.

"I did, sir."

"Was he curious about your business?"

The fellow hesitated.

"Speak up!" cried Campbell. "I'm not blaming you."

"Well, sir, maybe he was, but I had no need to tell him."

"He guessed, eh?"

"I think, sir, he knew already."

A rush of relief sent the colour back to Campbell's cheeks. What could Murdoch want with such news were he not anxious to warn Cameron in time?

Then, gathering up his reins, Campbell vaulted into the saddle.

"Let us go slow," he said. "There is no great hurry—your horse is lame already."

Some three hours later they reached Inversnaid and drew rein in the courtyard. Campbell walked into the officers' quarters and inquired if Lieutenant Douglas were on duty. The sergeant shook his head.

"No, Captain," he said, "the lieutenant went to Glasgow this morning, and will not be back till to-morrow."

For a moment Campbell said nothing.

Then, straightening himself, he ordered him to give the command to fall in, and, turning away, went to his own room and, throwing himself upon the bed, buried his head in his arms.

Ten minutes later he reappeared. In the courtyard were ranged two lines of red-coated soldiers.

They were pleasant enough fellows—Englishmen from London who had seen service with him abroad, but today he hated their round familiar faces.

He inspected them mechanically, even sending back a man whose piece was dirty. Then, forming fours, they wheeled to the right through the Castle gateway and over the short rank grass.

I:

"What is it that you see, John?" asked the mother of the sick child Glenbucket way.

Her husband peered long down the road towards Inversnaid.

"I see the sun glinting on steel," he answered.

"On steel! It cannot be!"

"Dhia gleidh sinn, but it is—they are coming!"

"Who are?" asked the boy in the corner drowsily, kneading his blinking eyes with doubled hands.

"Lie quiet," snapped the woman, "and hold your tongue."

Something in the tone of her voice set him staring at her wide-eyed.

"Damn you!" he cried in a passion. "See how late it is! Why did you not wake me?"

"You ungrateful——"

"Whisht!" The man came running in, a finger on his lip. "Stop your bickering. What's to be done? Where is Callum? Why do you stand there?" He looked from one to the other like one gone crazy.

In the distance came the beat of marching feet.

With something near to a sob the lad leapt to his feet.

"Soldiers!" he said. "And I sleeping here!"

"What do you mean?" asked the woman. "What have you to do with——" She hesitated.

"Is it of Archibald Cameron you speak?" cried the boy in a low voice. "Then tell me where he lies, if you know, for I am sent to warn him."

Nearer came the noise of feet.

"Who are ye?" she asked.

"They call me Chuckie Stane—and I come from Strathyre."

"How do I know you are what you say?"

He poured a torrent of words into her ears. In his agitation he gripped her arm with his lean fingers, clenching it fiercely.

"Now!" he said, breathless.

"He lies in a hut in the wood, in the hollow of yonder glen," she whispered. "Haste ye—and the Mother of God lend wings to your feet."

Outside the company of redcoats had halted, and as Chuckie Stane slipped through the back door Campbell's tall form filled the entrance.

"Good day," he said. "Perhaps you can direct me to a small house which lies in a wood in Glenbucket?"

The man and woman had grown of a sudden monstrous dense.

"We are not sure," responded the man, after a conference with his wife in whispers. "We will ask Stewart, the smith—he has an uncle in those parts."

It took twenty minutes to learn that, in the opinion of the village, there was no house nor any wood in Glenbucket that answered to the description.

With a grim smile Campbell gave the order to march, setting himself at the rear of his men that he might think in solitude.

It was about a mile farther on that he heard shouts of

excitement in the front of his party, and, running up a hillock, detected the ragged figure of a boy limping quickly towards a clump of trees on the hill-side.

Three men, with the sergeant, were running in pursuit, and hastily abandoning his position he hurried after his little force, calling vainly on them to halt.

But far away now were the redcoats dotted on the hill-side, and still farther away, making for a wood in a little glen, moved the drab figure of the boy with flying coat and frantic jerky steps.

And then, out of the still autumn day, came dropping back the dull bang of a shot.

With agonized eyes Campbell saw the little frail shadow fleeing so bravely fling up its arms and change into a distorted, crumpled bundle of clothes rolling down the rocky brae.

"They've killed him," he said in a whisper. "My God, they've killed him!"

The soldiers looked at him with wondering stupidity. To shoot a suspect was no new thing, surely, and Captain Campbell was hardly a raw recruit to the business of war.

As for Campbell, in that solitary shot he had heard as it were the striking of the hour of destiny.

When they returned, carrying the boy between them, he greeted them in black silence.

The sergeant bustled up, wiping the beads of perspiration from his brow.

"A spy, sir," he panted. "I called on him to stop, but he shouted he would see me damned first. Those were the words, Saunders, were they not?"

"Damned was what he said," replied the fellow.

Campbell glared at them both and turned to the form upon the ground.

The blood was oozing from a wound in the back.

The deadly pallor of the boy's face made Campbell think he was already dead. But suddenly he opened his eyes, and they rested upon him.

"My poor lad," he said, bending down, "why did you run from us? Would I could have saved you."

"Captain Campbell," he whispered.

"You know my name?"

A comical expression gleamed in the glazing eyes for an instant and was gone.

"Know you?" he said. "I'm Chuckie Stane—Miss Ethlenn's Chuckie Stane."

Campbell's head stooped lower. The tears dropped from his eyes upon the ashen cheeks beneath his arm.

Again the boy's eyes opened, and this time the agony of death was in them.

"Captain," he whispered, "I fell asleep and woke too late. You will save him, will ye no? Promise me—Oh, I am dying!" He paused, gasping for breath. "My father was shot too," said he, and with a horrid noise of coughing his head fell back upon the ground.

The sergeant bustled forward as Campbell took off his great-coat to lay upon the body, but meeting his eyes he stepped hastily backwards.

"March on," roared Campbell in a sudden fury. "On with you—you English swine."

It was the sole sign of Jacobitism he ever showed.

And when they had passed on he came alone, his sight so blurred that more than once he was like to fall upon the road.

Half an hour later they reached a little wood, and at that point Campbell gave his orders. He placed half a dozen men at each corner, and, taking three along with him, he walked rapidly up the leaf-strewn path, and turning the corner of the trees came upon a hut in a tiny glade.

"Stay here," he ordered; "I will go alone," and approaching the hut he knocked upon the door. For a full minute there was no sound within—then a voice called:

"Who is there?"

"Open, in the name of the King!" cried Campbell.

"I know but one king," answered the voice, "and that James, by the grace of God lawful sovereign of Great Britain."

"I hold a warrant for the arrest of one Archibald Cameron," said Campbell, "and I must warn you that the house is surrounded."

At that the door was flung back by the man within.

"I am Archibald Cameron," said he, with his arms across his breast and his head flung back. "And I am at your service."

"Pettigrew!" cried Campbell in an agonized voice.

Cameron came a little nearer, for the evening sun was in his eyes.

"Captain Campbell?" he said, smiling. "Come now, that is better than I had hoped. And yet ye mind the old woman yon night at Crianlarich?"

"This," returned Campbell heavily, "is like to turn my brain."

"No, no," rejoined Cameron. "You must forgive me for my incognito when last we met. Come, sir, your men await us."

So he chatted amiably, while Campbell only nodded, unable to reply. The gaping soldiery fell in behind them, and the march to Inversnaid commenced.

On the roadside lay the covered body of Chuckie Stane, and as they reached it Cameron turned with silent interrogation to his companion.

"Here lies a poor boy," said Campbell, speaking for



the first time since they left Glenbucket, "who died for his principles as gallantly as any gentleman of your sympathies."

And he took off his peaked hat as he spoke.

Cameron's face whitened at the words. Then, treading softly, he drew back the cloth upon the face.

"Merciful God!" he cried. "Chuckie Stane!"

"Come, sir," said Campbell, "we must on. Sergeant, I put this body in your charge. Convey it to Inversnaid."

Cameron said no further word until they began to pass through the little village where the sick child lay. The father and mother stood with streaming eyes before the door, and dark looks fell upon the soldiers from every side.

"There is a patient of mine lies in this cottage," said Cameron. "Would it delay you overmuch——"

"We shall await you here," responded Campbell, and turned his back.

Thanking him, Cameron passed inside the hovel, and for a quarter of an hour remained. Then, shaking hands with the mother and clapping the father on the shoulder, he took his place, and the march was resumed. His spirits seemed to have returned, until they passed below the gateway of Inversnaid Fort, when he shuddered and cast a lingering glance towards the sunset on the dim outlined hills.

Campbell must have read his thoughts, for, taking his arm, he drew him onward.

"Courage," he said in a low voice.

"Thank you," returned Cameron, quickening his step. Together they passed out of the soldiers' sight.

## CHAPTER XX

### I

CAMPBELL led his prisoner to his own room, and closing the door begged him to be seated. He walked to the window, and for some minutes remained looking down upon the square below. Then turning sharply he drew near to the fire.

"Dr. Cameron," he said, "while you are in my charge I must ask your promise that you will not attempt escape. Should you, of course, refuse to grant this—then I must act accordingly."

For a moment Cameron hesitated.

"I promise," he replied at last.

"Thank you, sir. For to-night, then, will you make use of this room? Food will be served to you, and I can only hope that you will be as comfortable as circumstances will permit."

This he said in a cold, official tone, and with a bow moved towards the door.

"Perhaps——" began Cameron.

"Well, sir?"

"Perhaps you would honour me with your presence—that is, if it is not irksome to you. You will recollect we have met on a happier occasion."

"Sir," said Campbell, "I would be glad indeed. I feared that my presence would not be welcome. Duty," he added ruefully, "is sometimes vastly inconsiderate."

Cameron held out his hand.

"Let us forget all that," he returned heartily. "I knew by your face to-day that you had nothing to do with this business."

"I thank you for those words from the bottom of my heart. Fate plays a strange game, Dr. Cameron. I once thought we moulded our own destinies. It was a foolish notion you'll agree."

"True, Captain Campbell—they are the handiwork of God."

"In my opinion, Dr. Cameron, they are the sport of circumstance. Let me run over the leading events of my own experience. As a boy I was bent upon adventure. I was saved times without number, as though I were the special darling of the gods. All for what purpose? To be the commander of Inversnaid Garrison, and to wound to the very heart the only woman I have ever loved." He paused, staring moodily at the fire. "Life," he repeated, in a voice full of scorn, "what has life given to me—or to you?"

Cameron started from a reverie.

"Of what woman do you speak?" he asked gently.

For an instant the other hesitated.

"I spoke hastily," he replied; "but since she stands between us—it is of Miss Ethlenn Murdoch."

"I thought so."

"Did she speak of me, Doctor?"

"Barely at all, but something told me. Alas, poor girl! she will feel this."

"Feel it! It will come near killing her."

Cameron glanced at him in some surprise.

"No, no," he said; "you cannot mean that."

"But I do. By a chain of circumstances she proved the means by which you were discovered. All un-

wittingly she and I too, for that matter, were the unconscious instruments of disaster."

Cameron pointed to a chair.

"Tell me of this," he said gravely.

Campbell clenched his hands and related all that had taken place since the midnight journey from Balquhiddie, and when it was finished a long silence fell upon the two.

At last Cameron stirred.

"I see," he said. "And now I know who betrayed me. Captain Campbell," he added, with a pathetic smile, "it comes hard on a Highlander to be sold by one of his own clan."

"One of his own clan!"

"Who else but the man you knew as Samuel Carmichael? He is a Cameron of Glenevis and relative to me. Oh, there are braw doings since the 'forty-five!" he cried bitterly. "Whisperings in Hanoverian ears that must make all London laugh."

"That cur!" burst out Campbell. "The mean——"

"Whisht, man," said Cameron. "Take a heed to your tongue. Poor soul, he will never spend another happy day. I would not share his dreams—no, I would not share his ghastly dreams. And that poor girl— Wait, I will write her a letter which you will deliver in person, Captain Campbell, if you will. Or, better still, I will write it this night when all the world's asleep and when the hill wind is blowing in through the window. We start to-morrow?"

"For Edinburgh."

"And then?"

"I cannot say. Thank God you are my prisoner no longer."

"Would that I were, for it is a lonely road I travel."

And yet I am glad, were it not for my wife and hapless little ones."

"Anything I can do——" began Campbell.

"Thank you, sir. Perhaps you will carry out some little commissions for me in case I do not see them in Edinburgh."

He sat musing for a moment, then began to cut the buckles from off his shoes, and, handing them to Campbell, spoke in a brave voice, though the tears stood in his eyes.

"These I send by you to my wife," he said, "as my last present to my son, and bid her tell him from me that I send these, and not my silver ones; and that if I had gold ones I would not send him gold, but these steel ones I wore when I was skulking, for as steel is hard and of small value, it is therefore an emblem of constancy and disinterestedness: so I would have him constant and disinterested in the service and defence of his king, prince, and country, and neither be bribed nor frightened from his duty."

Campbell inclined his head gravely.

"Sir," he said, "I envy you your great courage."

"Such courage as I have, which was never much, I have from God, Captain Campbell, Who has directed my steps for close on fifty years. You said a moment back that in life there was no law but that of circumstance. Then let me tell you that in my very death, for death this will mean for me, there is the ordinance of the Almighty."

"I fail to follow you, sir."

Cameron laid his hand upon his companion's knee.

"Listen," he said. "It is the will of God that the Stuarts shall never sit upon the throne of Britain. By the sacrifice of one man the miserable embers of the cause will be for ever stamped out."

"It would become the Government to be clement."

"Aye, and give heart to a score of waverers. No, no, Captain Campbell, it is better that one man should suffer than that we should see another Culloden."

"But why did you not act according to such sentiments, Dr. Cameron?"

He shook his head several times without replying; then:

"Why, indeed," said he, and fell into silence.

At that moment there came a knock at the door, and a soldier saluted in the entrance.

"A gentleman to see you, sir," he said, addressing Campbell.

"A gentleman? It is late for callers. Did he give his name?"

"No, sir. He said he preferred not."

Campbell rose to his feet and nodded to the man to go.

"I will return," he said to Cameron, and walked slowly from the room, closing the door behind him.

The soldier awaited him in the passage.

"I put him in the officers' mess-room," he said.

"How did he come?" asked Campbell.

"On horseback, Captain."

"Is his horse travel-stained?"

"It is a fresh horse, sir."

Leaving him, Campbell strode to the adjoining room and disappeared within, shutting the door behind him.

## II

Before the fire a man was standing, his head sunk upon his breast. At the click of the door he slowly turned his face, and in the pale, distraught features Campbell recognized Samuel Carmichael.

"Mr. Carmichael!" he said coldly.

"My name is Cameron," said the other. "Samuel Cameron. Did you not know?"

"You may remember you corrected me on a former occasion."

But Cameron did not heed his words.

"Does he know"—he jerked his head backwards towards the wall—"that I—I——?"

"He does."

Samuel Cameron's features contracted for an instant.

"May I sit down?" he said humbly. "I have something to say."

Campbell nodded towards a chair.

"I cannot see what purpose you serve in coming here," he remarked.

Cameron raised tortured and miserable eyes to his.

"Captain Campbell," he began in a strange, unnatural voice, "you see before you a man who has been in hell, and who would repair if possible the work he has done."

"It is too late now."

"No, no, sir," he cried, catching hold of the skirt of his coat. "Listen to me, I beg of you. What I did I did in madness—the madness of jealousy——"

"Jealousy of whom?"

"Can you ask? Of you."

"Of *me*?" He was startled out of his cold indifference.

"Do you not understand? Why, you and Ethlenn Murdoch. Oh, can you not see? How could she act so?"

"I do not understand."

"That night—my God, that night! I met her coming from your room."

Campbell grasped his throat with an oath, then drew his fingers back.

"Out with it," he cried roughly, "and then I will kill you."

"Yes, yes," went on Cameron, speaking rapidly like a man in a fever, "and when she came out of your room something went in my brain, and I was mad. I rode to Robin Oig, and he told me where Archie lay hid. Oh, I had no real grudge against Archie—he was always kind was Archie, not like Lochgarry." He paused, breathless. "You will see Robin does not escape, Captain Campbell?" he said in a whining voice.

"Tush!" muttered Campbell, "the man is crazed."

He turned his back upon the miserable creature and took a turn up the room. There was truth in his words, no denying that. And that talk of Ethlenn? Supposing she had been in his room, what would have brought her there? Suddenly his face cleared.

"Did it never strike you what sent that poor girl to my room?" he asked, and receiving no reply he lowered his voice. "What but the paper which she thought I had stolen instead of your friend Robin Oig?" he added pitilessly.

A groan escaped Cameron's lips, and then another. With his fingers thrust into his eyes he commenced weeping like a child, his whole body torn and quaking with sobs.

To Campbell the sight of such misery in a human being became insufferable. He was not a hard man, only one sorely tried and deeply harassed in mind.

"Be a man," he said roughly, shaking him by the shoulder.

The torrent of tears passed away as quickly as it had come. It left Cameron more exhausted, more quiet. Only his eyes shone with fever.



"The past," he said, with a sort of dignity, "is over and cannot be recalled. I did not come to speak of that——"

"Then, in God's name, what brought you?" asked Campbell.

"Because of Archie."

Campbell drew back, and slowly raising his head met Cameron's eager gaze.

"I fail to understand," he said coldly. "Nothing can avail the Doctor now."

"Give me a hearing, Captain Campbell. I ask it for his sake."

Campbell hesitated a moment, then shrugged his shoulders.

"As you will," he replied, "so that it be brief."

Cameron thanked him with a glance.

"If Archie reaches Edinburgh," he said, "he is as good as hanged. Whenever news came that he and Lochgarry were in Scotland, it was determined that one or both should suffer the extreme penalty, and it is unnecessary to tell you what effect that will have on the Highlands. I will be frank with you to-night as we will never meet again. I had promised to do my best to ensure his capture. I am not a Jacobite, and though that is a poor excuse, it sufficed me then. Until—until I met Ethlenn Murdoch——" A spasm of pain crossed his features, and he went on in a strained, agonized voice: "And then all was different, and I had sworn on the dirk that all that had passed, and then—you know the rest. Think, Captain Campbell, what it will mean to that girl if Archie be killed through her misfortune." Campbell drew his hand across his eyes.

"You should have realized that sooner," he said hoarsely.

"Think of his innocent wife and bairns."

"Enough!" cried Campbell in a torture. "Do not fling words at me as though I were to blame. It is all your cursed work."

"I know—I know. But what can I do now unless——"

"Unless what?"

"*I take his place.*"

Cameron, thinking from Campbell's stunned silence that he was softening, drew a little closer and began to pour words into his ear.

"There is no danger," he said. "No one can guess. I will go in to see him, and he will change into my clothes. A fresh horse waits below, which will convey him to the coast. There I have arranged for a boat to take him to Ireland and thence to France. Have pity, Captain Campbell, on this poor gentleman and on a man whose life is become horrible to his very soul. Besides," said he, with a note of persuasiveness, "how will Miss Murdoch receive you now?"

With a cry Campbell sprang to his feet and pointed to the door.

"Go," he cried, "before I do you an injury. You would dare address a soldier as you have just now! For what do you take me?"

Cameron rose painfully to his feet.

"I took you for a gentleman," he said simply, "and one with some kindness of heart."

The flush died from Campbell's cheeks.

"I foresaw something like this," said he, "and perhaps I take your words too strongly. Forgive me for that, since you are a man striving to repair the past. But even if I were so dishonourable a soldier, Dr. Cameron is too honourable a man."

The other took a quick step forward.

"Let me see him," he begged, "and if that fails I will leave you for ever."

Campbell looked long upon the ground.

"God forgive me if I do wrong," he said. "Go, and though you will not persuade him you may at least pray for his forgiveness." And, without another word, he led the way to the passage and pointed to the door.

Then, returning, Campbell dragged in the chair to the fire and sat with his aching head between his hands.

### III

Long after he heard the door open and a step halt before the room in which he sat. But it dragged slowly on and died away.

Then, from the courtyard, came the clattering of a horse's hoofs and a wild thudding down the hill.

Slowly Campbell rose to his feet and, leaving the room, knocked upon Archibald Cameron's door.

There was no answer.

He knocked again and then entered.

For a moment he thought the room was empty.

Then he saw his prisoner standing by the window, one hand upon the open casement as though he were dreaming of what might have been, the cool night wind upon his cheeks, the scent of fallen leaves in his hair.

"God rest you, Doctor," he said gently.

From the far distance came the faint thunder of mad hoofs.

"May God forgive us all," replied Cameron in a broken voice, never turning his head at the shutting of the door.

## CHAPTER XXI

### I

**W**HERE means of transit are most difficult news has a manner of travelling the quickest.

It was about eight in the morning of the day following that on which Cameron was captured that a travelling pedlar entered Strathyre, and, for such is the way of these things, within a quarter of an hour there was no soul there who did not know by heart the whole sad business, and dark looks were cast at the towering walls of Murdoch from many lowering eyes.

Some one had seen Campbell and Ethlenn that night ; a disreputable wastrel snaring rabbits had forgotten the incident till then. Some one else had got into talk with the soldier and learned for whom he rode so fast. There was no need to fling mud at old Murdoch. Besides, had not their fathers said that there was a curse about the place ? And then that girl with her foreign looks and Parisian ways. Oh, she might be pleasant enough, but whoever trusted a smooth tongue ? And so it progressed, and with a smatter of truth for all its evil origin, just that suggestion of likelihood on which gossip is transformed to scandal.

One or two of the younger spirits were for stoning Murdoch, and had not Ronald Macgregor, that sleek and timid rascal, arrived—might have done so. But he addressed them with a great show of enthusiasm bravely

curbed, which was ever his pose, and counselled less active operations.

At that the young men looked very fierce and glared at each other, and let their anger subside, to their own secret satisfaction and the relief of their relatives.

Ronald Macgregor, finding himself in the enviable position of a man who has controlled public opinion and formed a policy, warmed to the subject over a horn mug of whisky, and from the cunning of his resourceful brain evolved a scheme which tickled his audience mightily. Force, he had already remarked, was answered by force, and all present knew what that meant—but there was something better, there was stealth. When an enemy could not be crushed by violence he could be overcome by cunning. He let them chew that for a moment, sipping his spirits with his eyes upon the ground. There were uses for Murdoch once the old man and his girl were gone—much could be done with such a place even in such law-abiding times. He laid down his horn and ran the back of a freckled hand across his mouth.

“I do not understand you,” said an old man near him, and a murmur of approval went up and died away.

Ronald Macgregor held up his hand.

“What I am telling you,” he said, “is for your good, for, as you know, it does not matter to me who lives in Murdoch.”

That was so obvious that no one required to assent.

“But were I in your place what I would be doing is this—I would make it impossible for them to remain in Murdoch at all. We all need food, even the old fox that is Murdoch himself, and who is there to carry food except

yourselves, or to kill game but old Donald and that laddie Chuckie Stane?"

"Chuckie Stane is shot," cried the pedlar; "that I forgot."

"Shot!"

"Aye, by Captain Campbell's own hand, so I was hearing."

That set the martial spirits boiling again. None had ever spoken a kind word to the boy, nor would have raised a hand to lift him out of Balvaig—but one would have imagined at that moment that his nearest kinsmen were calling for the blood of his foes.

"Ye hear?" cried Macgregor, seizing his opportunity. "And who brought that sneaking Campbell here?—Answer me that."

There was a deep roar of voices. "Murdoch—Murdoch."

"Ye speak right. And who will be shot next, think ye?—maybe one of us. He has never shown kindness to any here, I doubt."

"Nothing but sour looks." It was the pedlar who shouted that. As a man who had fallen out of public notice he felt that a bold bid for publicity was well counselled. But no one heeded him.

"We'll starve him out," cried a prosperous-looking man with a red face.

"And his sly daughter."

Ronald Macgregor warned them to silence.

"Gently," he said. "We must not let a whisper of this reach their ears. First of all, old Donald must be stopped from carrying meat to the house, and then in the night some of you will see that the garden is stripped of vegetables. There is a cow, is there not, and some hens?"

And so it went on, and with the spilling of spirits, brave projects were flung out like spume upon the wind to fall unseen into nothingness. The riot of voices rose and fell—sometimes Murdoch was blamed, sometimes his daughter, but deepest imprecations were showered upon the head of Campbell. Ronald Macgregor, grown bold with whisky, drank loudly to the success of their enterprise.

“And here,” he cried huskily, “is damnation for Captain Campbell——”

There was a sudden lull in the clash of noise even as he spoke, and he peered here and there to ascertain what it signified. Suddenly from the open door a quiet, resonant voice replied :

“Thank you, Mr. Macgregor, for your kindly interest in my welfare.”

It was Roderick Campbell himself.

In the absolute stillness the horn mug fell from Macgregor's hands and gushed its contents on the floor.

“Captain Campbell !” he gasped.

“Certainly,” said he. “I trust my presence will not disturb your little gathering, Mr. Macgregor.”

“Eh, sir, it's no gathering of mine.”

“I only judged from the prominent part you were taking—you were audible a hundred yards away.”

All this time he took no notice of the ugly glances cast upon him by the drunken crowd inside the place, but, being a tall man, stared coolly over their heads, holding his horse's reins loosely in his hands.

A faint rustling travelled through the silent figures like the breath of a breeze in dry autumn leaves, and, growing steadily, sent the whole room of them swaying and jostling just as branches swing together.

Then from the back of the place some one shrieked "Murderer!" in a shrill, half-hearted voice, and that was like the setting of a fuse to powder.

The mob lurched forward, breathing quickly, as bullocks toss their heads and glare with stupid eyes.

But at that moment Campbell drew a pipe casually from his pocket, and stuffing tobacco inside the bowl set about lighting it. Now there is not one man in a thousand who can strike another when he is busy about the lighting of a pipe. It takes a slow brain a considerable time to harmonize such a homely action with violence.

For want of something else to do the cluster of sullen eyes watched the blue smoke curl upwards from the bowl, and with childlike forgetfulness became engrossed.

Nor did they stir when Campbell leisurely mounted his charger, only surging to the doorway to watch him.

Had not a woman from the safety of a neighbouring cottage screamed a volley of foul words in Gaelic he might have turned his back on them and walked away.

But of a sudden they remembered, and, urged onwards by the efforts of Ronald Macgregor from the seclusion of the room, they poured on to the road and ran in a body at him.

And at that moment a stone hit his horse upon the quarters, and rearing madly it flung out its fore feet, dashing one of his assailants to the ground.

Springing from his saddle, Campbell was at the wounded man before his companions had recovered from their surprise, and raising him gently from the ground he turned sharply upon the threatening crowd.

"Water," he cried, "bring me water," and turning



his back he loosened the man's coat about the neck. He knew instinctively that no one had moved. Without so much as raising his eyes he called: "Ronald Macgregor."

Again there was no answer.

"Ronald Macgregor, in the name of the King I order you to get me water or to send some one for it."

He said it sharply, and then followed the shuffling of footsteps.

They watched him bathe the man's head as they had watched him light his pipe. Then when he had finished, and the fellow, very white and silent, was led away, they followed him with vacant faces to the cottage from whose door the stone had come, and even nudged each other at the things they heard from within.

He took no notice of them as he remounted his beast, not so much as to steer his way, but rode unswerving, and it was left for them to fall away like water before a ship and watch him pass. No hand was raised to stay him, no word uttered. It might have been a village of the dead, so intensely still had it become.

And at the same slow pace he reached Murdoch Castle, and drawing rein slid from the saddle upon the ground. Janet greeted him before the step. One glance at her anxious face and he drew her aside.

"How is your mistress?" he asked.

"So strange, sir, that I'm like to greet whenever I see her. This day or two has worked a sair change in her that I couldna hae believed. If she would only speak, sir, but she sits with eyes like a stricken hind watching the road, aye, watching the road, and no food has passed her lips since yester morn."

"For whom does she wait?" he asked in a whisper.

Janet shook her head dolefully.

"Wha kens that kens mair than I do," she replied, "though I'm thinking that it may be Chuckie Stane."

Campbell nodded. He had been prepared for that, and yet he had hoped perhaps—— So she had sent Chuckie Stane, not her father.

"Is your master in?" he inquired.

"He is, sir, in his room. He talks of naething but the auld fir. He says it was nae storm tore it up, and that there is something below it, and then he is like to scream. Will ye see him, sir?"

"I do not know. Perhaps—— By the by, things look ill in Strathyre. I'll send you a few men to guard this place. It's none too safe just now."

The old woman drew him a little distance from the house.

"I've heard whispers," she said, her lips trembling.

"Old Donald he's na come the morn, and he's no missed a day this twenty years. It's not illness is keeping Donald. Oh, sir, sir, there's been nae love lost between Murdoch and Strathyre, and I doubt there's trouble brewing at last. He has treated them like cattle and waur—and yet I canna just see them facing the auld man——"

Campbell did not reply for a moment, and when he did his voice was curt.

"Will you inform Miss Murdoch that I wish to see her, and that I carry a letter from a friend?"

The suspense until Janet's return was almost more than he could suffer. The terrible silence of Murdoch Castle—his ghastly errand—the clouds that threatened to burst upon the old man and the girl he loved ere long—all this did not bear brooding upon.

He fidgeted up and down—up and down. At last Janet was back, whispering at his elbow.

"Go up, sir," she said, "and speak to her softly—the poor lassie looks scared to death—like a white ghost——"

Campbell nodded and went quickly up the stairway.

When he entered the room in which she sat he saw nothing but two great, haunted eyes dwarfing the pallorous face in which they gleamed. She was dressed in black—everything was black about her, her hair, her clothes, the chair in which she crouched. The window set high in the wall threw the sickly sunshine on her face, making it appear more mournful than might otherwise have been.

“You have come back,” she said in an infinitely pathetic voice.

Without replying, Campbell approached her, and drew one of her cold hands into his own.

“You have heard?” he inquired gently.

For a moment she looked into his face, seeming to search with her eyes for what she knew she would not find.

“Tell me,” she said, not answering his question, “tell me everything.”

“I have a letter——” he began.

But she shook her head; and so he told her, sparing nothing, least of all himself. When he spoke of Chuckie Stane the thing grew too awful and he broke down, but no tear came to cool the fever in her dry eyes—and the limp hands never tightened in his grasp. Only when he told of Carmichael a faint tinge of crimson mounted to her white cheeks, and then fled again on the instant.

At last it was ended. He raised his mournful eyes to hers, and wondered if she had heard, had realized. And even as he considered—her voice, like a thing travelling from an infinitely long distance, showed him that she had.

“Where is Doctor Cameron now?” she asked.

“He awaits me some five miles distant—he said he would not pain you with a sight of his—his——”

"I understand."

Again, after a pause, she spoke.

"Let me have the letter."

He drew it from his pocket, and without a word she laid it on her lap.

In the utter silence that followed Campbell rose unsteadily to his feet.

"Miss Murdoch," he began, "have you no word for me?"

She stirred, and a little frown crossed her brow.

"For you?" she repeated.

"I wish," he cried brokenly, "that I had never been born. Oh, that I had never come here—it might have saved you all this pain."

"No," she said, "this is but the end of a tale."

He looked at her with puzzled eyes.

"Can you ever forgive me?"

"I—I have nothing to forgive."

"Miss Murdoch—I love you. Do not start so—I know I have no right to speak now, but I cannot see you so broken and miserable. I, too, am wretched, more wretched, perhaps, than you. Scotland is no home for you or me. This place is even dangerous to you. Let us go abroad, far away to the South. Ethlenn—Ethlenn, oh, my darling——"

She pushed him back with trembling fingers.

"No—no," she cried faintly, "stop saying such things—I could not—please do not persist in this——"

"You shall. Ethlenn—I will not leave you here." He shivered in the sombre room and tried to draw her to him. But, with a supreme effort, she sprang from him and, grasping the mantelpiece with one hand to steady herself, turned her tragic eyes upon him.

"Go," she said, "for the love of God, leave me and

this house for ever. Love is not for such as I—only silence and the grave. After what has passed it were better we never met again in this world. Do not weep, I implore you, for I cannot bear it——”

“Ethlenn,” he moaned, and took a step towards her. “My beloved.”

Then, catching her to him, he kissed her upturned lips passionately, while she clung to him, her hands about his neck.

After a little, gently loosening his arms, she drew him across the room and to the door.

“Good-bye,” she whispered, and drew it slowly back upon the hinges. “Good-bye.”

He read dismissal in her eyes. He tried to speak, but no words came.

Then stumbling down the stairs he reached the courtyard and his horse.

## II

Long after, when Edinburgh was in sight, Archibald Cameron turned to him and said:

“Mine is, perhaps, an easier road than yours, Captain Campbell,” for he knew all, at which the other nodded sadly.

“Would it were mine,” he replied; “and yet, who knows? I shall hand in my resignation to-morrow and go to the wars.”

“Wars—what wars?”

Campbell smiled, and met the other’s eyes for a fraction of a second.

“By the Providence of God,” said he, “somewhere there are always wars.”

Then in silence, riding side by side, with the soldiers about them, they entered the High Street of Edinburgh.

## III

The black cloak of night began to fall about Strathyre, blotting out the hills, the woods, the cold rills of water, smoothing the jagged peaks into indistinguishable grey, and wrapping the village in a garment of clinging mist. Castle Murdoch stood solitary for a breath of space, like an exile staring across the valley, and then the mist rising stealthily crept up its moist walls foot by foot until only the topmost tower remained.

The night was bitter cold, but it was not till nine of the clock that the snowflakes drifted down and settled upon the window-frames.

Inside the vast, sombre-coloured room where Murdoch spent his days father and daughter sat together. Between them a great fire burned and hissed when the snow fell into the flames.

They had said no word that day.

It was about the hour of ten when Ethlenn shivered violently and her eyes closed. Her father rose, and limping across the room, returned with a plaid and placed it carefully about her shoulders. He waited a little, as though he prayed she might speak, but no word crossed her lips.

Then seating himself again, he stared into the fire.

Long after Janet knocked.

"They're robbing us, sir!" she wailed.

From the night came harsh laughter far away, and then silence.

Very slowly Murdoch raised his great white head. She feared an outburst, but none came. He only bade her go.

The snow fell faster, until the turn of the night, when

it ceased, and the moon riding high in the heavens gleamed fitfully upon the desolate House of Murdoch. From the north there came a sound of haunted wind, sighing in forlorn places, unutterably sad, passing from one white silence to another.

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doch.  
wind,  
from

## EPILOGUE

SOME time in the month of June Condillac was sitting in his study when Lochgarry came upon him like a stormy petrel seeking shelter. He was the same robust figure, red-cheeked, travel-stained, his riding boots caked with mud, his great-coat buttoned across his chest.

Condillac went to meet him with outstretched hands, saying no word. Had he not heard he might have guessed all from Lochgarry's face.

"You have just arrived," said he at last.

Lochgarry nodded gloomily.

"It is all over," he remarked bitterly. "They killed Archie three days ago. I stood near Tyburn to see him pass."

"Poor gentleman," sighed Condillac, "poor misguided gentleman. I feared it was a hopeless task."

Lochgarry shook his head desperately.

"Dying embers," said he; "and now Fassifern is taken, Sergeant Mohr Cameron is dead, even Robin Oig is waiting trial, for which God be thanked."

"And what of——" Condillac hesitated, but Lochgarry helped him out.

"Mistress Murdoch," he said, "was a brave woman."

"She is not dead?"

"No—not dead—but utterly crushed——"

Condillac laid his hand upon the other's knee.

"Tell me," he said softly.



Slowly, in queer, twisted sentences, Lochgarry told him of all he had learned of the strange story of Ethlenn and Roderick Campbell, blaming nobody, least of all the house of Murdoch. He gave the facts as they were, defending no one, seeking no meaning in the relentless blows of circumstance.

"I must go to her," said Condillac, when he was at an end. "I once made some one a promise I would do what I could."

"You can do nothing," answered Lochgarry bluntly.

"This Campbell," went on Condillac, taking no heed of the last words, "where is he now?"

"I hear he passed through Paris a week back. It is hard to see any gentleman so broken, be his name what it may."

"Travelling——"

"To Portugal, I take it, where I depart to-night."

He stood up as he spoke and took his hat in his hand.

"Should you see him," said Condillac, "tell him that one dear to him—some day perhaps——"

Lochgarry shook his head.

"It is kind of you," he replied, "but such men as Campbell seldom return."

"Alas," cried Condillac in a melancholy voice, "what unseen hand blinds our eyes and sends us groping into utter darkness? We, Monsieur, have lost what was dearest to us—but these others, they are young, and who knows what may not come about? There are occasions," he added, smiling wistfully, "when the blind can guide the blind——"

Lochgarry bowed his head, understanding dimly what he meant.

"And now, Monsieur," continued Condillac, "farewell, and remember this poor house is always at your

service. We have not been robbed of all. We have our memories—and they will grow the sweeter with the years.”

Lochgarry seemed about to speak, but bowed very deeply instead, and then shaking hands they parted without a word, and a moment later Condillac stood alone.

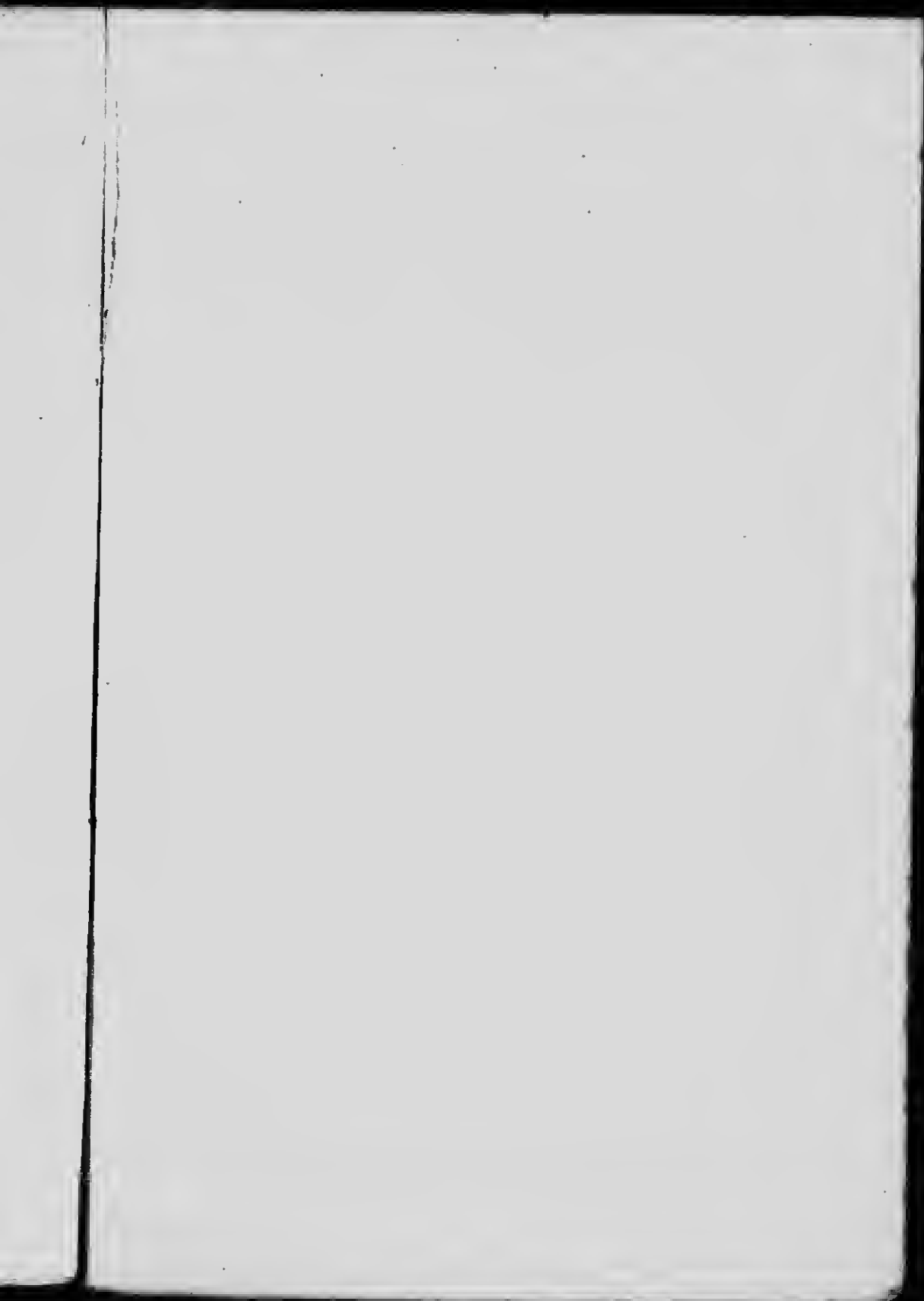
He wandered to the window and looked down upon the sunlit street.

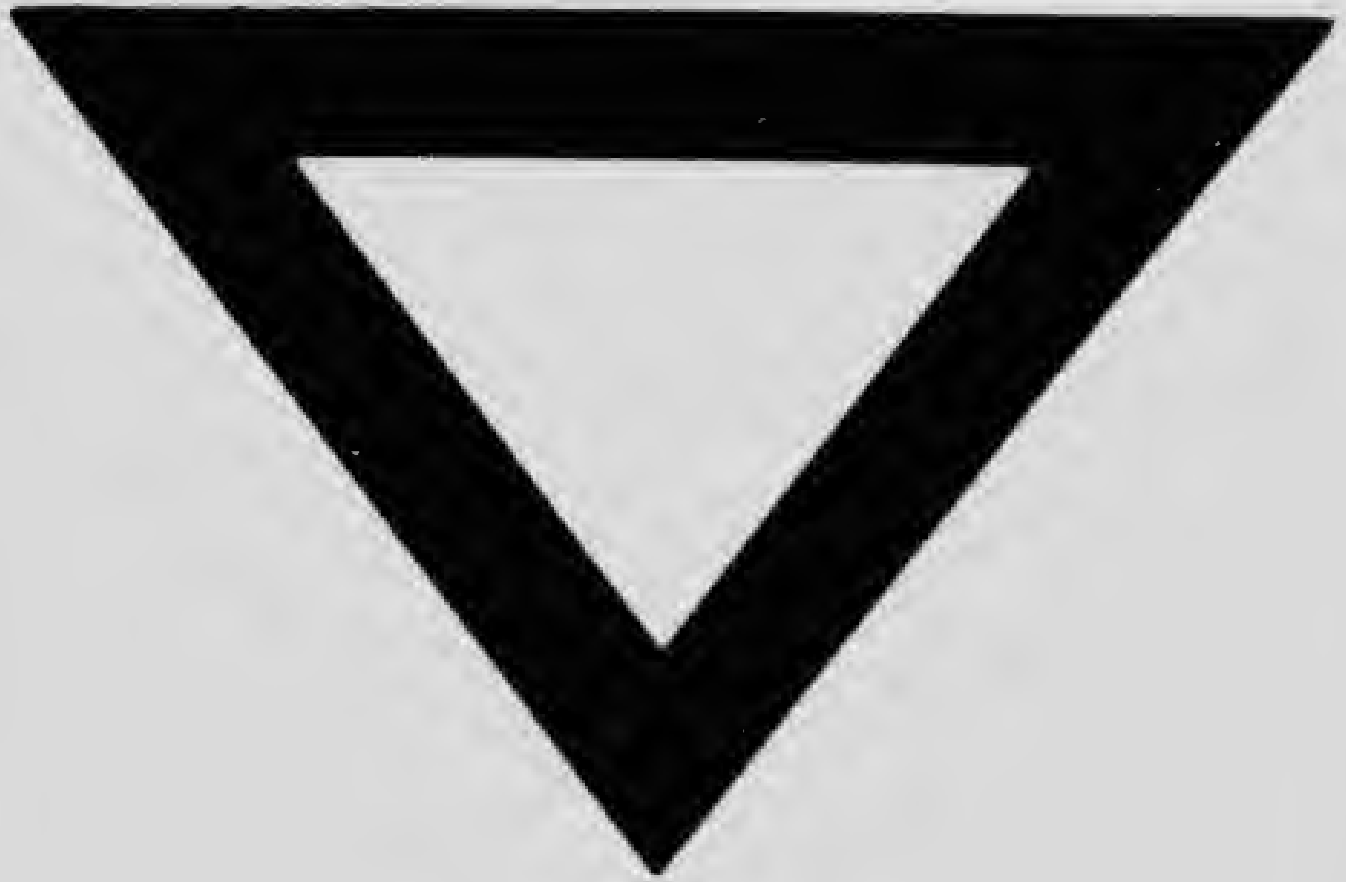
“Six months,” he murmured, “only six fleeting months, and yet——” Then sighing a little, he began to pack for his long journey to the North.

The sun shone brilliantly down upon the empty roadway, where a few blue-grey pigeons clustered in search of corn. It flashed shafts of light from the distant spire of the Convent of St. Joseph—all the flowers in the unseen Garden of Moths were ablaze with gorgeous colouring.

Summer was come again as it had come before, as it would come through all the myriad years, ripening the harvest for the scythe of the reaper.

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