

CHAPTER II - ON THE TRACK OF THE MINISTER

On the afternoon of the Saturday that carted me and my two boxes to Thrums, I was ben in the room playing Hendry at the dambrod. I had one of the room chairs, but Leeby brought a chair from the kitchen for her father. Our door stood open, and as Hendry often pondered for two minutes with his hand on a "man," I could have joined in the gossip that was going on but the house.

"Ay, weel, then, Leeby," said Jess, suddenly, "I'll warrant the minister 'll no be preachin' the morn."

This took Leeby to the window.

"Yea, yea," she said (and I knew she was nodding her head sagaciously); I looked out at the room window, but all I could see was a man wheeling an empty barrow down the brae.

"That's Robbie Tosh," continued Leeby; "an' there's nae doot 'at he's makkin for the minister's, for he has on his black coat. He'll be to row the minister's luggage to the post-cart. Ay, an' that's Davit Lunnan's barrow. I ken it by the shaft's bein' spliced wi' yarn. Davit broke the shaft at the saw-mill."

"He'll be gaen awa for a curran (number of) days," said Jess, "or he would juist hae taen his bag. Ay, he'll be awa to Edinbory, to see the lass."

"I wonder wha'll be to preach the morn--tod, it'll likely be Mr. Skinner, frae Dundee; him an' the minister's chief, ye ken."

"Ye micht' gang up to the attic, Leeby, an' see if the spare bedroom vent (chimney) at the manse is gaen. We're sure, if it's Mr. Skinner, he'll come wi' the post frae Tilliedrum the nicht, an' sleep at the manse."

"Weel, I assure ye," said Leeby, descending from the attic, "it'll no be Mr. Skinner, for no only is the spare bedroom vent no gaen, but the blind's drawn doon frae tap to fut, so they're no even airin' the room. Na, it canna be him; an' what's mair, it'll be naebody 'at's to bide a' nicht at the manse."

"I wouldna say that; na, na. It may only be a student; an' Marget Dundas" (the minister's mother and housekeeper) "michtna think it necessary to put on a fire for him."

"Tod, I'll tell ye wha it'll be. I wonder I didna think o' 'im sooner. It'll be the lad Wilkie; him 'at's mither mairit on Sam'l Duthie's wife's brither. They bide in Cupar, an' I mind 'at when the son was here twa or three year syne he was juist gaen to begin the diveenity classes in Glesca."

"If that's so, Leeby, he would be sure to bide wi' Sam'l. Hendry, hae ye heard 'at Sam'l Duthie's expeekin' a stranger the nicht?"

"Haud yer tongue," replied Hendry, who was having the worst of the game.

"Ay, but I ken he is," said Leeby triumphantly to her mother, "for ye mind when I was in at Johnny Watt's (the draper's) Chirsty (Sam'l's wife) was buyin' twa yards o' chintz, an' I couldna think what she would be wantin' 't for!"

"I thocht Johnny said to ye 'at it was for a present to Chirsty's auntie?"

"Ay, but he juist guessed that; for, though he tried to get oot o' Chirsty what she wanted the chintz for, she wouldna tell 'im. But I see noo what she was after. The lad Wilkie 'll be to bide wi' them, and Chirsty had bocht the chintz to cover the airm-chair wi'. It's ane o' thae hair-bottomed chairs, but terrible torn, so she'll hae covered it for 'im to sit on."

"I wouldna wonder but ye're richt, Leeby; for Chirsty would be in an oncommon fluster if she thocht the lad's mither was likely to hear 'at her best chair was torn. Ay, ay, bein' a man, he wouldna think to tak off the chintz an' hae a look at the chair without it."

Here Hendry, who had paid no attention to the conversation, broke in--

"Was ye speirin' had I seen Sam'l Duthie? I saw 'im yesterday buyin' a fender at Will'um Crook's roup."

"A fender! Ay, ay, that settles the queestion," said Leeby; "I'll warrant the fender was for Chirsty's parlour. It's preyed on Chirsty's mind, they say, this fower-and-thirty year 'at she doesna hae a richt parlour fender."

"Leeby, look! That's Robbie Tosh wi' the barrow. He has a mighty load o' luggage. Am thinkin' the minister's bound for Tilliedrum."

"Na, he's no, he's gaen to Edinbory, as ye micht ken by the bandbox. That'll be his mither's bonnet he's takkin' back to get altered. Ye'll mind she was never pleased wi' the set o' the flowers."

"Weel, weel, here comes the minister himsel, an' very snod he is. Ay, Marget's been puttin' new braid on his coat, an' he's carryin' the sma' black bag he bocht in Dundee last year: he'll hae's nicht-shirt an' a comb in't, I dinna doot. Ye micht rin to the corner, Leeby, an' see if he cries in at Jess McTaggart's in passin'."

"It's my opeenion," said Leeby, returning excitedly from the corner, "'at the lad Wilkie's no to be preachin' the morn, after a'. When I gangs to the corner, at ony rate, what think ye's the first thing I see but the minister an' Sam'l Duthie meetin' face to face? Ay, weel, it's gospel am tellin' ye when I say as Sam'l flung back his head an' walkit richt by the minister!"

"Losh keep's a', Leeby; ye say that? They maun hae haen a quarrel."

"I'm thinkin' we'll hae Mr. Skinner i' the poopit the morn after a'."

"It may be, it may be. Ay, ay, look, Leeby, whatna bit kimmer's that wi' the twa jugs in her hand?"

"Eh? Ou, it'll be Lawyer Ogilvy's servant lassieky gaen to the farm o' T'nowhead for the milk. She gangs ilka Saturday nicht. But what did ye say--twa jugs? Tod, let's see! Ay, she has so, a big jug an' a little ane. The little ane 'll be for cream; an', sal, the big ane's bigger na usual."

"There maun be something gaen on at the lawyer's if they're buyin' cream, Leeby. Their reg'lar thing's twopence worth o' milk."

"Ay, but I assure ye that sma' jug's for cream, an' I dinna doot mysel but 'at there's to be fowerpence worth o' milk this nicht."

"There's to be a puddin' made the morn, Leeby. Ou, ay, a' thing points to that; an' we're very sure there's nae puddins at the lawyer's on the Sabbath onless they hae company."

"I dinna ken wha they can hae, if it be na that brither o' the wife's 'at bides oot by Aberdeen."

"Na, it's no him, Leeby; na, na. He's no weel to do, an' they wouldna be buyin' cream for 'im."

"I'll run up to the attic again, an' see if there's ony stir at the lawyer's hoose."

By and by Leeby returned in triumph.

"Ou, ay," she said, "they're expectin' veesitors at the lawyer's, for I could see twa o' the bairns dressed up to the nines, an' Mistress Ogilvy doesna dress at them in that wy for naething."

"It fair beats me though, Leeby, to guess wha's comin' to them. Ay, but stop a meenute, I wouldna wonder, no, really I would not wonder but what it'll be--"

"The very thing 'at was passin' through my head, mother."

"Ye mean 'at the lad Wilkie 'll be to bide wi' the lawyer i'stead o' wi' Sam'l Duthie? Sal, am thinkin' that's it. Ye ken Sam'l an' the lawyer married on cousins; but Mistress Ogilvy ay lookit on Chirsty as dirt aneath her feet. She would be glad to get a minister, though, to the hoose, an' so I warrant the lad Wilkie 'll be to bide a' nicht at the lawyer's."

"But what would Chirsty be doin' gettin' the chintz an' the fender in that case?"

"Ou, she'd been expeckin' the lad, of course. Sal, she'll be in a mighty tantrum aboot this. I wouldna wonder though she gets Sam'l to gang ower to the U. P's."

Leeby went once more to the attic.

"Ye're wrang, mother," she cried out. "Whaever's to preach the morn is to bide at the manse, for the minister's servant's been at Baker Duft's buyin' short-bread--half a lippy, nae doot."

"Are ye sure o' that, Leeby?"

"Oh, am certain. The servant gaed in to Duffs the noo, an', as ye ken fine, the manse fowk doesna deal wi' him, except they're wantin' short-bread. He's Auld Kirk."

Leeby returned to the kitchen, and Jess sat for a time ruminating.

"The lad Wilkie," she said at last, triumphantly, "'ll be to bide at Lawyer Ogilvy's; but he'll be gaen to the manse the morn for a tea-dinner."

"But what," asked Leeby, "aboot the milk an' the cream for the lawyer's?"

"Ou, they'll be hae'n a puddin' for the supper the nicht. That's a mighty genteel thing, I've heard."

It turned out that Jess was right in every particular.